

PSALM 40

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 40

To the chief Musician, a Psalm of David

Jarchi interprets this psalm of the Israelites, and of their deliverance and song at the Red sea. The title of it, in the Syriac version, is,

“A psalm of David according to the letter, when Shemaiah brought the names of those who minister in the house of the Lord;”

(see ^{<1346>}1 Chronicles 24:6); according to Kimchi, the subject of this psalm is the same with that of the two preceding; and R. Obadiah thinks it was composed by David, when he was recovered of a leprosy; but though it might be written by David, it was not written concerning himself, or on his own account, but of another. The title of this psalm is somewhat different from others in the order of the words; whereas it is usually put “a psalm of”, or “for David”; here it is, “for David, a psalm”; and may be rendered, as Ainsworth observes, “a psalm concerning David”; not literally, but typically understood; not concerning David himself, but concerning his antitype and son, who is called by his name, (^{<3574>}Ezekiel 37:24,25 ^{<3815>}Hosea 3:5); and that it is to be interpreted of him is evident from the application of (^{<13906>}Psalm 39:6-8), unto him by the apostle in (^{<58015>}Hebrews 10:5-9); and the whole of it is applicable to him; some apply it to Jeremiah in the dungeon, and others to Daniel in the den, as Theodoret observes.

Ver. 1. *I waited patiently for the Lord*, etc.] Or “waiting I waited” ^{f563}; which denotes continuance, constancy, and patience; and which Christ exercised in the garden, when he submitted himself entirely to the will of God; and on the cross, when he continued in sure hope and firm expectation of his help and assistance, though he was for a while forsaken by him; (see ^{<28107>}Isaiah 50:7-9);

and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry; both in the garden, by delivering him from fear of death; and on the cross, by upholding, helping, and assisting him, by carrying him through his sufferings and death, and raising him from the dead; (see ^{<2308>}Isaiah 49:8 ^{<58107>}Hebrews 5:7).

Ver. 2. *He brought me up also out of an horrible pit,* etc.] Which, with the following phrase,

out of the miry clay, expresses the state and condition Christ was in at the time of his bloody sweat, his crucifixion, and his lying in “sheol”, the pit or grave, sometimes rendered hell, which these figurative phrases fitly signify; when it is observed, that he was made sin, and had the sins of all his people on him; and, as the type of Joshua, was clothed with their filthy garments; he might be truly said to be in the miry clay; and also that he was made a curse for them, and bore the wrath of God in their room and stead; and was forsaken by his God and Father, and so endured both the punishment of loss and sense, and what was tantamount to the sufferings of the damned in hell; (see ^{<B901>}Psalm 69:1,2); to which may be added the noisy insults of malignant men, and the infernal fiends, who surrounded him on the cross; when he was in an horrible, or “noisy pit”, as the words may be rendered ^{f564}, the allusion being to subterraneous caverns or pits, in which the falls of water make so horrible a noise as is intolerable; or to deep pits, into which anything cast makes a great sound: and the issue of all this was, that he was laid in the pit of the grave, and held under the power and with the cords of death; from all which he was delivered when he was raised from the dead, justified in the Spirit, and glorified in the human nature by his God and Father;

and set my feet upon a rock; on Mount Zion in heaven, whither he was carried up after his resurrection; where he will remain until his second coming, being set down at the right hand of God, in a most stable, firm, and unalterable state, as well as an honourable one; for he will die no more, and death shall no more have dominion over him;

[and] established my goings; in treading the path of life, which was shown him at his resurrection; in passing through the air, the territory of Satan, at his ascension; and in his entrance into his glory, and making his way to his Father’s right hand and throne.

Ver. 3. *And he hath put a new song in my mouth, [even] praise to our God,* etc.] Sung by him in the midst of the great congregation of angels and saints, upon his resurrection, ascension, and session at the right hand of God; (see ^{<9222>}Psalm 22:22,25); when he went to his God and ours, to his Father and ours; and in which song he is joined by all his people above and below, (^{<A110>}Revelation 5:9-13);

many shall see [it], and fear, and shall trust in the Lord; even all the elect of God, as many as are ordained to eternal life; the many whose sins Christ bore, for whom he became a ransom, whom he justifies and brings to glory: these all “see” him in the horrible pit and miry clay, in his state of humiliation, as bearing their sins, and the punishment due unto them; as wounded, bruised, and crucified; as rising again for their justification; and as on Mount Zion crowned with glory and honour; and a multitude of harpers with him, singing the new song; these see the salvation he has wrought out, the glory, fulness, and suitableness of it, and their interest in it; and they “fear” not with a fear of hell and damnation, which is inconsistent with the trust after mentioned; but with a godly and filial fear, which arises from and is encouraged by the grace and goodness of God, their faith in the sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ Jesus, and which render him a proper object of trust and confidence; for he is so both as suffering, crucified, and slain, and as risen again, and exalted at the Father’s right hand, (^{<402>}Galatians 2:20 ^{<402>}1 Peter 1:22).

Ver. 4. *Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust*, etc.] For such are safe and secure in him, are possessed of all blessings of grace through him, have peace in their own souls now, and shall enjoy eternal happiness with him hereafter;

and respecteth not the proud; such as the Pharisees, and all self-righteous persons, who trust in themselves and their own righteousness, submit not to the righteousness of Christ, and despise others; to these such who trust in Christ have no respect; they neither esteem them, nor imitate them;

nor such as turn aside to lies; to idols, the lying vanities of the Gentiles; or to any doctrines injurious to the person, office, blood, righteousness, sacrifice, and grace of Christ; which are no other than lies, and which those who believe in Christ have no respect to, but abhor both them and the abettors of them.

Ver. 5. *Many, O Lord my God, [are] thy wonderful works [which] thou hast done*, etc.] This is the “new song”, as Aben Ezra rightly observes, which is said in (^{<940>}Psalm 40:3), to be put in the mouth of the Messiah; who sometimes speaks in the plural number, being the representative of his people, and sometimes in the singular; for it is the same person that speaks here who is continued speaking in (^{<946>}Psalm 40:6), and following; and which are applied to Christ, (^{<805>}Hebrews 10:5); the “works” here said to be done, and to be “many” and “wonderful”, are not the creation of the

world, the dividing of the sea, and feeding the people of Israel forty years in the wilderness, as Jarchi interprets them; but the incarnation of Christ, redemption by him, the resurrection of him from the dead; regeneration and conversion, and the preservation of the saints from the evil of the world, safe to the kingdom and glory of God; all which, as they are many and various, and display the manifold wisdom and grace of God, so they are marvellous, and will be the subject of the wonder of saints to all eternity;

and thy thoughts [which are] to us-ward; that is, the decrees of God, as Aben Ezra truly explains them; the purposes, counsels, and intentions of God; which, though mentioned last, are before his works, and are the spring of them: these were in the mind of God from everlasting, were unknown till revealed, were thoughts of peace, and not of evil, and are unfrustrable, and ever fulfilled, and are manifold, precious, and amazing, (^{<1907>}Psalm 139:17); and these were concerning all the elect of God as considered in Christ, and members of his; and therefore he says to us-ward; and all the works before mentioned were done to them, or for them, and on their account; and so Jarchi and Aben Ezra interpret the phrase, “because of us”, or “for our sakes”; even the incarnation, sufferings, death, and resurrection of Christ, and the thoughts of them, were for them;

they cannot be reckoned up in order to thee; or “there is none can order them unto thee”^{<1565>}; there is no power in man to do it, as Aben Ezra observes; or “there is none like unto thee”, as Jarchi and the Oriental versions; (see ^{<1251>}Exodus 15:11 ^{<1807>}Psalm 89:7 ^{<2318>}Isaiah 40:18,25); though this sense seems to break in upon the account of the wonderful works and thoughts of God, which are still designed in the following clause;

[if] I could declare and speak [of them], they are more than can be numbered; that is, by men: from this general account of, the many and wonderful works and thoughts of God, the Messiah passes on to take notice of one particular design and work of the Lord, the redemption of his people by the sacrifice of himself.

Ver. 6. *Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire*, etc.] These were desired, willed, and appointed by God, and that very early, even from the times of our first parents; and, when performed aright, were acceptable to God, quite down to the times of the Messiah: indeed, when offered without faith in Christ, and with a wicked mind, to merit any thing at the hand of God, they were always abominable to him; and he likewise ever preferred love to himself, and of the neighbour, obedience to the commands of the

moral law, and works of mercy to men, before all the sacrifices of the ceremonial law, (^{<0152>}1 Samuel 15:22 ^{<3106>}Hosea 6:6) (^{<4123>}Mark 12:33); nor were these ever in such esteem with him as the sacrifices of a broken and contrite heart, or of praise and thanksgiving, (^{<3516>}Psalm 51:16,17 69:30,31); nor were they ever regarded by him but as they respected Christ; nor were they ever designed to cleanse from sin, and take it away, but to lead to the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ: but none of these senses have place here: the meaning of the words is, that it was not the will of God, at the time this passage refers to, that legal sacrifices should continue any longer; and that they should not be offered up, even by good men, in the best manner, and to the best ends and purposes; the time being come that a better sacrifice should be offered, which was the sum and substance of them, and was prefigured by them;

mine ears hast thou opened; or “dug”, or “bored” ^{f566}; in allusion, as is thought by many, to (^{<0206>}Exodus 21:6); though the phrase rather signifies the formation and excavation of the ear; or the preparing and fitting it for its use; that is, to hearken to the will of his heavenly Father, to become man, offer himself a sacrifice, and suffer and die in the room of his people; to which he became obedient, taking upon him the form of a servant, when found in fashion as a man; and was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; (see ^{<2304>}Isaiah 50:4-6); in (^{<3105>}Hebrews 10:5), the words are rendered as by the Septuagint, “but a body hast thou prepared me”; and with it the Arabic and Ethiopic versions agree; and so Apollinarius,

“flesh of mortal generation;”

a part of the body being put for the whole; and which, indeed, is supposed: for unless a body had been prepared for him, his ears could not have been opened; and it was in the body, in human nature, that he was the obedient servant; and this is to be understood, not only of a preparation of this body, in the purposes, counsel, and covenant of God; but chiefly of the formation of it in the womb of the virgin, where it was curiously wrought and prepared by the Holy, Ghost, that he might have something to offer, and in it become, as he did, an offering and a sacrifice to God, of a sweet smelling savour;

burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required; any longer; this body being prepared for the Messiah to be offered up in.

Ver. 7. *Then said I*, etc.] As in the council and covenant of peace, when and where he declared his willingness to come into the world, and make satisfaction for the sins of his people; so when the fulness of time was come for his appearance in human nature he repeated the same; for of the time of his coming into the world are these words interpreted, (^{<3805>}Hebrews 10:5); when sacrifice and offering God would not have any longer continued, and when a body was prepared him, then he said,

Lo, I come; O Father; as Apollinarius, in his metaphor, adds; that is, freely, and without compulsion; immediately, at once, without any delay; and he himself, and not another; and this not by change of place, but by assumption of nature; taking the body, or human nature, prepared for him, and uniting it to himself; to which the word “lo” is prefixed as a note of attention and admiration; the incarnation of Christ being a wonderful affair, and of the utmost moment and importance;

in the volume of the book [it is] written of me; either in the book of divine predestination, in the purposes and decrees of God, (^{<1396>}Psalms 139:16); or in the book of the Scriptures; either in general, (^{<3839>}John 5:39) (^{<4247>}Luke 24:27,44); or particularly in the book of the Psalms, (^{<3905>}Psalms 1:50:2 2:2,6,7); or rather in the book of the law, the five books of Moses, since these were the only books or volumes that were composed at the writing of this psalm; and it has respect not to (^{<6185>}Deuteronomy 18:15); nor (^{<6178>}Deuteronomy 17:18); nor (^{<4216>}Exodus 21:6); but rather (^{<10815>}Genesis 3:15); and seeing the coming of Christ into the world was not only appointed of God, agreed unto by Christ, but was prophesied of, and penned down in the sacred writings; therefore at the appointed time he came, freely and willingly. This book is called a volume, or roll, alluding to the manner of writing formerly; when what was written was finished, it was rolled about a stick in the manner of a cylinder; and in this form is the book of the law with the Jews to this day; (see Gill on “^{<4047>}Luke 4:17”).

Ver. 8. *I delight to do thy will, O my God*, etc.] This he came down from heaven to do, and this he did do, by preaching the Gospel, and working miracles; and above all by obtaining eternal redemption for his people, which he effected by fulfilling the law, becoming a sacrifice, and suffering and dying in their room; all which were the will of God, and grateful to him, and in doing which Christ took the utmost delight and pleasure, (^{<4034>}John 4:34 ^{<4230>}Luke 12:50);

yea, thy law [is] within my heart; either the whole moral law, under which he was, as man, and the surety of his people; and which was written upon his heart, and which he perfectly obeyed; or that particular law, injunction, and command laid upon him by his Father, to offer himself a sacrifice, and lay down his life for men; which he agreed to, had it in his mind, his heart was set upon it, and he cheerfully complied with it, (^{<4008>}John 10:18 14:31).

Ver. 9. *I have preached righteousness in the great congregation*, etc.] Not the righteousness which the law requires men to do; but the righteousness which Christ himself wrought out, for the justification of them that believe; this he was a preacher, as well as the author of, and is part of the glad tidings he was anointed to preach, (^{<2601>}Isaiah 61:1); and the word ⁱ⁵⁶⁷ here used signifies, for the most part, the publishing of good tidings; and this our Lord did publicly, before all the people, in the synagogues of the Jews, and in the temple, whither the people in great numbers resorted; especially at the three great festivals in the year; the feasts of passover, pentecost, and tabernacles, when all the males were obliged to appear, and made up a great congregation indeed; (see ^{<4123>}John 2:23 5:1,14 8:2 18:20);

lo, I have not refrained my lips, O Lord, thou knowest; Christ appeals to his divine Father, the searcher of hearts, and trier of reins, for the truth of this; that he had not laid any restraint upon his lips, nor kept back anything in his ministry that was profitable; but had taught the way of God in great integrity and sincerity; had opened his mouth, and spoke freely and fully, and used great plainness of speech.

Ver. 10. *I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart*, etc.] Meaning not the essential righteousness of God, though that was abundantly declared in the wounds, sufferings, and death of Christ; and which was the end indeed of his being a propitiation for sin, (^{<4125>}Romans 3:25,26); but his own righteousness, as before, which he wrought out, and brought in; and which is called the righteousness of God his Father, because it is approved of by him, and accepted with him, and which he imputes to all his people;

I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: trial is, the “faithfulness” of God in executing all his purposes, counsels, and decrees, which are said to be faithfulness and truth; and in fulfilling his covenant and promises, relating to the redemption and salvation of men by Christ; and in the mission of Christ into this world on that account; and in the accomplishment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning him;

and in making good all the particular promises of support, help, and strength, made to the Messiah himself: and by his “salvation” is meant, that which is of God the Father’s appointing, continuing, and settling, in the council and covenant of grace; which he sent his Son to be the author of, and which he has obtained; and is the great doctrine of the Gospel preached by himself, and his faithful ministers, (^{<209>}Luke 19:9,10 ^{<416>}Mark 16:16);

I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation; or “in the great congregation”, as the Targum. By the “lovingkindness” of God is designed both his love to Christ, which was before the foundation of the world, and continued in his lowest state of humiliation, and which our Lord was far from concealing, but gave openly instances of it, (^{<872>}John 17:24 10:17 5:20-23); and this love to his people; and which he declared to be the same with that which he is loved with, and instances in the gift of himself to them by his Father, as the great evidence of it, (^{<873>}John 17:23 3:16); and by “truth” is intended the Gospel in general, which came by Christ, was preached by him, which he bore witness to, to do which was one end of his coming into the world; and this was not concealed by him, who is truth itself; but was fully and plainly declared by him, as it had not been before, (^{<817>}John 1:17 18:37).

Ver. 11. *Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O Lord*, etc.] this is a petition of Christ to his Father, when in the midst of his sorrows and sufferings, before related; and particularly when he hid his face from him, and withheld the discoveries of his tender and affectionate love;

let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me; as he had promised; of which promise some notice is given, (^{<240>}Isaiah 49:8), in the fulfilment of which the lovingkindness, truth, and faithfulness of God, would appear. Some read these words as expressive of faith in these things, “thou wilt not withhold”, etc. “thy lovingkindness and thy truth shall continually preserve me” ^{f568}.

Ver. 12. *For innumerable evils have compassed me about*, etc.] Like floods of water all around him; (see ^{<980>}Psalm 18:4,5 Jon 2:5); these are the evils of punishment inflicted on him, as the surety and Saviour of his people; such as the sorrows and griefs he bore all his days; the cruel mockings and scourges he endured; his being buffeted and spit upon; his head crowned with thorns, and his hands and feet pierced with nails;

insulted by men and devils; crucified between two thieves, and so died the shameful and painful death of the cross;

mine iniquities have taken hold upon me; not any committed by him; he was conceived, born, and lived without sin, knew none, nor did he any; but the sins of his people, which were imputed to him, laid upon him, and which he voluntarily took and bore; and which he reckoned as his own and was responsible for them; these, when he hung upon the cross, came upon him from all quarters, and he bore them in his own body upon the tree;

so that I am not able to look up; or “cannot see” ¹⁵⁶⁹; either the end of these iniquities, they being so numerous, as is after related; or he could not bear to look upon them, they were so filthy and nauseous, and he so pure and holy; or he could not behold his Father’s countenance, which these sins that were upon him separated him from, and caused to be hid from him; or, like one pressed down with the guilt of sin, as the poor publican was, could not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven, (⁴²⁸³Luke 18:13);

they are more than the hairs of mine head; as they must needs be, since they were the iniquities of all the elect of God, of the whole general assembly ad church of the firstborn, written in heaven, (²⁵⁰⁶Isaiah 53:6);

therefore my heart faileth me; as man; (see ⁴²²⁴Psalm 22:14); though being supported by his divine nature, and by his divine Father and eternal Spirit, he failed not, nor was he discouraged, (²⁴⁰⁴Isaiah 42:4); this is said to show the truth of the human nature, the greatness of men’s sins, the strictness of divine justice, and what strength was necessary to accomplish man’s salvation.

Ver. 13. *Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me*, etc.] From the innumerable evils which compassed him about; from sinful men, and from devils, signified by the sword, dog, and lion, (⁴²²¹Psalm 22:20,21); and from the power and dominion of death and the grave; all which was done when he was raised from the dead, and as the fruit and effect of God’s well pleasedness in him, and with what he did and suffered; (see ⁴²²⁸Psalm 22:8 18:19);

O Lord, make haste to help me; (see Gill on “⁴²²⁹Psalm 22:19”).

Ver. 14. *Let them be ashamed and confounded together*, etc.] As they will be at the last day, when they shall see him whom they have pierced come in

the clouds of heaven, in his own and his Father's glory, and in the glory of the holy angels;

that seek after my soul to destroy it; that is, his life, as did Herod in his infancy, and the Scribes and Pharisees, chief priests and elders of the people of the Jews, frequently, and at last accomplished what they sought after;

let them be driven backward; as those were who came with Judas into the garden to apprehend him, (^{<3816>}John 18:6);

and put to shame that wish me evil: as did the Jews, who sought all opportunities to ensnare him, and that they might have to accuse him to the Roman governor; and who earnestly desired his crucifixion, and vehemently wished his death; (see ^{<3946>}Psalm 41:5).

Ver. 15. *Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame*, etc.] Of their shameful wishes, words, and actions, as they were: their habitations in Jerusalem were desolate, and so was their house or temple there, and their whole land, and they themselves were stripped of everything, when Jerusalem was taken and destroyed; (see ^{<4238>}Matthew 23:38) (^{<4411>}Acts 1:20);

that say unto me, Aha, aha; words expressive of joy, (^{<4851>}Psalm 35:21,25), exulting at his miseries and sufferings on the cross, (^{<4473>}Matthew 27:39-44); so the Targum,

“we have rejoiced at his destruction, with joy at his affliction.”

Ver. 16. *Let all those that seek thee*, etc.] In the first place, with their whole hearts, earnestly and diligently, in Christ, and under the influences of his Spirit, for pardon, righteousness, communion, larger measures of grace, and for honour, glory, immortality, and eternal life;

rejoice and be glad in thee: as their covenant God, the Father of their mercies, the God of all comfort and salvation, who pardons their sins, clothes them with the robes of righteousness and garments of salvation, and accepts their persons in Christ; all which is matter of joy and gladness: Christ is concerned for the joy of his people, (^{<4351>}John 15:11); the Targum is, “they shall”, or “let them rejoice, and be glad in thy word”: in himself, the essential Word, in whom there is always ground and reason of joy and gladness; because of his person, blood, righteousness, and sacrifice;

let such as love thy salvation; either Christ, who is God's salvation, (^{<4048>}Genesis 49:18 ^{<3406>}Isaiah 49:6 ^{<4129>}Luke 2:29,30); and who is loved by his people, universally, superlatively, and sincerely; or the salvation of him, his deliverance from the grave, resurrection from the dead, and exaltation; the benefits of which believers share in, and so have reason to love it: or the salvation he is the author of, which is loved by those that know it; partly because agreeable to the divine perfections, the glory of God is great in it; and partly because it is so full and complete in itself, and so suitable to them;

say continually, the Lord be magnified; let this be their constant employment in this world, as it will be for ever in the next, to ascribe greatness to God; or greatly to praise him, because of the great salvation wrought out for them.

Ver. 17. *But I [am] poor and needy*, etc.] As Christ was literally, (^{<4789>}2 Corinthians 8:9); and in a spiritual sense, when deserted by his Father, forsaken by his disciples, and surrounded by his enemies; and had the sins of his people, the curse of the law, and the wrath of God upon him;

[yet] the Lord thinketh upon me; thinketh good for me, as the Targum; or thinks highly of me; has me in great esteem though despised of men, and in such a suffering state;

thou [art] my help and my deliverer; he believed he should have what he prayed for, (^{<4903>}Psalms 40:13); (see ^{<2810>}Isaiah 50:7-9);

make no tarrying, O my God; which is a repetition of the request in (^{<4903>}Psalms 40:13).