

PSALM 57

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 57

*To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David,
when he fled from Saul in the cave*

Some think the words “Altaschith” are the beginning of a song, to the tune of which this was set, as Aben Ezra; others, that they are taken from (^{<R025>}Deuteronomy 9:26); they signifying “destroy not” ^{f755}; others, that they refer to what David said to Abishai, when he would have slain Saul, “destroy him not”, (^{<0249>}1 Samuel 26:9); but that was an affair that happened after this psalm was penned: they seem rather to be words which were frequently used by David in the time of his distress; who often said unto the Lord, either in an ejaculatory way, or vocally, or both, “do not destroy [me]”, or “suffer [me] to be destroyed”; of which he was in great danger, as appears from (^{<3574>}Psalm 57:4,6); and therefore prefixed these words in the title of the psalm, in memorial of the inward anguish of his mind, and of what his mouth then uttered; and to this agrees the Chaldee paraphrase,

“concerning the trouble at the time when David said, do not destroy.”

Of the word “michtam”, (see Gill on “^{<3140>}Psalm 16:1”), title. The occasion and time of writing this psalm were David’s fleeing from Saul in the cave; or rather “into” ^{f756} the cave, as it should be rendered; for it was after that Saul was gone that David and his men came out of the cave; but he fled hither for fear of Saul; and while he was here, Saul, with three thousand men, came to the mouth of the cave, and he himself went into it; which must have put David and his men into a very great panic, there being no retreat, nor any human possibility of an escape, but must expect to fall into the hands of the enemy, and be cut to pieces at once. This cave was in Engedi, (^{<0240>}1 Samuel 24:1-3); of which Leviticus Bruyn ^{f757} says, it is on the top of a very high hill, and is extremely dark; which agrees with the account in the above place, since it was on the rocks of the wild goats Saul

sought David, and coming to the sheepcotes there, went into the cave where David was.

Ver. 1. *Be merciful unto me, O God*, etc.] Or “be gracious to me”^{f758}; which words are repeated by him. “Be merciful”, or “gracious, unto me”; to show the greatness of his distress, the eagerness, vehemency, and importunity he used in prayer; his case requiring a speedy answer, and immediate relief; and that he expected only from the mercy and grace of God; (see Gill on “~~Psalm~~ Psalm 56:1”);

for my soul trusteth in thee; or “in thy word”; as the Targum; and in thee only, both as the God of providence and the God of grace; and a great act of faith this was to trust in the Lord in such circumstances; and it was not a bare profession of trust, but it was hearty and sincere; his “soul” trusted in the Lord; he trusted in him with all his heart and soul, and trusted him with his soul or life: and this he makes a reason or argument for mercy; seeing, as the mercy of the Lord is an encouragement to faith and hope; so the Lord has declared, that he takes pleasure in those that hope and trust in it; wherefore mercy may be expected by such;

yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge; or “I will hope”^{f759}; the meaning is, that he would betake himself to the power and protection of God, and make him his refuge from the enemy: the allusion is either to the hen, or any other bird covering its young with its wings, when a bird of prey is near, till that is gone; or to the cherubim, whose wings overshadowed the mercy seat, between which the glory of God dwelt; and so the Targum,

“in the shadow of thy Shechinah, or glorious Majesty, will I trust;”

which agrees with his applying to the mercy seat, or to God on a throne of grace and mercy: and here he determines to abide,

until [these] calamities be overpast; the storm of them was over, which was very black and threatening. The Targum is,

“until the tumult is over;”

and so the Syriac version; until Saul and his men were gone, of whom he was afraid. The Septuagint version, and those that follow it, render the words “until sin passeth away”; the cause of these troubles; unless sin is put for sinful men; and so the sense is as before; (see ~~Isaiah~~ Isaiah 26:20).

Ver. 2. *I will cry unto God most high*, etc.] To remember him in his low estate, and who is higher than the highest, than Saul and his mighty men with him. This epithet David no doubt made use of, to encourage his faith in the Lord, who is above all, and can do all things; as follows;

unto God that performeth [all things] for me; in a providential way, having made him, upheld him in being, fed and clothed him, preserved him, and followed him with his goodness all his days; and in a way of grace he performed all his purposes concerning him, all his promises unto him, and was performing and would perfect the work of grace in him; (see ^{<1308>}Psalm 138:8 ^{<1006>}Philippians 1:6). The Targum adds a fable by way of paraphrase on the text,

“who commanded, or prepared a spider, to perfect in the mouth of the cave a web for me;”

so it is in the king’s Bible; as if, when he was in the cave, God so ordered it in his providence, that a spider should spin a web over the month of it, which prevented his persecutors from searching for him in it; but the Scripture is silent in this matter. Such a story is reported of Felix, bishop of Nola, in ecclesiastical history ^{f760}.

Ver. 3. *He shall send from heaven, and save me*, etc.] His angel, as the Targum adds; or his angels, as Kimchi; who are ministering spirits, sent forth by him, to encamp about his people, and guard them, as they did Jacob when in fear of Esau, (^{<1331>}Genesis 32:1,2); or to deliver them out of trouble, as Peter when in prison, (^{<4127>}Acts 12:7); or rather the sense may be, that David did not expect any help and deliverance in an human way, by means of men on earth; but he expected it from above, from heaven, from God above, and which he believed he should have; and he might have a further view to the mission of Christ from heaven to save him, and all the Lord’s people; and which he may mention, both for his own comfort, and for the strengthening of the faith of others in that important article;

[from] the reproach of him that would swallow me up. Meaning Saul; (see ^{<1361>}Psalm 56:1,2). The Targum renders it,

“he hath reproached him that would swallow me up for ever;”

and to the same sense the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Ethiopic, Arabic, and Syriac versions; disappointed them, and filled them with reproach, shame, and confusion.

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{<488D>}Psalm 3:2”).

God shall send forth his mercy and his truth; shall manifest and display the glory of these his perfections, his mercy and grace, his truth and faithfulness, in his deliverance and salvation; and which are remarkably glorified in salvation by Christ Jesus; and who himself may be called “his grace and his truth” ^{f761}, as the words may be rendered; he being the Word of his grace, and truth itself, and full of both; and by whom, when sent forth, grace and truth came, (^{<4014>}John 1:14,17); it may also intend a constant supply of grace, whereby God would show forth the truth of his promises to him.

Ver. 4. *My soul [is] among lions*, etc.] Not literally understood; though such there might be in the wildernesses where he sometimes was; but figuratively, men comparable to lions, for their stoutness, courage, strength, fierceness, and cruelty; meaning not his own men, as some think, who were fierce, and of keen resentment against Saul, and would fain have killed him when he was in the cave, had they not been restrained by David, (^{<0240>}1 Samuel 24:4,7); but Saul, and those with him, who were three thousand chosen men, stout, courageous, fierce, and furious. It is usual in scripture to describe powerful princes, and especially persecuting ones, by the name of lions, (^{<3185>}Proverbs 28:15 ^{<2407>}Jeremiah 50:17 ^{<3047>}2 Timothy 4:17). Achilles, in Homer ^{f762}, is compared to a lion for his cruelty. The soul of Christ was among such, when he was apprehended by the band of men that came with Judas to take him; when he was in the high priest’s hall buffeted and spit upon; and when he was in the common hall of Pilate, surrounded by the Roman soldiers; and when he was encircled on the cross with the crowd of the common people, priests and elders, (^{<4855>}Matthew 26:55,67 27:27,39,41 ^{<3222>}Psalm 22:12,13,21); and so the souls of his people are often among lions, persecuting men, and Satan and his principalities, who is compared to a roaring lion, (^{<4088>}1 Peter 5:8); and among whom they are as wonderfully preserved as Daniel in the lion’s den;

[and] I lie [even among] them that are set on fire; of hell, as the tongue is said to be in (^{<3886>}James 3:6); by the devil, who stirred up Saul against David, filled him with wrath and fury, so that he breathed out nothing but flaming vengeance, threatening and slaughter, against him; and by wicked men his courtiers, who kindled and stirred up the fire of contention between them; among these incendiaries, as Junius renders the word ^{f763},

David was, who inflamed the mind of Saul against him, which he suggests in (⁹²⁴⁰1 Samuel 24:10);

[even] the sons of men, whose teeth [are] spears and arrows; whose words, formed by means of their teeth, were very devouring ones, (⁹⁵⁰⁴Psalm 52:4); were very piercing and wounding; calumnies, detractions, and backbitings, speaking against him when absent and at a distance, may be meant; (see ⁹³⁰⁴Proverbs 30:14);

and their tongue a sharp sword; (see Gill on “⁹⁵⁰²Psalm 52:2”); and there was a sort of swords called “lingulae”, because in the shape of a tongue ¹⁷⁶⁴.

Ver. 5. *Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens,* etc.] That is, show thyself to be God, that sittest in the heavens, and art higher than they, by saving me, and disappointing mine enemies; that I, and those that are with me, may magnify the Lord and exalt his name together. The Targum is,

“be thou exalted above the angels of heaven, O God;”

[let] thy glory [be] above all the earth; that is, above all the inhabitants of the earth, as the Chaldee paraphrase: let the glory of God in my deliverance be seen by all that dwell upon the earth; for by how much the lower and more distressed his case and condition were, by so much the more would the glory of God be displayed in bringing him out of it. Nothing lies nearer the hearts of the people of God than his glory; this is more desirable than their own salvation: David breathes after the one, when he says nothing of the other, that being uppermost; though his meaning is, that the one might be brought about by the other.

Ver. 6. *They have prepared a net for my steps,* etc.] They laid snares for him, as the fowler does for the bird, in order to take him. It denotes the insidious ways used by Saul and his men to get David into their hands; so the Pharisees consulted together how they might entangle Christ in his talk, (⁴²²⁵Matthew 22:15);

my soul is bowed down; dejected by reason of his numerous enemies, and the crafty methods they took to ensnare and ruin him; so the soul of Christ was bowed down with the sins of his people, and with a sense of divine wrath because of them; and so their souls are often bowed down; or they are dejected in their spirits, on account of sin, Satan’s temptations, various afflictions, and divine desertions. The Targum renders it,

“he bowed down my soul;”

that is, the enemy; Saul in particular. The Septuagint, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, “they bowed down my soul”; the same that prepared a net for his steps; everyone of his enemies; they all were the cause of the dejection of his soul: the Syriac version leaves out the clause;

they have digged a pit before me, into the midst whereof they are fallen [themselves]; contriving and seeking to find out the places where David’s haunt was, Saul got into the very cave where he and his men were; and had his skirt cut off, when his life might as easily have been taken away, (^{<10232>}1 Samuel 23:22,23 24:3,4). (see ^{<19715>}Psalm 7:15,16 9:15).

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{<1982>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 7. *My heart is fixed, O God*, etc.] Firm and sure, trusting in the Lord, believing that he should be saved by him out of his troubles; (see ^{<19103>}Psalm 101:1 112:7,8). So, in a spiritual sense, a heart fixed and established, or that is firm and sure, is one that is assured of its salvation by Christ, rooted and grounded in the love of God, firmly built on the foundation, Christ, and has its affections set on him; and is unmoved, from the hope of the Gospel, and the doctrines of it, by whatsoever it meets with in the world. It may be rendered, “my heart is prepared”, or “ready”^{f765}; that is, according to some, to receive good or evil, prosperity or adversity, at the hand of God; to which sense is Jarchi’s note,

“my heart is faithful with thee in the measure of judgment, and it is faithful with thee in the measure of mercy.”

That is, whether I am chastised with judgments, or followed with mercies, my heart is firm and true to God. The Targum is,

“my heart is prepared for thy law, O Lord; my heart is prepared for thy fear;”

that is, it is prepared for the worship and service of God; it is ready to every good work; it is prepared to pray unto him, and to wait for an answer, which are both from the Lord, (^{<20611>}Proverbs 16:1 ^{<19107>}Psalm 10:17); and particularly to sing praise unto him, as follows;

my heart is fixed; this is repeated, to show the vehemency of his spirit, and the certainty of the thing;

I will sing and give praise; for the salvation wrought for him, and which he was sure of; and before he had finished this psalm, or while he had composed it, did enjoy it.

Ver. 8. *Awake up, my glory*, etc.] Meaning his soul, whom Jacob calls his honour, (^{<0406>}Genesis 49:6); it being the most honourable, glorious, and excellent part of man; is the breath of God, of his immediate production; is a spirit incorporeal and immortal; is possessed of glorious powers and faculties; had the image of God stamped upon it, which made man the glory of God, (^{<6107>}1 Corinthians 11:7); and has the image of Christ on it in regenerated persons; and is that with which God and Christ are glorified; and is, upon all accounts, of great worth and value, even of more worth than the whole world: and this sometimes in the saints is as it were asleep, and needs awaking; not in a literal sense; for it is incapable of natural sleep, being incorporeal; but in a figurative and spiritual sense, as when grace is dormant, and not in exercise; when the soul is backward to and slothful in duty, unconcerned about divine things, and lukewarm and indifferent to them; which is occasioned by prevailing corruptions and worldly cares; and sometimes it becomes dull, and heavy, and inactive, through an over pressure by sorrows and troubles, as the disciples of Christ were found sleeping for sorrow, (^{<0225>}Luke 22:45); which seems to have been the case of the psalmist here; he had been in great distress, his soul was bowed down, (^{<6506>}Psalms 57:6); he had hung his harp upon the willow, and could not sing one of the Lord's songs in the place and circumstances he was in; but now he calls upon his soul, and arouses all the powers and faculties of it, and stirs up himself to the work of praise, just as Deborah did, (^{<0652>}Judges 5:12); some by his glory understand his tongue, as in (^{<0169>}Psalms 16:9) compared with (^{<4025>}Acts 2:26 ^{<6302>}Psalms 30:12); and so may design vocal singing here, as instrumental music in the next clause:

awake, psaltery and harp; which, by a prosopopoeia, are represented as persons; as if they were animate, sensible, and living: these had been laid aside for some time as useless; but now the psalmist determines to take them up and employ them in the service of praising God: these are fitly put together, because psalms were sung to harps; and so with the Greeks a psalm is said to be properly the sound of the harp ^{f766};

I [myself] will awake early; in the morning, when salvation and joy come; and so soon cause his voice to be heard, as in prayer, so in praise; or "I will awaken the morning": so Jarchi; be up before the sun rises, the morning

appears, or day dawns: this is taking the wings of the morning, and even preventing that. The Targum is,

“I will awake to the morning prayer.”

Ver. 9. *I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people*, etc.] Either among the people of Israel, as Aben Ezra, when each of the tribes meet together; and so it denotes the public manner in which he would praise God for his salvation: or among the Gentiles, as the following clause shows;

I will sing unto thee among the nations: the Apostle Paul seems to have reference to this passage in (^{<515D>}Romans 15:9); which he produces as a proof of the Gentiles glorifying God for his mercy in sending the Gospel among them, and calling them by his grace; by which they appeared to be his chosen and redeemed ones; and in forming them into Gospel churches, among whom his praise was sung: for this supposes something to be done among the Gentiles, which should occasion praise; and here the psalmist represents the Messiah, who in his ministers and members praise God for his wonderful mercy to the Gentile world, as follows.

Ver. 10. *For thy mercy [is] great unto the heavens*, etc.] Which denotes the exceeding greatness and largeness of it; as it is in the heart of God, who is plenteous in mercy; as it is expressed in the covenant of grace, where are stores of it; as it is shown forth in the choice of persons to eternal life; in the mission of Christ into this world to die for them; in the regeneration of them, the pardon of their sins, and eternal life: and this mercy is not only extended to persons in the several parts of the earth, but is as high as the heaven above it, (^{<4A31I>}Psalm 103:11);

and thy truth unto the clouds; the faithfulness of God in performing his purposes and his promises; or the Gospel, and the doctrines of it, which contain the deep things of God; unless Christ himself should be meant, who is the truth which sprung out of the earth, (^{<4951I>}Psalm 85:11); is now ascended unto heaven, and is higher than the heavens; and whose exaltation and glory may be designed in (^{<4957I>}Psalm 57:11).

Ver. 11. *Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens*, etc.] As Christ now is at the Father’s right hand, and who is God over all, blessed for ever;

[let] thy glory [be] above all the earth; as it is above all the men on earth and angels in heaven. This is repeated from (^{<4957B>}Psalm 57:5); (see Gill on

“~~Psalm~~ Psalm 57:5”), and shows the vehemency of his desire after these things, and how much his heart was set upon them.