

PSALM 116

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 116

Theodoret applies this psalm to the distresses of the Jews in the times of the Maccabees under Antiochus Epiphanes; and R. Obadiah interprets some passages in it of the Grecians of those times; but it rather seems to have been written by David on account of some troubles of his, out of which he was delivered; and refers either to the times of Saul, and the persecutions he endured from him, particularly when he was beset round about by him and his men in the wilderness of Maon, (~~1235~~1 Samuel 23:26), to which he may have respect (~~1313~~Psalm 116:3). The inscription of the psalm in the Syriac version is,

“the progress of the new people returning to the Christian worship, as a child to understanding: and as to the letter, it was said when Saul stayed at the door of the cave where David lay hid with his men;”

(see ~~1244~~1 Samuel 24:4). But since mention is made of Jerusalem, (~~1369~~Psalm 116:19), where the psalmist would praise the Lord for his deliverance, which as yet was not in his hands nor in the hands of the Israelites, but of the Jebusites; some have thought it was written on account of the conspiracy of Absalom against him, and who, hearing that Ahithophel was among the conspirators, said the words related in (~~1351~~Psalm 116:11), it is very probable it was composed after the death of Saul, and when he was settled in the kingdom, as Jarchi observes, and was delivered out of the hands of all his enemies; and very likely much about the same time as the eighteenth psalm was, which begins in the same manner, and has some expressions in it like to what are in this. David was a type of Christ, and some apply this psalm to him.

Ver. 1. *I love the Lord*, etc.] As the Messiah, David’s antitype, did; of which he gave the fullest proof by his obedience to his will; and as David, the man after God’s own heart, did, and as every good man does; and the Lord is to be loved for the perfections of his nature, and especially as they are displayed in Christ, and salvation by him; and for his works of creation,

providence, and grace, and particularly for his great love shown in redemption, regeneration, and other blessings of grace, as well as for what follows.

Because he hath heard my voice and my supplication; in the original text the words lie thus, “I love, because the Lord hath heard”, or “will hear”; and so read the Septuagint and Vulgate Latin, Ethiopic, Syriac, and Arabic versions, and so the Targum; and may be rendered, “I love that the Lord should hear me”, so the Syriac and Arabic versions; nothing is more desirable and grateful to good men than that the Lord should hear them; but Kimchi and others transpose the words as we do, which gives a reason why he loved the Lord; because he heard his prayers, which were vocal, put up in a time of distress, in an humble and submissive manner, under the influence of the Spirit of grace and supplication, in the name of Christ, for his righteousness sake, and through his mediation; and such supplications are heard and answered by the Lord, sooner or later; and which engages the love of his people to him; (see ^{<880>}Psalm 34:1-6). It may be applied to Christ, who offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, and was always heard; and for which he thanked his Father and loved him, (^{<880>}Hebrews 5:7 ^{<814>}John 11:41,42).

Ver. 2. *Because he hath inclined his ear unto me*, etc.] Not as hard of hearing, for his ear is not heavy that it cannot hear; he is quick of hearing, and his ears are always open to the righteous; it rather denotes his readiness to hear; he hearkens and hears, he listens to what his people say, and hears them at once, and understands them, though ever so broken and confused; when their prayers are but like the chatterings of a crane or swallow, or only expressed in sighs and groans, and even without a voice; when nothing is articulately pronounced: moreover, this shows condescension in him; he bows his ear as a rattler to a child, he stoops as being above them, and inclines his ear to them.

Therefore will I call upon him as long as I live; or “in my days”^{f1607}; in days of adversity and affliction, for help and relief; in days of prosperity, with thankfulness for favours received; every day I live, and several times a day: prayer should be constantly used; men should pray without ceasing always, and not faint; prayer is the first and last action of a spiritual life; it is the first thing a regenerate man does, “behold, he prays”; as soon as he is born again he prays, and continues praying all his days; and generally goes out of the world praying, as Stephen did, “Lord Jesus, receive my spirit”;

and it is the Lord's hearing prayer that encourages his people to keep on praying, and which makes the work delightful to them. Christ was often at this work in life, and died praying, (~~4162~~Luke 6:12 23:46).

Ver. 3. *The sorrows of death compassed me*, etc.] Christ, of whom David was a type, was a man of sorrows all his days; and in the garden he was surrounded with sorrow; exceeding sorrowful even unto death, in a view of the sins of his people imputed to him, and under a sense of wrath for them, he was about to bear; and his agonies in the article of death were very grievous, he died the painful and accursed death of the cross. This was true of David, when Saul and his men compassed him on every side, threatening to cut him off in a moment; when he despaired of life, and had the sentence of death in himself, and saw no way to escape; and such a case is that of the people of God, or they may be said to be compassed about with the sorrows of death, when through a slavish fear of it they are all their lifetime subject to bondage; and especially when under dreadful apprehensions of eternal death.

And the pains of hell gat hold upon me; or "found me"^{f1608}; overtook him, and seized upon him; meaning either the horrors of a guilty conscience under a sense of sin, without a view of pardon; which is as it were a hell in the conscience, and like the pains and torments of it: or "the pains of the grave"^{f1609}; not that there are any pains felt there, the body being destitute of life, and senseless; but such sorrows or troubles are meant which threaten to bring down to the grave, which was the case of Jacob on the loss of his children, (~~01375~~Genesis 37:35 42:38). This applied to Christ may design the wrath of God and curse of the law, which he endured in the room and stead of his people, as their surety; and which were equivalent to the pains of the damned in hell; or it may refer to his being laid in the grave, in a strait and narrow place, as the word^{f1610} signifies; where he lay bound in grave clothes, till he was loosed from the pains and cords of death, it being not possible he should be held by them, (~~4124~~Acts 2:24), (see Gill on "~~1984~~Psalm 18:4-5")

I found trouble and sorrow; without seeking for them; they seized and took hold of him, on David, and his antitype, when in the above circumstances; and often do the saints find trouble and sorrow from a body of sin and death, from the temptations of Satan, divine desertions, and afflictive providences. Aben Ezra refers the one to the body, the other to the soul.

Ver. 4. *Then called I upon the name of the Lord*, etc.] Upon the Lord himself in prayer for speedy deliverance; or “in the name of the Lord”^{f1611}, in the name of the Messiah, the only Mediator between God and man; “saying”, as follows, and which word may be supplied,

O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul; from these sorrows and pains, from these afflictions and distresses, from death and the grave, and from wrath, and a sense of it, and fears about it.

Ver. 5. *Gracious is the Lord*, etc.] So the psalmist found him, calling upon him; so he is in Christ, the author and giver of all grace, to help in time of need.

And righteous; faithful to his promises, just in every dispensation of his providence, even in afflictive ones; righteous in punishing the enemies of his people, and in saving, justifying, and pardoning them for Christ’s sake.

Yea, our God is merciful; compassionate, tenderhearted, a heart full of pity, as a father to his child; and sympathizes with his people under all their afflictions, and saves them out of them; see (~~4885~~ Psalm 86:5,15).

Ver. 6. *The Lord preserveth the simple*, etc.] Such as have but a small degree of understanding, either in things natural or spiritual, in comparison of others; babes, as the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions render it, so in the Talmud^{f1612}; (see ~~40125~~ Matthew 11:25). Such who are sensible of their lack of wisdom, and what they have they do not lean unto or trust in, but being sensible of their weakness commit themselves to the Lord; they are sincere and upright, harmless and inoffensive, artless and incautious, and so easily imposed upon by designing men; but the Lord preserves them, as from sin, from a total and final falling away by it, so from gross errors and heresies; he preserves them from the snares and pollutions of the world, and from the temptations of Satan, so as not to be overcome with them; he preserves them by his Spirit, power, and grace, safe to his kingdom and glory.

I was brought low and he helped me; the psalmist returns to his own case, and gives an instance of the divine goodness in himself; he had been brought low by affliction of body, by distress of enemies, through want of the necessaries and conveniences of life; he had been brought low as to spiritual things, through the weakness of grace, the prevalence of corruption, the temptations of Satan, and the hidings of God’s face; but the Lord helped him to bear up under all this; he put underneath his everlasting

arms, and upheld him with the right hand of his righteousness; he helped him out of his low estate, and delivered him out of all his troubles, when none else could; when things were at the greatest extremity, and he in the utmost distress, just ready to go down into silence and dwell there, (¹⁹⁴⁷Psalm 94:17). The Targum is,

“he looked upon me to redeem me.”

Ver. 7. *Return unto thy rest, O my soul*, etc.] To a quiet and tranquil state after much distress ^{f1613}; a soliloquy, an address to his own soul to return to God his resting place, as Kimchi; or to Christ, whose rest is glorious, and which lies in a cessation from a man’s own works; not from doing them, but from depending on them, or from labouring for life by them; in a deliverance from the bondage of the law, its curse and condemnation, and from the dominion and tyranny of sin, and from the distressing guilt of it on the conscience; in spiritual peace and joy, arising from the application of the blood of Christ, and from a view of his righteousness and justification by it, and of his sacrifice, and of the expiation of sin by that; which is enjoyed in the ways and ordinances of Christ, and oftentimes amidst afflictions and tribulations: this is sometimes broke in upon and interrupted, through the prevalence of sin, the temptations of Satan, and divine desertions; but may be returned to again, as Noah’s dove returned to the ark when it could find rest nowhere else; as the believer can find none but in Christ, and therefore after he has wandered from him he returns to him again, encouraged by the following reason.

For the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee; in times past, even in an eternity past, having loved him with an everlasting love, chosen him in Christ, made a covenant with him in him, blessed him with all spiritual blessings in him, and made unto him exceeding great and precious promises; provided a Redeemer and Saviour for him, whom he had made known unto him, having enlightened, quickened, and converted him; and had laid up good things for him to come, and had done many great things for him already; all which might serve to encourage his faith and hope in him. The Targum is,

“because the Word of the Lord hath rendered good unto me.”

Ver. 8. *For thou hast delivered my soul from death*, etc.] From a corporeal death, when his life was in danger, surrounded by Saul’s army, in the hand of the Philistines at Gath, and when his son rebelled against him; and from

a spiritual death in regeneration, which is a passing from death to life; and from an eternal death, the just wages of sin: and not only so, but even

mine eyes from tears; they were sometimes full of, and shed in great plenty; he watered his couch with them; and especially when absent from the worship of the Lord, and without his presence, which his enemies sometimes reproached him with; and particularly when he fled before his rebellious son, and at the death of him; but God dried up all his tears; (see ^{<B106>}Psalm 6:6 42:3 ^{<D153>}2 Samuel 15:30 18:33). Many are the occasions of the saints weeping as they pass through the valley of “Baca”, but God will wipe away all tears from their eyes.

And my feet from falling through a “push” ^{f1614}, by an enemy, so as to fall; the people of God are liable to falling, both into sin and into calamity; it is the Lord only that keeps them; and which they may expect from their interest in his love, covenant, and promises, and from their being in the hands of Christ; (see ^{<F563>}Psalm 56:13).

Ver. 9. *I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living.*] As in the sight of the omniscient God, according to his word and will, and in such manner as to please him. So Enoch’s walking with God is by the apostle explained of pleasing him; compare (^{<D162>}Genesis 5:22 ^{<S105>}Hebrews 11:5), and so the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, and Arabic versions render it, “I will please the Lord”; or, as the Syriac and Ethiopic versions; “that I may please the Lord”; be grateful to him; or walk gratefully and acceptably before him, sensible of the obligations I am under to him: and this, in the strength of grace, he determined to do “in the land of the living”; in this world, where men live, and as long as he lived in it; or in the church of God, among the living in Jerusalem, with whom he resolved to walk in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord. The land of Canaan is thought by Jarchi and Kimchi to be meant; and this being a type of heaven, the meaning may be, that he should walk and dwell where living and glorified saints are to all eternity; and so it is an expression of his faith of future glory and happiness, agreeably to what follows.

Ver. 10. *I believed, therefore have I spoken,* etc.] Here the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions, begin a new psalm, but without any foundation in the original; nor is it countenanced by the Targum; and is manifestly against the connection with the preceding verses. David expresses his faith in relation to what goes before, though the particulars of it are not mentioned, but are left to be supplied from

thence: he not only believed there was a God, but that this God was gracious and merciful, and that he was his God; who had made a covenant with him, ordered in all things, and sure: he believed the promises of it; and particularly the grand promise of it respecting Christ, and salvation by him: he believed the Lord would deliver him out of all his troubles; that he should walk before him, and see his goodness in the land of the living; he believed a future state of happiness he should hereafter enjoy. The Apostle Paul quotes this passage, and applies it to himself and other Gospel ministers; declaring their faith in the resurrection of the dead, and an eternal weight of glory they were looking for, (~~ROMS~~2 Corinthians 4:13,14); and therefore spake so freely about these things. Faith gives boldness and freedom of speech to men; which believers use with God in prayer, in the believing views of him, as their God in Christ; and of Christ, his person, blood, righteousness, and sacrifice: it gives ministers boldness and freedom to speak out plainly, constantly, and boldly, the Gospel of Christ; it gives the same to private Christians, to speak freely one to another of their gracious experiences, and to declare publicly to the churches of Christ what God has done for their souls;

I was greatly afflicted; when he believed and spake, and yet nevertheless did; he might be afflicted, reproached, and persecuted for his faith, and his speaking of it; particularly as it respected his coming to the crown and kingdom of Israel. And it is no unusual thing for saints to be persecuted for their faith, and profession of it; and yet none of these things move them from it; their faith remains, and is much more precious than gold that perisheth; and they hold fast the profession of it. Many and great afflictions are the common lot of believers.

Ver. 11. *I said in my haste, all men [are] liars.*] The sin of lying is common to man; there is a natural proneness and propensity to it: men go astray from the womb, speaking lies; yet such who have received the grace of God “put [it] off” with the rest of “the deeds of the old man”, and are “children that will not lie”. Wherefore, though the greater part of mankind might deserve this character, yet all and every individual of them did not. However degenerate the age was in which David lived, and the faithful among men were few; yet there were some to whom this imputation did not belong; and therefore, on cool reflection, he owned it was said “in haste”; not with thought and deliberation, but rashly and precipitately, unadvisedly, in a passion, and under a temptation, and when off of his guard; and which he acknowledged and repented of. The Targum is,

“I said in my flight;”

when he made haste and fled from Saul, whom he might call a liar and dissembler, pretending respect to him when he had none; and also his courtiers; nay, even Samuel himself, who had anointed him, and assured him he should be king; and yet now he thought he had deceived him, and he should perish by the hand of Saul, and never come to the kingdom, (~~1~~1 Samuel 27:1); or when he fled from his son Absalom, whom he might call a liar, who had deceived him with the pretence of a vow; and also Ahithophel and others, who proved treacherous and unfaithful to him. Some take the words in a quite different sense, as an instance of his great faith; that when he was so greatly afflicted, and obliged to fly, yet declared that every man that should say he should not come to the kingdom was a liar; so Kimchi: and others think his meaning is, that every man is a liar in comparison of God, who is true and faithful to his promises, and not a man, that he should lie. Men of both high and low degree are a lie and vanity, and not to be trusted and depended upon; but a man may safely put confidence in the Lord; to this agrees (~~4~~Romans 3:4); where the apostle seems to have some respect to this passage.

Ver. 12. *What shall I render unto the Lord?* etc.] He considers the Lord only as the author and giver of his mercies, and has nothing to say of his own merits, nor of other persons, who might be instruments of good to him; but is for giving all the glory to God: not as though he could render anything proportional or equivalent to what he had received, but as having a grateful sense of mercies, and willing, to express it; though at a loss, in a great measure, in what manner to do it, and therefore puts this question to himself and others:

[for] all his benefits towards me; or, “all his benefits are upon me”^{f1615}. This being a clause of itself; and shows what moved him to put the question he did; a sense of divine favours was impressed upon him, a load of benefits lay on him, and he wanted to ease himself in expressions of gratitude. These benefits were the blessings of nature and providence; his being, and the preservation of it, food, raiment, etc. and the blessings of grace; spiritual blessings, all things pertaining to life and godliness, sanctification, adoption, pardon, justification, and eternal life. These may well be called “benefits”, since they spring entirely from the free grace of God; and they were many, more than could be counted and reckoned up, and set in order before the Lord; and yet he was desirous that none of them

might be forgotten, but that praise might be rendered to the Lord for them all.

Ver. 13. *I will take the cup of salvation*, etc.] Or “salvations”^{f1616}; not the eucharistic cup, or the cup in the Lord’s supper, which the apostle calls “the cup of blessing”, (^{<616>}1 Corinthians 10:16); though some so think, and that the psalmist represents the saints under the Gospel dispensation; nor the cup of afflictions or martyrdom for the sake of Christ; being willing, under a sense of mercies received, to bear or suffer anything for his sake he should call him to; as knowing it would be a token to him of salvation, and work for his good: but rather an offering of praise for temporal salvation, and for spiritual and eternal salvation; in allusion to a master of a family, who at the close of a feast or meal, used to take up a cup in his hands, and give thanks; (see ^{<627>}Matthew 26:27);

and call upon the name of the Lord; invocation of the name of the Lord takes in all worship and service of him, public and private, external and internal; and particularly prayer, which is calling upon the Lord in the name of Christ, with faith and fervency, in sincerity and truth: and the sense of the psalmist is, that he would not only give thanks for the mercies he had received, but continue to pray to God for more; and this was all the return he was capable of making.

Ver. 14. *I will pay my vows unto the Lord now, in the presence of all his people*.] Make good the resolutions and determinations he made in the strength of divine grace, in the time of his troubles; that should the Lord deliver him out of them, he would give him all the glory, and offer thanksgiving and praise to him; and now being delivered, this he declares he would do, in a public way, before all the people of God, assembled in the house of the Lord, as witnesses of it; (see ^{<663>}Psalms 66:13,14).

Ver. 15. *Precious in the sight of the Lord [is] the death of his saints*.] The Lord has his saints or sanctified ones, who are sanctified or set apart by God the Father from all eternity; who are sanctified in Christ, their head and representative; who are sanctified by his blood, shed for the expiation of their sins; who are sanctified by his Spirit and grace, are called with an holy calling, and have principles of holiness wrought in them, and live holy lives and conversations. The word^{f1617} used also signifies one that has received kindness and favour, and shows it: saints are such, who have received spiritual blessings from the Lord; to whom he has been kind and bountiful; and these are merciful and beneficent to others. Now these die as

well as others, though holy and righteous, and though Christ has died for them; he has indeed delivered them from death as a punishment, he has abolished it in this sense; and has freed them from the curse and sting of it, but not from that itself; because it is for their good, and it is precious in the sight of the Lord. Saints are precious to him, living and dying; there is something in their death, or that attends it, that is delightful to him, and of high esteem with him; as when they are in the full exercise of grace at such a season; when they die in faith, and have hope in their death; and their love is drawn out unto him, and they long to be with him: besides, they die in the Lord, and sleep in Jesus, in union with him; with whom he is well pleased, and all in him; and they die unto him, according to his will, and are resigned unto it; and so glorify him in death, as well as in life. It is the time of their ingathering to him; at death he comes into his garden, and gathers his flowers, and smells a sweet savour in them; their very dust is precious to him, which he takes care of and raises up at the last day. The commonly received sense of the words is, that the saints are so dear to the Lord, their lives are so much set by with him, and their blood so precious to him, that he will not easily suffer their lives to be taken away, or their blood to be spilled; and whenever it is, he will, sooner or later, severely revenge it; (see ~~1921~~ 1 Samuel 26:21,24) (~~1924~~ Psalm 72:14). And to this sense is the Targum,

“precious before the Lord is death sent to (or inflicted on) his saints;”

that is, by men. The words will bear to be rendered, “precious in the sight of the Lord is that death”, or “death itself, for his saints”; that very remarkable and observable death, even the death of his Son, which was not only for the good of his saints, for their redemption, salvation, justification, pardon, and eternal life; but in their room and stead; and which was very acceptable unto God, of high esteem with him, of a sweet smelling savour to him: not that he took pleasure in it, simply considered; for he that hath no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, even of a sinner, could have none in the death of his Son; but as hereby his justice was satisfied, his law fulfilled, the salvation of his people procured, and his covenant, counsels, purposes, and decrees, accomplished. **htwmh** has a double **h** in it; one at the beginning, and the other at the end of the word; which is very emphatic, and so may point at something very remarkable; and what more so than the death of Christ? and **l** is sometimes used for substitution, and

signifies “for”, “instead”, or “in the room of”, another; (see ^{<B046>}Exodus 4:16 5:12 ^{<B081>}Numbers 10:31 14:34 ^{<B118>}Proverbs 21:18).

Ver. 16. *O Lord, truly I [am] thy servant, I [am] thy servant*, etc.] Not merely by creation, and as obliged by providential favours; but by the grace of God, which made him a willing one: and he was so, not nominally only, but in reality; not as those who say Lord, Lord, but do not the will of God; whereas he served the Lord cheerfully and willingly, in righteousness and true holiness: and this he repeats for the confirmation of it, and to show his heartiness in the Lord’s service, and his zealous attachment to him; and which he mentions, not as though he thought his service meritorious of anything at the hand of God; but that his being in this character was an obligation upon him to serve the Lord, and him only, and might expect his protection in it;

[and] the son of thy handmaid; his mother was also a servant of the Lord; and had trained him up in his infancy in the nurture and admonition of the Lord; so that he was inured to it early, and could not easily depart from it;

thou hast loosed my bonds; the bonds of affliction and death in which he was held; these were loosed, being delivered from them, (^{<B118>}Psalm 116:3,8); and the bonds of sin, and Satan, and the law, in whose service he had been, which was no other than a bondage; but now was freed from the servitude and dominion of sin, from the captivity of Satan, and the bondage of the law; and therefore, though a servant, yet the Lord’s free man.

Ver. 17. *I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving*, etc.] For deliverance from afflictions and death; for loosing his bonds, in every sense; for all mercies, temporal and spiritual; (see ^{<B167>}Romans 6:17); Such sacrifices are according to the will of God; are well pleasing to him, when offered up through Christ, and in faith, and are a glorifying of him. These are more acceptable than all ceremonial sacrifices; and therefore the psalmist determined to offer this, and not them;

and will call upon the name of the Lord; (see Gill on “^{<B113>}Psalm 116:13”).

Ver. 18. *I will pay my vows unto the Lord*, etc.] (See Gill on “^{<B114>}Psalm 116:14”). And the Targum here, as there, paraphrases the latter clause,

now in the presence of all his people, thus;

“I will then declare his signs (or wonders) to all his people;”

the marvellous things he had done for him.

Ver. 19. *In the courts of the Lord's house*, etc.] This is added by way of explanation of (~~19618~~ Psalm 116:18), what he meant by “the presence of all his people”; the assembly of the saints met together in the house of the Lord, at the door of the tabernacle, in the courts of it, where the people got together to worship God;

in the midst of thee, O Jerusalem; the Lord's house or tabernacle; for as yet the temple was not built, and the courts of it were in the midst of the city of Jerusalem. And this shows, as some interpreters have observed, that this psalm must have been written after David came to the kingdom, and had got this city into his hands, whither he brought the ark of the Lord. The whole signifies that he would praise the Lord publicly, as well as privately; and he concludes the psalm thus,

Praise ye the Lord; calling upon the Lord's people, in his house and courts, to join with him in this work of praise.