

PSALM 138

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 138

A Psalm of David

This psalm is generally thought to have been written by David upon his being advanced to the throne; on account of which he praises the Lord, who had supported him under many exercises, and had made good his promise to him, at least in part; and he firmly believed the accomplishment of the rest, that he would perfect what concerned him, (^{<BDB>}Psalm 138:8). It seems as if this psalm was composed between his being king over Judah and over all Israel. Though Theodoret understands the psalm as a thanksgiving of the Jews upon their return from Babylon, which David prophesied of. The Syriac version calls it a thanksgiving with a prophecy; as indeed it is a prophecy of the Messiah's kingdom, and of the calling of the Gentiles in the latter day, as appears from (^{<BDB>}Psalm 138:4).

Ver. 1. *I will praise thee with my whole heart*, etc.] Cordially and sincerely, in the uprightness and integrity of his heart; which denotes not the perfection of his service, but the sincerity of it; his heart was in it, and his whole heart; all the powers and faculties of his soul were engaged in it, being deeply sensible of the great favours and high honours bestowed upon him; and though the object of praise, to whom he was obliged for them, is not so fully expressed; yet is easily understood to be Jehovah, the Being of beings, the Father of mercies, even Jehovah, Father, Son, and Spirit, and especially the Messiah; see (^{<BDB>}Psalm 111:1);

before the gods will I sing praise unto thee; before the princes, as Jarchi; before the kings, as the Syriac version; with which agrees (^{<BDB>}Psalm 119:46); and who would join therein, (^{<BDB>}Psalm 138:4); or before the judges, as the Targum, Aben Ezra, Kimchi, and Ben Melech; or civil magistrates, who are sometimes called gods, (^{<BDB>}Psalm 82:1,6); and they are the powers ordained of God, and represent him on earth; or the sanhedrim, as the Midrash; or before the gods of the Gentiles, those fictitious deities, above whom Jehovah is; and over whom the psalmist triumphs, having conquered the nations where they were worshipped; and

therefore in their presence, and notwithstanding them, or in opposition to them, praised the Lord; (see ^{<1984>}Psalm 18:49); or rather before the ark, the symbol of the presence of the true God; or, as Gussetius^{f1831} interprets it, “before thee, O God, will I sing praise”; or I will sing praise to thee, the Son the Messiah, one divine Person before another; the Son before God the Father, and it may be added before God the Holy Spirit, the two other divine Persons; the Septuagint, Vulgate Latin, Ethiopic, and Arabic versions, render it, “before the angels”, who are sometimes called gods, (^{<1985>}Psalm 8:5 97:7); and who attend the assemblies of the saints and churches of Christ, (^{<4110>}1 Corinthians 11:10 ^{<4180>}Ephesians 3:10).

Ver. 2. *I will worship towards thy holy temple*, etc.] Not the temple at Jerusalem, which was not yet built, though, when it was, the Jews in their devotions at a distance looked towards it, (^{<1038>}1 Kings 8:38,40); but rather the tabernacle of Moses, in which was the ark, as Aben Ezra and Kimchi observe; and over that the mercy seat and cherubim, between which Jehovah dwelt; and this being a type of Christ’s human nature, which was perfectly holy, and is called by himself a temple, and is the true tabernacle God pitched, and not man, (^{<4119>}John 2:19 ^{<3882>}Hebrews 8:2); he may be designed, and to him, as Mediator, should we look, and with him deal in all our devotions for acceptance with God; (see Jon 2:4); unless heaven itself is meant, which is the palace of Jehovah, the habitation of his holiness, his temple where he dwells, (^{<3104>}Psalm 11:4 ^{<3121>}Habakkuk 2:20);

and praise thy name, for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth; which may primarily regard the goodness and grace of God in promising David the kingdom, and his faithfulness in making good the promise, and for both which he was under obligation to praise the name of the Lord; and holds good with respect to all other promises: and it may also signify the free favour and love of God to his people, which is from everlasting, is the source of all blessings, and is better than life; and the faithfulness of God to himself, his perfections, purposes and promises, council and covenant: it may be rendered, “for thy grace, and for thy truth”^{f1832}, which both come by Christ, (^{<4017>}John 1:17); grace may intend both the doctrine of grace, the Gospel of the grace of God preached by Christ, and the blessings of grace which come through him; as justification, pardon, adoption, sanctification, and eternal life, which are all of grace, and by Christ: and truth also may signify the word of truth, or solid substantial blessings, in distinction from typical ones; or the good things that come by Christ our High Priest, of

which the law was only a shadow; and these are all of them things the name of the Lord is to be praised for;

for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name; or “above every name of thine”^{f1833}; which Aben Ezra interprets of the glorious name Jehovah; the word God spake to Moses, the name in which he made himself known to him, and to the Israelites, he had not to their fathers, (^{<0834>}Exodus 3:14 6:3); but rather it is to be understood of God’s word of promise, and his faithfulness in fulfilling it; which, though not a greater attribute than any other, yet is made more known and more illustrious than the rest; and particularly may regard the promise of the coming of the Messiah, and of the blessings of grace by him; Jarchi interprets it particularly of the pardon of sin. It may with propriety be applied to Christ, the essential Word, that was made flesh, and dwelt among men; whom God has highly exalted, and not only given him a name above every name of men on earth, but also above any particular name or attribute of his: or however he has magnified him “according”^{f1834} to every name of his, it being his will that men should honour the Son as they honour the Father; or “with”^{f1835} every name along with each of them; or “besides”^{f1836} every name; for all these senses the word will bear. Some render them, as Ben Melech, “thou hast magnified above all things thy name” and “thy word”; or, as others, “thy name [by] thy word”^{f1837}; (see ^{<0816>}Psalm 8:1 57:10,11); The Targum is,

“the words of thy praise above all thy name;”

or “over all thy name”: everything by which he has made himself known in creation and providence; “thou hast magnified thy word”, all being done according to the word said in himself, his decrees and purposes; or declared in his word and promises, whereby he has glorified it.

Ver. 3. *In the day when I cried thou answeredst me*, etc.] When in distress through Saul’s persecution, he cried to the Lord, and he immediately answered him, and delivered him out of his troubles; and such immediate answers of prayer are to be remembered with thankfulness: (see ^{<0816>}Psalm 18:6 ^{<0824>}Isaiah 65:24);

[and] strengthenedst me [with] strength in my soul; put him good heart and spirit, when before ready to faint; strengthened his heart and grace in it, particularly faith, and drew it forth into lively act and exercise so that he sunk not under the weight of affliction and trouble, but was filled with

courage to withstand his enemies, and with strength to do the will and work of God; this is to be understood of inward spiritual strength; (see ^{<4816>}Ephesians 3:16).

Ver. 4. *All the kings of the earth shall praise thee, O Lord*, etc.] Or “let [them] confess”, or “praise thee”^{f1838}; a wish or prayer. Not only the kings known to David, as Kimchi limits it; or that lived in his days, as Hiram and others; but in the latter day, when they shall come to Zion, the church, and be nursing fathers to it, and shall serve and worship the King Messiah, (^{<2423>}Isaiah 49:23 60:3,11,16 ^{<4720>}Psalms 72:10,11);

when they hear the words of thy mouth; either the promises of it fulfilled not only with respect to David; but the Messiah, and his church and people, in the latter day, even the glorious things spoken thereof: or the doctrines of the Gospel, which are the words of his mouth, and more desirable than thousands of gold and silver; and which, when kings shall hear so as to understand, they will praise the Lord for them; (see ^{<2325>}Isaiah 52:15). The Targum is,

“the words of thy praise.”

Ver. 5. *Yea, they shall sing in the ways of the Lord*, etc.] Which are all mercy and truth; ways of pleasantness, and paths of peace: so the eunuch went on his way, and in the ways of the Lord rejoicing, (^{<4189>}Acts 8:39); Or, “they shall sing of the ways of the Lord”^{f1839}; of the excellency, pleasure, and usefulness of them;

for great [is] the glory of the Lord; shown in the works of creation; more especially in the person of Christ, and in the glorious work of redemption and salvation by him; and of which there will be a great display throughout the earth in the latter day, by means of the Gospel, the great spread of it, and the multitude of persons converted by it; which will make the ways of the Lord still more pleasant; (see ^{<2308>}Isaiah 6:3).

Ver. 6. *Though the Lord [be] high*, etc.] Above all the earth, and all the nations of it, and the highest of men in it; above the heavens, and the angels there, who are his creatures and at his command; above all the blessings and praises of his saints: the perfect knowledge of him is so high as not to be attained; and his thoughts and ways are higher than ours, as the heavens are higher than the earth; he is indeed the most High, higher than the highest; (see ^{<4930>}Psalms 113:4,5). According to Arama, here begins the song,

“the kings of the earth shall sing in the ways of the Lord?”

yet hath he respect unto the lowly; for good, as the Targum; that are low in their own eyes, humbled under a sense of sin, convinced, of the insufficiency of their own righteousness to justify them, and made to submit to the righteousness of Christ; ascribe the whole of their salvation to the free grace of God; patiently and quietly bear every afflictive providence; think the worst of themselves, and the best of others; and, being the followers of the lowly Jesus, learn of him, imitate him, and become like unto him: these the Lord has a gracious respect unto; he looks upon them with a look of love; he has respect to their persons in Christ, and to their sacrifices for his sake, which are those of a broken and contrite heart; he regards their prayers, though low and destitute, and gives more grace unto them; yea, he condescends to dwell with them, and in due time highly exalts them; see (²⁵⁷¹⁵Isaiah 57:15 66:2 ²¹⁴¹¹Luke 14:11). David may have in view his own low state and condition as a shepherd, in which he was when the Lord took him, and raised him to the throne of Israel;

but the proud he knoweth afar off; the Targum adds,

“to destroy them:”

such who are proud of themselves and what they have; of their wisdom and knowledge, of their strength or beauty, of their wealth and riches; or of their righteousness and holiness; of the purity and goodness of their hearts, and power of their free will, they vainly think themselves possessed of; and despise others below them in these things, or the practice of them: these the Lord takes notice of, and looks upon them at a distance with scorn and contempt; nor will he admit them to nearness to him, nay, opposes himself to them, and sooner or later abases them; (see ³⁰⁸⁸Proverbs 3:34). The Septuagint and Vulgate Latin versions render it, “high things he knoweth afar off”; things too high for creatures, that are out of their reach; he sees and knows all persons and things, whether in heaven or in earth. Others render them, “and the high One knoweth afar off”^{f1840}; knows the lowly, owns and acknowledges them for his own; takes care of them, provides for them, and protects them: and then the sense is the same with the preceding clause.

Ver. 7. *Though I walk in the midst of trouble*, etc.] Trouble attends the best of men; both outward and inward trouble, from sin, Satan, and the world; yea, they are in the midst of it, surrounded with it; and it is a way in

which they walk through this world, and enter the kingdom of heaven; it is continued unto them; it is a long walk, and yet will have an end; (see ^{<19204>}Psalm 23:4);

thou wilt revive me; preserve his life amidst all his troubles, support him under them, make him cheerful and fearless; revive his work of grace in him, quicken him to the lively exercise of grace, and fervent discharge of duty: this the Lord does by his gracious presence, by the discoveries of his love, and by the application of precious promises;

thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies; to stop and restrain it; which he can easily do, when most violent and outrageous, (^{<19760>}Psalm 76:10). Or, “against the nose of mine enemies”^{,f1841}; strike them on the nose, as men do unruly horses to stop them: or give a slap on their face with the left hand, as Arama observes, the right being after mentioned;

and thy right hand shall save me; for that has saving strength in it, (^{<19206>}Psalm 20:6). This may be understood of Christ, who is not only the man of his right hand, but is the right hand of his righteousness; by whom he saves his people with a spiritual and eternal salvation, as well as with a temporal one, (^{<23410>}Isaiah 41:10 ^{<23007>}Hosea 1:7).

Ver. 8. *The Lord will perfect [that which] concerneth me*, etc.] Or “will”, or “may the Lord perform for me”^{,f1842}: all things in providence; all that he had appointed for him, that would be for his good and his own glory, (^{<19570>}Psalm 57:2); and particularly what concerned him as a king. He had made him king over the house of Judah; he had begun to fulfil his promise concerning the kingdom; and he would perfect it, by setting him over all the tribes of Israel. Also he believed he would perfect what concerned him as a saint, even the good work of grace upon his heart; which is but a begun work, is imperfect, is gradually carried on, and will be completed; God is able to do it, and none can hinder him; he has promised to do it, and he is faithful who will do it; and his glory is concerned in it; and it may be depended on it will be finished; he is a rock, and his work is perfect; (see ^{<10006>}Philippians 1:6);

thy mercy, O Lord, [endureth] for ever; a phrase often used by the psalmist, with which his heart was affected; and here used, both as an argument by which he concluded God would perfect his begun work, and as an encouragement to make the following request:

forsake not the works of thine own hands; as are all the works of providence and grace: the work of grace upon the heart may be expressed in the plural number, because of the several branches of it; which are all so many works, as the work of faith, labour, of love, etc. (~~500B~~1 Thessalonians 1:3); and which is the Lord's handiwork; and a curious work it is, a new creation work, a work of almighty power; and which he will never cease from, or be remiss in, as the word^{f1843} signifies, until he has accomplished it, (~~500B~~2 Thessalonians 1:11). It is a prayer of faith, and may be most confidently believed: and some indeed render it as an expression of faith, "thou wilt not forsake the works of thine hands",^{f1844}; David himself was the work of God's hands, as Kimchi observes, as a creature, as a king, and as a saint; and so are all the people of God, (~~235B~~Isaiah 45:11); and whom he will never leave nor forsake; for they are his church, his chosen, his children, his portion and inheritance, (~~190A~~Psalm 94:14).