

PSALM 123

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 123

A Song of degrees.

This psalm is not thought to be written by David, but by some other person in later times; and at a time, as is clear, when the people of God were much exposed to the scorn and contempt of men. Dr. Patrick thinks it was written by some pious person; perhaps by Isaiah, in Hezekiah's time, when Rabshakeh poured out his contempt on God, on the king and the people. Others are of opinion, it was written by one of the Babylonish captivity, when the Jews were jeered by the Babylonians, and they tauntingly asked them to sing one of the songs of Zion; and scornfully said of Jerusalem, Is this the city men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth? So Aben Ezra says, the psalmist speaks of a great man of the generation, which was in captivity or in a siege; and Kimchi says, that he speaks in the language of the children of the captivity; to which agrees the Syriac inscription,

“it is said in the person of Zorobabel, the prince of the captives.”

Others think it was composed in the times of Antiochus, the little horn prophesied of by Daniel, whose look was more stout than his fellows; who magnified himself against God and his people, profaned the sanctuary, and took away the daily sacrifice: and others are of opinion it was written a little before the coming of Christ, in the person of those who were waiting for it, and spiritual redemption and salvation by it; and who were scorned and derided by the proud Scribes and Pharisees.

Ver. 1. *Unto thee lift I up mine eyes*, etc.] Not only the eyes of his body, this being a prayer gesture; (see ^{<0419>}Matthew 14:19 ^{<0114>}John 11:41 17:1); but the eyes of his mind and understanding, opened by the Spirit of God; particularly the eye of faith, by which he looked for and expected help and salvation from the Lord. The phrase is expressive of holy confidence in God, and a comfortable hope of receiving good things from him; as, on the contrary, when persons are ashamed and confounded with a sense of their sins, and the aggravations of them, and of their own unworthiness and

vileness; and, on account of the same, almost out of all hope, cannot lift up their eyes to heaven, or their face before God, (^{<1506>}Ezra 9:6 ^{<1902>}Psalms 40:12 ^{<2013>}Luke 18:13);

O thou that dwellest in the heavens; the heaven of heavens, the third heaven, the seat of angels and glorified saints; and though the Lord is everywhere, and fills heaven and earth with his presence, and cannot be contained any where; yet here is the more visible display of his glory; here he keeps his court; this is his palace, and here his throne is prepared, and on it he sits^{f1752}; so some render the word here; as the Judge of the whole earth, and takes a view of all men and their actions; and, as the God of nature and providence, governs and orders all things after his own will; and, as the God of grace, sits on a throne of grace, kindly inviting and encouraging his people to come unto him: and therefore the psalmist addresses him as such; (see ^{<2102>}Ecclesiastes 5:2) (^{<4013>}Matthew 6:9). The Targum is,

“O thou that sittest on a throne of glory in heaven!”

Ver. 2. *Behold, as the eyes of servants [look] unto the hand of their masters; [and] as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress*, etc.] To direct them in their work and business, to point out unto them what they shall do; which is often done by a motion of the hand of the master or mistress, or rap of their fingers without speaking^{f1753}, which the servant observes: or to help and assist them against their enemies, and protect them from them; servants unarmed, and molested in their masters' service, have no other to flee to for protection but them; so Aben Ezra: or to receive food and sustenance from them, as servants and maidens do, from their masters and mistresses, in whose service they are; (see ^{<3015>}Proverbs 31:15); so Kimchi and Arama; the latter observes, that they have their food in a way of mercy, and not justice; contrary to what the apostle says, (^{<5011>}Colossians 4:1); or in order to receive their wages from them; (see ^{<8002>}Job 7:2);

so our eyes [wait] upon the Lord our God; look unto him for direction in his service. Saints are servants, not of sin, nor of Satan, nor of men, but of the Lord; and not on the foot of creation only, but of redemption, and are made so by the grace of God; and they are willing to work, and are desirous to know what they should do; they inquire of God; they wait upon him, in his word and ordinances, for direction; and, being informed, do it with all their might, and follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes or directs

them: and they look unto him for strength to assist them therein, being conscious of their own weakness; they apply to him, and wait upon him for strength, and do all they do in his name and strength; they look unto him for protection from all their enemies, which are many and mighty, and are stronger than they; and for food, both temporal and spiritual, and for all the necessaries and comforts both of a corporeal and spiritual life; and likewise for the recompence of reward, the reward of the inheritance, which is of grace, and not of debt. Joseph Kimchi thinks that the allusion is to servants, that look to the hand of their masters that correct and chastise them, and bear it patiently; and look to the hand that smites, till it shall have done, and mercy is shown them. And thus the saints look to the chastising hand of God, and humble themselves under it, and patiently endure it, till the Lord shall please to remove it from them; and this agrees with what follows:

until that he have mercy upon us; God is gracious and merciful; and he has his set time to have mercy on his people: and it becomes them to continue praying to him, and waiting on him, until he is pleased to show it to them; men should pray always, and not faint; they will find mercy in due time, (~~QRL~~ Luke 18:1,7).

Ver. 3. *Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy upon us*, etc.] Merit is not pleaded; for, though servants, they knew they were unprofitable ones: but mercy is asked; whether by the awakened sinner, under first convictions, or by the backsliding professor, for forgiveness of sins, under a sense of them, or as under the correcting: and chastising hand of God for them: and which is repeated, to show the state of their case, which requires mercy, and in haste; and the eagerness of their spirit, and the earnestness of their suit, their prayer being the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man;

for we are exceedingly filled with contempt; by reason of meanness in outward circumstances, the common lot of God's people; and therefore are reckoned the faith of the world, and the offscouring of all things: and on account of their religion, which wicked men make a jest of; reckon an engine of state, to keep people in awe of the civil magistrate; or a piece of priestcraft, to serve the lucrative views of a set of men; or as mere cant and enthusiasm, and a gloomy melancholy business, which none but fools will give into; and particularly on account of peculiar doctrines embraced, which are branded as novel, irrational, and licentious; and ordinances, which entirely depend on the sovereign will of the institutor of them. For

these things, and the like, contempt was plentifully poured upon them; they had enough of it, and too much, so much that they could not bear it; it was become intolerable and loathsome, and the more, as it had been a long time continued on them. So Aben Ezra and Kimchi interpret the word, rendered “exceedingly”, of a long time.

Ver. 4. *Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease*, etc.] That are in easy and affluent circumstances; abound in the things of this world, and have more than heart can wish; have no outward trouble, as other men, or as the saints have; nor any uneasiness of mind, on account of sin and their eternal state: they have been at ease from their youth; Satan, that has the possession of them, keeps the goods in peace; and their consciences are seared as with a red hot iron, and they are past feeling; though they are far from having any true solid peace of mind: and such persons are generally scorers of the saints, and load them with their gibes and jeers in a most insolent manner; which makes it very irksome and grievous to bear;

[and] with the contempt of the proud: who are proud of their natural abilities; of their wealth and riches, and of their honours and high places: and such are generally scorers, and deal in proud wrath; and, through their pride, persecute the poor saints with their reproaches, and by other ways; (see ^{<1724>}Proverbs 21:24 ^{<1702>}Psalm 10:2). Some understand by these characters, “that are at ease”, or “quiet”^{f1754}, and are “proud”, or “excellent”^{f1755}, as the phrases may be rendered, such described by them as are the objects, and not the authors, of scorn and contempt; even the saints, who are the quiet in the land, and the excellent in the earth; those precious sons of Zion, who are disesteemed by the men of the world, (^{<1750>}Psalm 35:20 16:2 ^{<2000>}Lamentations 4:1,2).