

PSALM 86

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 86

A Prayer of David

The title is the same with the Seventeenth Psalm, and the subject of it is much alike: it was written by David, when in distress, and his life was sought after; very likely when he was persecuted by Saul, and fled from him; so Aben Ezra, Jarchi, and Kimchi: and as he was a type of Christ in his afflictions, as well as in his exalted state, it may not be unfitly applied to him, as it is by some interpreters. The Syriac inscription of it is,

“for David, when he built an house for the Lord; and a prophecy of the calling of the Gentiles; and moreover, a prayer of a peculiar righteous man.”

Theodoret thinks it predicts the siege of Jerusalem by the Assyrians, and Hezekiah’s hope in God.

Ver. 1. *Bow down thine ear, O Lord, hear me*, etc.] This is spoken of God after the manner of men, who, when they listen and attentively hearken to what is said to them, stoop and bow the head, and incline the ear; and it denotes condescension in the Lord, who humbles himself as to look upon men, so to bow down the ear and hearken to them: this favour is granted to the saints, to whom he is a God hearing and answering prayer, and which Christ, as man and Mediator, enjoyed; (see ^{<887>}Hebrews 5:7 ^{<814>}John 11:41,42),

for I am poor and needy; weak and feeble, destitute and distressed, and so wanted help and assistance; and which carries in it an argument or reason enforcing the above petition; for the Lord has a regard to the poor and needy; (see ^{<898>}Psalm 6:2 12:5 35:10). This may be understood literally, it being the common case of the people of God, who are generally the poor and needy of this world, whom God chooses, calls, and makes his own; and so was David when he fled from Saul, being often in want of temporal mercies, as appears by his application to Ahimelech and Nabal for food; and having nothing, as Kimchi observes, to support him, but what his

friends, and the men of Judah, privately helped him to; and the character well agrees with Christ, whose case this was; (see ^{<408>}2 Corinthians 8:9 ^{<408>}Matthew 8:20 ^{<408>}Luke 8:2,3). Moreover, it may be taken in a spiritual sense; all men are poor and needy, though not sensible of it; good men are poor in spirit, are sensible of their spiritual poverty, and apply to the Lord, and to the throne of his grace, for the supply of their need; and such an one was David, even when he was king of Israel, as well as at this time, (^{<340>}Psalm 40:17), and may be applied to Christ; especially when destitute of his Father's gracious presence, and was forsaken by him and all his friends, (^{<424>}Matthew 27:46 ^{<424>}26:56).

Ver. 2. *Preserve my soul*, etc.] Or life, which Saul sought after; and this prayer was heard: David was often remarkably preserved by the Lord from his attempts upon him; and so was the soul or life of Christ preserved in his infancy from Herod's malice; in the wilderness from wild beasts, and from perishing with hunger; and often from the designs of the Jews, to take away his life before his time; and he was supported in death, preserved from corruption in the grave, and raised from thence: instances there are of his praying for the preservation of his life, with submission to the will of God, in which he was heard, (^{<405>}Matthew 26:39,49 ^{<405>}John 12:27 ^{<387>}Hebrews 5:7). The Lord is not only the preserver of the lives of men in a temporal sense, but he is the preserver of the souls of his people, their more noble part, whose redemption is precious; he keeps them from the evil of sin, and preserves them safe to his kingdom and glory; yea, their whole soul, body, and spirit, are preserved by him blameless, unto the coming of Christ:

for I am holy; quite innocent, as to the crime that was laid to his charge by Saul and his courtiers; or was kind, beneficent, and merciful, to others, and to such God shows himself merciful, they obtain mercy: or was favoured of God, to whom he had been bountiful, on whom he had bestowed many mercies and blessings; and therefore desires and hopes that, to the rest of favours, this of preservation might be added; or, as he was a sanctified person, and God had begun his work of grace in him, he therefore entreats the Lord would preserve him, and perfect his own work in him: some, as Aben Ezra observes, would have the sense to be,

“keep my soul until I am holy:”

so Arama interprets it,

“keep me unto the world to come, where all are holy:”

the character of an Holy One eminently and perfectly agrees with Christ, as well as the petition; (see ^{<9161>}Psalm 16:1,10).

O thou, my God, save thy servant that trusteth in thee; both temporally and spiritually: the arguments are taken from covenant interest in God, which is a strong one; from relation to him as a servant, not by nature only, but by grace; and from his trust and confidence in him; all which, as well as the petition, agree with Christ; (see ^{<9201>}Psalm 22:1,8,10,20,21 ^{<2301>}Isaiah 42:1).

Ver. 3. *Be merciful unto me, O Lord*, etc.] In my distressed and miserable condition, being an object of mercy, pity, and compassion; this petition is used by Christ in (^{<9410>}Psalm 41:10)

for I cry unto thee daily; or “all the day”; every day, and several times in a day, (^{<9517>}Psalm 55:17) constant and importunate prayer is the duty of saints, and available with God, (^{<3167>}1 Thessalonians 5:17 ^{<2181>}Luke 18:1-7). Christ was much in the exercise of it, (^{<4162>}Luke 6:12).

Ver. 4. *Rejoice the soul of thy servant*, etc.] With the discoveries of love, of pardoning grace, and mercy, before made sad with sin or sufferings; and with the light of God’s countenance, before troubled with the hidings of his face: this may be applied to Christ, in sorrowful circumstances, who was made full of joy with his Father’s countenance, (^{<4157>}Matthew 26:37,38 ^{<4128>}Acts 2:28)

for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul: in prayer, as the Targum adds; and it denotes the devotion, fervency, heartiness, and sincerity, of his prayer; the doing of it with a true heart, the lifting up of the heart with the hands unto God, (^{<2184>}Lamentations 3:41) or by way of offering unto the Lord, not the body only, but the soul or heart also; or as a depositum committed into his hands; so Christ lifted up his eyes, and his heart and soul, to his divine Father; and also made his soul an offering for sin, and at death commended his spirit into his hands, (^{<6701>}John 17:1 ^{<2530>}Isaiah 53:10 ^{<2236>}Luke 23:46), (see Gill on “^{<9201>}Psalm 25:1”).

Ver. 5. *For thou, Lord, art good*, etc.] Essentially and independently good, from whom every good and perfect gift comes; good in himself, and good to others; good to all, in a providential way; and good to his own special people in a way of grace: this is asserted by Christ, (^{<4197>}Matthew 19:17)

and ready to forgive; there is forgiveness with him, and it is to be had without difficulty; he has largely provided for it; he is forward unto it, he freely giving it; it is according to the riches of his grace; he does abundantly pardon; no sooner is it asked but it is had; this David knew by experience, (^{<4915>}Psalm 32:5),

and plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee; in truth, in sincerity, in a right way, through Christ, and faith in him; to such not only the Lord shows himself merciful, but is rich and abundant in mercy; he has a multitude of tender mercies, and abounds in his grace and goodness, and in the donation of it to his people; all which encourage their faith and hope in their petitions to him.

Ver. 6. *Give ear, O Lord, unto my prayer*, etc.] As this psalm is called, in the title of it; his own prayer, and not another's, not one composed for him, but what was composed by him; this petition is repeated, as to the sense of it, from (^{<4906>}Psalm 86:1) to show his importunity to be heard:

and attend to the voice of my supplications; which proceeded from the spirit of grace and supplication, put up in an humble manner, in a dependence on the mercy of God, which the word used has the signification of, and were attended with thanksgiving, (^{<4982>}Psalm 86:12,13), according to the apostle's rule, (^{<5046>}Philippians 4:6), these were vocal prayers, and not mere mental ones; (see ^{<5057>}Hebrews 5:7).

Ver. 7. *In the day of my trouble I will call upon thee*, etc.] David had his troubles, both inward and outward, before and after he came to the throne, in private and public life; and every good man has his troubles; and there are some particular times or days of trouble; which trouble arises from different causes; sometimes from themselves, their corruptions, the weakness of their grace, and the poor performance of their duties; sometimes from others; from the persecutions of the men of the world; from the wicked lives of profane sinners, and especially professors of religion, and from the spread of false doctrine; sometimes from Satan and his temptations; and sometimes from the more immediate hand of God in afflictions, and from the hidings of his face: these troubles do not last always; they are but for a day, for a particular time; and such a season is a fit one for prayer, and the Lord invites and encourages his people to call upon him in prayer when this is the case, (^{<4915>}Psalm 50:15). Christ had his times of trouble, in which he called upon his divine Father, (^{<4913>}John 11:33,41 12:27)

for thou wilt answer me; which the idols of the Gentiles could not do; Baal could not answer his priests, (^{<1186>}1 Kings 18:26), this the psalmist concluded, both from the promise of God, (^{<915>}Psalm 50:15), and from his frequent experience, (^{<938>}Psalm 138:3), a very encouraging reason or argument this to call on the Lord: Christ was always heard and answered, (^{<914>}John 11:41,42).

Ver. 8. *Among the gods there is none like unto thee, O Lord*, etc.] Among the angels of heaven, as the Targum, in the king's Bible; (see ^{<1266>}Matthew 24:36), and who are sometimes called gods, and among whom there is none like to the Lord; (see ^{<970>}Psalm 97:7 ^{<906>}Hebrews 1:6 ^{<986>}Psalm 89:6) or among civil magistrates, he being King of kings, and Lord of lords, the only Potentate; among whom he judges, over whom he presides, and whom he sets up and puts down at pleasure, (^{<921>}Psalm 82:1-6), or among all those that are named gods in heaven, or on earth, the nominal and fictitious gods of the Gentiles, who are vanity, and the work of error: the portion of Jacob is not like them, (^{<2405>}Jeremiah 10:15,16), there is none like him, for the perfections of his nature, his power, wisdom, faithfulness, holiness, justice, mercy, grace, and goodness; (^{<1251>}Exodus 15:11 ^{<988>}Psalm 89:8 ^{<1135>}113:5,6 ^{<3078>}Micah 7:18).

neither are there any works like unto thy works; as the works of creation and providence, and those of redemption and grace, in which there is such a manifest display of the perfections of his nature, (^{<1234>}Deuteronomy 3:24).

Ver. 9. *All nations whom thou hast made*, etc.] All nations, or the inhabitants of all nations, are made by the Lord, and of the blood of one man, (^{<4176>}Acts 17:26), and which as it shows the obligation of all men to come and worship, as is said should be; so likewise that the Lord, who has made them, is able to make them come to do homage to him, as follows:

shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; “come”, spiritually, by faith and repentance, to the Lord himself, being drawn by the power of his efficacious grace through the ministry of the word; and, locally, to the house and ordinances of God, to attend upon them, and wait on him in them; and “worship” both externally, according to his revealed will; and internally in the exercise of grace, in spirit and in truth: this is prophetically said of the conversion of the Gentiles in Gospel times, especially in the latter day; (see ^{<654>}Revelation 15:4). Kimchi and Arama say this will be in the time of the Messiah:

and shall glorify thy name; the Lord himself, with their bodies and spirits, which are his; and ascribe the glory of their salvation to him, and glorify him for his mercy towards them in their redemption and conversion; glorify that and every perfection of his, displayed in their salvation; and also his Gospel, which brings them the news of it; (see ^{<615B>}Romans 15:9 ^{<413B>}Acts 13:48).

Ver. 10. *For thou art great*, etc.] In his nature, and the perfections of it; in his power, wisdom, truth, faithfulness, love, grace, and mercy; and in all his persons; the Father is great, greater than all; the Son is the great God, and our Saviour; and the Spirit, which is in his people, is greater than he that is in the world:

and doest wondrous things; in nature and providence; such as the forming of all things out of nothing; upholding all things by the word of his power; the formation of man, soul and body, and the union of both; and the constant government of the world; and more especially in grace, as the provision in the covenant in eternity, the mission of Christ in time, the conversion of a sinner, and bringing him to eternal glory:

thou art God alone; to the exclusion of all such who are not gods by nature; but not to the exclusion of the Son and Spirit, who are, with the Father, the one God, (^{<618B>}1 John 5:7).

Ver. 11. *Teach me thy way, O Lord*, etc.] The methods of thy grace, which thou hast taken, and dost take, in the salvation of men, in the contrivance, impetration, and application of it; or the way which thou hast marked out for thy people to walk in, the way of thy commandments: each of these the psalmist had knowledge of before; but he desires to be more and more instructed therein, as every good man does; (see ^{<625B>}Psalms 25:4,5 ^{<611B>}Isaiah 2:3).

I will walk in thy truth; in Christ, the truth of types, and by whom grace and truth came, and who is truth itself, and the true way to eternal life; and to walk in him is to walk by faith in him, in hope of eternal happiness through him, (^{<611B>}John 1:17 14:6 ^{<510B>}Colossians 2:6) or in the truth of the Gospel, of Gospel doctrine, Gospel worship, and Gospel conversation; to walk in it is to walk becoming it, and abide by it, its truths and ordinances; (see ^{<610B>}2 John 1:4 ^{<610B>}3 John 1:3,4)

unite my heart to fear thy name; there must be an heart given to man to fear the Lord; for the fear of the Lord is not naturally in their hearts, or

before their eyes; and they should have, not a divided and distracted heart, an heart divided between God and the world, between the fear of God and the fear of man; but a heart united to the Lord, that cleaves to him, and him only; a single and a sincere heart; a heart that has a single view to his glory, and a sincere affection for him; and such a heart the Lord has promised to give to his people, in order to fear him, (~~2423~~ Jeremiah 32:39).

Ver. 12. *I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart*, etc.] And under that consideration, that he was his God, and which itself is sufficient matter of praise; this makes him amiable, and such he is, love itself: this is a blessing of pure grace, and is the foundation of all other blessings, and continues for ever: this work of praise, which is no other than ascribing glory to God, and giving thanks unto him for mercies received, the psalmist determines to do with his whole heart, which is to be engaged in every spiritual service; even all of it, all that is within it, every power and faculty of the soul, (~~1930E~~ Psalm 103:1), which is expressive not of perfection, but sincerity:

and I will glorify thy name for evermore; by celebrating the perfections of his nature, by giving him the glory of the works of his hands, by praising him for all favours, by devoting himself unto him, and by doing all things for his glory, and that for ever, in time as long as he lived, and to all eternity.

Ver. 13. *For great is thy mercy toward me*, etc.] Both in things temporal and spiritual; an instance of which follows:

and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell; from a very distressed and disconsolate condition, being almost in despair, under a deep sense of sin, and a fearful apprehension of the wrath of God, as, particularly, when he was charged by Nathan; or from hell itself, and the severest punishment in it; from the second and eternal death, which every man is deserving of, and are only delivered from by the grace of God, and blood of Christ: this shows the sense the psalmist had of the just demerit of sin, and his thankfulness for deliverance from it; (see ~~19613~~ Psalm 56:13). Kimchi interprets it of the grave; but says, there are some that interpret it of the judgment, or condemnation of hell: such who have escaped great dangers in long and perilous journeys, or have been delivered from threatening diseases, are said to be saved from hell ^{f1224}.

Ver. 14. *O God, the proud are risen against me*, etc.] As all men naturally are, and as all are without the grace of God; and because they are, they deal in proud wrath: as, through the pride of their heart, they seek not after God; so, through the same, they persecute his people, treating them with the utmost contempt, and as the offscouring of all things. Jarchi interprets this particularly of Doeg and Ahithophel:

and the assemblies of violent men have sought after my soul; or “terrible”^{f1225} ones, who breathed out nothing but cruelty, threatenings, and slaughter; and who were many, and got together in bodies, and entered into combinations and conspiracies; and whom nothing would satisfy but the taking away of his life, which they sought after; (see ^{<GRB>}Psalm 22:12-16)

and have not set thee before them; they did not consider the omniscience of God, that he knew and took notice of all they did; nor his omnipresence, that he was everywhere, and there was no fleeing from him; nor his omnipotence, who was able to crush them to pieces; nor his justice, which will render tribulation to them that trouble him; nor his goodness, which should lead to repentance; nor had they any fear of him, nor respect to his glory: in short, they were like the unjust judge, who neither feared God nor regarded men, (^{<GRB>}Luke 18:4).

Ver. 15. *But thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion*, etc.] Or merciful^{f1226}, in the most affectionate and tender manner, as a parent to its child, or particularly as a mother to the son of her womb; and is rich and plenteous in his mercy, and freely bestows it; and this was the support of the psalmist under his troubles from his enemies, that though they were cruel the Lord was merciful:

and gracious; so he has been in eternity, as appears by his election of grace, by the covenant of his grace, and the provisions of it in his Son; and so he is in time, as is manifest from his kindness in Christ Jesus, from his justification, pardon, adoption, effectual calling and salvation of his people, which are all of grace;

longsuffering; not only to wicked men, but to his chosen ones; which longsuffering of his is salvation to them; he bears with them, and waits to be gracious to them, to bring them to repentance, and save them, (^{<GRB>}2 Peter 3:9,15),

plenteous in mercy; or goodness; (See Gill on “¹⁸¹⁵Psalm 86:5”), and truth: in fulfilling promises; (see ¹²⁴⁶Exodus 34:6), to which these words refer.

Ver. 16. *O turn unto me, and have mercy upon me*, etc.] For it seems the Lord had turned away from him, and had hid his face, and withheld the manifestation of his grace and mercy from him, and had not yielded him the help and assistance he expected; and therefore entreats that he would turn again to him, and show him his face and favour, and be merciful to him:

give thy strength unto thy servant; spiritual strength, strength in his soul, to exercise grace, perform duty, bear the cross, and stand up against all enemies, and hold out to the end: this is God’s gift; and the psalmist pleads his relation to him as his servant, not merely by creation, but by grace; this is interpreted by the Jews of the King Messiah ^{f1227}:

and save the son of thine handmaid; out of the hands of those that were risen up against him; (see ¹³⁹⁴Psalm 119:94). Some think this has a special reference to Christ, who was made of a woman, called an handmaid, (¹⁰¹⁴Luke 1:48), born of a virgin, the son of Mary: Arama says David uses the word “handmaid”, because he sprung from Ruth the Moabitess.

Ver. 17. *Show me a token for good*, etc.] Not only one by which he might know that his sins were pardoned, and his person accepted with God, and that he should be saved; but one visible to others, even to his enemies, by which they might know that God was on his side, and would verily do him good: Kimchi interprets it of the kingdom; and his being raised to the throne of Israel was a token of the Lord’s goodness to him, and showed that he had a delight in him, and meant to do him good:

that they which hate me may see it, and be ashamed; of their envy of him, their combinations and conspiracies against him, and of all their efforts to distress him, to hinder him of the kingdom, or deprive him of it, or make him uncomfortable in it:

because thou, Lord, hast holpen me, and comforted me; he comforted him by helping him against his enemies, and out of his troubles; and, by doing both, showed him a token for good, and filled his enemies with shame and confusion.