

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

The psalmist prays for deliverance from his enemies, whose desperate wickedness he describes, Psalm 59:1-7; professes strong confidence in God, Psalm 59:8-10; speaks of the destruction of his enemies, Psalm 59:11-15; praises God for benefits already received; and determines to trust in him, Psalm 59:16, Psalm 59:17.

The title, "To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, Michtam of David," has already occurred: and perhaps means no more than that the present Psalm is to be sung as Psalm 57:1-11, the first which bears this title. But there is here added the supposed occasion on which David made this Psalm: it was, "when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him." When the reader considers the whole of this Psalm carefully, he will be convinced that the title does not correspond to the contents. There is scarcely any thing in it that can apply to the circumstances of Saul's sending his guards by night to keep the avenues to the house of David, that when the morning came they might seize and slay him; and of his being saved through the information given him by his wife Michal, in consequence of which he was let down through a window, and so escaped. See 1 Samuel 19:10, 1 Samuel 19:11. There is not in the whole Psalm any positive allusion to this history; and there are many things in it which show it to be utterly inconsistent with the facts of that history. The Psalm most evidently agrees to the time of Nehemiah, when he was endeavoring to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, when the enterprise was first mocked; then opposed by Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian, who watched day and night that they might cause the work to cease; and laid ambuscades for the life of Nehemiah himself. Every part of the Psalm agrees to this: and I am therefore of Calmet's opinion, that the Psalm was composed in that time, and probably by Nehemiah, or by Esdras.

Verse 1

Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God - A very proper prayer in the mouth of Nehemiah, when resisted in his attempts to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem, who opposed the work, and endeavored to take away the life of the person whom God had raised up to restore and rebuild Jerusalem. I conceive the Psalm to have been made on this occasion; and on this hypothesis alone I think it capable of consistent explanation.

Verse 2

The workers of iniquity - Principally Sanballat the Horonite, Tobiah the Ammonite, and Geshem the Arabian; who were the chief enemies of the poor returned captives.

Bloody men - The above, who sought the destruction of the Israelites; and particularly, that of Nehemiah, whom four several times they endeavored to bring into an ambush, that they might take away his life. See Nehemiah 6:1-4.

Verse 3

For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul - For my life. See the passages referred to above.

Verse 4

They run and prepare themselves - They leave no stone unturned that they may effect my destruction and prevent the building.

Verse 5

O Lord God of hosts - This was a proper view to take of God. when Israel, a handful of poor distressed captives were surrounded and oppressed by the heathen chiefs above mentioned, and their several tribes. But Jehovah God of hosts, was the God of Israel; and hence Israel had little to fear.

Be not merciful to any wicked transgressors - Do not favor the cause of these wicked men. They are *שׂוֹנְאֵי דָם* (bodedey aven), "changers of iniquity;" they go through the whole round of evil; find out and exercise themselves in all the varieties of transgression. How exactly does this apply to Nehemiah's foes! They sought, by open attack, wiles, flattery, foul speeches, fair speeches, threats, and ambuscades, to take away his life. Do not show them favor, that they may not succeed in their wicked designs. The prayer here is exactly the same in sentiment with that of Nehemiah, Nehemiah 4:4, Nehemiah 4:5. Hear, our God, for we are despised; turn their reproach upon their own heads; - cover not their iniquity, and let not their sin be blotted out.

Verse 6

They return at evening - When the beasts of prey leave their dens, and go prowling about the cities and villages to get offal, and entrap domestic animals, these come about the city to see if they may get an entrance, destroy the work, and those engaged in it.

Verse 7

They belch out with their mouth - They use the lowest insult, the basest abuse. They deal in sarcasm, ridicule, slander, and lies.

Verse 8

Thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them - They have mocked us; God will turn them and their schemes into ridicule and contempt: "Thou shalt have all these heathenish nations in derision."

Verse 9

Because of his strength will I wait upon thee - With this reading, I can make no sense of the passage. But instead of חֲזַק (uzzo), "his strength," חֲזִיק (uzzi), "my strength," is the reading of fourteen of Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS., of the Vulgate, Septuagint, Chaldee, and, in effect, of the Aethiopia, Syriac, and Arabic; and also of the Anglo-Saxon. To thee I commit all my strength; all I have I derive from thee, and all the good I possess I attribute to thee. The old Psalter translates, My strength I shall keep till the, for myn uptaker thou art. See on Psalm 59:17 (note).

Verse 10

The God of my mercy shall prevent me - The mercy of God shall go before me, and thus help me in all my doings.

God shall let me see my desire - The sentence is short. God will let me see concerning my enemies, i.e., how he will treat them.

Verse 11

Slay them not, lest my people forget - I believe the Chaldee gives the true sense of this verse: "Do not slay them suddenly, lest my people should forget. Drive them from their habitations by thy power, and reduce them to poverty by the loss of their property." Preserve them long in a state of chastisement that Israel may see thou hast undertaken for them: that thy hand is on the wicked for evil and on them for good. The Canaanites were not suddenly destroyed; they were left to be pricks in the eyes and thorns in the sides of the Israelites. It is in a sense somewhat similar that the words are used here.

Verse 12

For the sin of their mouth - This verse has puzzled all the commentators. If we take חַטָּאת (chattath) for sin-offering instead of sin, we shall get a better sense. Some of Nehemiah's enemies made a profession of the Jewish religion. Tobiah and his son were allied by marriage to the Jews; for Eliashib the priest had married his grandson to the daughter of Sanballat; and this produced a connection with Tobiah, the fast friend of Sanballat. Besides this very priest had given Tobiah one of the great chambers in the house of the Lord, where formerly the meat-offerings, the frankincense, the vessels, and the tithe of the corn and wine and oil were kept; Nehemiah 13:4, Nehemiah 13:5, Nehemiah 13:7-9. And there were children of Tobiah (probably the same family) who professed to be of the Levites, Nethinim, or children of Solomon's servants; but as they could not show their father's house and their seed, whether they were of Israel; these, and others which were children of the priests, were put out of the priesthood, and out of the sacred service, as polluted; as having sprung from intermarriages with heathens. See Ezra 2:59-62. Tobiah was expelled from the house of the Lord by Nehemiah, and all his household stuff thrown out of doors: Nehemiah 13:7, Nehemiah 13:8. And this was doubtless one ground of the enmity of Tobiah to Nehemiah; and in this verse of the Psalm he may allude particularly to his occupancy of the chamber of offerings, which offerings, instead of being given to the Levites, were consumed by Tobiah and his household. This may be fairly gathered from Nehemiah 13:6, Nehemiah 13:10, Nehemiah 13:11. Here then we have the sin of their mouth; their eating the offerings that belonged to the Levites; so that the temple service was deserted, the Levites being obliged to go and till the ground in order to obtain the means of life. And if we take חַטָּאת (chattath) for sin-offering, it may refer to promises of sacrifice and offering which Tobiah and his family made, but never performed. They ate instead of offering them; and here was the sin of their mouth, in connection with the words of their lips, and their cursing and lying which they spake, for which the psalmist calls upon the Lord to consume them, that they may not be, Psalm 59:13.

Verse 14

At evening let them return - He had mentioned before, Psalm 59:6 that these persons came like beasts of prey round the city striving to get in, that they might take possession. Now, being fully assured of God's

protection and that they shall soon be made a public example, he says, Let them return and make a noise like a dog, etc., like dogs, jackals, and other famished creatures, who come howling about the city-walls for something to eat, and wander up and down for meat, grumbling because they are not satisfied, Psalm 59:15. Nehemiah had made up all the breaches; and had the city guarded so well day and night, by watches who continually relieved each other, that there was no longer any fear of being taken by surprise: and now they must feel like the hungry beasts who were disappointed of their prey.

Verse 16

I will sing of thy power - For it was because thy hand was upon me for good, that I have thus succeeded in my enterprises.

Yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy - I shall publish abroad what thou hast done; and done not for my worthiness, nor for the worthiness of the people; but for thy own mercy's sake.

In the day of my trouble - When I came with small means and feeble help, and had the force and fraud of many enemies to contend with, besides the corruption and unfaithfulness of my own people; thou wast then my defense; and in all attacks, whether open or covered, my sure refuge. I will, therefore, sing of thy mercy in the morning - I will hasten to acquit myself of a duty I owe to thee for such singular interpositions of mercy and power.

Verse 17

Unto thee, O my strength - A similar sentiment to that expressed, Psalm 59:9. But the words are very emphatic: God is my strength; God is my elevation. My God is my mercy. I have nothing good but what I have from God. And all springs from his dwelling in me. God, therefore, shall have all the glory, both now and for ever. As many persons may still think that the inscription to this Psalm is correct, the following analysis may be applied in that way; or considered as containing a general resolution of the Psalm, without referring it to any particular occasion.