

PSALM 140

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 140

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David

This psalm, A ben Ezra says, was composed by David before he was king; and Kimchi says, it is concerning Doeg and the Ziphites, who calumniated him to Saul; and, according to our English contents, it is a prayer of David to be delivered from Saul and Doeg. The Syriac inscription is,

“said by David, when Saul threw a javelin at him to kill him, but it struck the wall; but, spiritually, the words of him that cleaves to God, and contends with his enemies.”

R. Obadiah says, it was made at the persecution of David by Saul, which was before the kingdom of David; as the persecution (of Gog) is before the coming of the Messiah. It is indeed before his spiritual coming, but not before his coming in the flesh; and David may be very well considered in the psalm as a type of Christ, for he was particularly so in his sufferings, as well as in other things.

Ver. 1. *Deliver me, O Lord, from the evil man*, etc.] Either Saul; so Theodoret; or rather Doeg, according to R. Obadiah: but Jarchi interprets it of Esau; by whom he means Edom, or Rome, or rather the Christians in general. Were his sense confined to the Papists, he might be thought to be much in the right; for this is applicable enough to the man of sin, and his followers: for it may be understood collectively of a body of evil men; all men are evil by nature, their hearts, thoughts, words, works, and ways. David’s enemies were evil men; and so were Christ’s; as Herod, Judas in particular, and the Jews in general: and such are the enemies of God’s people; the world, profane sinners, persecutors, and false teachers; and to be delivered from such is desirable, and to be prayed for, and an happiness when enjoyed; (see ^{STRE}2 Thessalonians 3:2);

preserve me from the violent man: or, “the man of violences”^{f1876}; of a violent spirit, that breathes out slaughter and death; of a fierce countenance, of blustering words, and furious actions. Such a man was

Doeg; who loved evil, and all devouring words, devised mischief, and boasted in it, (^{<151>}Psalm 52:1-4); and Herod, who in his wrath, being disappointed, ordered sit the infants in and about Bethlehem to be slain; and the Jews, who were violently set on the death of Christ, and vehemently desired it: and such are all violent persecutors of the church of God, who clothe themselves with the garment of violence, and drink the wine of it; and to be preserved from such is a great mercy.

Ver. 2. *Which imagine mischiefs in [their] heart*, etc.] This shows that not a single person barely is meant but more, as Saul's courtiers; who were secretly and continually meditating mischief against David, traducing him to Saul, and devising things to take away his life. Such were the Jews to Christ, who were always plotting to entangle him, or contriving to kill him; and so wicked men are ever devising mischief against the quiet in the land, which is very abominable to God; and rightly observed here, to prevail upon the Lord to preserve from them, (^{<191>}Psalm 2:1 ^{<168>}Proverbs 6:18);

continually are they gathered together [for] war; so Saul gathered together three thousand men, and went in pursuit of David, as an enemy, to take him. So Herod and Pontius Pilate joined together, though before enemies, in the prosecution of Christ; and Jews and Gentiles gathered together against him: so the saints, being in a warfare state, have their enemies, who often combine against them, and attack them, and will not suffer them to be at rest and peace; as sin, Satan, the world, and false teachers; (see ^{<307>}Psalm 120:7).

Ver. 3. *They have sharpened their tongues like a serpent*, etc.] Which Kimchi says it does before it bites. Aristotle^{f1877} observes, that the tip or extreme point of a serpent's tongue is as small as a hair, and so exceeding sharp and piercing. Arama interprets this of the sharpness and cunning of the serpent; and particularly the serpent that deceived Eve, and spake cunningly to her. "For God knoweth", etc. and may design the calumnies and detractions, which were sharp as a razor; as swords, and spears, and arrows, and as the tongue of a serpent, (^{<504>}Psalm 57:4 64:3); and the subtlety of false teachers, and deceitful workers; and the sharp and cutting words of wicked men against Christ and his people, (^{<115>}Jude 1:15);

adder's poison is under their lips; which may signify the malignity of sin in wicked men, which comes from the old serpent the devil; is latent in men; very infectious, like poison, and deadly and incurable, but by the grace of God, and blood of Christ: and may describe particularly the mischief of the

tongue, which is a little member, as the asp is a little creature; but very mischievous, full of deadly poison, which lurks in it, lies under it, and which spitting out, it stupifies and kills insensibly; as do the calumnies of wicked men, and the doctrines of false teachers; (see ^{<RB3>}Romans 3:13). The Targum is,

“the poison of the spider;”

though it is said ^{f1878} the spider is not venomous.

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{<RB2>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 4. *Keep me, O Lord, from the hands of the wicked*, etc.] From falling into their hands, and the weight of them}; and from their laying hands on him, being men of power and authority;

preserve me from the violent man: or men, everyone of them; (see Gill on “^{<SH1>}Psalm 140:1”);

who have purposed to overthrow my goings: to supplant him; to cause him to stumble and fall, to his disgrace and reproach; and that they might take an advantage of him, and an occasion against him. Arama interprets it, to drive me out of the land of Israel; (see ^{<RB1>}1 Samuel 26:1,9). So Christ’s enemies thought to have supplanted him, and have found something against him, to accuse him of to Caesar, (^{<D25>}Matthew 22:15-22).

Ver. 5. *The proud have hid a snare for me, and cords*, etc.] These were the Ziphites, according to Arama; (see ^{<RB5>}Psalm 119:85); the character well agrees with the Scribes and Pharisees, who were proud boasters, and despised others, and often laid snares for Christ to take away his life; and with the enemies of the church and people of God; who, through their pride, persecute them, and are insidious, and use artful methods to ensnare them; as the fowler lays his snare for the bird, and has his cords to draw it to him when it is taken in the snare, to which the allusion is;

they have spread a net by the wayside: they waylaid him; knowing the way he would go, they lay in wait for him, to seize him at once as he went along; (see ^{<BR1>}John 18:1,2); the word “cords” in the preceding clause should be connected with this, and be read, “and with cords they have spread a net by the wayside”: it being usual, as Jarchi observes, to fasten a long cord at the top of the net; and when the fowler sees the birds under the net, he draws the cord, and the net falls upon the fowls;

they have set gins for me; all these expressions design the insidiousness, and the private, secret, artful methods, the enemies of David, of Christ and his people, took and do take to ensnare them. Arama interprets the “snare and cords” of the watching of David’s house; the “net by the wayside” of posting themselves at the gates of the city, and surrounding it; and gins of spies; (see ^{<0691>}1 Samuel 19:11-24).

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{<4982>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 6. *I said unto the Lord, thou [art] my God*, etc.] He said this to the Lord himself; claimed his covenant interest in him, and expressed it in the strength of faith: and this he did when in the midst of trouble and distress; in danger of falling into the hands of evil and violent men; they imagined mischief against him; were bent on his ruin, and laid nets, snares, gins, and traps for him; when he applied to his God, who only could deliver him; and being his covenant God, he had reason to believe he would; (see ^{<4914>}Psalm 31:14);

hear the voice of my supplications, O Lord; the requests he put up in an humble manner for deliverance and salvation; and which he expressed vocally, and entreated they might be heard and answered; and nothing could tend more to strengthen his faith in this than that it was his own God and Father he prayed unto; (see ^{<4982>}Psalm 28:2); Thus Christ, in the days of his flesh, offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying; and in the midst of his troubles, and surrounded with enemies, declared his faith in God as his God, (^{<887>}Hebrews 5:7 ^{<4920>}Psalm 22:10,11 ^{<1246>}Matthew 27:46).

Ver. 7. *O God the Lord, the strength of my salvation*, etc.] Temporal and spiritual, which he was able to effect; the mighty God and mighty Saviour: and this encouraged David to believe he should have deliverance; and this secured, confirmed, and established it to him; and to which he was the more induced by what experience he had had of the divine goodness to him, as follows:

thou hast covered my head in the day of battle; with the helmet of salvation, as Kimchi, Aben Ezra, and Arama observe; which, in a spiritual sense, is to a believer the hope of salvation, (^{<4067>}Ephesians 6:17) (^{<5188>}1 Thessalonians 5:8); a defensive weapon to him; and protects him while he is engaging with his spiritual enemies in this his state of warfare, sin, Satan, and the world. Perhaps David may have respect to the divine protection of him, when he fought with Goliath. Salvation was Christ’s helmet, when he

engaged with all his and our enemies; even with all the powers of darkness, and obtained deliverance for us, (^{<23916>}Isaiah 59:16,17).

Ver. 8. *Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked,* etc.] Of Doeg, as the Targum, and of other wicked men, who were desirous both of taking him, and of taking away his life: but the desires of such men are under the restraints of the Lord; nor can they fulfil them unless they have leave from him, which is here deprecated. The psalmist entreats he might not be delivered up to their will, or they have their will of him; (see ^{<49712>}Psalm 27:12). Jarchi interprets it of Esau, as in (^{<49101>}Psalm 140:1); and it is applicable enough to antichrist and his wicked followers; who, could they have their desires, would root the Gospel, and the interest of Christ and his people, out of the world;

further not his wicked device: or, “let not his wicked device come forth”^{f1879}, or proceed to execution, or be brought to perfection; let him be disappointed in it, that he may not be able to perform his enterprise, or execute his designs; which cannot be done without the divine permission. The Rabbins, as Jarchi and others, render it, “let not his bridle come out”^{f1880}; the bridle out of his jaws, with which he was held by the Lord, and restrained from doing his will; let him not be left to his liberty, and freed from the restraints of divine Providence; (see ^{<23729>}Isaiah 37:29);

[lest] they exalt themselves. Grow proud, haughty, and insolent to God and man; (see ^{<46227>}Deuteronomy 32:27). Or, “let them not be exalted”^{f1881}; upon the ruin of me and my friends.

Selah; on this word, (see Gill on “^{<49102>}Psalm 3:2”).

Ver. 9. *[As for] the head of those that compass me about, let the mischief of their own lips cover them.*] Meaning either their natural head, put for their whole persons; and the sense is, let the mischief they have contrived for others fall upon themselves; (see ^{<33910>}Ezekiel 9:10) (^{<49716>}Psalm 7:16); or some principal person, the head and leader of them, as the word is sometimes used, (^{<23914>}Isaiah 9:14,15 7:8); and designs either Saul, who at the head of three thousand men surrounded the hill where David and his men were; or Doeg the Edomite, who was over the servants of Saul, and accused David to him; so Kimchi: or Ahithophel, who was at the head of the conspirators against him; so the Targum paraphrases it,

“Ahithophel, the head of the sanhedrim of the disciples of wickedness.”

If we understand this clause of Christ, the antitype of David, it may design Judas; who was the guide to them that sought Jesus, and, at the head of a band of men, enclosed and took him: or if of the church and people of God, the man of sin may be intended, the pope of Rome; the head over many countries, the antichristian nations, (^{<9106>}Psalm 110:6). The word is used of the gall and poison of asps, (^{<9104>}Job 20:14); and if so taken here, as Arama interprets it, it will make the sense agree with (^{<9106>}Psalm 140:3); and may be read in connection with the following clause, thus: “let the poison of those that compass me about, [even] the mischief of their lips, cover them”^{f1882}; or the labour of them^{f1883}: let the lies and calumnies they have so industriously spread, and took so much pains to propagate to the hurt of others, like deadly poison, cover them with shame and confusion; and the mischief they have boasted of, and gave out that they would do, let it come upon them on all sides, and utterly ruin and destroy them.

Ver. 10. *Let burning coals fall upon them*, etc.] From heaven, as the Targum, Aben Ezra, and Kimchi, by way of explanation; alluding to the burning of Sodom and Gomorrah with fire from thence: and may design both the terrible judgments of God in this life, and everlasting burnings in hell; so Jarchi interprets it of the coals of hell; see (^{<9106>}Psalm 11:6 18:8,12,13 120:3,4);

let them be cast into the fire; into the fire of divine wrath, and have severe punishment inflicted on them in this world; and into the fire of hell hereafter, as the Targum, which is unquenchable and everlasting; and into which all wicked men, carnal professors, the followers of antichrist, the devil and his angels, will be cast: of the phrase of casting into hell, (see ^{<9105>}Matthew 5:29,30 ^{<9105>}Mark 9:45,47);

into deep pits, that they rise not up again; meaning either the grave, the pit of corruption; from whence the wicked will not rise to eternal life, as the Targum adds, for though they will rise again, it will be to everlasting shame and damnation, (^{<9106>}Daniel 12:2 ^{<9105>}John 5:28,29); or else the pit of hell, the bottomless pit, from whence there will be no deliverance; where they must lie till the uttermost farthing is paid, and that will be for ever. Arama refers this to Korah, who was burnt and swallowed up, and rose not again in Israel.

Ver. 11. *Let not an evil speaker be established in the earth*, etc.] One that sets his mouth against the heavens, and speaks evil of God; of his being, perfections, purposes, and providences: whose tongue walks through the

earth, and speaks evil of all men, even of dignities; and especially of the saints of the most High, and of the Gospel and ways of Christ. Or, “a man of tongue”^{f1884}; that uses his tongue in an ill way, in detractions and slanders^{f1885}; in blaspheming God, his name and tabernacle, and those that dwell therein, as antichrist, (^{<663B>}Revelation 13:5); a man that calumniates with a triple tongue, so the Targum; like a serpent, whose tongue seems to be so sometimes. Kimchi applies this to Doeg, and Jarchi to Esau. The request is, that such an one might not be established in the earth; in the land of the living, as the Targum; might not increase and flourish in worldly substance, or be continued in his posterity; but be rooted out of the earth, and he and his be no more; (see ^{<390B>}Psalm 3:4,5);

evil shall hunt the violent man to overthrow [him]; or “to impulsions”^{f1886}: to drive him from evil to evil, as Kimchi. The sense is, that the evil of punishment shall hunt him, as a beast of prey is hunted; it shall closely pursue him and overtake him, and seize on him, and thrust him down to utter ruin and destruction. The Targum is,

“the injurious wicked man, let the angel of death hunt, and drive into hell.”

Of the violent man, (see ^{<390B>}Psalm 140:1,4); he who purposed to overthrow David, he was persuaded would be overthrown himself. This clause teaches us how to understand the rest; for though they are delivered out as wishes and imprecations, yet are prophetic, and are strongly expressive of the certainty of the things imprecated.

Ver. 12. *I know*, etc.] Here is a double reading: the “Keri”, or marginal reading, is, “thou knowest”; an appeal of the psalmist to God, who knew the thoughts of the wicked concerning him, and their devices against him; as Kimchi: but the Scripture reading is, I know; expressing his full persuasion and assurance

that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, [and] the right of the poor; of his poor and afflicted people, that are afflicted within and without, by men and devils; and who are poor as to the things of this world, and poor in spirit, and sensible of their spiritual poverty, but rich in grace: the cause of these God will maintain against their oppressors, and right their wrongs, and avenge their injuries; this the psalmist knew, and was assured of from the word of God, from instances and examples in former times, and from his own experience, (^{<390B>}Psalm 9:4).

Ver. 13. *Surely the righteous shall give thanks unto thy name*, etc.] The same with the poor and the afflicted; who, though traduced by men, and evil spoken of and ill used by them, are righteous in the sight of God; being justified by the righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to them, and received by faith, in consequence of which they live soberly and righteously: these the psalmist knew and was assured they would give thanks to the Lord, and praise his holy name, for the righteousness by which they are made righteous, and for every other blessing of grace and mercy of life; for maintaining their cause and their right, and for the ruin and destruction of their enemies; see (⁶¹⁸²Revelation 18:20 19:1,2);

the upright shall dwell in thy presence; under his care and protection; in his gracious presence, enjoying the light of his countenance here; and in his glorious presence hereafter, where is fulness of joy: these upright ones are such who are upright in heart; whose hearts are right with God, sincere in his service and worship, and walk uprightly according to the rule of his word. These, as some render it, “shall sit before [him]”,^{f1887} or “in his presence”: as children before a father, in whom he delights; or as disciples before a master, to be taught and instructed. The Targum is,

“shall return to pray before thee:”

and so Aben Ezra interprets it of their dwelling, or sitting before God, in the house of prayer; and Kimchi adds, by way of explanation,

“to seek thee, and know thy ways.”

Jerom reads it, “shall dwell with thy countenance or face”,^{f1888}; and understands it of dwelling with Christ, the face of God, (³⁰⁰³Hebrews 1:3); with whom they shall dwell for evermore.