

PSALM 4

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 4

To the chief Musician on Neginoth, a Psalm of David

This psalm is inscribed “to the chief musician”, or “conqueror”^{f51}: who excelled others in the art of music, and carried the glory from them; who was very skilful, and instructed others in it, and was the master of the song, as Chenaniah, (^{<13152>}1 Chronicles 15:22,27); who set the tune, led on the psalm, and had the whole direction and management of it; and so the Jewish doctors^{f52} generally understand it of one that presided over the rest of the musicians and singers; and to such an one was this psalm sent, to be sung in public worship: for the psalms of David were not composed for private use only, but for public service; and were committed into the hands and care of the chief of the singers, as Asaph and others; (see ^{<13107>}1 Chronicles 16:7); by whom they were preserved and transmitted to future ages for the use of the church, not only in the former but in the present dispensation. The Septuagint interpreters, and after them the Vulgate Latin and Ethiopic versions, render it “unto the end”, or for ever; to this agrees the sense of R. Saadiah Gaon^{f53}, who says,

“this is a psalm of David, who gave it to one of the singers to sing it continually,”

as if it was **j xnl**, “for ever”; but the former sense is best, to understand it of the chief musician, or precentor, who is said to be “on neginoth”: the singular; “neginah”, is used in the title of (^{<19101>}Psalm 61:1), and it is sometimes rendered “a song”, as in (^{<18119>}Job 30:9) (^{<19716>}Psalm 77:6); hence the Vulgate Latin version here renders it “in songs”; and the Septuagint renders it “in psalms”; and then the meaning is, that this person was the chief man that presided over the songs and psalms: though the Jewish writers^{f54}, for the most part, interpret it of a musical instrument so called; not such an one as was blown, as the pipe and trumpet, but what was played upon with the hand; (see ^{<19166>}1 Samuel 16:16,23 19:9); a stringed instrument, which was touched with the fingers as an harp, or struck with a quill or bow as a violin. And as there were various instruments of music

used in the temple service, so there were persons set over them, some over one sort, and some over another; and this man presided over the instruments that were played with the hand: and it looks as if this psalm was to be sung to such an instrument, by its being inscribed and sent to him. Aben Ezra takes the word to be, “the beginning of a song”; and the Targum renders the whole, “to sing upon the chorus” or “dances”. It is called “a Psalm of David”, being written by him, under the inspiration of the Spirit of God; the occasion of it was Absalom’s rebellion; and it was written when he fled from him, as the preceding, as Kimchi thinks; but, according to Lightfoot and others, it was the rebellion of Sheba, (¹⁰⁰¹2 Samuel 20:1-22), though others refer it to the time of his distresses and persecutions by Saul; according to the Jewish Rabbins ^{f55}, where there are the words ^ˆwgynw j wxyn, as they are both in this title, the psalm belongs to future time, to the world to come, to the times of the Messiah.

Ver. 1. *Hear me when I call, O God of my righteousness*, etc.] Or, “my righteous God” ^{f56}, who is righteous in his nature, ways, and works, the just Judge of the whole earth, who will do right; or “the vindicator of my righteousness”, as the Syriac version renders it; that is, of his innocence and uprightness, which the Lord knew and was a witness of: and since he was his covenant God, he doubted not but he would bring it forth as the light, and favour his righteous cause, and do him justice upon his enemies: or the psalmist addresses God in this manner, because he was the author of his righteousness, and was the justifier of him, by imputing the righteousness of his Son unto him. So Christ addresses his Father, (⁴⁸⁷⁶John 17:26); who he knew would justify him, and by whom he was justified as the surety of his people, when he, rose from the dead: and so the saints can draw nigh to God the Judge of all, through the righteousness of Christ; knowing that he is just, and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus; and that he is just and faithful to forgive their sins, and cleanse them from all unrighteousness, on account of his blood. The petition put up by the psalmist is, to be heard when he called, that is, to hear his prayer, as it is explained in the latter part of the verse: and God is a God hearing prayer; and so David, Christ, and all the saints, have found him to be: and the encouragement to pray to the Lord, in hope of being heard, arose from past experience of divine goodness;

thou hast enlarged me [when I was] in distress; when he had like to have been killed by Saul casting a javelin at him; and when his house was watched by men that Saul set there, and he was let down through a

window and escaped; and when he was shut in at Keilah, where Saul thought he had him safe; and at other times, to which he may here refer, as in (~~1989~~ Psalm 18:19 31:8); and this may be applied to the Messiah, when in the garden, beset with sorrows, and an angel strengthened him; and when on the cross, surrounded by various enemies, whom he conquered; and when in death and the grave, from the pains and cords of which he was loosed, and set in a large place. And this agrees also with the experience of the saints; who, when in distress through sin, Satan, and the law, have been set free, through the Gospel proclaiming liberty to the captives to such enemies; and the opening of the prison to them that have been bound by them: and when they have been so shut up and straitened in themselves, that they could not come forth in the discharge of duty, and in the exercise of grace; through the Spirit of the Lord, who is a spirit of liberty, they have been enlarged in the duty of prayer and of praise, and in the exercise of faith and love; and their hearts have been enlarged through the discoveries of the love of God towards them, so that they have run cheerfully in the ways of his commandments; who also gives them largeness of heart, an increase of the knowledge of Christ, and of the love of God, and tills them with joy and peace in believing, and draws out the desires of their souls to his name, and the remembrance of him;

have mercy upon me: the psalmist pleads no merit nor worthiness of his own, but applies to the grace and mercy of God; and sensible of his sin, both original and actual, he entreats a discovery of pardoning grace and mercy. The words may be rendered, “be gracious unto me”¹⁵⁷, or “show me favour”; bestow the blessings of grace, grant larger measures of grace, and fresh supplies of it: and so all sensible sinners apply to God for mercy; and all the saints have recourse to him as the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, for every mercy, both temporal and spiritual. Nor is this unsuitable to the Messiah, as man and Mediator; with whom, God keeps his mercy for evermore, as the head and surety of his people, and upon whom, as man, the grace of God was; and who increased, as in stature, so in favour with God and man; and which, no doubt, was desirable by him;

and hear my prayer: the same petition with that in the beginning of the verse; invocation and prayer being the same thing.

Ver. 2. *O ye sons of men*, etc.] Meaning great men, the nobles of Israel; and so the Jewish interpreters¹⁵⁸ generally explain it; such as Ahithophel,

and others, who were in the conspiracy with Absalom, (^{<10152>}2 Samuel 15:12): and so they were the kings and princes of the earth, and the rulers of the Jewish sanhedrim, the chief priests and elders, who were the enemies of Christ; and such, generally speaking, have been the persecutors of the saints; these men of power and authority, of dignity and honour, and who were in high places, and boasted of their titles and grandeur, the psalmist addresses by way of expostulation in the following words;

how long [will ye turn] my glory into shame? Meaning either God, who was his glory, (^{<9978>}Psalm 3:3); whom they reproached when they said there was no help for him in him; or his tongue, the instrument of praise, and the songs of praise he expressed by it, (^{<9978>}Psalm 7:8); which they jeered and scoffed at: or rather his royal glory and majesty, which they attempted to vail by casting him down from his excellency, by dethroning him, and setting up Absalom in his room. So the Jews endeavoured to turn the glory of Christ into shame, which lay in his being the only begotten of the Father; by denying his sonship, by condemning him to death; because he said he was the Son of God; and by mocking at him under that character on the cross; and also by their spitting upon, buffeting, and crucifying the Lord of glory; by reproaching his Gospel, ministers, and people; and by not acknowledging him as the Messiah, and submitting to his righteousness. And wicked men do as much as in them lies to turn the glory of the saints into shame, by aspersing their character, taking away their good name and reputation among men; by reproaching and reviling them, and speaking all manner of evil of them; and by persecuting them in the most violent manner;

[how long] will ye love vanity; or “a vain thing”^{f59}. Such as the placing of Absalom upon the throne, on which their hearts were set; and such was the vain imagination of the Jews, with which they pleased themselves, that Jesus should die, and his name perish; and such are all the attempts of wicked men to ruin and destroy the people and interest of Christ; for no weapon formed against them shall prosper;

[and] seek after leasing? Or “a lie”^{f60}; or that which fails and deceives, as a lie does: and such were all the counsels and designs of the great men of Israel against David: and so the Jews may be said to seek after a lie, when they seek after another Messiah besides Jesus of Nazareth: for every other proves a “Bar Cozbi”, that is, the son of a lie; as the false Messiah in Adrian’s time was called by themselves. And so do all such as seek after

and embrace false doctrines, errors, and heresies, and are given up to believe them. Now the psalmist suggests that these great men were obstinate, and continued in these sinful practices; and that in the issue all their efforts would be vain and fruitless; and which he further strengthens by observing to them what follows.

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “~~MRD~~ Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 3. *But know*, etc.] Take notice of it, consider it, be assured of the truth, of it; it may be depended upon as fact,

that the Lord hath set apart him that is godly for himself: which may be understood of David himself, an holy good man; a man after God’s own heart; whom the Lord chose, and in a marvellous manner separated from the rest of his brethren; took him from the sheepfold, and set him upon the throne of Israel, for the glory of his great name; and therefore the attempts of his enemies against him would be without success: and also of the Messiah, God’s Holy One, whom he has chosen out from among the people to be their Saviour and Redeemer, to the glory of his grace; wherefore the work of the Lord has prospered in his hands: and likewise of all the saints, and of their election; which act is expressed by their being set apart, or separated from others, who are called the rest; and which is a marvellous act of grace: for the word may be rendered, “he hath wonderfully set apart”^{f61}. It is an amazing instance of grace that God should make one to differ from another, and separate them from their mother’s womb, and call them by his grace. The object of this act is “him that is godly”, or “holy”^{f62}: not that any are set apart or chosen by God for their godliness, or holiness; for they are chosen through sanctification of the Spirit, and not because they were or it was foreseen they would be holy. Holiness, faith, godliness, and good works, are the fruits of election, and not the causes of it: but the word *dysj*, rendered “godly”, signifies “good” and “merciful”^{f63}; and designs one, that God is good, and gracious, and merciful unto; who is an object of his free grace and favour; and therefore he chooses and sets him apart of his own grace and mercy, and according to his sovereign will and pleasure: and that “for himself”; for his own use and service, for his praise and honour, and to the glory of his grace; which is his grand end in predestination, election, and in all spiritual blessings. And now all attempts against such persons are in vain; all charges against them are of no avail; all methods, whether by open force of persecutors, or by the cunning of false teachers, that lie in wait to deceive,

to prevail against them, prove failures: and God will avenge his elect, that cry unto him day and night; as follows;

the Lord will hear when I call unto him; and deliver out of the hands of enemies, and cut them off: wherefore it is a vain thing for men to set themselves against Christ and his people.

Ver. 4. *Stand in awe, and sin not*, etc.] That is, stand in awe of God, and his righteous, judgments; be afraid of him, and tremble before him; make him your fear and your dread, and go on no longer and proceed no further in sinning against him. The Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, render it, “be ye angry, and sin not”: which are the words of the apostle, (^{<4095>}Ephesians 4:26); referring to this place; and which doubtless is the reason of these versions. There is an anger that is sinful, when it is without a cause, or exceeds due bounds, and is not directed to a good end, and is productive of bad effects, by words or deeds; and when it is soon raised, or long continued; and there is an anger that is not sinful; when it arises from a true zeal for God and religion; when it is kindled, not against the persons, but sins, of men; and when it is continued to answer good purposes; as the good of those with whom we are angry, and the glory of God, and the promoting of the kingdom and interest of Christ;

commune with your own heart upon your bed: when retired from men and business, and you are at leisure to think and meditate then reflect upon your actions, seriously consider them; ask your heart some proper and close questions; examine narrowly and thoroughly the principles on which, and the views with which, you act;

and be still; cease from all your rage and fury against me, against the Lord, and against his people; or “say in your own hearts”^{f64}, as follows.

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{<4095>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 5. *Offer the sacrifices of righteousness*, etc.] Offer for sacrifice things righteously gotten, for the Lord hates robbery for burnt offering, (^{<2908>}Isaiah 61:8). Some respect may be had to the unrighteous acquisitions of Absalom and his men, and who were now in possession of Jerusalem, and of the altars of the Lord, and were sacrificing on them; in which they gloried; and to which this may be opposed. Likewise sacrifices of righteousness are such as were according to the law, and were offered in a right manner; which were not maimed, nor had any blemish in them; (see

^{<3013>}Malachi 1:13,14); and particularly such as were offered up in the faith of the great sacrifice, Christ; for, without faith, it is impossible to please God by any sacrifice. And this sense is confirmed by the following clause, which requires trust in the Lord. Moreover, righteousness, with the Jews, signifies alms, beneficence, showing mercy to the indigent; and acts of liberality are sacrifices, with which God is well pleased; and which are preferred by him to the sacrifices of the ceremonial law, (^{<3836>}Hebrews 13:16 ^{<3016>}Hosea 6:6). The sacrifices also of a broken heart, and of a contrite spirit, are such as God esteems of; he looks to those that have them, and dwells with them. And to this sense the Chaldee paraphrase inclines, in which the words are thus paraphrased;

“subdue your corruptions, and it shall be reckoned to you as a sacrifice of righteousness?”

and why may not the sacrifice of praise for mercies received, especially for the righteousness of Christ, be at least included, if not principally designed; since these are sacrifices which, under the ceremonial law, were more pleasing to God than others; and are always acceptable to him through Jesus Christ our Lord? Agreeably to this, Aben Ezra thinks the peace offerings are intended, which were in a way of thanksgiving; and are opposed to sin offerings, and trespass offerings, and burnt offerings; from the last of which sacrifices of righteousness are distinguished in (^{<4519>}Psalm 51:19);

and put your trust in the Lord: not in your strength, in horses and chariots, and numbers of men; nor in wise counsels, nor in riches, nor in fleshly privileges, nor in works of righteousness, or sacrifices of righteousness: for though they are to be performed, they are not to be trusted in; nor in your own hearts. And while the psalmist is striking at the false confidence of the sons of men he is addressing, he may at the same time be thought to be encouraging those that were with him to trust in the Lord, Jehovah, the Son of God, before spoken of by him as the object of trust, (^{<4912>}Psalm 2:12); to trust in his person for the acceptance of their persons and sacrifices of righteousness; and in his righteousness for justification; in his blood for pardon; in his sacrifice for expiation of sin; in his fulness for daily supplies; and in his power for protection and safety. And it is right to trust in him at all times; in times of affliction, temptation, and desertion: he is always the same; in him is everlasting strength; he has an heart as well as

an ability to help and succour, and none ever trusted in him and were confounded. Such have peace and safety, and can want no good thing.

Ver. 6. [*There be*] many that say, who will show us [any] good? etc.]

These may be thought to be the men of the world; carnal worldly minded men, seeking after temporal good, and taking up their rest and contentment in it; to whom the psalmist opposes his wish and request, in the following words. Or these are the words of the men that were along with David, wishing themselves at home and in their families, enjoying the good things of life they before had; or rather these are the words of the same many, the enemies of David, spoken of in (^{490B}Psalm 3:1,2); who were wishing, as Kimchi observes, that Absalom's rebellion might prosper; that David might die and his son reign in his stead, so the evil they wished to him was good to them: or they may be the words of the same men, expressing the desperate condition that David and his friends were in, which the psalmist represents in this manner, "who will show us any good?" none, say they, will show them any good, neither God nor man; there is no help for him in God; he and his friends must unavoidably perish: and this produces the following petition,

Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us; meaning his gracious presence, the manifestations of himself, the discoveries of his love, communion with him, the comforts of his Spirit, and the joys of his salvation; suggesting that in the enjoyment of these things lay their good and happiness, and their safety also; his face and favour, love and grace, being as a shield to encompass them, and as a banner over them, (^{495D}Psalm 5:12 ²¹⁰⁴Song of Solomon 2:4); and so Jarchi observes, that the word here used signifies to lift up for a banner ^{f65}; so, me respect seems to be had to the form of the priests blessing, (^{402B}Numbers 6:24-26); and the words are opposed to the good desired by carnal men, and express the true happiness of the saints, (⁴⁸⁹⁵Psalm 89:15); this is a blessing wished for not only by David, but by his antitype the Messiah, (⁴⁰⁷⁴Matthew 27:46); and by all believers.

Ver. 7. *Thou hast put gladness in my heart,* etc.] The Ethiopic version reads it "into our heart"; in granting the above request; for, nothing so rejoices the hearts of God's people as the light of his countenance, or the enjoyment of his gracious presence: this was matter of exceeding joy to Christ himself, (⁴⁹²⁶Psalm 21:6 ⁴⁰²⁸Acts 2:28); and so it is to all his members; this causes inward gladness, gladness of heart, and is opposed to

the external rejoicings of wicked men and of hypocrites: and this is of God's putting into the heart; and indeed none can put gladness either into a wounded conscience, into the heart of a sensible sinner, or into the soul of one that is panting after the presence of God, and communion with him, but God himself;

more than in the time [that] their corn and their wine increased: meaning the time of harvest and of vintage; when there is a good harvest, and a good vintage, there is joy among men, and the contrary when it is otherwise, (^{230B} Isaiah 9:3 ²⁰¹² Joel 1:12); these things being of general use, spread an universal joy among people; there is scarce any earthly thing that occasions more joy than these do: and yet the joy on such occasions is not to be compared with spiritual joy, that is a joy unspeakable and full of glory. Some take the *m* to be not comparative, but causal, and render the words ^{f66}, “thou hast put gladness in ray heart from the time that their corn”, etc. as do the Chaldee paraphrase and Syriac versions; and the Arabic version renders it, “because of the multitude of fruits”, etc. and then the sense is, as if David should say concerning his enemies,

“I never envied their prosperity, I always rejoiced when they had a good harvest, or vintage, and still do; and yet they have rose up and rebelled against me, and requited me evil for good.”

And this sense is given into by the Jewish commentators ^{f67}, and shows of what an admirable spirit, and in what a sweet disposition of mind, the psalmist was; that while his enemies were seeking his life he was rejoicing in their prosperity; and is a sad aggravation of their wickedness: and this may also be understood of the rejoicing of David, and even of the Messiah, and likewise of all good men, at the spiritual prosperity of the saints, at any increase of grace, spiritual knowledge, and joy, signified by these outward things, as in (²⁸¹² Jeremiah 31:12); the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, add “oil” to corn and wine.

Ver. 8. *I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep,* etc.] Signifying, that he had such a calmness and serenity of mind, amidst all his troubles, that he could not only lay himself down in great peace, and much composure of mind, but sleep also, and that as soon as laid down almost; some lay themselves down, but cannot sleep, through the anxiety of their minds; but the psalmist could do both: or the word rendered “both” may be translated “together” ^{f68}; and the sense be either that he would lie down and sleep

together with his friends, committing himself and them to the care and protection of God; or that he should lie down and sleep together with his enemies; meaning that he was assured that there would quickly be a reconciliation and peace between them; (see ^{<10647>}Proverbs 16:7);

for thou, Lord, only makest me dwell in safety; suggesting that his protection and safety were owing to the power and presence of God only; and that was the reason of the tranquillity of his mind, and why he slept so quietly in the night watches, though in such danger from his enemies; or “thou, Lord, makest me only” or “alone” ^{f69}, being solitary and destitute of friends, to dwell in safety; find the shadow of thy wings, encompassed by thy favour, and surrounded by thy power; (see ^{<6338>}Deuteronomy 33:28).