PSALM 7

✠ This psalm is written in the form of a Lament.

✣ See the note about "lament" in the introduction to Psalm 3.

✠ This psalm (verses 2, 7, 8) is used as the Prokeimenon of Sunday Matins in Tone 2.

✠ Saint Augustine tells us that this psalm can be understood as being spoken by the Incarnate Lord, provided that we understand that it is our weaknesses which He bore that are expressed in His words and example of humility.

✣ Father P Reardon suggests that the underlying voice of the psalms is not simply 'man', but '*the* Man'. He tells us that the undercurrent or the foundation of the psalms is the voice of Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and Man. He teaches that the correct theological principle in praying the psalms is the Hypostatic Union. He further teaches that to pray this particular psalm is to enter into the Mind of our Lord and His redemptive Passion. Here we do not express our suffering, but rather we taste to some extent our Saviour's experience of tasting the gall, the whip, the pain.

"*Supplication to Christ, the Righteous Judge*"

"*God the Just Judge strong and patient*"

"*Evil is self-destructive*"

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1 A psalm by David, which he sang to the LORD, about the words of Hushai, son of Jemeni.

V 1 About the Inscription : in the Masoretic (Hebrew) text, the Inscription is : "A Shiggaion of David, which he sang to the Lord concerning Cush, a Benjaminite".

✣ The meaning of "*shiggaion*" is not clearly established. Its root-word meaning suggests a song of strong emotion, whether a lament or a praise. Others say that it is an unknown musical term.

✣ This psalm is the second psalm of fourteen having an historical inscription. See the note about the Inscription on Psalm 3:1.

✠ About "*Lord*" : see the note about "*Lord*" on Psalm 1:2.

✠ About "*words*" : in this verse, the Greek gives the of λόγος, *logos*, "word". *Logos* in the singular may refer only to "a word", but it may also refer to "the Word", as in the Word of God, the *Logos* of God. Throughout the text, one may in the heart sense that, in the singular usage, the Word Himself may be sometimes implied. However, the choice about what is sensed to refer to the Word of God in the psalter is largely subjective. In the plural, "*words*" refers to general communication, whether divine or human.

✣ See Psalms 16:4 ; 17:1 ; 18:4 ; 21:2 ; 40:9 ; 44:2 ; 49:17 ; 50:6 ; 54:22 ; 55:5, 6, 11 ; 58:13 ; 63:6 ; 64:4 ;

90:3 ; 102:20 ; 104:8, 19, 27, 28, 42 ; 105:12, 24 ; 108:3 ; 111:5 ; 118:9, 16, 17, 28, 42, 43, 49, 74, 81, 101, 114, 130 139, 147, 160, 161 ; 136:3 ; 140:4 ; 144:13 ; 147:4, 7 ; 148:8 ; Habakkuk 3:5 (Matins Canticle 4). See the note about "*Word*" on Psalm 32:4.

✠ About "*Hushai*" : Saint John Chrysostom says that Hushai is a very clever, brave, and very loyal man. He paid attention neither to David's weaknesses, nor to the threat of armies and warriors, but rather to God's unassailable assistance and favour which rested on the king. He exhorts us to remember Hushai, to flee those who are in the wrong, although they appear to be strong, and to hold to those who are in the right. Evil is, in fact, weaker than anything, whereas solitary virtue is stronger than anything. He points to the fact that the Lord had been arranging all the events for the good.

- ✣ Saint Augustine explains that many commentators inform us that the meaning of "*Hushai*" is "silence". He says that we may correctly understand this silence in the context of the way in which our Lord contended, by the mystery of silence, with those who plotted and schemed against Him. The silence of our Saviour, His unfathomable compassion, forgiveness, long-suffering and obedience in love to the Father accomplished the salvation of the world. Saint Augustine points out that instead of giving retribution, King David cared for and protected his son Absalom (whose name means "a father's peace").

- ✣ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) reminds us that Hushai is the one who saved David's life when he was at war with Absalom, and that he announced to the king his son's death.

- ✣ Hushai (in Greek Χουσι, *Khousi*) is not distant in sound from "Cush", a word associated with Ethiopia, at the southern limit of Egypt. See 2 Kingdoms 18:21-22, where Hushai is described as being a Cushite.

- ✣ See 2 Kingdoms 15:32-37 ; 16:16-19 ; 17:5-16 ; 18:21-22, 31-32 ; 1 Chronicles 27:33.

✠ Saint John Chrysostom informs us that in other versions, there are alternative Inscriptions : "A Psalm on David's Ignorance" ; "On David's not Knowing" ; and he notes that one version exchanges "Ethiopian" for "Khousi". Saint John Chrysostom believes that King David gave the symbolic name "Jemini", "son of the right hand", right after the deed that Hushai had performed. The root meaning of this word is "righteous" in Hebrew. It could also mean "righteousness". There are similar examples in Scripture : Judas = "*son of perdition*" (John 17:12) ; the devil (or antichrist) = "*son of perdition*" (2 Thessalonians 2:3) ; the welcoming man = "*son of peace*" (Luke 10:6).

- ✣ Saint Jerome supports the assertion of Saint John. He refers us to 1 Moses 35:16-20 when Rachel named her son "Ben-Oni" (Son of My Sorrow), which Jacob adjusted to "Benjamin" (Son of the Right Hand).

- ✣ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) adds that in history, Hushai is not called "son of Jemeni (Yemenis)", but rather "Hushai the Archite". He therefore contradicts the other commentators, and he says that Jemeni is a historically non-existent name.

✠ *The Orthodox Study Bible* notes that it can be said that King David and his army are compared with Christ and the Church ; and that Absalom and his army are compared with the devil and his angels. This psalm is about spiritual struggle.

[Κύριε ὁ Θεός μου Domine, Deus meus]

2 O LORD my God, on You have I hoped./ Save me from all those pursuing me, and rescue me,

V 2 About "*God*" : see the note about "*God*" on Psalm 3:3.

✠ About "*on You have I hoped*" : Saint Athanasius recommends that when we learn that someone is plotting against us, as Ahithophel did against King David, that we sing Psalm 7 and put our trust in God our Deliverer, who will deliver us.

✣ Saint John Chrysostom informs us that King David, when he learned about Hushai's bravery and how the Lord had arranged everything for David's protection, attributed everything that had happened to the Lord. He confessed that he put his trust, his hope, only on Him. He thus wrote this psalm in thanksgiving to God for everything that had been accomplished through Hushai and many others. In the face of difficulties and isolation, things become easy because the Lord is present.

✣ See the notes about "*hope on the Lord*" and "*hope*" on Psalm 4:6.

✠ About "*save me*" : see the note on Psalm 3:8.

✠ About "*all those pursuing me*" : although this originally referred to human pursuers, we may ourselves appeal for protection against spiritual pursuers also.

✠ About "*pursuing*" : see 2 Moses 15:9 (Matins Canticle 1) ; 5 Moses 32:30 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Psalm 33:15.

✠ About "*rescue*" : see the note about "*rescue*" on Psalm 6:5.

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3 lest, as a lion, one of them snatch my soul,/ when there is no-one to redeem, nor to save.

V 3 About "*lion*" : see the notes on Psalms 9:30 ; 16:12 ; see also Psalms 21:14, 22 ; 34:17 ; 56:5 ; 57:7 ; 2 Timothy 4:17 ; 1 Peter 5:8.

✠ About "*snatch*" : see Psalms 9:30 ; 21:14 ; 39:15 ; 49:22 ; 68:5 ; 103:21.

✠ About "*soul*" : see verse 6 ; see the note about "*soul*" on Psalm 3:3.

✠ About "*there is no-one to redeem, nor to save*" : Saint John Chrysostom rhetorically asks why, with an army supporting him, King David would say this. It is, he continues, because King David considered not even the whole world as help, should he not receive help from God (see Psalm 32:16) ; nor did he, being alone, consider it solitude, as long as God was with him.

✠ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) writes about the dual use of the two verbs, "*to redeem*", and "*to save*". He says that Man can be saved through faith in the Lord (see Matthew 8:13 ; Luke 7:50). Liberation (freedom from slavery) needs someone who is not in bonds to redeem the one who is in bonds. He says

that King David prays to be saved from his enemies now, in this life, and to be delivered in the hour of his death from those on the threshold crossing to the afterlife (the devils and his own sins) which will rush like a lion to kidnap his soul. Therefore, Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) offers a possible interpretation, following Saint John Chrysostom : "Deliver me from the crowd of my enemies, and deliver me so that I do not get caught as though there were no-one who redeemed".

✠ About "*redeem*" : according to the dictionaries, this word means "to get something or someone back", "to exchange", or "to make something or someone seem less bad". It may be related to "liberation". Its origin is in Latin, "to buy back". However, its theological usage does not involve purchasing.

✣ See 2 Moses 15:13 ; 3 Kingdoms 1:29 ; Psalms 24:22 ; 25:11 ; 30:6 ; 31:7 ; 33:23 ; 43:27 ; 48:8, 16 ; 54:19 ; 58:2 ; 68:19 ; 70:23 ; 71:14 ; 73:2 ; 76:16 ; 77:42 ; 102:4 ; 105:10 ; 106:2 ; 118:134, 154 ; 129:8 ; 135:24 ; 143:10 ; Lamentations of Jeremiah 3:54 ; 1 Peter 1:18. See the note about "*Redeemer*" on Psalm 18:15. See the note about "*redemption*" on Psalm 48:9.

✠ About "*nor to save*" : see Psalms 17:42 ; 32:16, 17 ; 43:4, 7. See also the note about "*save*" on Psalm 3:8.

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4 O LORD my God, if I did this :/ if there be unrighteousness in my hands,

V 4 About this verse : Father P Reardon reminds us that this is the prayer of one with clean hands and conscience, one who cannot be reproached. This is not the prayer of an average human being.

✠ About "*God*" : see the note on verse 2.

✠ About "*unrighteousness*" : see verses 15, 17 ; see also 5 Moses 32:4 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Psalms 10:5 ; 16:3 ; 26:12 ; 27:3 ; 51:5 ; 54:12 ; 57:3 ; 61:11 ; 62:12 ; 63:3 ; 65:18 ; 71:14 ; 72:6, 7 ; 88:33 ; 91:16 ; 100:7 ; 118:29, 69, 104, 163 ; 143:8, 11.

✠ About "*hands*" : see verse 5 ; see 2 Moses 15:9 (Matins Canticle 1) ; 5 Moses 32:27 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Psalms 9:17 ; 17:1, 21, 25, 35 ; 21:17, 21 ; 23:4 ; 25:6, 10 ; 27:2, 4 ; 30:9 ; 34:10 ; 35:12 ; 36:24, 33 ; 40:4 ; 43:21 ; 46:2 ; 48:16 ; 57:3, 11 ; 62;5, 11 ; 67:32 ; 70:4 ; 72;13 ; 75:6 ; 76:3, 21 ; 77:61, 72 ; 80:7 ; 81:4 ; 87:10 ; 88:26, 49 ; 89:17 ; 90:12 ; 96:10 ; 97:8 ; 105:10, 41, 42 ; 106:2 ; 113:12, 15 ; 122:2 ; 124:3 ; 126:4 ; 128;7 ; 133:2 ; 134:15 ; 139:15 ; 140:2 ; 142:6 ; 143:1, 7, 11 ; 149:6 ; 151:2 ; Daniel 3:32 (Matins Canticle 7).

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5 if I requited those who requited me with bad things,/ then may I fall, empty, from the hands of my enemies.

V 5 About this verse : Saint John Chrysostom shows us that these words refer us to the words of the Beatitudes. The implication is that the righteous Man, Christ, has not paid back evil with evil ; He has not fallen victim to enmity. He, and we Christians with Him, bear abuse with a good spirit. King David preferred to be banished from his homeland rather than assassinate King Saul who pursued him without cause. If we are struck, we, with King David and Christ do not resist. If we are hated, we do not hate in return. We, with Christ feel compassion for those who harm themselves by letting the wild beast within them off the leash. With Him, we, for our part, love our enemies and treat them kindly. He points out the

confidence of King David. He has a clear conscience about not having repaid evil with evil, as is seen especially in his relationship with King Saul (see 1 Kingdoms, chapters 24 and 26), and later with his son Absalom (see 2 Kingdoms, chapters 18 and 19). If he were not completely clean in his conscience, then he would not have dared to call down curses upon himself.

- ✣ Saint Augustine explains that if he had repaid evil to those who have done evil to him, then it would be appropriate that bad things happen. However, this is not the case. The words demonstrate the application of Matthew 5:45.
- ✣ See 1 Kingdoms 24:7-8 ; 26:9 ; Jeremiah 18:20 ; Romans 12:17-21.

✠ About "*requited*" : see 5 Moses 32:6, 35, 41, 43 ; Psalms 17:21, 25 ; 30:24 ; 34:12 ; 37:21; 40:11 ; 54:21 ; 93:23 ; 102:10 ; 118:17 ; 136:8 ; 137:8 ; 141:8.

✠ About "*empty*" : Saint Augustine explains that King David is saying that if he had not anticipated the example of our Saviour and followed His example of silence and forbearance for our sake, then let him fall, empty-handed before his enemies. "Empty", indeed, is the boast of any human being who wishes to avenge himself on any other human being. When anyone is openly attempting to overcome a human being, then he, himself, is being overcome by the devil.

- ✣ Saint Dorotheos of Gaza uses the word adverbially, meaning "without help".
- ✣ See Psalm 16:9 ; see Luke 1:53 (Canticle 9, Part 1). See the note about "*emptiness*" on Psalm 2:1.

✠ About "*enemies*" : Saint John Chrysostom clarifies for us that Christ did not tell us that we should not have enemies. It is beyond us to control how others feel about us. Rather, he says, our Saviour directed us not to be an enemy to anyone nor to permit ourselves to feel enmity towards anyone. Enemies who harm us are in fact harming themselves far more.

- ✣ See the note about "*enemies*" on Psalm 5:9.

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6 Then may the enemy closely pursue my soul and lay hold of it,/ and trample my life to the ground,/ and make my glory pitch its tent in the dirt.

Pause

V 6 About "*enemy*" : see the note about "*enemies*" on Psalm 5:9.

✠ About "*closely pursue*" : see Psalms 17:38 ; 22:6 ; 30:16 ; 34:3, 6 ; 37:21 ; 68:27 ; 70:11 ; 82:16 ; 108:16, 31 ; 118:84, 86, 150, 161 ; 141:7 ; 142:1, 3.

✠ About "*soul*" : see the note on verse 3.

✠ About "*lay hold of*" : see 2 Moses 15:9 (Matins Canticle 1) ; Psalms 17:38 ; 34:2 ; 39:13 ; 68:25.

✠ About "*trample my life to the ground*" : Saint Basil the Great reminds us that the soul of the righteous person, not preoccupied with the body, has its life in Christ-God (see Galatians 2:20). However, the soul of the sinner, or the one who lives in obedience to the passions of the flesh, is smeared with them, as though it were mud. The enemy is determined to trample the soiled soul and to bury it completely.

✠ About "*trample*" : Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) points out that this precisely translates the

Greek verb καταπατέω, *katapateō*. It can have the meaning of "tread under foot", "step down upon" "oppress", "destroy", "press grapes".

✣ See Psalms 90:13 ; 138:11.

✠ About "*glory*" : Saint Augustine points out that "*glory*" may be dragged down into that dust which the wind blows from the earth (see Psalm 1) when it is tainted with pride and personal boastfulness. God-given "*glory*" is bright, beautiful and strong ; and, as the Apostle Paul exhorts us (Galatians 6:11-18), refers only to the Lord. He stresses that if we glory, we glory only in the Lord (1 Corinthians 1:31).

✠ About "*pitch its tent in the dirt*" : Saint John Chrysostom says that this means to be humiliated, trampled upon, and to have one's honour buried in the dust.

✣ See 1 Moses 3:14 ; Psalm 142:3.

✠ About "*pitch ... tent*" : see the note about "*pitch ... tent*" on Psalm 5:12.

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7 Arise, O LORD, in Your anger ;/ be exalted in the boundaries of Your enemies./ Awake, O LORD my God, in the ordinance which You commanded,

V 7 About this verse : Saint Jerome brings this verse into the context of the Resurrection of Christ. He addresses our Saviour : "Arise, in order that a vast multitude may believe in You. Then, after You have risen, what else would we pray for ? Above them on high be enthroned. For whose sake ? For the sake of the gathering (assembly) of the people. In that You suffered, You suffered for us. In that You rose again, You rose for us. In that You ascended to the Father, You ascended for us. Be enthroned above those on high".

✣ See John 3:13.

✠ About "*arise*" : see the note about "*arise*" on Psalm 3:8.

✠ About "*anger*" : see the note on verse 12 ; see the note about "*anger*" and "*fury*" on Psalm 2:5.

✠ About "*be exalted*" : Saint John Chrysostom asks how it can be that God who is already perfect, who is always "on high", and who cannot change, can be exalted. Saint John begins to answer by saying that even though one who has weak eyes may think that the sun is dim, it is not, in fact. It is only perceived to be so by the weak eyes. Similarly, God can be neither weak nor humiliated except in the minds of those who are enemies towards Him. Saint John shows that King David is not concerned with his own situation ; but rather, he hopes that God may be glorified by those who until now consider Him to be weak and powerless. Saint John hopes that this misunderstanding will be rectified, and that God will be exalted in the minds and hearts of those who until now misperceive Him. He further prays that by seeing God's glory, those who are at enmity with King David will see the light and cease the enmity.

✣ See the note about "*exalting*" on Psalm 3:4.

✠ About "*enemies*" : see the note about "*enemies*" on Psalm 5:9.

✠ About "*awake*" : see the note about "*awoke*" on Psalm 3:6.

✠ About "*God*" : see the note on verse 2.

✠ About "*ordinance which You commanded*" : Saint John Chrysostom shows us that we are, with King David, asking that what the Lord has commanded us to do, He Himself do towards us. We ask that He will help us. We ask that, as He has told us to do, He will help the wronged, and not neglect those who are suffering at the hands of the malicious.

✠ About "*ordinance*" : see the note about "*ordinance*" on Psalm 2:6.

✠ About "*commanded*" : see Psalms 32:9 ; 77:5, 23 ; 104:8 ; 106:29 ; 110:9 ; 118:4, 138 ; 132:3 ; 148:5 ; Daniel 3:30 (Matins Canticle 7).

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8 and a gathering of the peoples shall surround You ;/ and for the sake of this, turn back on high.

V 8 About "*a gathering ... shall surround You*" : Saint John Chrysostom asserts that our interpretation of these words must be appropriate to God. Therefore, we are to understand that the "surrounding" implies that the people will give God great honour, since in the Temple, the people stood about the Altar in a circle while they offered Him thanksgiving and praise. His request is that God be praised, therefore, by both His friends and His enemies.

✣ Saint Augustine adds that two sorts of assemblies can be understood : the assembly of the believers, or the assembly of the persecutors. At the Incarnation, Christ received a response from both. From the persecutors, His humility was scorned, and they raged against Him (see Psalm 2:1). From the believers, the vast crowd who accepted His humility surrounded Him (see Psalm 2:8).

✠ About "*gathering*" : see Psalms 15:4 ; 21:17 ; 39:11 ; 61;9 ; 67:31 ; 73:2 ; 81:1 ; 85:14 ; 105:17, 18 ; 110:1.

✠ About "*peoples*" : see verse 9 ; see the note about "*peoples*" on Psalm 2:1.

✠ About "*surround*" : see 5 Moses 32:10 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Psalms 21:17 ; 26:6 ; 31:7, 10 ; 47:13 ; 48:6 ; 54:11 ; 58:7, 15 ; 87:18 ; 90:4 ; 108:3 ; 117:10, 11, 12 ; Jonah 2:4, 6 (Matins Canticle 6). See also the notes about the related words "*encompassed*" and "*encircled*" on Psalm 16, verses 9 and 11.

✠ About "*for the sake of this*" : Saint Augustine interprets this as referring to the gathering of believers, by explaining that the Lord returned on high at the Ascension, and He sent the Holy Spirit to the believers. All was done for our salvation. Thus, the Apostles could be filled with the Holy Spirit, which could not be given before His glorification (see John 12:32) ; so that they could preach the Gospel, and thus fill the earth with churches.

✠ About "*on high*" : Saint Athanasius explains that this could refer to the Holy Cross on which our sins have been offered (see John 12:32). It can also refer to the Lord's return to Heaven at the Ascension.

✣ See John 3:13 ; 16:5, 16.

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9 The LORD will judge the peoples./ Judge me, O LORD, in accordance with my righteousness,/ and in accordance with my guilelessness in me.

V 9 About "*will judge*" : Saint John Chrysostom assures us that all the peoples of the earth will be judged by the Lord. He reminds us that there is both a present and a future judgement of all peoples (and of all people). The future judgement will be universal, whereas the present judgement is partial. He reminds us that there is a Providence behind all the things that happen, that things do not happen by accident, and that the Lord uses events in order to stir our hearts to awareness of His activity behind the scenes towards our potential salvation.

✠ About "*people*" : see the note on verse 8.

✠ About "*judge me*" : Saint John Chrysostom interprets here that King David asks the Lord to judge him by his own life and deeds, and not in direct comparison with the Lord's righteousness. In the wording of this psalm, we see that King David is nevertheless aware that he has governed righteously, despite the false words and rumours circulated against him. He trusts that the Lord will not judge him unfairly. Saint John compares the plight of King David with the misunderstandings and slanders that the Apostle Paul endured. Saint John cautions us all against making a wrong condemnation of anyone just because of the troubles or deprivation endured by that person. These are not necessarily deserved, but rather imposed by circumstances or other persons. Saint John himself suffered such things.

✠ About "*judge*" : see the note about "*judging*" on Psalm 2:10.

✠ About "*judge me ... guilelessness in me*" : Saint Basil the Great corrects any possible mistaken perception of the intention of the Prophet David. He points out that there is not egotistical boasting on the part of the Prophet, because that is out of character for him. Rather, "*my righteousness*" refers simply to whatever a human being living in the fallen world may attain to. "*Guilelessness*" refers to ignorance or naïvité, since we are vulnerable to falling through this limitation. Therefore, the Prophet asks that this be kept in consideration at the judgement.

> ✣ Saint John Chrysostom assures us that even if we have come to the very summit of virtue (goodness, righteousness), it is nevertheless by mercy that we shall be saved.
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> ✣ Saint Augustine explains that King David is showing us that our soul does not have righteousness or innocence in and of itself, but rather that it is God's gift of light and brightness which produces in us righteousness and innocence. He tells us that our souls are like lamps which are lit by God, and the Light is Truth Himself. See John 1:8 ; 5:35. He continues the metaphor and he presents the burning and shining lamp as asking the Lord to judge it not by what it has of itself, but by the flame which shines when it is set on fire from Him.
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> ✣ Theodore of Cyrrhus understands these words in the same way as does Saint Basil. However, he reminds us also that in many other places in the Psalter, the Prophet David demonstrates his awareness of his weakness and sin. He reminds us specifically of Psalms 31:5 and 50:5. In this psalm, it is implied that he asks that the Lord not remember his other falls, but that He consider his lack of wrongdoing against Absalom and Ahitophel (and others).
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> ✣ This "*righteousness*" and "*guilelessnes*s" can only come from God Himself, and through one's participation in it. If we have such righteousness and guilelessness in our hearts, then it is the fruit of our communion with God and His life-giving love. Therefore, these virtues are the Lord's own virtues. We might well be careful also in our self-assessments to give thanks to God for any virtues we find within.

✠ About "*my righteousness*" : see the note about "*my righteousness*" on Psalm 4:2.

✠ About "*guilelessness*" : see Psalms 25:1, 11 ; 36:37 ; 100:2.

✠ About "*in me*" : the Greek words are ἐπ' ἐμοί, *ep' emoi*. This phrase is frequently translated "in me". However, the dictionaries provide other preferred alternative translations such as "on", "upon", "above", "over", "at" or "near". Saint Augustine's comments reflect these alternatives, particularly "above".

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10 Then, let the evil of sinners be brought to an end,/ and You will direct the righteous one,/ O God, examining the heart and the reins.

V 10 About "*let the evil of sinners be brought to an end*" : primarily, Saint John Chrysostom comments that the correction of sinners will help the righteous to become more attentive about and focussed on doing the Lord's will and avoiding all evil. From the perspective of a physician, he stresses that applying a treatment (correction) to an illness (sin) promotes healing. However, it is without mercy to leave a person without treatment, since the illness (sin) will only worsen. Therefore, we ought not to lament those who are chastised, but rather those who appear to sin with impunity. The Lord chastises those whom He loves (see Proverbs 3:12). Those who are being chastised are being led to health through the compassionate leniency of the Lord. Even an amputation will keep the other healthy parts from becoming poisoned. However, if someone manages to evade all correction, that person's final state will be lamentable.

✠ About "*evil*" : Saint Silouan of Mount Athos reminds us that of itself, "*evil*" is but a parasite which has in itself no strength nor substance. It has either of these only in accordance with what we, ourselves give it or attribute to it.

- A popular parable expresses this comprehension. A child asked how it could be that a grandparent was so predictably peaceful and never angry. The grandparent replied that, nevertheless, it seemed that there were two wolves within who struggled to prevail. The one was very calm and peaceful, the other was very fiery and prone to violence. The child asked, But how do you know which will prevail ? The grandparent replied that it is the wolf that is fed which will prevail. It is our responsibility to know which one is which, and what is right to do.
- See Psalms 27:4 ; 34:12 ; 50:6 ; 54:16 ; 72:8 ; 93:23 ; 140:4.

✠ About "*direct*" : this word translates the Greek verb κατευθύνω, *kateuthunō*, which means "keep straight", "go straight up" (see Psalm 140:2), "go straight towards", "lead", "guide", "prosper".

- See Palms 36:23 ; 39:3 ; 118:5, 133 ; Luke 1:79 (Matins Canticle 9, Part 2).

✠ About "*righteous one*" : see the note about "*righteous one*" on Psalm 5:13.

✠ About "*God*" : see the note on verse 2.

✠ About "*examining the heart and the reins*" : Saint John Chrysostom explains that when the Lord judges each and every person, He will do so not on the basis of mere rules, but rather on the basis of His intimate knowledge of every thought of the hearts of human beings (see Hebrews 8:27). Saint John affirms this in part on the basis of the use of the word "*reins*" in the psalm. He says that the Prophet David's use of "*examining*" is in terms of precision in knowing (see Romans 8:27).

- Saint Augustine writes that although others can know our works and our words, only God knows the intentions of each one. He alone knows what causes our delight. Carefully exploring

our heart, He alone can direct the righteous.

✣ The term "Knower of Hearts" may express in the form of a title for the Lord what is stated by Saints John Chrysostom and Augustine.

✣ See the note about "*knows ... heart*" on Psalm 43:22. See also 2 Chronicles 6:30 ; Psalm 19:5 ; Matthew 9:4.

✠ About "*examining*" : see Psalms 10:4-5 ; 138:23 ; Jeremiah 17:6.

✠ About "*heart*" : see verse 11 ; see the note about "*heart*" on Psalm 4:3.

✠ About "*reins*" : this refers to the kidneys, or the heart (as the seat of emotions). In other words, it generally means the unconscious mind as well as the emotions.

✣ Saint John Chrysostom explains that the word "*reins*" refers to unspoken thoughts of the mind, the most intimate and profound thoughts ; and that this is hinted at by the position of the organs mentioned.

✣ See the note about "*reins*" on Psalm 15:7 ; see also Psalms 25:2 ; 138:13 ; Jeremiah 11:19 ; 17:6 ; 20:12 ; Apocalypse 2:23.

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11 Righteous is my help from God,/ saving those who are upright in heart.

V 11 About "*righteous ... God*" : Saint John Chrysostom reminds us that we can receive from the Lord only what is good and what is righteous. We therefore must be careful to keep our hearts attuned to His will, so that we would only ask from Him those things which are good and righteous, even for those who cause us pain. If our hearts are so attuned, our requests will be righteous, and we will have hope of salvation.

✣ Saint Basil the Great reflects that his help comes not from wealth, nor anything material, nor from any of his own personal or physical resources, nor from any human kinship. Rather, his help is only from God.

✠ About "*righteous*" : see the note about "*righteous*" on Psalm 2:12.

✠ About "*God*" : see the note on verse 2.

✠ About "*help*" : see Psalm 19:3 ; 21:20 ; 34:2 ; 37:23 ; 48:15 ; 59:13 ; 61:8 ; 69:2 ; 79:12 ; 88:20, 44 ; 90:1 ; 107:13 ; 120:1, 2 ; 123:8.

✠ About "*saving*" : see the note about "*save*" on Psalm 3:8.

✠ About "*those who are upright in heart*" : Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) writes (with reference to Saint John Chrysostom) that the "*upright in heart*" are those who do not have the mind and intention turned to excess or to deficiency, but who are moving towards the middle way of virtue.

✣ See Psalms 10:2 ; 31:11 ; 35:11 ; 36:14 ; 48:15 ; 63:11 ; 72:1 ; 93:15 ; 96:11 ; 124:4 ; Proverbs 15:15.

✠ About "*upright*" : see the note about "*the upright*" on Psalm 24:21.

✠ About "*heart*" : see the note on verse 10.

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12 God is a Righteous Judge and strong and long-suffering,/ not bringing down anger every day.

V 12 About "*God is a Righteous Judge*" : Saint John Chrysostom corrects those who complain that they do not see quick requital for the lawless behaviours of the sinners and the ungodly. He reminds them that there is nothing to fear. The Eternal Judge is patient and righteous. The consequences may not be immediate, but the Lord will judge righteously at the right time. His Kingship has no time-limit.

- Bishop Eusebius of Cæsarea reminds us that God alone is able to judge righteously because He alone sees the hearts of human beings (1 Kingdoms 16:7).
- Saint Ambrose of Optina reminds us that the Lord, being "*righteous*", gracious, generous and merciful, shows His mercy both in truth and in true judgement.
- The Lord gives everyone the maximum time to repent.
- See 1 Moses 18:25 ; Psalm 9:5, 9 ; 2 Timothy 4:8 ; 1 Peter 2:23.

✠ About "*judge*" *:* see Psalms 49:6 ; 67:6 ; 74:8 ; Hebrews 12:23.

✠ About "*strong*" : this word translates the Greek word ἰσχυρός *iskhyros*, meaning "strong", "powerful", "mighty". There are three other adjectives which are likewise translated as "*strong*" in this Psalter.

- See Psalms 23:8 ; 34:10 ; 70:3, 10 ; 134:10 ; 135:12, 18 ; Habakkuk 3:4 (Matins Canticle 4).

✠ About "*long-suffering*" : Saint Basil the Great warns us not to misinterpret the fact that the Lord is "*long-suffering*" as being a sign of weakness. The Lord, who is strong, is also patient. He does not permit swift requital for misdeeds because He is "*long-suffering*".

- Saint John Chrysostom shows us that the Lord is merciful and "*long-suffering*". Being both righteous and strong, He is capable of correcting sinners. However, He often does not bring swift correction , since He is merciful and patient. He judges according to righteousness. However, He also forgives sins and He enables repentance. We sin daily, and we deserve punishment. He reminds us that an honest assessment of our daily behaviours will reveal this. However, in His loving-kindness, the Lord is always encouraging our repentance. When we pay attention to our frequent sins, we will understand His long-suffering. His delay in correcting does not demonstrate weakness, but rather the vastness of His "*long-suffering*". It is only when it is clear that we will not respond to the love and patience of the Lord that He begins to resort to surgical measures. We can see the extent of His compassion.
- Saint Theophylact of Ochrid comments about "*long-suffering*" (with reference to Christ's parable in Matthew 21:33-45) that when the householder went far away, it is a metaphor for the Lord who is simply waiting in His long-suffering. He appears to be far away, but He has never left. He waits in His love to observe what the vine-dressers will do.
- Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus explains that because of His love, God patiently waits for a very long time for human beings to make profit from these opportunities. When there is yet no movement, He gives them yet more opportunity to change and to improve. If, finally, there is no sign of awakening, then the Lord allows the consequences of this wilful straying to fall upon the person, in order that the one in error may yet repent.
- This patient, merciful and "*long-suffering*" aspect of the Lord's love is reflected in Ezekiel 18:23 :

"*Do I ever will the death of a lawless man," says the Lord, "since My will is for him to turn from the evil way and live?*" In liturgical texts, these words are adjusted into a direct statement that the Lord does not desire the death of the sinner, but rather that he should repent and live (see 2 Peter 3:9, 15). The the Lord is truly kind, patient and full of love. We ought never to deceive ourselves that these characteristics are a sign of weakness. Rather, the Lord is truly strong and all-powerful. If we take the Lord for granted, we will bring down the deserved wrath upon our own heads.

✣ See 4 Moses 14:18 ; Psalms 85:15 ; 102:8 ; 144:8.

✠ About "*anger*" : Saint John Chrysostom comments that "*anger*" as such is not God's "*anger*", because anger always eats up only the one who is angry. If we gain nothing from the remedies that the Lord sends, then there are consequences.

✣ See the note on verse 7.

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13 If you were not to turn about, He will polish up His sword./ He strung His bow, and He made it ready ;

V 13 About this verse : Saint John Chrysostom comments that the Lord does not in any way use such weapons. Rather, because of our materialism, the Lord uses these images as a pædagogical device, to bring us to our senses through fear, and to stay the hand of retribution. He cites the Prophet Jonah at Nineveh as an example. The more intolerable the threatening words, the more the utterances arise from parental gentleness and deep loving-kindness. Sometimes the Lord threatens punishment, but the threat is so as not to inflict it.

✠ About "*turn about*" : in this case, the expression means a change to the opposite direction, is used here and elsewhere to expresses a 180-degree turn. This verb is used to express the sense of repentance, which implies the turning away from darkness towards the Light.

✣ The Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica explains that repentance is life. Therefore, it is for us to get free of our negative characteristics and to turn towards the Absolute Good. He adds that no sin is unforgivable except the sin of unrepentance.

✣ See the note about "*turn about*" on Psalm 6:5. See the note about "*turn back*" on verse 17.

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14 and in it He prepared instruments of death./ He wrought His arrows for those who are on fire.

V 14 About "*instruments of death ... arrows*" : see the initial note on verse 13.

✠ About "*death*" : see the note about "*death*" on Psalm 6:6.

✠ About "*arrows*" : Saint Augustine suggests that the same "*arrows*" may be burning missiles (or missiles aimed at those who will burn) for the instruction of the faithful ; or they may be weapons which may be death-dealing for the heresies of unbelievers. From a different perspective, he suggests that the apostles

are launched as flaming arrows from a bow and bow-string (the Scriptures). Those who are struck, who already burn with God's love, are then set ablaze with the love of God.

✣ Saint Jerome notes that many say that these words refer to the devil. In other words, the devil's bow-and-arrow are always at the ready, and he is ever alert for the opportunity to shoot us down. Those whose hearts are burning with passion are those who will be struck down by the devil, because they are deliberately vulnerable to his assaults. Those who are burning are the target.

✣ Mother Maria of Normanby in North Yorkshire, UK, translated the Hebrew text as "[*He*] *makes of His arrows firebrands*" (as in the RSV translation : "*fiery shafts*"), and "*burning arrows*" in the Latin text. However, the Greek text says that He wrought His arrows for those who are burning.

✣ See Wisdom of Solomon 5:21 ; Lamentations 2:4 ; 3:12.

✠ About "*those who are consumed*" : Saint John Chrysostom says that the corrections are for those who are in need of being corrected, not for all and sundry.

✠ About "*on fire*" : this is the word used by the Fathers to express the literal meaning of being set on fire, or being kindled. One can discern two types of fire : the fire of passions and rebellion as partly described here ; and the fire of God's love, which is so strong and so different from our fallen ways. God's love is sometimes interpreted in human fashion as anger (which is not the case), because the Lord's love cleans away all that is not life-giving. This cleansing may sometimes feel like the burning of cauterisation. See John 5:35 where the fire as a burning light describes the Forerunner in terms of illumination. The Forerunner's illumination is from God, and it produces repentance.

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15 Behold, he was in travail in unrighteousness ;/ he conceived distress, and gave birth to lawlessness.

V 15 About this verse : Saint John Chrysostom explains that first there is pain, tumult, and upset, even before evil thoughts are conceived and accepted. Indeed, pain is there from the outset, and there are no words sufficient to express the anguish that the evil suffer. Even the thoughts producing the intention to do evil bring on this suffering. There is torture throughout. He further reminds us that this pain is the human being's reaction to the unrighteousness which is contrary to our nature.

✣ See Job 15:35 ; Isaiah 59:4.

✠ About "*he*" : Saint Athanasius explains that this pronoun refers to the enemy of our life, meaning the Adversary (also known as the Accuser).

✣ Metropolitan Bartholomew (Anania) comments that "*he*" refers an evil man. Predicative verbs are taken from the act of birth, but not in their natural order (to conceive, to be in pain (travail), to give birth). See Isaiah 26:18 (Matins Canticle 5) which does give the natural order.

✠ About "*unrighteousness*" : see the note on verse 4.

✠ About "*conceived*" : see Psalm 50:7 ; Isaiah 26:18 (Matins Canticle 5).

✠ About "*distress*" : see verse 17 ; see Psalm 9:28, 35.

✠ About "*lawlessness*" : see the note about "*lawlessness*" on Psalm 5:5.

16 He dug a pit and delved it up,/ and he shall fall into the hole which he has made.

V 16 About this verse : Saint John Chrysostom comments that the evil itself is a punishment. The one who digs a hole falls into it. Those who prepare evil for others suffer that evil, even before inflicting it on another. Even the fall of the scheming evil-doer is an opportunity which the Lord uses to teach repentance. He reminds us of the life of Joseph and of Moses in which the brothers and the Egyptians hurt themselves in their afflicting of these men. The Lord brought great good out of the evil plans. It is not the experiencing of the evil treatment, but the actual doing of evil that constitutes the wretchedness. Therefore, the Apostle exhorts us to endure wrong, rather than to do wrong. As Christians, we receive blows, but we do not repay in kind. See Matthew 5:39 ; 1 Corinthians 6:7.

✣ Falling into that hole is the result of all evil machinations and manipulations prepared for someone else. The phenomenon is nicknamed "boomerang effect".

✣ See the notes on Psalms 9:16 ; 10:5 ; 139:10 ; see also 1 Kingdoms 25:39 ; 3 Kingdoms 2:32, 58 ; Psalms 5:11 ; 9:23 ; 34:7-8 ; 36:15 ; 56:7 ; 140:10 ; Job 4:8 ; Proverbs 16:25 ; 26:28 ; 29:5 ; Ecclesiastes 10:8 ; Wisdom of Solomon 3:10 ; Wisdom of Sirach 27:26-28 ; Jeremiah 18:20.

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17 His distress shall turn back upon his head,/ and upon the crown of his head shall come down his unrighteousness.

V 17 About "*His ... head*" : see the note on verse 16.

✠ About "*head*" : Saint John Chrysostom suggests that we might recall such persons as Ahithophel and Absalom, who were each hanged by the head. He then reminds us that these events occurred because of the unrighteousness of each, and that it may be said that they brought it upon themselves. See 2 Kingdoms 17:23 ; 18:9-15.

✣ Saint Jerome adds that just as anyone who tosses a stone straight up and does not stand aside will be struck by the falling stone, similarly the devil dooms himself by his own arrogance. His self-exalting pride is his own defeat. Saint Jerome adds that in Esther 7:9-10, we see that Haman is burnt in a fire of his own kindling.

✣ Bishop Eusebius of Cæsarea suggests that these words were fulfilled in Ahithophel's own behaviours. His desire for evil towards another brought the same evil down upon his own head. He suggests that we beware.

✣ See Judges 9:24 ; Nehemiah 3:36 ; Esther 6:4 ; Psalm 139:10-11 ; Proverbs 22:7 ; Obadiah 1:15 ; Jeremiah 2:19 ; Galatians 6:7.

✠ About "*unrighteousness*" : see the note on verse 4.

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18 I shall confess the LORD because of His righteousness ;/ and I shall chant to the Name of the LORD Most High.

V 18 About "*confess*" : see the note on Psalm 6:6.

✠ About "*because of*" : Archimandrite Placide (Deseille) translates the Greek κατά, *kata*, as "*pour*" (in the sense of "concerning"). The Septuagint Greek usage allows for "in accordance with" and "for the reason of" as possible meanings for "*kata*".

✠ About "*His righteousness*" : see the note about "*Your righteousness*" on Psalm 5:9.

✠ About "*chant ... high*" : many do ask : "Why should I praise God ? Why does He need it ?" Saint John Chrysostom, reflecting on the fact that we were created for this purpose, explains that it is his greatest joy to give thanks to and to praise the Lord. It is not that God "needs" this, but that He accepts it from us, together with sacrifices, because it is good for us ; it is for our salvation ; it is dear to His heart that we do and are what and who we were created to do and to be. He reminds us that when the Three Youths in the furnace in Babylon were praising God, they made it clear that they did so because it was their love for the Lord who loves them which caused them to do so. It would not matter what was done by the tyrant ; they would still praise the Lord. Similarly, King David's faith and confidence in the Lord penetrated everything and sustained him in every trial.

✠ About "*chant to the Name*" : Saint John Chrysostom explains that making melody (chanting) to the Lord's Name and constantly remembering the Name of the Most High are characteristics of one who is in love with the Lord ; and this is not different from the way we characteristically express love to one another in songs.

- ✣ Chanting to the Name of the Most High is that for which we were created : to sing the Trisagion (thrice-holy hymn) in eternity.
- ✣ See the note on Psalm 12:6 ; see also Psalms 9:3 ; 17:50 ; 60:9 ; 67:5 ; 91:2 ; 134:3.

✠ About "*chant*" : "*chant*" translates ψάλλω, *psallō*. In Ancient Greek, this meant not to sing a psalm, but to play a stringed instrument with the fingers. By the time of the LXX this was less so, and the meaning then allowed for singing along with a plucked instrument, to sing in a hieratical manner.

- ✣ See Psalms 9:3, 12 ; 12: 6 ; 17:50 ; 20:14 ; 26:6 ; 29:5, 13 ; 32:2, 3 ; 46:7, 8 ; 56:8, 10 ; 58:18 ; 60:9 ; 65:2, 4 ; 67:5, 33, 34 ; 68:13 ; 67:33, 34 ; 68:13 ; 70:22, 23 ; 74:10 ; 91:2 ; 97:4, 5 ; 100:2 ; 103:33 ; 104:2 ; 107:2, 4 ; 134:3 ; 137:1 ; 143:9 ; 145:2 ; 146:7 ; 149:3.

✠ About "*Name of the Lord*" : see 5 Moses 32:3 (Matins Canticle 2) ; Psalms 12:6 ; 19:6 ; 39:5 ; 101:22 ; 112:1, 2 ; 114:4 ; 115:4, 8 ; 117:10, 11, 12, 26 ; 121:4 ; 123:8 ; 128:8 ; 134:1 ; 148:5, 13 ; Proverbs 18:10 ; Isaiah 50:10.

✠ About "*name*" : see the note about "*name*" on Psalm 5:12.

✠ About "*Lord Most High*" : this term, which is a title that refers to the Lord God, and it is similar to the Hebrew names "'Elohim 'Elyon" and "'El 'Elyon", which are both translated as "God Most High" (see Psalms 56:3 ; 77:35, 56). This second title or name, "God Most High", is equivalent to "*Lord Most High*" (see Psalms 12:6 ; 46:3 ; 96:9). They are both considered to be compound names for God. "*Lord Most High*" includes the personal name of God (YHWH, "Lord") and the word "'elyon", which is itself a title, "*Most High*."

✣ See Psalms 9:3 ; 12:6 ; 46:3 ; 56:3 ; 77:35, 56.

O God, the Searcher of hearts,
free us from those who persecute us ;
and give to us, who await Your Judgement,
a strong custody of the mind,
so that we do not repay our enemies evil for evil. — Roman
