

PSALM 34

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 34

*[A Psalm] of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech;
who drove him away, and he departed*

The author of this psalm is expressed by name; and the time and occasion of it are plainly intimated: it was composed by David, “when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech”; not Ahimelech the priest, sometimes called Abimelech, (^{<13186>}1 Chronicles 18:16); to whom David went alone for bread, pretending he was upon a private business of the king’s; to which sense the Syriac version inclines, rendering the words, “when he went to the house of the Lord, [and] gave the firstfruits to the priests”. But this Abimelech was king of Gath, the same with Achish, (^{<19210>}1 Samuel 21:10); who either had two names; or this of Abimelech, as it should seem, was a common name to all the kings of the Philistines; (see ^{<19112>}Genesis 20:2 26:8); as Pharaoh was to the Egyptian kings, and Caesar to the Roman emperors: the name signifies a “father king”, or “my father king”, or a “royal father”; as kings should be the fathers of their country: before him “David changed his behaviour”, his taste, sense, or reason: he imitated a madman; behaved as if he was out of his senses, scrabbling on the doors of the gates, and letting his spittle fall down upon his beard; for he being known and made known by the servants of the king, he was in great fear of losing his life, being in the hands of an enemy, and who he might justly fear would revenge the death of their champion Goliath; wherefore he took this method to get himself despised and neglected by them, and escape out of their hands: and which succeeded; for Abimelech, or Achish, seeing him behave in such a manner, treated him with contempt, was displeased with his servants for bringing him into his presence, and ordered them to take him away, or dismiss him; which is here expressed by this phrase, “who drove him away”, with scorn and indignation; “and he departed” to the cave of Adullam, glad at heart he had escaped such danger: upon which, under a sense of divine goodness, and by the inspiration of the Spirit of God, he composed the following psalm; (see ^{<19210>}1 Samuel 21:10-15 22:1).

Ver. 1. *I will bless the Lord at all times*, etc.] That is, ascribe blessing, give honour, praise, and glory to him, both as the God of nature and providence, for every temporal mercy; and that every day, and at all times in the day; since these are renewed every morning, and continue all the day long; and as the God of grace, for all spiritual blessings; and that continually, because these last always; they are irreversible, unchangeable, and without repentance; yea, saints have reason to bless God in times of adversity as well as prosperity, since it might have been worse with them than it is; they have a mixture of mercy in all, and all things work together for their good;

his praise [shall] continually [be] in my mouth; not the “praise” of which God is the author, but of which he is the object; which is due unto him, and is given him on account of the perfections of his nature, and the works of his hands, and the blessings of his providence and grace; this, the psalmist says, should be in his mouth: his meaning is, that he should not only retain in his heart a grateful sense of the divine favours, but should express it with his lips; should both make melody in his heart to the Lord, and vocally sing his praise; and that “continually”, as long as he lived, or had any being, (~~418D~~ Psalm 146:2).

Ver. 2. *My soul shall make her boast in the Lord*, etc.] Not in men, nor in any outward enjoyment, nor in any works of righteousness, but in the Lord; “in the Word of the Lord”, as the Targum; in the Lord Jesus Christ; in his wisdom, strength, riches, righteousness, redemption, and salvation; in interest in him, and communion with him: and this is not tongue but soul boasting; and not flashy and selfish, but solid, spiritual, and hearty; and with all the powers and faculties of the soul; (see ~~402D~~ 1 Corinthians 1:29-31);

the humble shall hear [thereof]; either of the deliverance the psalmist had out of the hands of his enemies; or of his blessing and praising the Lord for the same, and making his boast in him as the God of his salvation; or of both: of these humble ones, (see Gill on “~~402D~~ Psalm 10:12”);

and be glad; for such rejoice with them that rejoice, and are glad at heart that others share in the goodness and grace of God; and also because by such an instance of the divine power and kindness they are encouraged to hope that he will, in his own time, deliver them out of their afflictions and distresses also.

Ver. 3. *O magnify the Lord with me*, etc.] The psalmist invites the humble ones, who he knew would rejoice at the goodness of God to him, to join with him in ascribing greatness to the Lord, which is meant by magnifying him; for he cannot be made great by men, only declared how great he is, and that can only be done in an imperfect manner;

and let us exalt his name together: by proclaiming him to be the most High; by making mention of his glorious perfections and works, that he be exalted; and by praising him in the highest strains; or by having the high praises of him in their mouths; and there is more pleasure as well as more glory brought to God by doing this in a social way, or by a number of saints joining together in such service.

Ver. 4. *I sought the Lord, and he heard me*, etc.] Not that he sought the Lord publicly in his house and ordinances, for he was now at Gath; but privately by prayer and supplication; and that not vocally, but mentally; for he was in the midst of the servants of the king of Gath; yet earnestly, diligently, and with his whole heart, being in great distress; when it was right to seek the Lord, and which showed him to be a good man; and the Lord heard and answered even his silent groans, which could not be uttered;

and delivered me from all my fears; of being seized on by Achish, king of Gath, and of losing his life for killing Goliath: and many are the fears of God's people, both from within and from without, by reason of sin, Satan, and the world; but the Lord saves them out of the hands of all their enemies, grants them his presence, and shows them their interest in himself, which, scatters all their fears.

Ver. 5. *They looked to him, and were lightened*, etc.] That is, “the humble” ones, (^{488D}Psalm 34:2); and so this is a reason why they should join in praising and magnifying the Lord; these “looked” up to God in prayer and by faith, when in distressed and uncomfortable circumstances, for help and deliverance, and a supply of every needful good thing; and they were “enlightened”; so the Targum renders it, “their faces were enlightened”; as Jarchi and Aben Ezra interpret it, in opposition to what follows: they must have been enlightened before they could look, but by looking to the Lord more light was gained: this chiefly designs the light of joy, peace, and comfort, which is had in a way of believing: some render the word “and flowed”^{f493}, as a river does, that is, to the Lord, as in (^{281D}Jeremiah 31:12). So Kimchi and Ben Melech explain the word; and it denotes both the

numbers of them that looked up to the Lord in their distress, and the swiftness of their motion to him, and their earnestness and fervour of mind; so faith is not only a looking to Christ, but a going forth unto him;

and their faces were not ashamed; having what they prayed and looked for, and what they hoped and believed they should have; namely, deliverance and salvation, and so peace and pleasure.

Ver. 6. *This poor man cried*, etc.] Singling out some one person from among the humble, who was remarkably delivered; it is the common case of the people of God to be poor and afflicted, and in their afflictions they cry unto the Lord to be supported under them, and delivered out of them: or this may be understood of David himself, who was poor, not with respect to outward things, but in spirit; was much afflicted, and especially greatly distressed when in the court of Achish; at which time he cried unto the Lord, as was his usual way, and that internally, as Moses did, (^{<02415>}Exodus 14:15). Some think Jesus Christ is intended by this poor man, who was poor in temporals, though rich, and Lord of all; and was greatly afflicted, both in body and soul; and who, in the days of his flesh, offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, (^{<3070>}Hebrews 5:7);

and the Lord heard [him], and saved him out of all his troubles; so the Lord always heard his son Jesus Christ, and especially in the day of salvation, and delivered him out of all his troubles, both of body and soul, when he raised him from the dead, and gave him glory; and he heard David his servant, as he often did; particularly when at Gath, and made way for his escape from thence; and from whence he came safe to the cave of Adullam; and the Lord hears all his poor and afflicted ones, when they cry unto him, and in the issue saves them from all their troubles, by reason of a body of sin and death, the temptations of Satan, and the persecutions of men.

Ver. 7. *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him*, etc.] By whom may be meant, either the uncreated Angel, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Angel of God's presence, and of the covenant, the Captain of salvation, the Leader and Commander of the people; and whose salvation is as walls and bulwarks about them; or as an army surrounding them: or a created angel may be intended, even a single one, which is sufficient to guard a multitude of saints, since one could destroy at once such a vast number of enemies, as in (^{<1295>}2 Kings 19:35); or one may be put for more,

since they are an innumerable company that are on the side of the Lord's people, and to whom they are joined; and these may be said to encamp about them, because they are an host or army; (see ^{<0101>}Genesis 32:1,2 ^{<0103>}Luke 2:13); and are the guardians of the saints, that stand up for them and protect them, as well as minister to them;

and delivereth them; out of the hands of all their enemies. David had a guard, an army of these about him, in the court of Achish, who preserved him from being seized, and receiving any harm there; and who brought him from thence in safety: there is no doubt but he here speaks his own experience.

Ver. 8. *O taste, and see that the Lord [is] good*, etc.] He is essentially, infinitely, perfectly, immutably, and solely good in himself; and he is communicatively and diffusively good to others: he is the author of all good, but not of any evil, in a moral sense; this chiefly regards his special grace and goodness through Christ: all the divine Persons in the Godhead are good; the Father is good, he has good designs towards his people, has provided good things for them, made good promises to them, and bestows good gifts on them: the Son is good; the good Shepherd that has laid down his life for the sheep; he is the fountain of all grace and goodness to his churches, and to particular believers; he has wrought a good work for them, the work of redemption, and he speaks a good word on their behalf in the court of heaven: the Spirit is good; he works good things in the hearts of the sons of men, and shows good things unto them; and gracious souls, such as the psalmist here calls upon, are capable of tasting and discerning how good the Lord is in some measure; (see ^{<0101>}Psalm 119:103 ^{<0103>}Song of Solomon 2:3 ^{<0101>}1 Peter 2:2,3). While unregenerate, their taste is vitiated, and remains unchanged, and sin is what they feed upon with pleasure, and so detest everything that is good; but in conversion a new taste is given, so as to have a saving experimental knowledge of the grace and goodness of God in Christ, an application of it to them; and in such manner as to live upon it, and be nourished by it; and though this is not a superficial taste of things, like that of hypocrites, nor a single one only, being frequently repeated; yet it is but a taste in comparison of the enjoyment of it in the heavenly state; and every taste now influences and engages trust in the Lord, as follows;

blessed [is] the man [that] trusteth in him; (see Gill on "^{<0101>}Psalm 2:12"); the Targum renders it, "that trust in his word".

Ver. 9. *O fear the Lord, ye his saints,* etc.] Who are sanctified by his Spirit, and so are openly and manifestly his; these are exhorted to fear the Lord with reverence and godly fear; and great reason there is why they should fear him, since he is King of saints, and fear is due to him from them; and seeing they have received many instances of grace and goodness from him, and therefore should fear him for his goodness's sake; and besides they, and they only, know him, and have the grace of fear in them, and so only can exercise it on him;

for [there is] no want to them that fear him; not in spirituals, since so much goodness is laid up for them; the heart of God is towards them, his secret is with them, his eye is upon them, and the sun of righteousness arises on them; and both grace and glory are given to them; nor in temporals, since godliness, or the fear of God, has the promise of this life, as well as of that which is to come.

Ver. 10. *The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger,* etc.] According to Apollinarius,

“the needy rich, whom famine presses;”

(see ^{<K&H>} Job 4:10,11);

but they that seek the Lord; by prayer, diligently, with their whole heart, and in the sincerity of their souls; the Targum is, “that seek the doctrine of the Lord”; that seek instruction from him, and to be taught by him: these

shall not want any good [thing]: which God has purposed to bestow upon them, which he has promised unto them, and provided for them; nor any thing that shall be for their good.

Ver. 11. *Come, ye children,* etc.] Meaning either his own children, those of his own family, judging it his duty to instruct them, and bring them up in the fear of the Lord; or his subjects, to whom he stood in the relation of a father, as every king does; or all his hearers, as those who attended the prophets are called the children or sons of the prophets; or young people in common may be designed, who should be taught early their duty to God and men: unless the children of God in general are here meant; or particularly the least among them, called babes and little children, who are little in their own eyes, are modest and humble; and who, as they need instruction, are most forward to receive it; and the word “come” does not

so much design local motion, a drawing near to hear, as readiness to hear, and a close attention of mind; as follows;

hearken unto me; as unto a father, giving good doctrine and wholesome advice; (⁽¹¹⁰⁾Proverbs 2:1,2 4:1,2);

I will teach you the fear of the Lord; which he had so often spoken of, and so many good things are promised to them that have it, and even in the context: this the psalmist could not give, nor can any man, only teach it, show the nature of it, in what it lies, how it shows itself, and what are the effects it produces: this is the first lesson to be taught and learnt; for it is the beginning of wisdom; it includes all grace, and every duty, and regards the whole worship of God, and the manner of it.

Ver. 12. *What man [is he that] desireth life?* etc.] Every man desires life, even a natural life; it is more desirable than all things in it; especially an healthful life, without which the blessings and mercies of life cannot be comfortably enjoyed; and still more a life of prosperity; life, with an affluence of good things, and even a long one: though it may be rather that a spiritual life is here meant, and a comfortable one; a life free from the remorse of a guilty conscience, from the fear of hell, damnation, and wrath; from the bondage of the law, and the dread of death; a life of faith on Christ, and communion with him; and a life of sobriety, righteousness, and holiness; and perhaps it may be best of all to understand it of eternal life, which is life eminently and emphatically; it follows,

[and] loveth [many] days; that is, good ones; as they are interpreted in (⁽¹¹⁰⁾1 Peter 3:10); not of this life, for the days of it are evil, and especially when they are lengthened out; the days of old age, (⁽¹¹⁰⁾Ecclesiastes 12:1); unless the days of the son of man, the days of enjoying the presence of God in his house and ordinances, should be intended; though rather the good and many days of eternity, even length of days, for ever and ever, in which will be fulness of joy, and never ceasing and never fading pleasures;

that he may see good; there is good to be seen and enjoyed in this life, which if the saints did not believe they should see and enjoy, they would often faint; and this good lies in the participation of the blessings of grace, and in fellowship with Father, Son, and Spirit: but the great and lasting good to be seen and enjoyed is in the world to come, when God shall be all in all, be seen as he is, and the saints shall inherit all things.

Ver. 13. *Keep thy tongue from evil*, etc.] This, and what follows in this verse and (^{<1314>}Psalm 34:14), point at the things wherein the fear of God shows itself; and suggest, that those who have it, and which is known by these fruits, shall enjoy the desirable and good days before mentioned. The tongue is an instrument of much evil, an unruly member, and needs restraint; and it is from evil, and not from good, it is to be kept; from evil speaking of God, from cursing and swearing; from evil speaking of men, reproaching and reviling them; from filthy speaking, from all obscene and unchaste words, and from all lying ones; for where such evil speaking is indulged, the fear of God cannot be in that man;

and thy lips from speaking guile; hypocritical and deceitful words, speaking with flattering lips and a double heart: some speak bad words in common conversation, through an evil habit and custom; and some speak good words with an ill design; and in neither of them is the fear of God before their eyes, nor in their hearts.

Ver. 14. *Depart from evil*, etc.] This denotes that evil is near to men; it keeps close to them, and should be declined and shunned: and it regards all sorts of evil; evil men, and their evil company; evil things, evil words and works, and all appearance of evil; and the fear of the Lord shows itself in an hatred of it, and a departure from it, (^{<1013>}Proverbs 8:13 16:6);

and do good; not only acts of beneficence to all in necessitous circumstances, but every good work; whatever the word of God directs, or suggests should be done; and which should be done from right principles of faith and love, and to right ends, the glory of God, and the good of his interest; and Christ should be looked and applied unto for grace and strength to perform; all which are evidences of the true fear of God;

seek peace, and pursue it; in the world, and with all men, as much as possibly can be; in neighbourhoods, cities, and states, and in the churches of Christ, and with the saints, as well as with God through Christ; and which in every sense is to be pursued after with eagerness, and to be endeavoured for with diligence; (see ^{<1218>}Romans 12:18 14:19) (^{<1214>}Hebrews 12:14).

Ver. 15. *The eyes of the Lord [are] upon the righteous*, etc.] These are the same with them that fear the Lord, and do good; not that they become righteous in the sight of God, or are justified before him, by their fear of him, and by their good works; but these are the fruits and effects of grace,

showing them to be righteous persons; for it is only by the righteousness of Christ that men are righteous before God: and upon these the eyes of the Lord are; not only his eye of Providence, to watch over them, protect them, and supply them with good things, but his eye of love; with complacency and delight he looks upon them, as clothed with the righteousness of his son; and it is with pleasure he looks upon them, that being well pleasing in his sight; seeing by it the law is magnified and made honourable; nor does he ever withdraw his eyes from them, (^{<18307>}Job 36:7);

and his ears [are open] unto their cry; for though they are righteous, they are sometimes in distress; their afflictions are many; the good days they are to see are hereafter; and at those times they cry unto the Lord; which is to be understood of prayer, and of the vehemency and fervency of it, when they have the ear of God, and he shows himself to be a God hearing and answering prayer.

Ver. 16. *The face of the Lord [is] against them that do evil*, etc.] Not against everyone that sins; for the righteous are not without sin; they have sin in them, and they do no good without it; but against them that live in sin, whose course of life is a series of wickedness, and they are workers of iniquity; and have no sense of sin, nor sorrow for it, go on in it without shame or fear; against these the face of the Lord is, he shows his resentment, and stirs up his wrath. For the Lord to be against a man is dreadful; a fearful thing it is to fall into his hands as a God of vengeance; there is no standing before him when once he is angry: and to have the face of God against a man is intolerable, when it is to destroy, and

to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth; so that they shall be no more thought of, nor spoken of, but with contempt and reproach; an everlasting mark of infamy being upon their names; (see ^{<21007>}Proverbs 10:7).

Ver. 17. [*The righteous cry*, etc.] The word “righteous” is not in the original text, but is rightly supplied in our version, as it is in the Targum, and by Jarchi; and so Kimchi and Ben Melech observe, that these words are not to be connected with (^{<18416>}Psalms 34:16), but with (^{<18415>}Psalms 34:15); and they are indeed an amplification of the last clause of it; and the cry of the righteous is meant, to which the ears of the Lord are open; though Aben Ezra thinks that these words are to be understood of them that do evil, and of their cry to the Lord, when they turn from their evil ways; but the former sense is best;

and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles; their inward troubles, through the workings of corruption in their hearts; through the violent assaults of Satan, the blasphemous thoughts he injects into them, and his solicitations of them to sin; and through divine desertions, and their outward troubles; through afflictions of body, losses of estate and friends, and the reproaches and persecutions of men; out of all these the Lord sooner or later delivers his people who cry unto him.

Ver. 18. *The Lord [is] nigh unto them that are of a broken heart,* etc.] Who are pressed and bore down with afflictions, by the sorrow of heart under which their spirits are broken, (^{2015B}Proverbs 15:13); or with a sense of sin, and sorrow for it, for which their hearts smite them, and they are wounded by it, and broken with it: to these the Lord is “nigh”; not in a general way only, as he is to all men, being God omnipresent, but in a special manner; he comes and manifests himself to them in a gracious way, pours in the oil and wine of his love, and binds up their broken hearts; yea, comes and dwells with them: he does not pass by them and neglect them, much less make the breach worse; he does not break the bruised reeds, but he heals their breaches;

and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit; not in a legal, but in an evangelical way; who are humbled under a sense of sin, and melted down in true repentance, under a view of the love and grace of God; and are poor and mean in their own eyes: to these the Lord has respect; the sacrifices of a broken and contrite spirit are not despised by him, but accepted through faith in Christ; and such he saves with an everlasting salvation in him.

Ver. 19. *Many [are] the afflictions of the righteous,* etc.] This may be understood of some one particular righteous person, since the singular number is here made use of; whereas the plural is always used before, when the righteous are made mention of; and the Lord Jesus Christ may be designed, who is eminently and emphatically “the righteous”; he is righteous both as God and man, and as Mediator, in the discharge of every branch of his office; and his afflictions were many, which he endured from men, from devils, and from God himself: many were the afflictions of his body, which he bore when buffeted, scourged, and crucified; and many were the afflictions of his soul, when he bore the sins of his people, endured the wrath of God for them, and was forsaken by him; though none of these were for any sins of his own, but for the sins of others; and out of

them all the Lord delivered him at last, and set him at his own right hand; or this may be understood of everyone of the righteous; who, though they are justified from sin, and are saved from wrath, yet have many afflictions; which are “evils” in themselves, as the word ^{f494} may be rendered, and are very troublesome and distressing; and these are great and grievous for quality, and many and abundant for quantity; though no more than it is the will of God should be, and not one too many;

but the Lord delivereth him out of them all; as Christ was, and all his people will be; if not in this life, by giving respites and intervals, as he sometimes does; yet hereafter, when the righteous are completely delivered out of all their trials and exercises, so as that they shall never return more upon them. The word translated “afflictions”, as it signifies “evils”, may be safely interpreted of moral evils, as well as of evils of afflictions: it is the same word that is used for moral evil in (¹⁹⁸² Psalm 34:21); and then the sense is, that many are the sins committed by righteous persons; for there are none without sin, in many things they all offend; yet they shall not perish by them, but they shall be delivered from them; as, from the dominion of them by the power of grace, and from the guilt of them by the blood of Christ, and from condemnation for them through his righteousness; so hereafter from the very being of them, and all molestation and disturbance by them.

Ver. 20. *He keepeth all his bones; not one of them is broken.*] This is literally true of Christ, in whom the type of the passover lamb had its accomplishment, and this passage also; (see ¹²²⁶ Exodus 12:46 ³¹³¹ John 19:31-36); and seems better to agree with him than with any of his members, since the bones of many of them have been broken by one accident or another; and especially many of the martyrs of Jesus have had all their bones broken upon the rack or wheel; wherefore, to understand these words of them might tend to create uneasiness and despondency in the minds of such who by any means have their bones broken; as if they were not righteous persons, this promise not being fulfilled in them: and to interpret this of the Lord’s keeping the bones of his people in the grave, and in the resurrection putting them together again; this is no other than what will be done to the wicked; it seems therefore best to understand the whole of Christ; and it looks as if this passage was had in view as fulfilled in (³¹³¹ John 19:36); since a Scripture is referred to; but if it is interpreted of the righteous in general, it must be with a limitation; as that their bones are all kept by the Lord, and not one is broken without his knowledge and will;

and that they are not broken finally, but restored again perfect and whole in the resurrection, and so will continue to all eternity: the phrase, without entering into particulars, may in general design the care of Providence over the righteous; with this compare (^{<400>}Matthew 10:29,30).

Ver. 21. *Evil shall slay the wicked*, etc.] Meaning either the evil they designed against the righteous shall return and fall upon their heads, to their own ruin; or the evil of affliction, which to them is the evil of punishment, both here and hereafter, from which they will have no deliverance in the end; though the righteous have from their afflictions, being not properly punishments, but chastisements for sin, and are but for a time; or else the evil of sin, which is the cause of death corporeal and eternal;

and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate; or “shall be guilty”^{f495}; be found so; or “shall be condemned”, or “damned”, as the Targum renders it. All wicked men hate the righteous, both Jesus Christ the righteous, and his people; and that because they are righteous, and do not run into the same excess of wickedness with them, these will be arraigned at the day of judgment, and will be convicted of all their hard speeches which they have spoken against Christ and his members; and will be pronounced guilty, and will be punished with everlasting destruction.

Ver. 22. *The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants*, etc.] Who are made so by his grace in the day of his power, and are willing to serve him, and to serve him with their minds, readily and cheerfully; and the soul of these, which is the more noble part of them, and is of more worth than a world, the redemption of which is precious, and requires a great price, the Lord redeems; not that their bodies are neglected, and not redeemed; but this is mentioned as the principal part, and for the whole; and this redemption is by the Lord, who only is able to effect it, and which he has obtained through his precious blood; and here it seems to denote the application of it in its effects; that is, the forgiveness of sin, justification, and sanctification, since it respects something that is continually doing;

and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate; or “be guilty”^{f496}, or “condemned”, or “damned”; because they are justified from all the sins they have been guilty of, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus; and having believed in him, they shall not be damned, according to (^{<4166>}Mark 16:16); and they shall be far from being desolate, and alone, and miserable;

they shall stand at Christ's right hand, be received into his kingdom and glory, and be for ever with him.