

"A God That Judgeth in the Earth"

Psalm 58

The title of this psalm is the same as Psalm 57, only without any reference to occasion. The occasion has been debated and there is no way we can be certain on what that occasion was (if any, for that matter). It may have come during David's conflict with Saul, as the surrounding psalms do, but whether in Saul's day or any other, the psalm speaks to the same problem – unjust rulers who abuse authority and oppose the righteous.

This psalm deals with one of the hardest realities of life in a fallen wicked world: those entrusted with power and judgment often abuse it. Instead of speaking righteousness, they speak lies; instead of judging uprightly, they weigh out violence. David looks at these corrupt rulers and asks the question every believer has asked at some point – Where is justice? The psalm answers by lifting our eyes from human courts to the heavenly court, from crooked judges to the righteous Judge. The message is summed up in its closing declaration: "Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."

I. THE CORRUPTION OF THE WICKED – vs. 1-5

A. Their unrighteous rule – vs. 1-2

Instead of judging uprightly, they devise violence and injustice.

1. The word "congregation" (עֵדָה) is only used this one time in the Hebrew Bible (it appears as part of the title of Psalm 56 where it is considered as the word "silence").

There is no clear understanding of the word within the context of this psalm but the

parallelism of verse one goes a long way in understanding its meaning and why it's translated "congregation."

a) "Do ye indeed speak righteousness" is clearly paralleled by "do ye judge uprightly."

b) If that's the case, then the synonymous parallel to "congregation" must be "sons of men," showing it's speaking of a group of people.

2. In context, the psalm is a rebuke to rulers/judges who pervert justice. "Congregation" is not talking about the worshipping congregation as we understand the word today, but about those assembled in authority – rulers, judges, people who had power to speak and decide matters of justice.

David is confronting corrupt leaders, asking, in essence, "Do you really speak what is right? Do you judge fairly?"

B. Their inherent depravity – vs. 3

1. Universal truth: all are born in sin – this is the universal doctrine of depravity: every man is born a sinner, estranged from God by nature.

Psalm 51:5

⁵ Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.

Romans 5:12

¹² Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

Ephesians 2:3

³ Among whom also we all had our conversation in

times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

2. Specific emphasis – the wicked manifest sin severely

- a) Psalm 58:3 is not just a general observation of mankind, but an indictment of the wicked who live out and harden themselves in sin from the very beginning.
- b) David intensifies the language to show how early and obstinate wickedness is in those who reject God.
- c) They are “estranged from the womb” not because their case is unique in having sin, but because they display their rebellion without restraint – their choices in life prove the corruption that belongs to all mankind.

- Psalm 58:3 shows us not only that sin begins at birth, but that in the wicked it hardens and deepens. The rest of Scripture confirms this picture: men love darkness (John 3), refuse correction (Jer. 13:23), and give themselves over to greater sin (Rom. 1). What begins with estrangement from God at birth ends with a conscience seared (1 Tim. 4:2) and a heart hardened like stone. Without God’s grace, sin doesn’t get better with age, it only gets worse.

John 3:19-20

¹⁹ And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. ²⁰ For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.

Jeremiah 13:23

²³ Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? *then* may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.

1 Timothy 4:2

² Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;

C. Their deafness to the truth – vs. 4-5

1. The wicked are like the deaf adder that “stoppereth her ear,” refusing to hear the charmer’s voice.
2. This is not natural inability, but willful rejection – they choose lies over truth.

Romans 1:25

²⁵ Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

2 Timothy 4:3-4

³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears;
⁴ And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

3. This is a sobering picture of those who refuse God’s Word. They don’t remain neutral – they will fill their ears with error.
4. The application for us today is that we shouldn’t be surprised when people resist the gospel. They are not merely uninformed, but all too often they are hardened against the truth.

II. THE CRY AGAINST THE WICKED – vs. 6-9

A. Imprecatory plea (call for God to judge the wicked) – vs. 6

David is using a strong metaphor (hyperbole) to picture the destructive power of the wicked and his longing for God to take away that power. Just as the teeth of a lion make it deadly, so the “teeth” of the wicked (their words, their threats, their plots) make them dangerous.

B. Pictures of powerlessness – vs. 7-8

1. Vs. 7a – “Let them melt away as waters which run continually” – like a flood that looks powerful but quickly drains away, David asks that their strength vanish to nothing.
2. Vs. 7b – “When he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces” – He’s asking that their attacks fail before they reach their target and can do any damage.
3. Vs. 8a – “As a snail *which* melteth, let every *one of them* pass away” – like a snail shrivels in the heat, he’s asking that the wicked fade into nothingness.
4. Vs. 8b – “*Like* the untimely birth of a woman, *that* they not see the sun” – as a stillborn child never sees life, he’s asking that the plans of the wicked never come to fruition.

David piles up images to say one thing: the wicked look powerful, but their end is certain. Like water that runs off, like arrows that miss, like a snail that melts, like a child that never sees the sun – their strength, their plans, and their legacy will all come to nothing when God acts.

C. Certainty of judgment – vs. 9

1. Vs. 9a – “Before your pots can feel the thorns” – before the fire has time to heat the pot.
 - a) In Bible times, people used dried thorns or brushwood as quick fuel for cooking.
 - b) The point: thorns burn fast – they flame up suddenly, but don’t last long enough to cook food.
 - c) It’s a picture of sudden judgment: the wicked are swept away before their plans even get started.

Let me say here: This is a general rule but there are going to be those that seem to be the exception to the rule. Many wicked today seem to live a long, successful life without any judgment at all, but remember: God’s time is not our time – judgment is coming.

2. Vs. 9b – “he shall take them away as with a whirlwind” – God removes them suddenly, violently, and irresistibly.

The whirlwind is an image of swift destruction throughout Scripture.

[Job 27:20-21](#) [Job speaking of the wicked rich]

²⁰ Terrors take hold on him as waters, a tempest stealeth him away in the night. ²¹ The east wind carrieth him away, and he departeth: and as a storm hurleth him out of his place.

[Proverbs 10:25](#)

²⁵ As the whirlwind passeth, so *is* the wicked no more: but the righteous *is* an everlasting foundation.

[Isaiah 17:13](#)

¹³ The nations shall rush like the rushing of many

waters: but *God* shall rebuke them, and they shall flee far off, and shall be chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.

3. Vs. 9c – “both living, and in *his* wrath”

a) This is a much-debated phrase but in the context of the psalm, and of verse 9 itself, the sense is that God will sweep them away alive, in His wrath.

b) None escape when God judges.

1 Thessalonians 5:3

³ For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

James 4:13-14

¹³ Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: ¹⁴ Whereas ye know not what *shall be* on the morrow. For what *is* your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

III. THE CONFIDENCE OF THE RIGHTEOUS – vs. 10-11

A. The rejoicing in God’s justice – vs. 10

1. Vs. 10a – “The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance”

a) This isn’t to be seen as what we would think as gloating over misery but joy in seeing the holiness of God affirmed.

b) We can compare this to Rev. 19:1-2 where heaven is seen rejoicing when Babylon is judged because the judgments of God are “true

and righteous.”

Revelation 19:1-2

¹ And after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God: ² For true and righteous *are* his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

2. Vs. 10b – “He shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked”

a) This is strong hyperbole to give a picture of complete victory and final vindication. The is warfare imagery in Hebrew poetry.

(1) In ancient battlefields, the slain lay in their blood, and the victors would literally tread over them.

(2) To “wash the feet in blood” is a vivid way of saying complete triumph over the enemy. There is a future prophetic reference in this phrase to the “day of the Lord” – specifically to the end of that period and the Battle of Armageddon.

b) For us today, this isn’t saying we are to take personal pleasure in the judgment of God, but that we are to rejoice in the fact that God will have the final say in the wickedness of man.

c) It’s a picture of how the victory will be so total that nothing of the enemy remains to threaten.

d) Just as in war, the victor walks freely across the battlefield, so the righteous will one day walk in peace, because God has put down every foe.

- For believers suffering today, this verse is reassurance: the day will come when every foe is under Christ's feet (1 Cor. 15:25), and we share in His victory.

1 Corinthians 15:25

²⁵ For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

B. The reward of the righteous – vs. 11a

"Verily *there is* a reward for the righteous" – in a world that often seems backwards, where the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, this psalm assures us that God sees, remembers, and will reward.

Matthew 5:10-12

¹⁰ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are ye, when *men* shall revile you, and persecute *you*, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great *is* your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.

2 Timothy 4:8

⁸ Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

C. The recognition of the Righteous Judge – vs. 11b

"Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth"

1. God is not distant or indifferent; He is active in the world.
2. Contrast this with Psalm 10:11, where the wicked say, "*God hath forgotten...He will never*

see it." Psalm 58 affirms the opposite.

3. This is ultimately fulfilled in Christ, to whom the Father has committed all judgment (John 5:22).

John 5:22

²² For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

- This grounds our confidence. Justice isn't left to human courts; it rests in God's hands. The Judge of all the earth will do right (Gen. 18:25).

Genesis 18:25

²⁵ That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

Conclusion: This psalm began with a troubling question – *"Do ye indeed speak righteousness, O congregation? do ye judge uprightly, O ye sons of men?"* When human judges fail, when wickedness seems to rule unchecked, the believer is tempted to despair. But the psalm does not end with the corruption of the wicked; it ends with the confidence of the righteous. However strong the imagery, however severe the judgment, the point is clear: God will not let injustice stand. One day, every wrong will be made right, every corrupt power will fall, and every righteous sufferer will rejoice. Until that day, we rest in this assurance: *"Verily he is a God that judgeth in the earth."*