

Justice for Unjust Judges

Psalm 58:1-11

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Introduction. What is your reaction to evil in the world? How do you respond to wicked rulers & judges? What do you think of Putin, Russia's president? Perhaps you might recall one or more of the "imprecatory" psalms. Just what is an "imprecatory" psalm? Ryrie identifies 11 of them: 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 137, 139, & 140. These psalms "invoke judgment or curses on one's enemies." Ryrie then suggests 4 purposes for these psalms: (1) to demonstrate God's just & righteous judgment toward the wicked (58:11); (2) to show the authority of God over the wicked (59:13); (3) to lead the wicked to seek the Lord (83:16); & (4) to cause the righteous to praise God (7:17). He adds, "Therefore, out of zeal for God & abhorrence of sin, the psalmist calls on God to punish the wicked & to vindicate His righteousness." We come tonight to Psalm 58. Note with me first of all its title (or superscription): "To the chief Musician. Al-taschith, Michtam of David." The word "Al-taschith" literally means "Do not destroy." This may refer to the title of the tune to which the psalm was sung (cf. Ps. 57). The word "Michtam" is not clearly defined. It comes from the verb "to cover" & Ryrie suggests "it may indicate psalms dealing with protection from one's enemies or psalms recited silently (with lips covering the mouth)."

Just what can we learn from this psalm? I see the theme of "Justice for Unjust Judges" which leads to 3 divisions: Consideration (:1-5); Condemnation (:6-9); & Consolation (:10-11).

I. There is **consideration** (:1-5)

A. The **questions** (:1) >

1. Do you judges ("*O congregation*" - leaders? rulers? gods?) speak righteously?
2. Do you judges judge righteously?

Note: The implied answer to both questions is "No!"

B. The **accusations** (:2) >

1. They work wickedness in their hearts, which leads them to...
2. They weigh (out) – a legal term of justice; yet here there is violence with their hands.

C. The **observations** (:3-5) >

[Note the depravity of the wicked: "*estranged from the womb.*" Compare Ephesians 4:18, "*alienated*" & Isaiah 53:6, "*gone astray*" & I John 1:8, "*deceive*" & Jude :13, "*wandering.*"]

1. Depravity shown by **deception** – "*speaking lies.*" "To be untruthful is one of the surest proofs of a fallen state, & since falsehood is universal, so also is human depravity" (Spurgeon).
2. Depravity shown by **destruction**:
 - a. They were venomous – "*poison of a serpent*" – cobra?
 - b. They were dangerous – "*will not hearken to the voice of charmers...*" – "The import of the passage is that David's enemies were obstinately deaf to all tender appeals, to all the demands of justice, to the dictates of nationality & of conscience" (Plumer).

Summary: They "exhibited a diabolical aptitude for evil & opposition to good" (Kirkpatrick).

Application: We all are born the same (Rom. 3:23), & "there, but by the grace of God, go I."

These leaders show no evidence of coming to God & dealing with their sin.

II. There is **condemnation** (:6-9)

A. The **invocations** for judgment (:6) >

1. "*Break their teeth...*" – fangs of the adder? Remove their deadliness.
2. "*Break out...young lions*" – render them powerless.

B. The illustrations of judgment (:7-9) >

1. “*Let them melt away as waters...*” – as water runs into the ground.
2. “*Let them (their arrows) be as cut in pieces*” – rendered useless.
3. “*As a snail which melteth...*” – dried up? “Is it that the snail seems to melt away as it goes along, leaving a slimy track behind it, or perhaps was popularly supposed to do so? Or is it not rather an allusion to the way in which snails dry up & perish in drought?” (Kirkpatrick).
4. “*Like the untimely birth of a woman...*” - a miscarriage?
5. “*Take them away as with a whirlwind...*” – swift destruction.

Summary: This indicates David’s righteous indignation.

Application: What about us? See Ephesians 4:25-26.

III. There is consolation (:10-11)

A. The victory (:10) >

1. There is **rejoicing** for the righteous.
2. There is “**reveling**” by the righteous – “*wash his feet in the blood of the wicked*”? Is this literal, like the victorious army on the battlefield, feet splattered in the enemies’ blood (cf. Psalm 68:23 & Revelation 14:17-20)? Or is this figurative, “the metaphorical & hyperbolic language of a warlike age”? (Kirkpatrick).

B. The vindication (:11) >

1. An **expectation** – “*reward for the righteous.*”
2. A **declaration** – “*He is a God that judgeth in the earth.*” Compare Genesis 18:25.

Conclusion: Do we see here justice for the unjust judges? Verse 10 declares that the righteous are glad when the wicked are overthrown. Scroggie says this suggests 3 things: “First, that it can never be right for us to cherish a spirit of vengeance; second, that the righteous could never believe it to be just that the wicked should escape; & third, that if it is right in God to destroy, it cannot be wrong in His servants to rejoice in what He does.” We know from Deuteronomy 32:35 & Romans 12:19 that vengeance is the Lord’s, not ours. Yet, “all wickedness must sooner or later be judged, & he who does not rejoice at the triumph of good over evil is not righteous” (Scroggie).

But how do we understand this psalm in light of Matthew 5:43-48, where we are told by Christ to love, bless, do good to, & pray for our enemies? Does this mean our personal enemies? And what about Matthew 5:39, where Christ tells us to turn the other cheek? (Oscars’ moment?)

Perhaps we should review again the 4 purposes of imprecatory psalms given by Ryrie. Might we also take into consideration Psalm 97:10, “*Ye that love the LORD, hate evil: He preserveth the souls of His saints; He delivereth them out of the hand of the wicked.*”

Commenting on Psalm 58:11, Spurgeon concludes, “If nothing else be true this is. The godly are not after all forsaken & given over to their enemies; the wicked are not to have the best of it, truth & goodness are recompensed in the long run. All men shall be forced by the sight of the final judgment to see that there is a God, & that He is the righteous ruler of the universe.” In the words of Abraham, “*Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*” (Genesis 18:25).