

# PSALM 12

## INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 12

### *To the chief Musician upon Sheminith, a Psalm of David*

The word “sheminith” is used in the title of (~~308~~ Psalm 6:1), and signifies “eighth”; and intends either the eighth note, to which the psalm was sung, or rather the harp of eight chords, to which it was set, as the Targum and Jarchi interpret it. Some Jewish writers <sup>f198</sup> understand it of the times of the Messiah; and the Syriac version entitles the psalm,

“an accusation of the wicked, and a prophecy concerning the coming of the Messiah:”

and the Arabic version says, it is concerning the end of the world, which shall be in the eighth day; and concerning the coming of the Messiah: but Arnobius interprets it of the Lord’s day.

**Ver. 1.** *Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth*, etc.] A godly man, according to the notation of the word <sup>f199</sup>, is one that has received grace and mercy of the Lord; as pardoning mercy, justifying and adopting grace; and who has principles of grace, goodness, and holiness, wrought in him; who fears the Lord, and serves him acceptably, with reverence and godly fear, and sorrows for sin, after a godly sort; who loves the Lord, and hopes and believes in him; who is regenerated and sanctified by the Spirit of God, and is a true worshipper of God, and lives in all holy conversation and godliness; and, particularly, is “beneficent”, “kind”, and “merciful” <sup>f200</sup> unto men: such may be said to “cease” when there are but few of them; when their number is greatly reduced <sup>f201</sup>, either by death, or when such who have seemed, and have been thought to be so, prove otherwise: in a view of which, the psalmist prays for help and salvation; “help”, or “save” <sup>f202</sup> Lord; meaning himself, being destitute of the company, counsel, and assistance of good and gracious men; or the cause and interest of religion, which he feared would sink by the ceasing of godly men. When all friends and refuge fail, saints betake themselves to God, and their salvation is of him; and he is their present help in a time of trouble; and he saves and reserves for himself

a number in the worst of times; as he did in Elijah's time, who thought there was no godly man left but himself; (see ~~<510>~~Romans 11:1-5);

*for the faithful fail from among the children of men*; so that there are none left among them but carnal, unregenerate, ungodly, and unfaithful men. The "faithful" are such who are upright in heart and conversation; who trust in the Lord, and believe in the Messiah; who abide by the truths and ordinances of God; and are faithful in what is committed to their trust, whether they be gifts of nature, Providence, or grace; and to their fellow Christians, in advising, reproof, etc. when needful: these may fail in the exercise of grace, and in the discharge of duty, but not so as to perish eternally. The words design the paucity of them, and the sad degeneracy of the times to which they refer: and they may belong either to the times of David, when Saul's courtiers flattered him, and spoke evil of David; when the men of Keilah intended to have delivered him up; when the Ziphites discovered him to Saul, and invited him to come and take him; or when Absalom rose up in rebellion against him, and so many of the people fell off from him: or else to the times of Christ; the people of the Jews in his age were a wicked and faithless generation; and even among his own disciples there was great want of fidelity: one betrayed him, another denied him, and all forsook him and fled; after his death, some doubted his being the Redeemer, and one of them could not believe he was risen from the dead, when he was. And these words may be applied to the antichristian times, the times of the grand apostasy, and falling away from the faith, upon the revealing of the man of sin; since which the holy city is trodden under foot; the witnesses prophesy in sackcloth; and the church is in the wilderness, and is hid there. Yea, to the second coming of Christ, when there will be great carnality and security, and little faith found in the earth. A like complaint with this see in (~~<250>~~Isaiah 57:1 ~~<300>~~Micah 7:2).

**Ver. 2.** *They speak vanity everyone with his neighbour*, etc.] That which is false and a lie, either doctrinal or practical; what was not according to the word of God, and was vain and empty, frothy, filthy, and corrupt; and which no godly and faithful man would do. And this being done in common, by the generality of men, one with another, shows the degeneracy of the age, and supports the complaint before made. They speak even

*[with] flattering lips*; as Cain did to Abel, Joab to Amasa, the Herodians to Christ, Judas to his Master, false teachers to those that are simple,

hypocrites to God himself, when they draw nigh to him only with their lips, and all formal professors to the churches of Christ, when they profess themselves to be what they are not. And this is a further proof of the justness of the above complaint;

*[and] with a double heart do they speak:* or “with an heart and an heart”<sup>f203</sup>; such are double minded men, who say one thing, and mean another; their words are not to be depended upon; there is no faithfulness in them. The Chinese<sup>f204</sup> reckon a man of “two hearts”, as they call him, a very wicked man, and none more remote from honesty.

**Ver. 3.** *The Lord shall cut off all flattering lips,* etc.] This is either a prophecy or a prayer, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi observe; that God either would or should cut off such who used flattery with their lips, by inflicting some judgment in this life, or everlasting punishment hereafter; by taking them away by death “out of the world”, as the Targum paraphrases it; or by casting them into hell, where all liars and deceitful persons will have their portion; (see ~~<K321>~~ Job 32:21,22);

*[and] the tongue that speaketh proud things,* or “great things”<sup>f205</sup>, as the little horn, (~~<2701>~~ Daniel 7:20,25); and the beast, or Romish antichrist, who is designed by both, (~~<6615>~~ Revelation 13:5,6); and which will be accomplished when Christ shall destroy him with the breath of his mouth, and the brightness of his coming; and indeed every tongue that riseth up against God, Christ, and his people, will be condemned; when ungodly sinners will be convinced of all their hard speeches, (~~<2547>~~ Isaiah 54:17) (~~<6015>~~ Jude 1:15). Perhaps some regard may be had to the tongue of Doeg the Edomite; (see ~~<K315>~~ Psalm 52:3-5).

**Ver. 4.** *Who have said, with our tongue will we prevail,* etc.] Either through the eloquence of them, or the outward force and power with which they are backed. The sense is, as we say, so shall it be; our words are laws, and shall be obeyed, there is no standing against them; our edicts and decrees shall everywhere be regarded: or “we will make one to prevail”, or “have the dominion”<sup>f206</sup>; meaning antichrist, the man of sin; for all this is true of the tongues of the antichristian party, and of their laws, edicts, and decrees and which have obtained everywhere, and by which the wicked one has been established in his tyrannical power and authority;

*our lips [are] our own*, or “with us”<sup>f207</sup>: we will say what we please, and make what laws and decrees we think fit, and impose them upon men; and so change times and laws without control, (<sup><sup>207></sup>Daniel 7:25);

*who [is] Lord over us?* which is the very language and conduct of antichrist, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God, (<sup><sup>208></sup>2 Thessalonians 2:4); and is indeed the language of the hearts and lives of all wicked and ungodly men, sons of Belial, men without any yoke or restraint; who walk, and are resolved to walk, after the imagination of their own evil hearts; not knowing the Lord, and being unwilling to obey him, or to be restrained by him; (see <sup><sup>209></sup>Exodus 5:2).

**Ver. 5.** *For the oppression of the poor*, etc.] The servants and people of God, who, for the most part, are poor in a temporal sense, and are all of them, and always, so in a spiritual sense, standing continually in need of fresh supplies of grace; and being often afflicted, as the word signifies, are mean and despicable in the eyes of the men of this world, and so oppressed by them, as the poor generally are by the rich; and as the people of Israel were oppressed by the Egyptians, so are the people of God by antichrist, and by his tyrannical laws and edicts, and by such haughty and insolent persons as before described;

*for the sighing of the needy*; who groan under their oppressions; being stripped of all good things, their friends, and worldly substance, they sigh inwardly, and cry unto the Lord, who sees their oppressions, hears their groans; and though he cannot be moved, as men are, by anything without himself, yet, according to his abundant mercy and sovereign will, he appears and exerts himself on the behalf of his people, and for their relief and assistance;

*now will I arise, saith the Lord*; to have mercy on the poor and needy, and to avenge them on their oppressors, and free them from them. And this the Lord promises to do “now”, speedily, immediately; God arises in the most seasonable time, when his people are in the greatest straits, and in the utmost distress and herein displays his wisdom, power, and goodness. This is an answer to the petition of the psalmist in (<sup><sup>210></sup>Psalm 12:1);

*I will set [him] in safety [from him that] puffeth at him*; or “in salvation”<sup>f208</sup>; in Christ the Saviour. All God’s people are put into the hands of Christ, and are preserved in him; there they are in safety, for out of his hands none can pluck them; and being built on him, the Rock, they are

safe, notwithstanding the waves and winds of temptation, persecution, etc. come with ever so much force upon them. Here it seems to signify, that God would deliver his poor and needy from their oppressions, and put them into a comfortable, prosperous, safe, and happy situation, in which they will be out of the reach of their enemies; as will be the witnesses, when they shall ascend to heaven, (<sup><6111></sup>Revelation 11:11,12); even out of the reach of him that “puffeth at” them, despises them, and treats them with the utmost scorn and contempt; (see <sup><9105></sup>Psalm 10:5). Or that “breathes”, or “let him breathe” <sup>f209</sup> threatenings and slaughters; as Saul did against the disciples of Christ, (<sup><4101></sup>Acts 9:1); or that “lays snares for him” <sup>f210</sup>, as the wicked do for the righteous; or that “speaks unto him” in such haughty and insolent language as before expressed. Some make this clause a proposition of itself, “he puffeth at him”; meaning either that he that is secure, safety puffs at his enemy, despises him, as he has been despised by him; or God, who breathes upon him, and whose breath is as a stream of brimstone, which kindles in him a fire of divine wrath, which is unquenchable; or else the sense is, God will “speak to himself”, or “to him” <sup>f211</sup>; in which sense the word is used (<sup><3104></sup>Habakkuk 2:4); that is, good and comfortable words to the poor; or “he will give him refreshment”, or “rest”: which he will determine in himself to speak to him: or “he shall have breathing”, or “let him breathe” <sup>f212</sup>: he shall have times of refreshing from the Lord, and rest from adversity, from the oppositions and persecutions of his enemies.

**Ver. 6.** *The words of the Lord [are] pure words*, etc.] This observation the psalmist makes in reference to what is just now said in (<sup><9105></sup>Psalm 12:5);, and in opposition to the words of wicked men in (<sup><9112></sup>Psalm 12:2,4); which are deceitful, sinful, and impure. The Scriptures are the words of God; and they are pure and holy, free from all human mixtures, and from all fraud and deceit; they are the Scriptures of truth. The promises are the words of God, and they are firm and stable, and always to be depended on, and are ever fulfilled, being yea and amen in Christ Jesus. The Gospel, and the doctrines of it, are the words of God; that is the sincere milk of the word, pure and incorrupt; as it is in itself, and as it is dispensed by the faithful ministers of it; and they are all according to godliness, and tend to encourage and promote purity and holiness of heart and life; (see <sup><2105></sup>Proverbs 30:5);

*[as] silver tried in a furnace of earth*; they are as “silver” for worth and value; yea, they are more valuable than silver or gold, (<sup><9101></sup>Psalm 19:10

119:72 <sup>(1080)</sup>Proverbs 8:10,11). The Bible is a mine of rich treasure, and to be searched into as for it; the promises in it are exceeding precious; they are like apples of gold in pictures of silver, and yield more joy than the finding a great spoil. The doctrines of the Gospel are comparable to gold and silver and precious stones, and to be bought at any rate, but to be sold at none: and they are as silver “tried”, which is pure, and free from dross. The words of men, of false teachers, are as dross and reprobate silver; but the words of the Lord are tried, and are pure, and free from all the dross of error and falsehood, (<sup>(983)</sup>Psalm 18:30). And they are as silver tried “in a furnace of earth”, which some <sup>f213</sup> render “by the Lord of the earth”; but the word rather signifies a furnace, or an refinery, in which metal is melted and purified; and may be applied to the Lord Jesus Christ in human nature, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and who came full fraught with the doctrines of the Gospel; and in whom they have been “tried”, by his sufferings and death, and are found to be pure, solid, and substantial: or to the ministers of the Gospel, who have this treasure in earthen vessels, whose works and words and ministry are tried by many fiery trials, and abide: or to all the people of God in general, who dwelt in earthly tabernacles; and who, in the midst of various afflictions, have a comfortable and confirming evidence of the purity and truth of the words of God, of the promises of his covenant, and the doctrines of the Gospel;

*purified seven times*; that is, many times, (<sup>(2146)</sup>Proverbs 24:16); and so completely and perfectly pure, and clear of all dross whatsoever, as silver so many times tried must needs be: and so the words of God are not only pure, but very pure, exceeding pure, (<sup>(19940)</sup>Psalm 119:140).

**Ver. 7.** *Thou shall keep them, O Lord*, etc.] Not the words before mentioned, as Aben Ezra explains it, for the affix is masculine and not feminine; not but God has wonderfully kept and preserved the sacred writings; and he keeps every word of promise which he has made; and the doctrines of the Gospel will always continue from one generation to another; but the sense is, that God will keep the poor and needy, and such as he sets in safety, as Kimchi rightly observes: they are not their own keepers, but God is the keeper of them; he keeps them by his power, and in his Son, in whose hands they are, and who is able to keep them from falling; they are kept by him from a total and final falling away; from the dominion and damning power of sin, and from being devoured by Satan, and from the evil of the world: and this the psalmist had good reason to

believe, because of the love of God to them, his covenant with them, and the promises of safety and salvation he has made unto them;

*thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever*; or “thou shalt preserve him”<sup>f214</sup>; that is, everyone of the poor and needy, from the wicked generation of men in which they live, from being corrupted or intimidated by them; and who are described in the beginning of the psalm. Some take these words to be a prayer, “keep thou them, O Lord, and preserve them”, etc.<sup>f215</sup>; and so the following words may be thought to be a reason or argument enforcing the request.

**Ver. 8.** *The wicked walk on every side*, etc.] Of the poor and needy, of the righteous ones, to watch them, lay snares for them, and hurt them; therefore, Lord, keep and preserve them: the wicked are everywhere in great numbers, the whole world lies in wickedness; and the men of it are like their father the devil, they go about to do all the mischief they can to the saints; wherefore they stand in need continually of divine preservation;

*when the vilest men are exalted*: either to great dignities and high offices, to be magistrates and rulers; (see <sup><ABD></sup>Proverbs 29:2); or are highly esteemed and caressed; which shows the sad degeneracy and badness of the times, and the unsafe and dangerous condition the people of God are in, unless kept by him; (see <sup><ABE></sup>Malachi 3:15,16); or else these words may be considered as expressive of the judgment of God upon wicked men, and so confirm what the psalmist had said of God’s regard to and preservation of his own people; and the sense be, that the wicked shall walk up and down here and there, as outcasts and vagabonds, in a most desolate, destitute, and miserable condition; and as the latter clause may be rendered, “according to [their] exaltation [shall be] the vileness”, depression, or humiliation “of the children of men”<sup>f216</sup>; they shall be brought as low as they have been made high; by how much the more highly they have been exalted, by so much the more deeply they shall be humbled: or else the meaning is, they shall walk about here and there fretting and vexing, when they shall see such who in their opinion are the meanest and basest of men, of low degree, and of a mean extract, exalted to the highest posts of honour and dignity; as David, who was taken from the sheepfold, and placed on the throne of Israel; so Jarchi, who observes that the Haggadah explains it of the Israelites, who will be exalted in time to come.