168 To Lie Prostrate (*Jacere*)

If a man lies prostrate it is a sign of suffering either of the body or of labor.

¶ Concerning the first, Jos. 7[:10]: Joshua was sorrowing because of the death of his people, “Arise, why do you lie flat on the ground?” Again, David lay flat down on account of the sorrow which he had for his sick son, 2 Kings 12[:16]. Thus, sorrowing for sins, they ought to lie prostrate for humility. For a lion lying prone does not attack according to Isidore, 12 *Etymologies,[[1]](#endnote-1)* thus Moses lay prostrate “before the Lord” when he prayed for the people, Deut. 9[:25].

¶ Concerning the second, it is said in Gen. 9[:21]: Noah lay prostrate “uncovered in his tent” and his shameful parts were open to view. The watchmen in the army never lie prostrate, but either they stand or sit on their horses prepared to the fight, so a man ought. According to the naturalists,[[2]](#endnote-2) an elephant lies prostrate. Therefore, rarely it is captures by the hunter unless by a trick, so that when it leans on an old or hollowed tree. Then both fall together, so neither is a man watching concerning his status is easily captured unless when he leans upon something defective. Saul lay prone in his tent and was in danger because he lost his lance and water jug, 1 Kings 26[:12]. So, lying in a torpor they lose the lance of protection and the water of devotion.

¶ Concerning the third, Matt. 9[:36]: Jesus “seeing the multitudes, he had compassion on them: because they were distressed and lying” prostrate. Thus, it is concerning the distressed and lying prostrate in sins. But the true shepherd Christ does not permit his sheep to be troubled with burdens over their strength, but he has them proceed in temptation, but the devil since he is not the shepherd but the wolf vexes those he can catch, as they were unfit for proceeding by walking or resting by sitting.

¶ Again, it is to be noted that something lying prostrate is more difficult to be lifted than a thing standing, as it is evident in things animate and inanimate, so a little matter lying in sin is more difficult to be moved to the good. Wherefore also in the portico of the pond a multitude lay languishing waiting for the movement of the water, John 5[:3-4], who could not be healed until the angel would descend and move the water. Thus, neither is such a one unless in the virtue of heaven. Again, Lazarus lay full of ulcers, Luke 16[:19]. Again, the centurion said my boy lies paralyzed, Matt. 8[:6]. Again, Holofernes lying on his bed was killed, Judith 13[:4-10]. Wherefore Chrysostom on Matthew, *Homily* 10,[[3]](#endnote-3) one lying prostrate cannot flee nor fight.

1. Isidore, *Etymologiae* 12.2.6 (PL 82:434): Circa hominem leonum natura est benigna, ut nisi laesi nequeant irasci. Patet enim eorum misericordia exemplis assiduis. Prostratis enim parcunt. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Cf. Julius Caesar, The Gallic War 6.27-28 (LCL 72:352-353): Sunt item, quae appellantur alces. Harum est consimilis capris figura et varietas pellium, sed magnitudine paulo antecedunt mutilaeque sunt cornibus et crura sine nodis articulisque habent neque quietis causa procumbunt neque, si quo adflictae casu conciderunt, erigere sese aut sublevare possunt. His sunt arbores pro cubilibus: ad eas se applicant atque ita paulum modo reclinatae quietem capiunt. Quarum ex vestigiis cum est animadversum a venatoribus, quo se recipere consuerint, omnes eo loco aut ab radicibus subruunt aut accidunt arbores, tantum ut summa species earum stantium relinquatur. Huc cum se consuetudine reclinaverunt, infirmas arbores pondere adfligunt atque una ipsae concidunt.

   Tertium est genus eorum, qui uri appellantur. Hi sunt magnitudine paulo infra elephantos, specie et colore et figura tauri.

   There are also [animals] which are called elks [alces]. The shape of these, and the varied color of their skins, is much like roes, but in size they surpass them a little and are destitute of horns, and have legs without joints and ligatures; nor do they lie down for the purpose of rest, nor, if they have been thrown down by any accident, can they raise or lift themselves up. Trees serve as beds to them; they lean themselves against them, and thus reclining only slightly, they take their rest; when the huntsmen have discovered from the footsteps of these animals whither they are accustomed to betake themselves, they either undermine all the trees at the roots, or cut into them so far that the upper part of the trees may appear to be left standing. When they have leant upon them, according to their habit, they knock down by their weight the unsupported trees, and fall down themselves along with them. [The account following this one (6.28) compares the size of another beast to the elephant; this may be the source of the confusion of the elk and elephant.] [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Chrysostom, cf. Robertus S. Remigii, *Historia Hierosolymitana* 4.5 (PL 155:704): Sicque eis divino nutu contigerat, ut nec fugere, nec pugnare licuerit. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)