

PSALM 77

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 77

To the chief Musician, to Jeduthun, A Psalm of Asaph.

Jeduthun was the name of the chief musician, to whom this psalm was inscribed and sent; (see ^{<1878>}1 Chronicles 25:1,3,6), though Aben Ezra takes it to be the first word of some song, to the tune of which this was sung; and the Midrash interprets it of the subject of the psalm, which is followed by Jarchi, who explains it thus,

“concerning the decrees and judgments which passed upon Israel;”

that is, in the time of their present captivity, to which, as he, Kimchi, and Arama think, the whole psalm belongs. Some interpreters refer it to the affliction of the Jews in Babylon, so Theodoret; or under Ahasuerus, or Antiochus; and others to the great and last distress of the church under antichrist; though it seems to express the particular case of the psalmist, and which is common to other saints.

Ver. 1. *I cried unto God with my voice*, etc.] Which is to be understood of prayer, and that vocal, and which is importunate and fervent, being made in distress; (see ^{<1878>}Psalm 3:4), or “my voice was unto God” ^{f1085}, “and I cried”; it was directed to him, and expressed in a very loud and clamorous way:

even unto God with my voice; or “my voice was unto God”; which is repeated to show that he prayed again and again, with great eagerness and earnestness, his case being a very afflicted one:

and he gave ear unto me; his prayer was not without success; God is a God hearing and answering prayer, according to his promise, (^{<1878>}Psalm 50:15).

Ver. 2. *In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord*, etc.] Not the creature, for help, and creature amusements to drive away trouble, but the Lord, in private, by prayer and supplication; a time of trouble is a time for prayer, (^{<1878>}James 5:13), all men have their trouble, but the people of God more

especially; and there are some particular times in which they have more than usual, and then it may be said to be “a day of trouble” with them; which sometimes arises from themselves, the strength of their corruptions, the weakness of their graces, their backwardness to duties, or poor performance of them; sometimes from others, from the profaneness or persecutions of the men of the world, from the heretical notions or wicked lives of professors; sometimes from the temptations of Satan, and at other times from the Lord himself more immediately, by his withdrawing his presence from them, or by laying his afflicting hand upon them; but, let the trouble come from what quarter it may, it is always right to seek the Lord. Some think reference is had to the time of trouble mentioned in (²⁷¹¹Daniel 12:1),

my sore ran in the night; my “stroke”, or “wound” ^{f1086}; so Kimchi interprets it; the wound that was made in his soul, and the pain and anguish, grief and trouble, which flowed from it; (see ²⁴⁰⁷Jeremiah 6:7) though the word may be literally rendered “my hand” ^{f1087}; and the sense is, either that his hand flowed or was wet with wiping his eyes, or with the tears that flowed from his eyes, which ran down to his fingers’ ends; so the Targum,

“in the night my eye dropped with tears;”

or rather that his hand was stretched out, as waters, that are poured out and run, are spread, that is, in prayer; the stretching out of the hand being a prayer gesture:

and ceased not; was not remiss and feeble, or was not let down, as Moses’s, (⁴²⁷¹Exodus 17:11,12), it denotes the constancy of prayer, and his continuance in it; he prayed without ceasing:

my soul refused to be comforted: such was the greatness of his distress, like that of Jacob’s and Rachel’s, (⁰¹³⁷⁵Genesis 37:35 ²⁶¹⁵Jeremiah 31:15), it is right to refuse comfort and peace, which men speak to themselves upon the false foundation of their own merit and works; or any but what comes from the God of all comfort, and through Christ, in whom is all solid consolation, and by his Spirit, who is the Comforter; but it is wrong to refuse any that comes from hence, and by means of the promises, the word and ordinances and ministries of the Gospel, or Christian friends; this shows the strength of unbelief.

Ver. 3. *I remembered God, and was troubled*, etc.] Either the mercy, grace, and goodness of God, as Jarchi; how ungrateful he had been to him, how sadly he had requited him, how unthankful and unholy he was, notwithstanding so much kindness; and when he called this to mind it troubled him; or when he remembered the grace and goodness of God to him in time past, and how it was with him now, that it was not with him as then; this gave him uneasiness, and set him a praying and crying, that it might be with him as heretofore, (~~1300~~ Job 29:2-4), or rather he remembered the greatness and majesty of God, his power and his justice, his purity and holiness, and himself as a worm, a poor weak creature, sinful dust and ashes, not able to stand before him; he considered him not as his father and friend, but as an angry Judge, incensed against him, and demanding satisfaction of him:

I complained; of sin and sorrow, of affliction and distress: or “I prayed”, or “meditated”^{f1088}; he thought on his case, and prayed over it, and poured out his complaint unto God, yet found no relief:

and my spirit was overwhelmed; covered with grief and sorrow, pressed down with affliction, ready to sink and faint under it:

Selah: (see Gill on “~~1300~~ Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 4. *Thou holdest mine eyes waking*, etc.] Or, “the watches”, or rather “keepers of the eyes”^{f1089}; the eyebrows, which protect the eyes; these were held, so that he could not shut them, and get any sleep; so R. Moses Haccohen interprets the words, as Jarchi observes; and so the Targum,

“thou holdest the brows of my eyes;”

a person in trouble, when he can get some sleep, it interrupts his sorrow, weakens it at least, if it does not put a stop to it; wherefore it is a great mercy to have sleep, and that refreshing, (~~1300~~ Psalm 127:1), but to have this denied, and to have wearisome nights, and be in continual tossing to and fro, is very distressing:

I am so troubled that I cannot speak; his spirits were so sunk with weariness, and want of sleep in the night, that he could not speak in the morning; or his heart was so full with sorrow, that he could not utter himself; or it was so great that he could not express it; or his thoughts were such that he dared not declare them; or he was so straitened and shut up in himself that he could not go on speaking unto God in prayer.

Ver. 5. *I have considered the days of old*, etc.] Either the former part of his life, the various occurrences of it, how it had been with him in time past, what experience he had had of the divine goodness; so the Syriac version renders it, “I have considered my days of old”; or the preceding age, and what has happened in that, which his ancestors had acquainted him with; or rather many ages past, from the days of Adam to the then present time; at least it may include the Israelites coming out of Egypt, their passage through the Red sea and wilderness, the times of the judges, and what befell them in their days, and how they were delivered out of their troubles; as appears from the latter part of the psalm, and with which agrees the following clause:

the years of ancient times; or, “of ages”^{f1090}; of times long ago past; it is very useful to read the history of the Bible, with respect to ancient times, and so the ecclesiastical history of ages past, and observe the faith and dependence of the Lord’s people upon him, and their deliverance out of trouble by him; which may be a means of strengthening faith in him, and of relief under present trials; but frequently the goodness of former times is only observed as an aggravation of the badness of the present ones, and of trouble in them; (see ^{<2070>}Ecclesiastes 7:10), the Targum interprets the whole of happy days and times, paraphrasing it thus,

“I have mentioned the good days which were of old, the good years which were of ages past.”

Ver. 6. *I call to remembrance my song in the night*, etc.] What had been an occasion of praising the Lord with a song, and which he had sung in the night seasons, when he was at leisure, his thoughts free, and he retired from company; or it now being night with him, he endeavoured to recollect what had been matter of praise and thankfulness to him, and tried to sing one of those songs now, in order to remove his melancholy thoughts and fears, but all to no purpose:

I commune with mine own heart; or “meditate”^{f1091} with it; looked into his own heart, put questions to it, and conversed with himself, in order to find out the reason of the present dispensation:

and my spirit made diligent search; into the causes of his troubles, and ways and means of deliverance out of them, and what would be the issue and consequence of them; the result of all which was as follows.

Ver. 7. *Will the Lord cast off for ever?* etc.] The Syriac version of this, and the two following verses, is not by way of interrogation, but affirmation: “the Lord hath forgotten me for ever, nor will he”, etc. and so expresses the language of unbelief; but the Arabic version, in connection with the last words, with which it begins this verse, is, “and I weighed in my spirit whether the Lord”, etc. and so makes it a subject of inquiry, and at most of questioning or doubting. The Targum, different from either, begins this and each of the verses thus, “is it possible that the Lord”, etc. suggesting that it was not possible that he should do this and the other, and so speaks the language of faith. Unbelief in the psalmist said, the Lord will cast “me”, or “his people”, off, for either or both may be understood; which so appears when God hides his face, or does not immediately arise to help; or suffers the enemy to prevail, and difficulties and discouragements to obtain and continue; but Faith says, he will not cast off his people, whom he foreknew, from having a share in his affections, from being interested in his covenant, from his sight, and being the objects of his care, from enjoying the privileges of his house and family, or so as to perish eternally:

and will he be favourable no more? or bear good will, show kindness, be propitious, graciously accept, as the word ^{f1092} signifies; this question supposes that he had been favourable, and bore a good will, as the gracious purposes and kind intentions of his heart, the well stored covenant of his grace, and the mission of his Son to be a Saviour, show; that he has been propitious through the propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, and has accepted of the persons and services of his people, and indulged them with near communion with himself; but that now he is not, he having withdrawn the sense of his love, and the communications of his divine favours; and Unbelief says he will be so no more, and adds, I am cut off from before his eyes, and am as the slain, that are remembered no more; and shall go softly all my years, in the bitterness of my soul; but Faith says, he will be favourable again; that joy will come in the morning; that the Lord will hear, and be a light unto the souls of his people, though in darkness; and will bring to the light, and cause to behold his righteousness.

Ver. 8. *Is his mercy clean gone for ever?* etc.] Or “his grace” ^{f1093}; and mercy is no other than grace to objects in misery; Unbelief says it is gone, that no more will be shown, and that the treasures of it are exhausted; but Faith says it is not gone, and observes that God is the God of all grace, is rich in mercy, and abundant in goodness; that his Son is full of grace and truth, and so is the covenant; and that though there is an abundance of it

given in conversion, and there are continual supplies of it afterwards; yet this grace is still sufficient, and this mercy abundant; salvation is by it, as for millions past, so for millions present and to come; the mercy of God is new every morning, it endures for ever, it is from everlasting to everlasting:

doth his promise fail for evermore? or word ^{f1094}; his words of consolation, as Kimchi interprets it; the sense may be, will he speak never a word of comfort more? Unbelief says he will not, but Faith says he will; and that though he brings into the wilderness, yet he will speak comfortably there; and as he answered the Angel of the covenant with good and comfortable words, so he orders his ministers to speak, and by them he does speak comfortably to his people: or, in general, the word of the Gospel is meant; which though it may be sometimes scarce and rare, and there may be few preachers of it; yet it lives and abides for ever, it is the everlasting Gospel; or, in particular, the promise or promises of the Gospel: Faith says not one of these shall fail, grounding it upon the ability of God, and his power to perform: and upon his faithfulness, which he will never suffer to fail; and the promises of God are so far from failing for evermore, that they never fail at all; there never was any instance of any; not one of the good things which God has spoken of, from the creation of the world to this present time, have ever failed; the promises are yea and amen in Christ; (see ^{<6234>}Joshua 23:14 ^{<4012>}2 Corinthians 1:20). The Targum interprets it differently of his evil word being fulfilled on every generation.

Ver. 9. *Hath God forgotten to be gracious*, etc.] He has not, is it possible that he should? as the Targum; it is not; he cannot forget the purposes of his grace and mercy, nor the covenant and promises of it, nor people the objects of it; and much less can he for his grace and mercy itself, so agreeable to his nature, what he delights in, and which he has proclaimed in Christ:

hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?; as an avaricious man shuts up his hand, and will not communicate liberally; or as the sea is shut up with doors, that its waters may not overflow; no, the mercies of God are not restrained, though unbelief says they are, at least queries if they are not, (^{<2365>}Isaiah 63:15), but Faith says they flow freely through Christ, and the people of God are crowned with lovingkindness and tender mercies; God gives liberally, and upbraideth not; and though he may hide his face in a little seeming wrath for a moment, yet with great mercies will he gather, and with everlasting kindness will he have mercy.

Selah. (See Gill on “~~300~~ Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 10. *And I said, this is my infirmity*, etc.] Referring either to what he had said in the preceding verses; and which is to be considered either as checking and correcting himself for what he had said, and acknowledging his evil in it; and it is as if he had said, this is a sin against God, that I am guilty of in questioning his love, and disbelieving his promises; it is an iniquity I am prone unto, a sin that easily besets me; it flows from the corruption of my nature, and the plague of my heart, and shows a distempered mind; it is owing to the weakness of my faith and judgment; I have said this rashly, and in haste, without well weighing and considering things, and I am sorry for it, I will stop and proceed no further: or else as comforting and encouraging himself in his melancholy circumstances; and the sense is, this is an “infirmity”, an affliction and trouble that I am at present exercised with; but it is but a temporal one, it will not always last; I shall get over it, and out of it; it is a sickness, but not to death; and it is “mine”, what is allotted to me; every man has his affliction and cross, and this is mine, and I must bear it patiently; (see ~~2100~~ Jeremiah 10:19), or else this refers to what follows, which some render, “the changes of the right hand of the most High”^{f1095}; and the meaning may be, this is my affliction and trouble, that there are changes in the right hand of the most High; that is, that that hand which used to be exerted in his favour, and against his enemies, was now withdrawn, and hid in his bosom; (see ~~3741~~ Psalm 74:11), and that which liberally distributed favours to him was now laid upon him in an afflictive way; and to this sense is the Targum,

“this is my infirmity, the change of the power of the right hand (or the powerful right hand) of the most High;”

though another Targum is,

“this is my prayer, etc. the years of the end from the right hand;”

and Aben Ezra makes mention of some as so interpreting the first clause, to which Deuteronomy Dieu agrees, who renders the whole, “and I said, this is my prayer, that the right hand of the most High might be changed”; that is, that his dispensations of providence might be changed; that he would bring him out of these afflicted, sorrowful, and melancholy circumstances, into a more comfortable one: as these words may be understood as what the psalmist comforted himself with, that there are “changes of the right hand of the most High”; I have been greatly troubled

and distressed, and I have been so weak as to call in question the mercy and favour of God, and his promises to me, which I own is my sin; but I have reason to believe it will not be always thus with me, God will take off his hand, it shall not always lie thus heavy upon me; though he cause grief, he will have compassion, and turn again to me; there will be a change, and I will wait till that comes: but Kimchi thinks the word *rwkza*, “I will remember”, which stands at the beginning of the next verse, belongs to that and this; and is to be supplied here, as it is in our translation, and interprets the whole to the like sense;

but I will remember the years of the right hand of the most High; which the psalmist proposed to do as a means to remove his doubts, despondency, and unbelief, and to relieve and strengthen his faith; as that God was the most High in all the earth, and above his enemies; that he had a right hand of power, which in years past had been exerted on the behalf of his people, and on his behalf; which was not impaired and shortened, but the same as ever, and sooner or later would be again used in his favour.

Ver. 11. *I will remember the works of the Lord*, etc.] His works of creation and providence, his government of the world, and particularly his regard for his own people, and his preservation of them, especially the people of Israel, whom he had not cast off, nor would and so might serve to strengthen his faith, that he would not cast him off for ever: and in like manner, what God has done for his people in a way of grace, in their redemption by Christ, and in a work of grace upon their souls, may be improved to the removing of doubts and fears, and unbelief, and for the strengthening of faith: there is a double reading of this clause, that in the margin is followed by us; but in the text it is written, “I will cause to remember”; that is, I will declare and show forth to others the works of the Lord:

surely I will remember thy wonders of old; such as were done in Egypt, at the Red sea, and in the wilderness; which exceeded the power and reason of man, and which showed ancient love and old friendship subsisting between God and his people; so the remembrance of God’s everlasting love, his ancient covenant, and the grace and blessings given in Christ before the world was, may be of use against despondency, and for the support and encouragement of faith.

Ver. 12. *I will meditate also of all thy work*, etc.] Or “works”^{f1096}, which were many; he desired not to forget any of them, but remember the multitude of his tender mercies, and not only call them to mind, but dwell upon them in his meditations and contemplations, in order to gain some relief by them under his present circumstances:

and talk of thy doings: for the good of others, and so for the glory of God, as well as to imprint them on his own mind, that they might not be forgotten by him; for all things that are talked of, and especially frequently, are better remembered, (see ^{<1457>}Psalm 145:4-7,11,12), the Targum is,

“I will meditate on all thy good works, and speak of the causes of thy wonders.”

Ver. 13. *Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary*, etc.] Or “in holiness”^{f1097}; that is, is holy, so the Syriac version, and to which the Targum agrees.

“O God, how holy are thy ways,”

(see ^{<1457>}Psalm 145:17), or “in the sanctuary”, the temple, the church of God, where he takes his walks, and manifests himself, and where the reasons of his providence, and dealing with his people, are opened and made known unto them, (see ^{<1982>}Psalm 68:24 73:17),

who is so great a God as our God? the Targum is, as the God of Israel; he is great in his persons, perfections, and works, and is greatly to be loved, feared, and praised.

Ver. 14. *Thou art the God that doest wonders*, etc.] In nature, providence, and grace; it seems chiefly to regard what was done for the Israelites in Egypt, and in the wilderness, (see ^{<1982>}Psalm 78:12,43),

thou hast declared thy strength among the people; the nations of the world, who heard what the Lord did for Israel by his mighty power, and with an outstretched arm, as follows.

Ver. 15. *Thou hast with thine arm redeemed thy people*, etc.] The people of Israel out of Egypt, which was typical of the redemption of the Lord’s people by Christ, the arm and power of God:

the sons of Jacob and Joseph. Joseph is particularly mentioned for honour’s sake, and because he was the means of supporting Jacob and his

family in Egypt; and had special faith in their deliverance from thence; the Targum is,

“the sons whom Jacob begot, and Joseph nourished.”

Selah. (See Gill on “^{<B102>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 16. *The waters saw thee, O God,* etc.] The waters not of Jordan, but of the Red sea; these felt and perceived the power of God, in causing a strong east wind, which dried it up, and made way for the children of Israel to pass through it as on dry land: compare with this (^{<B115>}Psalm 114:3 ^{<B110>}Habakkuk 3:10),

the waters saw thee; which is repeated for the confirmation of it, and to excite attention to it, as well as to express the psalmist’s admiration at it; the Targum is,

“they saw thy majesty in the midst of the sea, O God; they saw thy power upon the sea;”

not the Egyptians, but the sons of Jacob and Joseph; the old Syriac church understood these waters of the waters of Jordan, at the baptism of Christ, when in their way they saw the incarnate God, and felt his sacred body laid in them, by which he was made manifest to Israel; but Jerom better interprets them, by the help of (^{<B115>}Revelation 17:15) of people, nations, and tongues; some of which saw Christ corporeally, others spiritually, and by faith, as preached in the Gospel to the Gentile world:

they were afraid; of the majesty of God, obeyed their Sovereign, of whom they stood in awe, gave way unto him, and fled at his rebuke, (see ^{<B115>}Psalm 114:5) or “were in pain” ^{f1098}, as a woman in travail, as were the Gentile world at the preaching of the Gospel of redemption and salvation by Christ, (^{<B112>}Romans 8:22),

the depths also were troubled; not only the surface, or waves of the waters, were moved by the strong east wind, through the power of God, but the bottom of the sea was reached by it; the depths were congealed in the midst of it, the channels of water were seen, and the foundation of the world discovered, and the children of Israel went through the deep as on dry land, (see ^{<B115>}Exodus 15:8 ^{<B115>}Psalm 18:15).

Ver. 17. *The clouds poured out water,* etc.] This, with some other circumstances which follow, are not related by Moses in the history of this

affair; but as they are here recorded by an inspired penman, there is no doubt to be made of the truth of them; besides Josephus^{f1099} relates the same things; he says, that at the time when the Egyptians were drowned in the Red sea, rains descended from heaven, and there were terrible thunders, lightnings, and thunderbolts; this was when the Lord looked through the cloud, and troubled the host of the Egyptians, (^{<0141>}Exodus 14:24),

the skies sent out a sound; or the airy clouds, the lighter ones, and which were higher in the heavens, as the others before mentioned were thick clouds, full of water, and hung lower; these were thunderclouds, and thunder is the sound which they sent forth, as in the following verse:

thine arrows also went abroad: that is, lightnings, as in (^{<0984>}Psalm 18:14), so Aben Ezra; but Kimchi interprets them of hailstones.

Ver. 18. *The voice of thy thunder was in the heaven*, etc.] Thunder is the voice of God, (^{<0805>}Job 37:5 40:9) this is heard in “the orb”^{f1100}, or the air, so called, because spherical; the Targum is

“the voice of thy thunder was heard in the wheel;”

so the word here used sometimes signifies; so (^{<2003>}Ezekiel 10:13), and is so rendered here by some^{f1101}; some think this refers to the wheels of the chariots of the Egyptians, which were taken off, it may be by the force of thunder and lightning, so that they drove on heavily, (^{<0145>}Exodus 14:25),

the lightnings lightened the world; not only that part of the world where the Israelites and Egyptians were, but the whole world; for lightning comes out of the east, and shines to the west, (^{<0127>}Matthew 24:27), this was in the night, and a very dark night it was, as Josephus^{f1102} affirms; (see ^{<0974>}Psalm 97:4),

the earth trembled and shook; there was an earthquake at the same time; unless this is to be understood of the panic which the inhabitants of the earth were put into on hearing of this wonderful event, (^{<0110>}Joshua 2:9,10).

Ver. 19. *Thy way is in the sea*, etc.] In the sea of Suph, as the Targum, the Red sea; it was the Lord that made the way in the sea for the Israelites, and went before them, and led them through it:

and thy path in the great waters; because the word rendered path is written with y yod, and is in the plural number, though the Masorites observe, that

that letter is redundant, and so the word is singular; hence the Jews imagine there were more paths than one, even twelve, according to the number of the tribes, and which they think is intimated in (^{<49d63>}Psalm 136:13),

and thy footsteps are not known; not by the Egyptians, who assayed to follow after the people of Israel with the Lord at the head of them, nor by any since; for the waters returned and covered the place on which the Israelites went as on dry ground; so that no footsteps or traces were to be seen at all ever since; and such are the ways God, many of them in providence as well as in grace, (^{<6113>}Romans 11:33), it may be rendered “thy heels”, which made the footsteps or impressions; which latter being the works of God, may be seen and known, but not the former, he being invisible; so Gussetius^{f1103} observes.

Ver. 20. *Thou leddest thy people like a flock*, etc.] Either through the Red sea, according to R. Moses Hacoen, as Aben Ezra observes; (see ^{<2611>}Isaiah 63:11-13), or rather, as he and Kimchi, through the wilderness, after they were led through the sea; the people of Israel are compared to a flock of sheep; the Lord is represented as the Shepherd of them, who took care of them, protected and preserved them from their enemies:

by the hand of Moses and Aaron; the one was their civil and the other their ecclesiastical governor, and both under the Lord, and instruments of his, in guiding and conducting the people in all things needful for them. The Arabic version adds, “Allelujah”; from all this the psalmist concluded, though it is not mentioned, that as God had delivered his people of old out of their straits and difficulties, so he hoped and believed, that as he could, he would deliver him in his own time and way; and by this means his faith was relieved and strengthened.