

PSALM 6

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 6

To the chief Musician on Neginoth upon Sheminith, a Psalm of David

What is designed by “the chief musician”, and what is meant by “neginoth”, have been observed preciously, (see Gill on “~~3900~~ Psalm 4:1”). As for “sheminith”, it seems to be one particular sort of the “neginoth”, or stringed instrument, which this man had the care of; see the title of (~~3911~~ Psalm 12:1): which most of the Hebrew writers ^{f95} understand of the harp of eight strings, to which this psalm was set; and which, from the number of its strings, was called “sheminith”, which signifies “the eighth”: and this receives confirmation from (~~3152~~ 1 Chronicles 15:21). The eighth string was added to the harp by Simonides, according to Pliny ^{f96}: but if such an harp is here meant, this refutes it, for David lived long before Simonides. Though some ^{f97} have thought it refers to a poem or song of eight notes, to the tune of which this psalm was sung; or to the eighth note, which was grave, and which we call the bass. As for the eighth day of circumcision, of which some Jewish writers mystically interpret it; or the eighth, that is, the first day, or Lord’s day, to which some of the ancient Christian writers refer it, or the eighth age, or millennium, as Theodoret; these can by no means be admitted of. The occasion of it was either some bodily disease the psalmist laboured under, or some distress of soul, on account of sin; and the rather this seems to be the case, seeing the psalm begins with the same words as (~~3801~~ Psalm 38:1), in which the psalmist so much bewails his iniquity. Some have thought it was drawn up for the use of any and every sick person; and others say it was written on the account of Israel in captivity, who were then as sick persons ^{f98}: but rather the occasion of it was bodily sickness, inward guilt of conscience for sin, and distress by enemies; as appears from, (~~3913~~ Psalm 6:3,4,7,8).

Ver. 1. *O Lord, rebuke me not in thine anger,* The Lord sometimes rebukes or reproves men by his spirit, and sometimes by his word and ministers, and sometimes by his providences, and that on account of sin; to bring to a sense and acknowledgment of it; and particularly for remissness in duty, or neglect of it; and for trusting in the creature, or in any outward

enjoyment, boasting of it, and loving it too much; and these rebukes of his own people are always in love, and never in wrath, though they sometimes fear they are; (see ^{<380>}Psalm 88:7,16) (^{<210>}Lamentations 3:1); and therefore deprecate them, as the psalmist here does; not the thing itself, but the manner in which it is apprehended it is done, or doing;

neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure; when God chastens his own people it is not in a way of vindictive wrath, or as a proper punishment for sin; for this would be contrary to Christ's suretyship engagements and performances, and to the doctrine of his satisfaction for sin; it would draw a veil over it, and render it of none effect; it would be contrary to the justice of God to punish both surety and principal; and to the everlasting love of God to them, in which he always rests, and from which there can be no separation; nor would they be dealt with as children; and besides would be condemned with the world, and killed with the second death; whereas they will not, though chastened of God, it is the chastening of a father, is very instructive to them, and is always for their good, spiritual and eternal; is in measure, in judgment, and in love; and never in fury and hot displeasure; but this being feared, is deprecated.

Ver. 2. *Have mercy upon me, O Lord*, etc.] He knew he was a sinner, both by original sin and actual transgression, which he was always ready to own; he knew that what he had done deserved the wrath of God, even his hot displeasure; and that for such things it came upon the children of disobedience: he knew that there was mercy with God through Christ, and therefore he flees unto it, pleads for it, and entreats the manifestation of forgiving love: he pleads no merits of his own, nor makes any mention of former works of righteousness done by him, but throws himself upon the mercy of God in Christ; giving this as a reason,

for I [am] weak; either in body, through some disease upon him; or in soul, being enfeebled by sin, and so without spiritual strength to do that which was good of himself; to exercise grace, and perform duty, and much less to keep the law of God, or make atonement for sin, or to bear the punishment of it;

O Lord, heal me; meaning either his body, for God is the physician of the body, he wounds and he heals; so he healed Hezekiah and others; and he should be sought to in the first place by persons under bodily disorders: or else his soul, as in (^{<310>}Psalm 41:4); sin is the disease of the soul, and a very loathsome one it is, and is incurable but by the balm of Gilead, and the

physician there; by the blood of Christ, and forgiveness through it; and the forgiveness of sin is the healing of the diseases of the soul, (^{}Psalm 103:3);

for my bones are vexed; with strong pain; meaning his body, as Kimchi and Aben Ezra observe; because these are the foundation of the body, and the more principal parts of it: and this may be understood of his grief and trouble of heart for his sins and transgressions, which is sometimes expressed by the bones being broke, and by there being no rest in them, (^{}Psalm 51:8 38:3).

Ver. 3. *My soul is also sore vexed*, etc.] Or “exceedingly troubled”^{f99}, and even frightened and thrown into a consternation with indwelling sin, and on account of actual transgressions, and by reason of the hidings of God’s face, and through the temptations of Satan, and because of the fear of death; to which Old Testament saints were very incident.

But thou, O Lord, how long? it is an abrupt expression, the whole he designed is not spoken, being hindered through the grief and sorrow with which his heart was overwhelmed; and is to be supplied after this manner,

“shall I have refreshment?”

as the Chaldee paraphrase; or,

“wilt thou look and not heal me?”

as Jarchi; or

“my soul be troubled?”

as Aben Ezra; or

“shall I be afflicted, and thou wilt not heal me?”

as Kimchi; or

“wilt thou afflict me, and not arise to my help?”

(see ^{}Psalm 13:1,2).

Ver. 4. *Return, O Lord*, etc.] By this it seems that the Lord had withdrawn himself, and was departed from the psalmist, wherefore he entreats him to return unto him, and grant him his gracious presence. God is immense and omnipresent, he is everywhere: going away and returning cannot be

properly ascribed to him; but he, may be said to depart from his people, as to sensible communion with him, and enjoyment of him, when he hides his face, withdraws his gracious presence, and the comfortable discoveries and influences of his love; and he may be said to return when he visits them again, and manifests his love and favour to them: the Jewish writers^{f100} interpret it,

“return from the fierceness of thine anger,”

as in (^{<185B>}Psalm 85:3); and though there is no such change in God, as from love to wrath, and from wrath to love; but inasmuch as there is a change in his dispensations towards his people, it is as if it was so; and thus it is apprehended by them;

deliver my soul; from the anxiety, distress, and sore vexation it was now in, for of all troubles soul troubles are the worst: and from all enemies and workers of iniquity which were now about him, and gave him much grief and uneasiness; and from death itself, he was in fear of;

O, save me for thy mercy's sake; out of all troubles of soul and body, and out of the hands of all enemies, inward and outward; and with temporal, spiritual, and eternal salvation; not for his righteousness's sake, as Kimchi well observes; for salvation is according to the abundant mercy of God, and not through works of righteousness done by men, otherwise it would not be of grace.

Ver. 5. *For in death [there is] no remembrance of thee*, etc.] Of the goodness, truth, power, and faithfulness of God; no notice can be taken nor mention, made either of the perfections or works of God, whether of nature or of grace, by a dead man to others; he is wholly useless to men on earth with respect to these things;

in the grave who shall give thee thanks? for mercies temporal or spiritual; the dead cannot praise the Lord among men, only the living; (see ^{<181B>}Psalm 30:9 115:17 ^{<181B>}Isaiah 38:18,19); wherefore the psalmist desires that he might live and praise the Lord: this argument is taken from the glory of God, which end cannot be answered among men by death, as by life. It does not follow from hence that the soul either dies or sleeps with the body, and is inactive until the resurrection morn, neither of which are true; or that the souls of departed saints are unemployed in heaven; they are always before the throne, and serve the Lord day and night; they remember, with the utmost gratitude and thankfulness, all the goodness

and grace of God unto them, and praise him for all his wondrous works: but the sense is, that when a saint is dead, he can no more serve and glorify God on earth among men.

Ver. 6. *I am weary with my groanings*, etc.] By reason of bodily illness, or indwelling sin, or the guilt of actual transgressions, or the hidings of God's face, or a sense of divine wrath, or the temptations of Satan, or afflictions and crosses of various kinds, or fears of death, or even earnest desires after heaven and eternal happiness, or the low estate of Zion; each of which at times occasion groaning in the saints, as in the psalmist, and is the common experience of all good men. The psalmist being weary of his disease, or of sin, groaned till he was weary with his groaning; inward groaning affects the body, wastes the animal spirits, consumes the flesh, and induces weariness and faintness; (see ^{}Psalm 102:5 ^{}Jeremiah 45:3);

all the night make I my bed to swim: I water my couch with my tears; these are hyperbolic phrases ^{f101}, expressing more than is intended, and are not to be literally understood; for such a quantity of tears a man could never shed, as to water his couch and make his bed to swim with them, but they are used to denote the multitude of them, and the excessiveness of his sorrow; (see ^{}Psalm 119:136 ^{}Lamentations 3:48,49); and these tears were shed, not to atone and satisfy for sin, for nothing but the blood and sacrifice of Christ can do that; but to express the truth and reality, as well as the abundance of his grief; and this was done "all the night long"; (see ^{}Job 7:3,4); when he had leisure to think and reflect upon his sins and transgressions, and when he was clear of all company, and no one could hear or see him, nor interrupt him in the vent of his sorrow, and when his disease might be heavier upon him, as some diseases increase in the night season: this may also be mystically understood, of a night of spiritual darkness and desertion, when a soul is without the discoveries of the love of God, and the influences of his grace; and has lost sight of God and Christ, and interest in them, and does not enjoy communion with them; and throughout this night season weeping endures, though joy comes in the morning. And it may be applicable to David's antitype, to the doleful night in which he was betrayed, when it was the hour and power of darkness, and when he had no other couch or bed but the ground itself; which was watered, not only with his tears, but with his sweat and blood, his sweat being as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground; so he is often said to sigh and groan in spirit, (^{}Mark 7:34 8:12 ^{}John 11:33,38).

Ver. 7. *Mine eye is consumed because of grief*, etc.] Either by reason of the affliction he laboured under, which could not be joyous, but grievous; or because, of the sin that was in him, and those that he had committed, which were grieving to him; or through the sins of other professors of religion, or profane sinners, whom he beheld with grief of heart and weeping eyes: the word ^{f102} used signifies anger and indignation, and sorrow arising from thence, and may denote either indignation in himself at his enemies, who were rejoicing at his calamities; or the sense he had of the anger of God, and his hot displeasure, which he feared he was rebuking and chastening him with; and now his heart being filled with grief on one or other of these accounts, or all of them, vented itself in floods of tears, which hurt the visive faculty; for through much weeping the eye is weakened and becomes dim; and through a multitude of tears, and a long continuance of them, it fails; (see ~~<1870>~~ Job 17:7 ~~<1800>~~ Psalm 31:9 ~~<1011>~~ Lamentations 2:11);

it waxeth old because of all mine enemies; saints have many enemies, sin, Satan, and the world; and these are very oppressive ones, as the word ^{f103} here signifies; such as beset them about, straiten them on all hands, and press them sore; and they must be pressed down by them, were it not that he that is in them is greater than he that is in the world; and David's enemies gave him so much trouble, and caused him to shed such plenty of tears, that his eye waxed old, was shrunk up, and beset with wrinkles, the signs of old age; or it was removed out of its place, as the word is rendered in (~~<1804>~~ Job 18:4); or the sight was removed from that, it was gone from him, (~~<1880>~~ Psalm 38:10).

Ver. 8. *Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity*, etc.] The psalmist being fully assured that God had heard his prayer, that he should recover from his disorder, or be delivered out of his calamities, whether corporeal or spiritual, has on a sudden a spring of joy, faith, and comfort; as sometimes there is a quick transition from comfortable to uncomfortable frames; (see ~~<1807>~~ Psalm 30:7); so on the contrary, there is as quick a passage from uncomfortable to comfortable ones; (see ~~<1818>~~ Lamentations 3:18,24); who may be called "workers of iniquity" (see Gill on "~~<1816>~~ Psalm 5:5"); and these were either his open enemies, as Saul and his men, or Absalom and the conspirators with him, whom he bids to cease from following and pursuing after him; or his secret ones, hypocritical courtiers, that were about him, who were wishing and hoping for his death. It is the lot of God's people to be among the workers of iniquity; Lot was among the

Sodomites, David was in Meshech and in the tents of Kedar, Isaiah was among men of unclean lips; Christ's lily is among thorns, and his sheep among goats; and though in some respects a civil conversation with wicked men cannot be avoided, for then good men must needs go out of the world; yet as little company should be kept with them as can be, and no fellowship should be had with them in sinful practices, nor in superstitious worship; and though there will not be a full and final separation from them in the present state of things, there will be hereafter, when these very words will be used by David's antitype, the Lord Jesus Christ; not only to profane sinners, but to carnal professors of religion, who have herded themselves with the people of God, (^{<41254>}Matthew 25:41 7:23 ^{<41255>}Luke 13:25-28). The reason why the psalmist took heart and courage, and ordered his wicked persecutors, or sycophants, to be gone from him, was his assurance of being heard by the Lord;

for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping; referring to what is said (^{<41116>}Psalm 6:6,7); he had not only lifted up his voice in prayer, but he had wept and made supplication, as Jacob did, (^{<28134>}Hosea 12:4); sometimes God brings his people to the throne of grace weeping, and with supplications leads them, (^{<28119>}Jeremiah 31:9); and then hears their cry and answers them.

Ver. 9. *The Lord hath heard my supplication*, etc.] Which he had presented to him, (^{<41116>}Psalm 6:1,2,4); in which he deprecates his anger and hot displeasure; entreats his free favour, grace, and mercy; desires healing for soul or body, or both; prays a return of his gracious presence; and deliverance and salvation out of all his troubles, from all his enemies, and from death itself. The word ^{f104} used properly signifies petitions for grace and mercy, which the psalmist put up under the influence of the spirit of grace and supplication, and which were heard;

the Lord will receive my prayer; instead of a burnt offering, as Aben Ezra glosses it; as sweet incense, as what is grateful and delightful, coming up out of the hands of Christ the Mediator, perfumed with the sweet incense of his mediation: the word ^{f105} signifies prayer made to God as the righteous Judge, as the God of his righteousness, who would vindicate his cause and right his wrongs; and a believer, through the blood and righteousness of Christ, can go to God as a righteous God, and plead with him even for pardon and cleansing, who is just and faithful to grant both unto him. The psalmist three times expresses his confidence of his prayers

being heard and received, which may be either in reference to his having prayed so many times for help, as the Apostle Paul did, (⁴⁷¹³2 Corinthians 12:8); and as Christ his antitype did, (⁴¹⁵⁹Matthew 26:39,42,44); or to express the certainty of it, the strength of his faith in it, and the exuberance of his joy on account of it.

Ver. 10. *Let all mine enemies be ashamed*, etc.] Or “they shall be ashamed”^{f106}; and so the following clauses may be rendered, and be considered as prophecies of what would be; though if this be considered as an imprecation, it is wishing no ill; wicked men are not ashamed of their abominations committed by them, neither can they blush; it would be well if they were ashamed of them, and brought to true repentance for them; and if they are not ashamed now, they will be hereafter, when the Judge of quick and dead appears;

and sore vexed; or “troubled”^{f107}; as his bones had been vexed, and his soul had been sore vexed by them; as he knew they would be through disappointment at his recovery, and at his deliverance from the distresses and calamities he was now in, when he should sing for joy of heart, and they should howl for vexation of spirit;

let them return; meaning either from him, from pursuing after him; or to him, to seek his favour, and be reconciled to him, and be at peace with him, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi explain it; unless this word should only signify “again”, as it sometimes does, and be read in connection with what follows;

[and] let them be again ashamed suddenly^{f108}; intimating that his deliverance would be sudden, in a moment, in a very little time, and so would be their disappointment, shame, and confusion. Jarchi, from R. Jonathan and R. Samuel bar Nachmani, refers this to the shame of the wicked in the world to come.