

PSALM 141

INTRODUCTION TO PSALM 141

A Psalm of David

This psalm was written about the same time, and upon the same occasion, as that going before and what follows after; even when David was persecuted by Saul, and when he was in great danger of his enemies, and snares were laid for his life.

Ver. 1. *Lord, I cry unto thee*, etc.] With great earnestness, importunity, and fervency, being in distress; and knowing vain was the help of man, and that none could deliver him but the Lord, and therefore continued crying unto him for help^{f1889};

make haste unto me; which shows he was in a desperate condition; that he could not help himself, nor could any creature, only the Lord; and he was at a distance from him, as it seemed to him, and he delayed assistance; and therefore desires he would immediately draw nigh and be a present help in his time of need, and work speedy deliverance for him, his case requiring haste;

give ear unto my voice, when I cry unto thee; a request the psalmist frequently makes, not contenting himself with prayer, without desiring and looking for an answer to it.

Ver. 2. *Let my prayer be set forth before thee [as] incense*, etc.] Which was offered every morning on the altar of incense, at which time the people were praying, (~~Exo~~ Exodus 30:1,7,8 ~~Luke~~ Luke 1:10); and was an emblem of it, even of pure, holy, and fervent prayer; which being offered on the altar Christ, which sanctifies every gift, and by him the High Priest; through whom every sacrifice is acceptable unto God; and through whose blood and righteousness, and the sweet incense of his mediation and intercession, it becomes fragrant and a sweet odour to the Lord; and being directed to him, it goes upwards, is regarded by him, and continues before him as sweet incense; which is what the psalmist prays for; (see ~~Mal~~ Malachi 1:11 ~~Rev~~ Revelation 8:3,4);

[and] the lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice; the burnt sacrifice of the evening, according to Ben Melech, the lamb slain every evening; or else the minchah, as the word is; the meat, or rather the bread offering made of fine flour, with oil and frankincense on it, which went along with the former, (^{<1238>}Exodus 29:38-41); and so the Targum,

“as the sweet gift offered in the evening.”

This only is mentioned, as being put for both the morning and the evening sacrifice; or because the incense was offered in the morning, from which it is distinguished: or it may be, as Kimchi thinks, this psalm was composed in the evening; and so the inscription in the Syriac version is,

“a psalm of David, when he meditated the evening service.”

Or because this was the last sacrifice of the day; there was no other after it, as Aben Ezra observes; and the most acceptable; to which may be added, that this was the hour for prayer, (^{<401>}Acts 3:1 10:3). Wherefore “lifting up of [the] hands” was a prayer gesture, and a very ancient one both among Jews and Gentiles^{f1890}; Aristotle^{f1891} says, all men, when we pray, lift up our hands to heaven; and it is put for that itself, (^{<540>}1 Timothy 2:8); and is desired to be, like that, acceptable unto God; as it is when the heart is lifted up with the hands, and prayer is made in the name and faith of Christ.

Ver. 3. *Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth*, etc.] While praying, as Jarchi and Kimchi; that he might not utter any rash, unguarded, and unbecoming word; but take and use the words which God gives, even the taught words of the Holy Ghost; or lest, being under affliction and oppression, he should speak unadvisedly with his lips, and utter any impatient murmuring and repining word against God; or express any fretfulness at the prosperity of the wicked, or speak evil of them; especially of Saul, the Lord’s anointed, for the ill usage of him;

keep the door of my lips; which are as a door that opens and shuts: this he desires might be kept as with a bridle, especially while the wicked were before him; lest he should say anything they would use against him, and to the reproach of religion; and that no corrupt communication, or any foolish and filthy talk, or idle and unprofitable words, might proceed from them. The phrase signifies the same as the other; he was sensible of his own inability to keep a proper watch and guard over his words, as was necessary, and therefore prays the Lord to do it; (see ^{<1901>}Psalms 39:1).

Ver. 4. *Incline not my heart to [any] evil thing*, etc.] Or “evil word”,^{f1892}, as the Targum; since out of the abundance of that the mouth speaketh, (⁴⁰²³Matthew 12:34,35); or to any sinful thing, to the commission of any evil action: not that God ever inclines men’s hearts to sin by any physical influence, it being what is repugnant to his nature and will, and what he hates and abhors; for though he hardens the hearts of wicked men, and gives them up to the lusts of them; yet he does not move, incline, or tempt any man to sin, (³⁰¹³James 1:13,14); but he may be said to do this when he suffers them to follow their own sinful inclinations, and leaves them to be inclined by the power and prevalency of their own corruptions, and by the temptations of Satan, which is here deprecated; (see ⁴³³⁵Psalms 119:36 ⁴⁰⁶³Matthew 6:13). So as

to practise wicked works with men that work iniquity; to join with those that make a trade of sinning; the course of whose life is evil, in their unfruitful works of darkness; and do as they do, even commit crimes the most flagitious and enormous: he seems to have respect to great persons, whose examples are very forcible and ensnaring; and therefore it requires an exertion of the powerful and efficacious grace of God, to preserve such from the influence of them, whose business is much with them;

and let me not eat of their dainties; since their table was a snare to themselves, it might be so to him; and be a means of betraying him unawares into the commission of some sins, which would be dishonourable and grieving to him: the psalmist desires not to partake with them at their table; but chose rather a meatier table and coarser fare, where he might be more free from temptation; (see ⁴²⁰¹Proverbs 23:1-6). Or this may be understood of the dainties and sweet morsels of sin; which are like stolen waters, and bread eaten in secret, to a carnal heart: though the pleasures of it are but imaginary, and last but for a season, and therefore are avoided by a gracious man; by whom even afflictions with the people of God are preferred unto them, (⁵⁸¹²⁵Hebrews 11:25). The Targum interprets it of the song of the house of their feasts; which is ensnaring.

Ver. 5. *Let the righteous smite me, [it shall be] a kindness*, etc.] Or, “smite me in kindness”,^{f1893}. In love; in a loving and friendly manner, which makes reproofs the more agreeable and effectual. Not the righteous God, as Arama; though he does sometimes smite his people for their sins, (²⁵⁷¹⁷Isaiah 57:17); that is, reproveth, corrects, and chastises them, and that in love and for their good; and therefore such smitings and corrections

should be taken in good part by them, and received as fatherly chastisements, and as instances of his paternal care of them, and love to them; but rather righteous and good men; who, when there is occasion for it, should reprove and rebuke one another; but then it should be in a kind and tender manner, and with the spirit of meekness; and such reproofs should be as kindly received: “for faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful”, (~~1776~~ Proverbs 27:6). Or, “let the righteous beat me with kindness” or “goodness”^{f1894}; with precepts of goodness, by inculcating good things into him; which he should take, as if he overwhelmed and loaded him with benefits; even though it was like striking with a hammer, as the word signifies;

and let him, reprove me; which explains what is meant by smiting;

[it shall be] an excellent oil, [which] shall not break my head; give no pain nor uneasiness to his head or his heart, but rather supple and heal the wounds sin reproved for has made. The Targum is,

“the oil of the anointing of the sanctuary shall not cease from my head;”

with which he was anointed king; and signifies that he should enjoy the dignity, and continue in it. The Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Arabic versions, render it, “the oil of the ungodly”, or “sinners”: meaning their flattering words, which, though smooth as oil, were deceitful; and therefore he deprecates them, “let not the oil of the wicked”, etc. as being hurtful and pernicious;

for yet my prayer also [shall be] in their calamities; that is, when the righteous, that smote and reproved him for his good, should be in any distress; such a grateful sense should he retain of their favour in reproving him, that he would pray for them, that they might be delivered out of it; which would show that he took it kindly at their hand. Or, “in their evils”, or “against them”^{f1895}; which some understand of the evil practices of wicked men; which the psalmist prayed against, and that he might be kept and delivered from.

Ver. 6. *When their judges are overthrown in stony places*, etc.] The judges of David’s adversaries, the workers of iniquity; meaning Saul, Abner, etc. Arama refers this to Saul and his sons being slain on the mountains of Gilboa, (~~1800~~ 1 Samuel 31:1,8); which might be here prophetically spoken of. Or, as it is by some rendered, “when their judges are let down by the

sides of the rock”^{f1896}; or let go free, as Saul was by David more than once; when it was in the power of his hands to have taken away his life, which his principal friends urged him to do, (^{<024>}1 Samuel 24:2-7 26:3-12). Some render the words as an imprecation or wish, “let their judges be cast down”^{f1897}; or as a prophecy, they “shall be cast down in stony places”, or “by the sides of a rock”: so the word is used of casting or throwing down, (^{<103>}2 Kings 9:33); and may allude to the manner of punishment used in some places, by casting down from a precipice, from rocks and hills; (see ^{<452>}2 Chronicles 25:12 ^{<029>}Luke 4:29). Or, “when they slip by the sides of the rock”^{f1898}; endeavouring to get up it; as ambitious men are desirous of getting to the top of honour, power, and authority, but stand in slippery places, and often slip and fall. And when this should be the case of these judges, then should David be raised up on high; the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel. And then

they shall hear my words, for these are sweet: that is, the common people should hear them, and be pleased with them, who had been set against him by their judges; by which they would easily perceive that he had no enmity nor malice, nor ill design against Saul. This may respect either his very affectionate lamentation at the death of Saul and his sons, (^{<017>}2 Samuel 1:17-27); or what he delivered at the several times he spared the life of Saul, when he could have taken it away, (^{<029>}1 Samuel 24:9-19 26:17-25); and it is especially true of all the words which David spoke by inspiration, or the Spirit of God spake to him; particularly in his book of Psalms, concerning the Messiah, the covenant of grace, and the blessings of it; of the rich experiences of grace he had, and the several doctrines of the Gospel declared by him; which were sweet, delightful, and entertaining to those who have ears to hear such things; or whose ears are opened to hear them, so as to understand them and distinguish them; but to others not.

Ver. 7. *Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth*, etc.] Into which they were not suffered to be put, but lay unburied; or from whence they were dug up, and lay scattered about; which is to be understood of such of David's friends as fell into the hands of Saul and his men, and were slain: perhaps it may refer to the fourscore and five priests, and the inhabitants of Nob, slain by the order of Saul, (^{<028>}1 Samuel 22:18,19). Though the phrase may be only proverbial, and be expressive of the danger David and his men were in, and their sense of it, who looked upon themselves like dry bones, hopeless and helpless, and had the sentence of death in themselves, and were as it were at the mouth of the grave, on the brink of ruin;

as when one cutteth and cleaveth [wood] upon the earth: and the chips fly here and there, and are disregarded; such was their case: or as men cut and cleave the earth with the plough, and it is tore up by it, and falls on each side of it, so are we persecuted, afflicted, and distressed by our enemies, and have no mercy shown us; so the Targum,

“as a man that cuts and cleaves with ploughshares in the earth, so our members are scattered at the grave’s mouth.”

The Syriac and Arabic versions understand it of the ploughshare cutting the earth.

Ver. 8. *But mine eyes are unto thee, O God the Lord,* etc.] Not only the eyes of his body, lifted up to God in prayer, this being a prayer gesture, (<f114>John 11:41 17:1); but the eyes of his mind, or understanding, especially the eyes of faith and love; for it is expressive of his affection to God, his holy confidence in him, and humble hope and expectation of good things from him, in this his time of distress: his eyes were to him and him only, both for temporal food for himself and his men; and for spiritual food, for all supplies of grace, for wisdom and direction, for strength and assistance, for protection and deliverance;

in thee is my trust; not in himself, nor in his friends, nor in any creature, prince or potentate, but in the Lord, as the God of nature, providence, and grace; to which he was encouraged by his lovingkindness to him; by the everlasting strength in him; by what he had done for others and for him in times past; by the provisions he has made in his covenant and promises for those that trust in him, who are of all men most happy;

leave not my soul destitute; of daily food, of help and assistance, of the presence, spirit, and grace of God; or “naked”^{f1899}, and defenceless, but let it be surrounded or protected by almighty power and grace; or “pour not out my soul”^{f1900}, that is, unto death; suffer me not to be taken by enemies and slain; (see <2532>Isaiah 53:12). The Targum is,

“in the Word (of the Lord) I trust, do not empty my soul,”

or “evacuate”^{f1901} it, as Aben Ezra; that is, out of his body; for he observes, that the soul fills the body.

Ver. 9. *Keep me from the snare [which] they have laid for me,* etc.] Either Saul, who gave him a wife to be a snare to him, and set men to watch his

house and take him; or the Ziphites, who proposed to Saul to deliver him into his hands; (see ^{<0982>}1 Samuel 18:21 19:11 23:19,20).

and the gins of the workers of iniquity; the transgressions of wicked men are snares to others, by way of example; and so are the doctrines of false teachers, and the temptations of Satan, from all which good men desire to be kept, (^{<1006>}Proverbs 29:6 ^{<3008>}Hosea 9:8 ^{<3126>}2 Timothy 2:26); and it is the Lord alone that keeps and preserves from them, or breaks the snare and delivers them, (^{<3040>}Psalm 124:7).

Ver. 10. *Let the wicked fall into their own nets*, etc.] Which they have laid for others, as they very often do; (see ^{<3075>}Psalm 7:15,16); or “into his net”,^{f1902}, either Saul into his own net, and others with him, so Kimchi and Ben Melech; or the wicked into the net which God has laid for them; (see ^{<3123>}Ezekiel 12:13);

whilst that I withal escape; or “whilst I together escape”, or “pass over”,^{f1903}; that is, while he, together with his companions, passed over the net laid; or,

“till I pass over safe and sound,”

will all mine, as Noldius^{f1904}; not only pass over and escape the snares of the wicked, but pass out of this world into a state of happiness and glory in another.