

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

David cries to God for mercy, with the strongest confidence of being heard, Psalm 57:1-3; he describes his enemies as lions, Psalm 57:4; thanks God for his deliverance, Psalm 57:5; and purposes to publish the praises of the Lord among his people, Psalm 57:6-11.

The title is, To the chief Musician, Al-taschith, (destroy not), a golden Psalms of David, (or one to be engraven), where he fed from Saul in the cave. It is very likely that this Psalm was made to commemorate his escape from Saul in the cave of En-gedi, where Saul had entered without knowing that David was there, and David cut off the skirt of his garment. And it is not improbable that, when he found that Saul was providentially delivered into his hand, he might have formed the hasty resolution to take away his life, as his companions counselled him to do; and in that moment the Divine monition came, *אל תשחית* (al tascheth)! Destroy not! lift not up thy hand against the Lord's anointed! Instead, therefore, of taking away his life, he contented himself with taking away his skirt, to show him that he had been in his power. When, afterwards, he composed the Psalm, he gave it for title the words which he received as a Divine warning. See the history 1 Samuel 24 (note): See also my note upon the fourth verse of that chapter, 1 Samuel 24:4 (note).

Verse 1

Be merciful unto me - To show David's deep earnestness, he repeats this twice; he was in great danger, surrounded by implacable enemies, and he knew that God alone could deliver him.

My soul trusteth in thee - I put my life into thy hand; and my immortal spirit knows no other portion than thyself.

In the shadow of thy wings - A metaphor taken from the brood of a hen taking shelter under her wings when they see a bird of prey; and there they continue to hide themselves till their enemy disappears. In a storm, or tempest of rain, the mother covers them with her wings to afford them shelter and defense. This the psalmist has particularly in view, as the following words show: "Until these calamities be overpast."

Verse 2

I will cry unto God most high - He is the Most High; and therefore far above all my enemies, though the prince of the power of the air be at their head.

Unto God, *אלהים* (Iael), unto the strong Good, one against whom no human or diabolic might can prevail. David felt his own weakness, and he knew the strength of his adversaries; and therefore he views God under those attributes and characters which were suited to his state. This is a great secret in the Christian life; few pray to God wisely; though they may do it fervently.

That performeth all things for me - Who works for me; *גומר* (gomer), he who completes for me, and will bring all to a happy issue.

Verse 3

He shall send from heaven, and save me - Were there no human agents or earthly means that he could employ, he would send his angels from heaven to rescue me from my enemies. Or, He will give his command from heaven that this may be done on earth.

Selah - I think this word should be at the end of the verse.

God shall send forth his mercy and his truth - Here mercy and truth are personified. They are the messengers that God will send from heaven to save me. His mercy ever inclines him to help and save the distressed. This he has promised to do; and his truth binds him to fulfill the promises or engagements his mercy has made, both to saints and sinners.

Verse 4

My soul is among lions - *בְּתוֹךְ לִבְיֹטִים* (bethoch lebaim). I agree with Dr. Kennicott that this should be translated, "My soul dwells in parched places," from *לִבְיֹטִים* (laab), he thirsted. And thus the Chaldee seems to have understood the place, though it be not explicit.

I lie even among them that are set on fire - I seem to be among coals. It is no ordinary rage and malice by which I am pursued: each of my enemies seems determined to have my life.

Verse 5

Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens - Let the glory of thy mercy and truth be seen in the heavens above, and in the earth beneath. Several of the fathers apply what is said above to the passion of our Lord, and what is said here to his resurrection.

Verse 6

They have prepared a net for my steps - A gin or springe, such as huntsmen put in the places which they know the prey they seek frequents: such, also, as they place in passages in hedges, etc., through which the game creeps.

They have digged a pit - Another method of catching game and wild beasts. They dig a pit, cover it over with weak sticks and turf. The beasts, not suspecting danger where none appears, in attempting to walk over it, fall through, and are taken. Saul digged a pit, laid snares for the life of David; and fell into one of them himself, particularly at the cave of En-gedi; for he entered into the very pit or cave where David and his men were hidden, and his life lay at the generosity of the very man whose life he was seeking! The rabbins tell a curious and instructive tale concerning this: "God sent a spider to weave her web at the mouth of the cave in which David and his men lay hid. When Saul saw the spider's web over the cave's mouth, he very naturally conjectured that it could neither be the haunt of men nor wild beasts; and therefore went in with confidence to repose." The spider here, a vile and contemptible animal, became the instrument in the hand of God of saving David's life and of confounding Saul in his policy and malice. This may be a fable; but it shows by what apparently insignificant means God, the universal ruler, can accomplish the greatest and most beneficent ends. Saul continued to dig pits to entrap David; and at last fell a prey to his own obstinacy. We have a proverb to the same effect: Harm watch, harm catch. The Greeks have one also: ἡ βλάβη τοῦ συμβουλοῦ ὡς τὸ πρῶτον ἡ βλάβη τοῦ συμβουλοῦ. An evil advice often becomes most ruinous to the adviser. The Romans have one to the same effect: -

Neque enim lex justior ulla est

Quam necis artificem arte perire sua.

There is no law more just than that which condemns a man to suffer death by the instrument which he has invented to take away the life of others.

Verse 7

My heart is fixed - My heart is prepared to do and suffer thy will. It is fixed - it has made the firmest purpose through his strength by which I can do all things.

Verse 8

Awake up, my glory - Instead of קִינּוֹרִי (kebodi), "my glory," one MS., and the Syriac, have קִינּוֹרִי (kinnori), "my harp." Dr. Kennicott reads קִינּוֹרִי (kebori), which he supposes to be some instrument of music; and adds that the instrument used in church-music by the Ethiopians is now called קִינּוֹרִי (kaber). I think the Syriac likely to be the true reading: "Awake up, my harp; awake, psaltery and harp: I will awake early." Such repetitions are frequent in the Hebrew poets. If we read my glory, it may refer either to his tongue; or, which is more likely, to his skill in composition, and in playing on different instruments. The five last verses of this Psalm are nearly the same with the Psalm 108:1-5 of Psalm 108:1-13. The reason of this may be, the notes or memoranda from the psalmist's diary were probably, through mistake, twice copied. The insertion at the beginning of the 108th Psalm seems to bear no relation to the rest of that ode.

Rabbi Solomon Jarchi tells us that David had a harp at his bed's head, which played of itself when the north wind blew on it; and then David arose to give praise to God. This account has been treated as a ridiculous fable by grave Christian writers. I would however hesitate, and ask one question: Does not the account itself point out an instrument then well known, similar to the comparatively lately discovered Aeolian harp? Was not this the instrument hung at David's bed's head, which, when the night breeze (which probably blew at a certain time) began to act upon the cords, sent forth those dulcet, those heavenly sounds, for which the Aeolian harp is remarkable? "Awake, my harp, at the due time: I will not wait for thee now, I have the strongest cause for gratitude; I will awake earlier than usual to sing the praises of my God."

Verse 9

Among the people - The Israelites.

Among the nations - The Gentiles at large. A prophecy either relating to the Gospel times, Christ being considered as the Speaker: or a prediction that these Divine compositions should be sung, both in synagogues and in Christian churches, in all the nations of the earth. And it is so: wherever the name of Christ is known, there is David's known also.

Verse 10

Thy mercy is great unto the heavens - It is as far above all human description and comprehension as the heavens are above the earth. See the notes on Psalm 36:5, Psalm 36:6, where nearly the same words occur.

Verse 11

Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens - The same sentiments and words which occur in Psalm 57:5 (note). See the note there.

David was not only in a happy state of mind when he wrote this Psalm, but in what is called a state of triumph. His confidence in God was unbounded; though encompassed by the most ferocious enemies, and having all things against him except God and his innocence. David will seldom be found in a more blessed state than he here describes. Similar faith in God will bring the same blessings to every true Christian in similar circumstances.