

PSALM 41

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 41

To the chief Musician, a Psalm of David

In this psalm is a prophecy concerning Christ, and concerning Judas Iscariot, as runs part of the title in the Syriac version; and in the Arabic version it is called a prophecy concerning the incarnation, and the salutation of Judas; and certain it is that (^{<9403>}Psalm 41:9) is to be understood of him, and of his betraying Christ into the hands of his enemies, since it is cited and applied to him by our Lord himself, (^{<6138>}John 13:18); so that having such a sure rule of interpretation, we may safely venture to explain the whole psalm of Christ, which treats both of his humiliation and exaltation; for it neither agrees with David wholly, nor with Hezekiah, to whom some ascribe it, as Theodoret remarks.

Ver. 1. *Blessed [is] he that considereth the poor*, etc.] Not the poor of the world in common, nor poor saints in particular, but some single poor man; for the word is in the singular number, and designs our Lord Jesus Christ, who, in (^{<9407>}Psalm 40:17), is said to be “poor and needy”: and so read the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Ethiopic versions here; who became poor for our sakes, that we might be enriched by his poverty; being born of poor parents, educated in a mean manner, and in public life was ministered to by others: the word ^{f570} here used signifies one that is attenuated, weak, and exhausted either of his substance or strength, or both; as Christ was in his state of humiliation, when he was emptied of his riches, and, though Lord of all, had not where to lay his head; and whose strength was dried up like a potsherd, when he suffered on the cross; and indeed at best he was encompassed with weaknesses and infirmities: and in this his low estate he is to be wisely considered, or attended to with wisdom and understanding; and he may be said wisely to consider him, who considers how great a person he is, that came into such a low estate for us; not a mere man, but above angels and men, that has all the perfections of deity in him, is the eternal Son of God, truly and properly God, and the Creator of all things, and Governor of the universe; which consideration will engage to and encourage faith and hope in him, lead to adore his wonderful grace, and to

admire his condescension and humility in becoming poor and weak; as also who considers that the poverty of Christ was for our sakes, and that we might be made rich with the riches of grace and glory; and considers it so as not to be offended with it; (see ^{<4116>}Matthew 11:6 13:57); and which may serve to support us under all meanness and infirmity, and in whatsoever estate saints may come into; and likewise who considers him in his offices which he exercised in that his estate as the apostle and high priest of our profession; and him in his exalted state in heaven; (see ^{<3828>}Hebrews 12:3 3:1 7:4 8:1); in a word, he wisely considers him, who believes in him as his Saviour, prizes him as the pearl of great price, cleaves close unto him, and follows him wherever he goes; who desires to know more of him, is concerned for his honour, interest, kingdom and glory, and pities his poor members, and freely and bountifully communicates to them; and so the Targum,

“blessed is the man that wisely considers the afflictions of the poor, that he may have mercy on him;”

and such an one is an happy man, and the following things said of him prove him to be so;

the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble: or “in the evil day”, ^{f571}; out of all his trouble, temporal and spiritual, of body and soul; in every time of affliction, private and personal; or in a time of public calamity; perhaps reference may be had to the time of Jerusalem’s destruction, which was a time of great tribulation, (^{<4121>}Matthew 24:21); when those who did not consider Christ in his poor and low estate, but despised and rejected him, were destroyed; and such as did were saved from that calamity: and it may also include the day of judgment, which is the evil day, unto which the wicked are reserved, and when they will be punished with everlasting destruction; but then those that consider Christ, and believe in him, will be saved from wrath. Some ^{f572} take these words, with what follows in the two next verses, as a prayer, and as delivered by him that visits the sick, for his comfort; and so Joseph Kimchi interprets it of an honourable man visiting a sick man, and instructing and comforting him with such words as these, that “the Lord will deliver him”, etc.

Ver. 2. *The Lord will preserve him and keep him alive,* etc.] Amidst a thousand deaths, to which he is exposed for making a profession of his faith in Christ; (see ^{<4110>}2 Corinthians 1:10 4:10,11 6:9); or this may refer to his spiritual life, which is hid and preserved in Christ, in whom he believes;

and is safe and secure; because Christ lives he shall live also, and shall never die the second death, nor be hurt by it, but shall have everlasting life;

[and] he shall be blessed upon the earth; with temporal blessings; for whatever he has, be it more or less, he has it with the blessing of God, and as a blessing of the covenant, and in love, and so is a blessing indeed: and with spiritual blessings; with peace, pardon, righteousness, and a right and title to eternal glory and happiness; and he will be blessed in the new earth, in which righteousness will dwell, and where he will dwell, live, and reign with Christ a thousand years;

and thou wilt not deliver him into the will of his enemies; not into the will of Satan, that roaring lion who would devour him if he might; nor of wicked men, and furious persecutors, whose wrath the Lord makes to praise him; and the remainder of it is restrained by him; some read these words as a prayer, “do not thou deliver him”, etc. (see ⁴⁹⁷¹²Psalm 27:12); so Pagninus, Montanus, Junius and Tremellius, Ainsworth, and others.

Ver. 3. *The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing,* etc.] When on a sick bed, or a death bed, where he lies languishing, and ready to expire; when his natural strength, spirits, and heart fail him, then the Lord strengthens him with strength in his soul; and is the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever. The Targum is,

“the Word of the Lord shall help him in his life, and shall appear to him on the bed of his illness, to quicken him;”

thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness; or “all his bed thou hast turned” or “wilt turn in his sickness”¹⁵⁷³; meaning not the recovery of him from a bed of sickness to a state of health, which is the sense given by many; much less a turning him from a state of ease and rest into trouble and distress; but making him easy and comfortable on a bed of sickness; which, in a literal sense, is done when a sick person’s bed is turned or made, or he is turned upon it from side to side; so the Lord, by the comforts of his Spirit, makes a sick and death bed easy to them that believe in Christ, and often puts that triumphant song into their mouths in their dying moments, “O death! where is that sting?” etc. (⁴⁶⁵⁵1 Corinthians 15:55); and this is the peaceful end and blissful state of such who wisely consider Christ and believe in him; low estate, through the sins of his the insults of his enemies, and the treachery of one of his disciples, is described in the following verses.

Ver. 4. *I said, Lord, be merciful unto me*, etc.] (See Gill on “^{<3901B>}Psalm 40:11”);

heal my soul; not that it was diseased with sin in such sense as the souls of other men are; but it is to be understood as a petition for comfort while bearing the sins of others, and which Christ as man stood in need of when in the garden and on the cross; so healing signifies comfort in trouble, as in (^{<2577B>}Isaiah 57:18 ^{<304D>}Malachi 4:2);

for I have sinned against thee; or “unto thee”, or “before thee”, as the Targum; not that any sin was committed by him in his own person, but he having all the sins of his people on him, which he calls his own, (^{<190D>}Psalm 40:12); he was treated as a sinner, and as guilty before God, (^{<258D>}Isaiah 53:12); and so the words may be read, “for I am a sinner unto thee” ^{f574}; I am counted as one by thee, having the sins of my people imputed to me; and am bound unto thee, or under obligation to bear the punishment of sin; or thus, “for I have made an offering for sin unto thee” ^{f575}, so the word is used, (^{<086B>}Leviticus 6:26 9:15); and so it might be rendered in (^{<087B>}Leviticus 5:7,11); and perhaps may be better rendered so in (^{<084B>}Leviticus 4:3); and be understood, not of the sin of the anointed priest, but of his offering a sacrifice for the soul that sinned through ignorance, (^{<190D>}Psalm 41:2), which offering is directed to: and then the sense here is, heal me, acquit me, discharge me, and deliver me out of this poor and low estate in which I am; for I have made my soul an offering for sin, and thereby have made atonement for all the sins of my people laid upon me; and accordingly he was acquitted and justified, (^{<5486>}1 Timothy 3:16).

Ver. 5. *Mine enemies speak evil of me*, etc.] That is, the Jews, who were enemies to his person, people, doctrines and ordinances, and would not have him to reign over them; these spake evil of him, charged him with being a glutton and a winebibber; said he had a devil, and was a Samaritan; imputed his miracles to diabolical influence; branded his doctrine with blasphemy, and spoke against his religion and worship, and wished him ill, saying,

when shall he die; they had a good will to assassinate him privately, but upon mature deliberation they consulted and determined to take what advantage they could against him, and deliver him up to the Roman governor; they feared, should he go on and succeed, through his doctrines and miracles, as he did, it would go ill with them; and they concluded, could he be brought to death, it would clearly appear to the common

people that he was not the Messiah; though this was the very thing he came into the world for, and which he himself was very desirous of; because hereby, and hereby only, the salvation of his people could be brought about; and though this was a thing foretold in prophecy, yet it seems as if Christ's enemies the Jews, and Satan himself, were ignorant of it, and of its virtue and use to save men; however, though it was an ill wish in them, it was well for us that he did die, though the consequence is not as they wished;

and his name perish? that is, the fame of his doctrine and miracles, the memory of him and his worthy deeds, particularly his Gospel, which so fully expresses the glory of his person and grace; yea, he himself, for they hoped that upon his death he would come into general disgrace, that his name would never be mentioned but with reproach, that his Gospel would be no more preached, and that he would be accursed of God and men: in all which they were sadly disappointed; for, upon his resurrection from the dead, he had a name given him above every name; his memory became precious to thousands; an ordinance was appointed to remember him to the end of the world in all his churches; his Gospel was ordered to be preached to all the world, as it was; and he himself is blessed for evermore.

Ver. 6. *And if he come to see [me]*, etc.] Meaning anyone of his enemies, when they came, as pretended, to pay him a friendly visit. A late learned writer^{f576} interprets this of Absalom, who visited his father when he had the smallpox, which he thinks, after mentioned, of which his enemies expected he would die, when Absalom pretended great concern for his life; though he, with others, were plotting against him, should he live, to destroy him;

he speaketh vanity; lies and falsehoods, in an hypocritical manner, with a double heart; his mouth and his heart not agreeing together; (see ^{<A1216>}Matthew 22:16);

his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; amasses to itself greater treasures of wickedness still, thought that itself is desperately wicked, and very wickedness: this is to be understood of the enemies of Christ observing his words and actions, and laying them up, with a wicked intention, against a proper time;

[when] he goeth abroad, he telleth [it]; as in the instances concerning giving tribute to Caesar, destroying the temple, and saying he was the son of God, (^{<A1217>}Matthew 22:17,18); compared with (^{<A1218>}Luke 23:2 ^{<A1219>}John

2:19,21); compared with (^{<4176>}Matthew 26:60,6^{<4157>} 1 John 5:17,18), compared with (^{<4155>}John 19:5).

Ver. 7. *All that hate me whisper together against me*, etc.] That is, they privately conspired against him; (see ^{<4125>}Matthew 22:15 ^{<4153>}John 11:53) (^{<4113>}Matthew 26:3,4);

against me do they devise my hurt; not only to take away his name and credit, but his life.

Ver. 8. *An evil disease, [say they], cleaveth fast unto him*, etc.] Not any bodily one, of which they might hope he would die; much less any foul disease, the disease of sin; but, as the phrase may be rendered, “a word of Belial”^{f577}; that is, a wicked charge or accusation; a charge of sin brought against him by the sons of Belial, as of blasphemy and sedition, which they concluded would be fastened upon him, and stick by him, and in which they should succeed to their wishes; or else the shameful punishment the death of the cross, inflicted on him, which they fancied would fix an indelible mark of infamy and scandal on him, since cursed is he that hangeth on a tree;

and [now] that he lieth, let him rise up no more; has much as he was dead, of which they had full proof, and was laid in the grave, his tomb watched, and the stone rolled to it sealed; they thought all was safe, and it was all over with him, that he would never rise again, as he had given out, and his disciples incapable of committing a fraud they afterwards accused them with: this, according to the above learned writer, (see ^{<4106>}Psalms 41:6), was said by Absalom, as he thinks Ahithophel is the person designed in (^{<4109>}Psalms 41:9).

Ver. 9. *Yea, mine own familiar friend*, etc.] Or, “the man of my peace”^{f578}; who did live peaceably with him, and ought always to have done so; whom he treated as his friend, as the rest of the apostles; calling him to that high office, and ordaining him to it, and qualifying him for it; and whom he called by the name of friend, when he came to betray him; Judas is meant;

in whom I trusted; with the bag and the money in it, both for the sustenance of his own family, the apostles, and for the relief of the poor, (^{<4126>}John 12:6 13:29);

which did eat of my bread; of his bread in common with the rest of the apostles; and who was eating with him when he gave the sign who should

betray him; and who seems to have eaten of the bread in the Lord's supper: even this same person

hath lifted up his heel against me; by supplanting him, dealing hypocritically with him, and betraying him into the hands of his enemies: the metaphor is either taken from an unruly horse throwing his rider, and then ungenerously spurning at him, and trampling on him; or from wrestlers, who seek to supplant and trip up each other's heels; which shows the ingratitude, baseness, and treachery of Judas; (see ~~John~~ John 13:18).

Ver. 10. *But thou, O Lord, be merciful unto me, and raise me up*, etc.] Not from a bed of illness, nor from a state of poverty and want; but from the dead: it was by the will of his divine Father that he suffered death, and it was to him he made satisfaction and reconciliation for the sins of his people, by his sufferings and death; and therefore it was but a reasonable request, that, having done this, he should be raised from the dead: besides, his Father had promised it, and he had believed it; so that this prayer was a prayer of faith, founded upon a divine promise; and the resurrection of Christ is for the most part ascribed to God the Father as his act; though not to the exclusion of the Son, who had power, as to lay down his life, so to take it up again; and though the resurrection of Christ from the dead is not only an act of power, but also of justice, he having paid his people's debts, atoned for their sins, and satisfied law and justice, it was but right and equitable that he should be discharged from the prison of the grave, and set free; yet here it is requested as an act of mercy, grace, and kindness; for, by doing it, it would appear that his Father's wrath was taken away from him, and that he had turned himself from the fierceness of his anger to him, and that he was well pleased with his righteousness and sacrifice; besides, it was giving him glory, as well as rolling away the reproach he lay under; and, however, it was in mercy to his body the church, whom he represented, since it was for their justification; nay, their regeneration is influenced by it; and so is the resurrection of their bodies, of which Christ's resurrection is the pledge and pattern. The end Christ had in view in making the request follows;

that I may requite them: not "him", Judas, last mentioned; for justice pursued and overtook him; he destroyed himself, and was gone to his own place, before Christ's resurrection from the dead; but them, the Jews, as a body; his enemies that spoke ill of him, wished ill to him, conspired against

him, to take away his life, and did bring him to the dust of death: and this his requital of them, after his resurrection, was either of good for evil, by ordering his disciples to preach his Gospel, first at Jerusalem, to those very persons who were concerned in his death, many of whom were converted, baptized, and added to the church; or of evil, for their evil to him, which had its accomplishment in part, at the destruction of Jerusalem, and will more fully at the day of judgment, when they that have pierced him shall see him come in the clouds of heaven.

Ver. 11. *By this I know that thou favourest me*, etc.] Or “delightest in me”^{f579}; as he did, both as his Son and his servant; in his obedience, sufferings, and death, whereby his counsels were accomplished, his covenant ratified, and the salvation of his people procured; and which delight and well pleasedness in him was the ground of his deliverance from the power of death and the grave; (see ~~1989~~ Psalm 18:19 22:8); the token by which Christ knew this was,

because mine enemy doth not triumph over me; Judas could not; he was too short lived, he was quickly taken away, and all the woes fall upon him imprecated on him, (~~1990~~ Psalm 109:6-10); nor the Jews; for though they were highly delighted when they had fastened him to the cross, and when he was dead, and laid in the grave; yet they could not sing their jubilee song over him until the third day was past; for they knew he had given out that he should rise again the third day; on which day he did rise, and his apostles preached that he was alive, and through him the resurrection of the dead, to their great grief, vexation, and mortification: nor did Satan, the enemy of Christ, personal and mystical, triumph over him; not in the wilderness, where, after he had tempted him, he was obliged to leave him; nor in the garden, and his agony there, where he was strengthened by an angel; nor even on the cross; for on that Christ himself triumphed over Satan and his principalities, whom he spoiled, and destroyed the devil and all his works; and, at his ascension to heaven, led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men, in token of triumph, and went forth, in the ministration of the Gospel, conquering, and to conquer; turning men from the power of Satan, and causing his servants to triumph in him, while they were in every place diffusing the savour of his knowledge.

Ver. 12. *And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity*, etc.] In the innocence of his nature, being free from sin, original and actual; in the uprightness of his life and conversation before God and men; and in the

perfection of his obedience and sacrifice, whereby he brought in a perfect righteousness, made complete atonement, and obtained full salvation and redemption for his people; and, because of all this, Jehovah the Father upheld him in his sufferings, as man and Mediator, that he failed not, and was not discouraged: or rather the sense is, that by several things which turned up in Providence, as the disagreement of the witnesses, declaration of his judge, and the confession of Judas his betrayer, he was cleared of the charges brought against him, and his innocence was maintained, and he upheld in it; but especially this was done by raising him from the dead, when he was openly acquitted, discharged, and justified, and declared to be the Holy One of God, (⁵⁴⁸¹⁶1 Timothy 3:16 ⁵⁴⁹⁶⁰Psalms 16:10);

and settest me before thy face for ever; after his resurrection, he was introduced into the presence of his Father, and was made glad with his countenance; where he sits before him as the Angel of his presence, and appears in the presence of God in the behalf of his people; is the Lamb in the midst of the throne, as though he had been slain; where his person, blood, righteousness, and sacrifice, are ever in view for their acceptance, and where he ever lives to make intercession for them; for here he will continue until the time of the restitution of all things.

Ver. 13. *Blessed [be] the Lord God of Israel*, etc.] Which is said, either by the Messiah, on account of the delight his Father had in him; the favour he had shown him in raising him from the dead, maintaining his innocence, and exalting him at his own right hand; and for all the blessings of grace the whole Israel of God enjoyed through him: or else by the church, who is meant by Israel, the Lord is the God of in a covenant way; who, hearing such things done to her Lord and head, breaks out into an exclamation of praise, and ascribes blessing and glory to God for them, which is due to him;

from everlasting, and to everlasting; that is, throughout all ages, world without end, (⁴⁴⁹²¹Ephesians 3:21).

Amen and Amen; which word, as Kimchi observes, signifies confirmation; and the doubling of it is for the greater confirmation of what is expressed. Here ends the first part of the book of Psalms, which is divided into five parts by the Jews ^{f580}.