

PSALM 85

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 85

To the chief Musician, A Psalm for the sons of Korah

This psalm is generally thought to have been composed after the return of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon; and yet when they were in some distress from their neighbours, either in the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, or in the times of Antiochus; but then this deliverance from captivity must be considered as typical of redemption by Christ; for as the title of the Syriac version is,

“it is a prophecy concerning Christ;”

it speaks of his dwelling in the land, of his salvation being near, and of the glory of the divine perfections as displayed in it; and perhaps some parts of it may respect the conversion of the Jews in the latter day; and Aben Ezra and Kimchi say, it is concerning the captivity of Babylon, yet also of their present captivity.

Ver. 1. *Lord, thou hast been favourable unto thy land*, etc.] The land of Canaan, which the Lord chose for the people of Israel, and put them into the possession of it; and where he himself chose to dwell, and had a sanctuary built for him; and therefore though the whole earth is his, yet this was his land and inheritance in a peculiar manner, as it is called, (~~<24618>~~Jeremiah 16:18), the inhabitants of it are meant, to whom the Lord was favourable, or whom he graciously accepted, and was well pleased with and delighted in, as appears by his choosing them above all people to be his people; by bringing them out of Egyptian bondage, by leading them through the Red sea and wilderness, by feeding and protecting them there; and by bringing them into the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey, and settling them in it; and by many temporal blessings, and also spiritual ones, as his word and ordinances; but especially by sending his own Son, the Messiah and Saviour, unto them; and which perhaps is what is here principally intended:

thou hast brought back the captivity of Jacob; or, “the captives”^{f1219} of Jacob; in a temporal sense, both out of Egypt, and out of Babylon; and in a spiritual sense from sin, Satan, and the law; the special people of God often go by the name of Jacob, and these are captives to the above mentioned; and redemption by Christ is a deliverance of them from their captivity, or a bringing of it back, for he has led captivity captive; and in consequence of this they are put into a state of freedom, liberty is proclaimed to these captives, and they are delivered, and all as the fruit and effect of divine favour.

Ver. 2. *Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people*, etc.] Took it from them, and laid it on Christ, who has bore it, and took it away, so as it shall never return more to their destruction; and by the application of his blood it is taken away from their own consciences; for this denotes the manifestation and discovery of forgiveness to themselves; it is a branch of redemption, and is in consequence of it; and is a fruit of the free favour and good will of God through Christ; and it only belongs to the Lord’s special people, the people he has taken into covenant with him, and for whose iniquity Christ was stricken:

thou hast covered all their sin; this is but another phrase for forgiveness, (see ^{<331>}Psalm 32:1), and this is done by the blood and righteousness, and propitiatory sacrifice of Christ, the antitypical mercy seat, the covering of the law and its transgressions, and the people of God from its curse and condemnation; whose sins are so covered by Christ, as not to be seen by the eye of avenging justice, even all of them, not one remains uncovered.

Selah. (See Gill on “^{<392>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 3. *Thou hast taken away all thy wrath*, etc.] Or “gathered”^{f1220} it; sin occasions wrath, and the people of God are as deserving of it as others; but the Lord has gathered it up, and poured it forth upon his Son, and their surety; hence nothing of this kind shall ever fall upon them, either here or hereafter; and it is taken away from them, so as to have no sense, apprehension, or conscience of it, which before the law had wrought in them, when pardon is applied unto them, which is what is here meant; (see ^{<311>}Isaiah 12:1),

thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger; the anger of God is very fierce against sin and sinners; it is poured forth like fire, and there is no abiding it; but, with respect to the Lord’s people, it is pacified

by the death of his Son; or he is pacified towards them for all that they have done, for the sake of his righteousness and sacrifice; and which appears to them when he manifests his love and pardoning grace to their souls; (see ^{<316>}Ezekiel 16:63).

Ver. 4. *Turn us, O God of our salvation*, etc.] Who appointed it in his purposes, contrived it in council, secured it in covenant, and sent his Son to effect it; the prayer to him is for converting grace, either at first, for first conversion is his work, and his only; or after backslidings, for he it is that restores the souls of his people; and perhaps it is a prayer of the Jews, for their conversion in the latter day; when sensible of sin, and seeking after the Messiah they have rejected, when the Lord will turn them to himself, and turn away iniquity from them, and they shall be saved, (^{<285>}Hosea 3:5 ^{<486>}2 Corinthians 3:16 ^{<512>}Romans 11:26),

and cause thine anger towards us to cease: the manifest tokens of which are now upon them, being scattered up and down in the world, and made a proverb, a taunt, and a jeer; but will be removed, and cease, when they shall be converted.

Ver. 5. *Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?* etc.] God is angry with the wicked every day, their life being a continued series of sin, without repentance for it, or confession of it; and he will be so for ever, of which they will have a constant sense and feeling; and is the worm that never dies, and the fire that is inextinguishable; but he does not retain his anger for ever with his own people; though he is displeased with them, and chastises them for their sins, his anger endures but for a moment; he is pacified towards them and turns away his anger from them, by discovering his pardoning love, and withdrawing his afflicting hand:

wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations? out of his heart, where it is supposed to be conceived; and out of his treasury, where it is thought to be laid up: this has been drawn out to a great length of time upon the Jewish nation; it has been upon them for almost twenty centuries, or ages, and still remains, and will until the fulness of the Gentiles is brought in; but it will not be drawn out to “all” ages or generations; for they shall return to the Lord, and seek him; and he will come to them, and turn away iniquity from them, and so all Israel shall be saved.

Ver. 6. *Wilt thou not revive us again*, etc.] Their return from the Babylonish captivity was a reviving of them in their bondage, (^{<408>}Ezra

9:8,9) and the conversion of them in the latter day will be a reviving them again, be as life from the dead; they are like the dry bones in Ezekiel's vision, or like the dead in the graves; and their being turned to the Lord will be a resurrection, or quickening of them, as every instance of conversion is; (see ^{<5115>}Romans 11:15 ^{<2570>}Ezekiel 37:1-10), men are dead in trespasses and sins, and they are quickened by the Spirit and grace of God, so that they revive, and live a life of sanctification; they are dead in law, and find themselves to be so, when spiritually enlightened; when the Spirit of God works faith in them, to look to and live upon the righteousness of Christ for justification; and who, after spiritual decays, declensions, and deadness, are revived again, and are made cheerful and comfortable by the same Spirit; all which may be here intended:

that thy people may rejoice in thee; it was a time of rejoicing in the Lord, when the Jews were returned from their captivity in Babylon; but their future conversion will be matter of greater joy, both to themselves and to the Gentiles; everlasting joy will be upon their heads, and in their hearts, when they shall return to Zion, (^{<1947>}Psalm 14:7 ^{<2350>}Isaiah 35:10) and so is the conversion of every sinner joyful to himself and to others; such rejoice in Christ, in his person, blood, and righteousness; and every view of him afterwards, as it is a reviving time, it fills with joy unspeakable, and full of glory: the Targum is,

“and thy people shall rejoice in thy Word;”

Christ, the essential Word.

Ver. 7. *Show us thy mercy, O Lord*, etc.] Or, “thy grace” ^{f1221} and goodness, the riches of which are shown forth in Christ; the mercy promised to Abraham and others, long expected, wished, and prayed for; his pardoning mercy, justification, salvation, and eternal life, by his free grace:

and grant us thy salvation; Jesus, the Saviour, and salvation by him, an interest in it, and the joys of it; which is all a free gift, a grant of divine favour, and not according to the merits and works of men.

Ver. 8. *I will hear what God the Lord will speak*, etc.] This the psalmist says in the name of the people of the Jews, whom he represents, in all the foregoing expostulations and petitions, refusing to be still and quiet, and wait and listen for an answer to the above request from the Lord, who speaks by his providences, word, and Spirit; (see ^{<3111>}Habakkuk 2:1),

for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints; as he does in his word, which is the Gospel of peace; and by his ministers, who bring the good tidings of it, and publish it; and by the blood and righteousness of his Son, which both procure, call for, and produce it; and by his Spirit, the fruit of which is peace: it is an answer of peace, or of good and comfortable words, that the Lord returns to his people sooner or later; and it is only to his own people he speaks peace, to his covenant ones, with whom the covenant of peace is made; and to his saints, his Holy Ones, whom he has set apart for himself, and sanctified by his Spirit: as for the wicked, there is no peace unto them, nor any spoken to them by him: Kimchi understands by the “saints” the godly among the Gentiles, as distinct from the Lord’s “people”, the Jews:

but let them not turn again to folly; to doubt of and question the providence of God; so Arama; or to idolatry, which there was danger of, upon the Jews’ return from Babylon; and it is observable, that they afterwards never did return to it, to which they were so much addicted before; or to a vicious course of life, to sin and iniquity, which is the greatest folly, after mercy has been shown; or to self-righteousness, and a dependence on it, to the neglect of Christ and his righteousness, which is the great folly of the Jews to this day; and when the Lord shall quicken them, and convert them, show them his mercy and salvation, speak peace and pardon to them, it would be very ungrateful in them to turn again to this folly.

Ver. 9. *Surely his salvation is nigh them that fear him*, etc.] That have a true sense of sin and folly, are humbled for it, hate it, and depart from it, and do not return unto it; have a reverential affection for God, a sense of his goodness, particularly his pardoning grace and mercy, and fear him on account of it, and to offend him; and that serve him with reverence and godly fear: to these his salvation is nigh; temporal salvation, for that is his, it is of him, and from him; and he is a present help in time of trouble: spiritual and eternal salvation is his; it is of his contriving, settling, appointing, and giving; and was now near being accomplished by Christ; who also may be meant by God’s salvation, being the Saviour of his providing, choosing, and sending, who, in a short time, would appear, and suddenly come to his temple, as Haggai and Malachi foretold, and as was fixed by Daniel’s weeks, (³⁰⁰⁶Haggai 2:6,7 ³⁰⁰¹Malachi 3:1 ²⁷⁰²Daniel 9:24), and therefore the psalmist speaks of it with the utmost certainty; “surely”: verily of a truth it is so; there can be no dispute about it; for this psalm, as

is generally thought, was written after the return of the Jews from the Babylonish captivity; so that the coming of the Saviour was at hand, and the impetration of salvation not afar off; and the revelation of it in the Gospel was just ready to be made, or in a little time; (see ^{<2501>}Isaiah 56:1) and this may be said to be nigh to sensible sinners, when it is brought unto them by the Gospel, and applied to their hearts by the Spirit of God, and they see their interest in it, the full possession of which in heaven is still nearer than when they believed; but then it is only so to them that fear the Lord; not to the wicked, from whom it is afar off, (^{<1991>}Psalm 119:155), this character seems to design converted persons among the Gentiles, as well as among the Jews; (see ^{<4133>}Acts 13:26 10:35)

that glory may dwell in our land; Christ, who is the brightness of his Father's glory, having the same nature, names, worship, and honour; whose glory is the glory of the only begotten of the Father, and who also is the glory of his people Israel; who, when he was incarnate, dwelt among men, particularly in the land of Judea, where the writer of this psalm dwelt, and therefore calls it "our land"; and though his appearance was then but mean, in the form of a servant, yet he had a glory, which was manifest in his doctrine and miracles; and he was the Lord of glory, even when he was crucified; (see Hebrews 1:^{<6014>}3 John 1:14) (^{<4072>}Luke 2:32 ^{<3076>}Philippians 2:6,7 ^{<4118>}1 Corinthians 2:8), or else the Gospel may be meant, which has a glory in it excelling that of the law; it containing glorious truths, and glorious promises; and which is the glory of a land where it is, and, when it departs, an "Ichabod" may be written on it: this came in consequence of Christ, the Saviour, and salvation by him, which it is a revelation of; and dwelt and abode in the land of Judea, till it was utterly despised and rejected: the whole of Gospel worship and ordinances may be intended also, together with a holy life and conversation becoming it.

Ver. 10. *Mercy and truth are met together*, etc.] Or "grace and truth", ^{f1222}, which are in Christ, and come by him; and so may be said to meet in him, the glorious Person, the Author of salvation, before mentioned, (^{<3014>}John 1:14,17), these may be considered as perfections in God, displayed in salvation by Christ: "mercy" is the original of it; it is owing to that that the dayspring from on high visited us, or glory dwelt in our land, or Christ was sent and came to work salvation for us; it was pity to the lost human race which moved God to send him, and him to come, who is the merciful as well as faithful High Priest, and who in his love and pity redeemed us; and though there was no mercy shown to him, he not being spared in the least,

yet there was to us; and which appears in the whole of our salvation, and in every part of it, in our regeneration, pardon, and eternal life; (see ^{<4072>}Luke 1:72,78 ^{<5185>}Titus 3:5) (^{<6008>}1 Peter 1:3 ^{<5501>}Psalms 51:1 ^{<6021>}Jude 1:21) or “grace”, the exceeding riches of which are shown forth in the kindness of God to us, through Christ; and to which our salvation, in whole and in part, is to be attributed, (^{<4017>}Ephesians 2:7,8), “truth” may signify the veracity and faithfulness of God, in his promises and threatenings: his promises have their true and full accomplishment in Christ, (^{<4072>}Luke 1:72 ^{<5138>}Romans 15:8 ^{<6021>}2 Corinthians 1:20) so have his threatenings of death to sinful men, he being the surety for them, (^{<0027>}Genesis 2:17 ^{<5218>}Philippians 2:8) and so mercy is shown to man, and God is true to his word:

righteousness and peace have kissed each other; as friends at meeting used to do: “righteousness” may intend the essential justice of God, which will not admit of the pardon and justification of a sinner, without a satisfaction; wherefore Christ was set forth to be the propitiation for sin, to declare and manifest the righteousness of God, his strict justice; that he might be just, and appear to be so, when he is the justifier of him that believes in Jesus; and Christ’s blood being shed, and his sacrifice offered up, he is just and faithful to forgive sin, and cleanse from all unrighteousness, (^{<2306>}Exodus 34:6,7) (^{<5125>}Romans 3:25,26 ^{<6009>}1 John 1:9) and thus the law being magnified, and made honourable by the obedience and sufferings of Christ, an everlasting righteousness being brought in, and justice entirely satisfied, there is “peace” on earth, and good will to men: peace with God is made by Christ the peacemaker, and so the glory of divine justice is secured and peace with God for men obtained, in a way consistent with it, (^{<0214>}Luke 2:14) and Christ’s righteousness being imputed and applied to men, and received by faith, produces a conscience peace, an inward peace of mind, which passeth all understanding, (^{<5101>}Romans 5:1 14:17 ^{<5047>}Philippians 4:7).

Ver. 11. *Truth shall spring out of the earth*, etc.] Either the Gospel, the word of truth, which sprung up at once in the land of Judea, as if it came out of the earth; and from Zion and Jerusalem it came forth into the Gentile world: or else the truth of grace God desires in the inward parts, and which springs up in such who are like cultivated earth, or good ground, being made so by the Spirit and grace of God, particularly the grace of “faith”; by which some render the word ^{f1223} here, which springs up in the heart, and, with it, man believes to righteousness: or rather Christ himself, “who is the

way, the truth, and the life”; who, though he is the Lord from heaven, yet may be said, with respect to his incarnation, to spring out of the earth, he taking flesh of the virgin: hence his human nature is said to be “curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth”; and “that new thing created in the earth”, (⁴⁹⁹⁵Psalm 139:15 ²⁸²²Jeremiah 31:22)

and righteousness shall look down from heaven: the justice of God, or the righteous God, shall look down from heaven on Christ, the truth, in our nature on earth, with pleasure beholding his obedience, sufferings and death, sacrifice and righteousness; being well pleased with him, and with all he did and suffered, and with all his people, considered in him: these upright and righteous ones his countenance beholds with delight, as they are clothed with Christ’s righteousness, washed in his blood, and their sins expiated by his sacrifice, and as they are hoping in his mercy, and trusting in his Son.

Ver. 12. *Yea, the Lord shall give that which is good*, etc.] Meaning not merely temporal good, as rain in particular, as some think, because of the following clause; but that which is spiritually good, his good Spirit and his grace, grace and glory: nor will he withhold any good thing from his people; every good and perfect gift comes from him:

and our land shall yield her increase; such who are like to the earth, which receives blessing of God, and oft drinks in the rain that comes upon it, and brings forth herbs to the dresser of it, (⁸⁰⁴²Hebrews 6:2), these increase with the increase of God, bring forth fruits of righteousness, and grow in grace and in the knowledge of Christ; though the whole may be interpreted of the incarnation of Christ, which agrees with what goes before and follows after; (see ⁴⁵⁰⁶Psalm 67:6,7).

Ver. 13. *Righteousness shall go before him*, etc.] The incarnate Saviour, the increase of our land, and fruit of the virgin’s womb; and righteousness may be put for a righteous person, as Aben Ezra interprets it; and may design John the Baptist, a holy and just man, (⁴⁰⁵¹Mark 6:20), who was the forerunner and harbinger of Christ, went before him, and prepared the way for him, (⁴⁰⁷⁶Luke 1:76 ²³⁴⁸Isaiah 40:3) and shall set us in the way of his steps; the business of John the Baptist being not only to prepare the way of Christ by his doctrine and baptism, but to guide the feet of his people into the way of peace; or to direct them to believe in Christ, and to be followers of him, the Lamb of God, whithersoever he went; who has left an example of grace and duty, that we should tread in his steps, (⁴⁰⁷⁹Luke 1:79), the

Targum renders it, “in the good way”; and such a way John taught men to walk in.