

Adam Clarke:

Introduction

David praises God, and exhorts others to do the same, Psalm 34:1-3; shows how he sought the Lord, and how he was found of him, Psalm 34:4-6. All are exhorted to taste and see the goodness of God; with the assurance of support and comfort, Psalm 34:7-10. He shows the way to attain happiness and long life, Psalm 34:11-16; the privileges of the righteous, and of all who sincerely seek God, Psalm 34:17-22.

The title states that this is a Psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed. The history of this transaction may be found in 1 Samuel 21:1-15 (note), on which chapter see the notes. But Abimelech is not the person there mentioned; it was Achish, king of Gath, called here Abimelech, because that was a common name of the Philistine kings. Neither MS. nor version reads Achish in this place; and all the versions agree in the title as it stands in our version, except the Syriac, which states it to be a Psalm of David, when he went to the house of the Lord, that he might give the first-fruits to the priests.

Of the occasion of this Psalm, as stated here, I have given my opinion in the notes on 1 Samuel 21:1-15, to which I have nothing to add. On the whole I prefer the view taken of it by the Septuagint, which intimates that David fell into an epileptic fit; that he frothed at the mouth, fell against the doorposts, and gave such unequivocal evidences of being subject to epileptic fits, and during the time his intellect became so much impaired, that Achish Abimelech dismissed him from his court. This saves the character of David; and if it cannot be vindicated in this way, then let it fall under reproach as to this thing; for hypocrisy, deceit, and falsehood, can never be right in the sight of God, whatever men may ingeniously say to excuse them.

This is the second of the acrostic or alphabetical Psalms, each verse beginning with a consecutive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. But in this Psalm some derangement has taken place. The verse which begins with vau (vau), and which should come in between the fifth and sixth, is totally wanting; and the twenty-second verse is entirely out of the series; it is, however, my opinion that this verse (the twenty-second) which now begins with phe (phe), podedeh, was originally written vepodeh or with padah, as more than a hundred of Dr. Kennicott's MSS. read it, thus making vepodah, and will redeem and this reads admirably in the above connection. I shall here place the verses at one view, and the reader shall judge for himself:

Psalm 34:5 They looked unto him, and were enlightened: and their faces were not ashamed.

Psalm 34:22 And the Lord will redeem the soul of his servants, and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.

Psalm 34:6 This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

Psalm 34:7 The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. Thus we find the connection complete, with the above emendation.

Verse 1

I will bless the Lord at all times - He has laid me under endless obligation to him, and I will praise him while I have a being.

Verse 2

My soul shall make her boast - Shall set itself to praise the Lord - shall consider this its chief work.

The humble - anavim, the afflicted, such as David had been.

Verse 3

Magnify the Lord with me - gaddelu lavhovah, make greatness to Jehovah; show his greatness; and let us exalt his name, let us show how high and glorious it is.

Verse 4

I sought the Lord - This is the reason and cause of his gratitude. I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me out of all my fears. This answers to the history; for when David heard what the servants of Achish said concerning him, he laid up the words in his heart, and was greatly afraid. 1 Samuel 21:13. To save him, God caused the epileptic fit to seize him; and, in consequence, he was dismissed by Achish, as one whose defection from his master, and union with the Philistines, could be of no use, and thus David's life and honor were preserved. The reader will see that I proceed on the ground laid down by the Septuagint. See before, Psalm 34:1 (note).

Verse 5

They looked unto him - Instead of $\text{x}^{\prime}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\sim}\text{x}^{\circ}$ (hibbitu), they looked, several of Dr. Kennicott's and De Rossi's MSS. have $\text{x}^{\prime}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\sim}\text{x}^{\circ}$ (habbitu), with the point pathach, $\hat{\text{a}}$ Look ye.

And their faces were not ashamed - Some MSS., and the Complutensian Polyglot, make this clause the beginning of a new verse and as it begins with a vau, $\text{x}^{\circ}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\prime}\text{x}^{\circ}$ (upheneyhem), $\hat{\text{a}}$ and their faces, they make it supply the place of the verse which appears to be lost; but see what is said in the introduction before the first verse.

Verse 6

This poor man cried - $\text{x}-\text{x}^{\prime}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\sim}\text{x}^{\circ}$ (zeh ani), $\hat{\text{a}}$ This afflicted man, David.

Verse 7

The angel of the Lord encampeth round - I should rather consider this angel in the light of a watchman going round his circuit, and having for the objects of his especial care such as fear the Lord.

Verse 8

O taste and see that the Lord is good - Apply to him by faith and prayer; plead his promises, he will fulfill them; and you shall know in consequence, that the Lord is good. God has put it in the power of every man to know whether the religion of the Bible be true or false. The promises relative to enjoyments in this life are the grand tests of Divine revelation. These must be fulfilled to all them who with deep repentance and true faith turn unto the Lord, if the revelation which contains them be of God. Let any man in this spirit approach his Maker, and plead the promises that are suited to his case, and he will soon know whether the doctrine be of God. He shall taste, and then see, that the Lord is good, and that the man is blessed who trusts in him. This is what is called experimental religion; the living, operative knowledge that a true believer has that he is passed from death unto life; that his sins are forgiven him for Christ's sake, the Spirit himself bearing witness with his spirit that he is a child of God. And, as long as he is faithful, he carries about with him the testimony of the Holy Ghost; and he knows that he is of God, by the Spirit which God has given him.

Verse 9

There is no want to them that fear him - He who truly fears God loves him; and he who loves God obeys him, and to him who fears, loves, and obeys God, there can be no want of things essential to his happiness, whether spiritual or temporal, for this life or for that which is to come. This verse is wanting in the Syriac.

Verse 10

The young lions do lack - Instead of $\text{x}^{\circ}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\prime}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\circ}$ (kephirim), the young lions, one of Kennicott's MSS. has $\text{x}^{\circ}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\prime}\text{x}^{\text{TM}}\text{x}^{\circ}$ (cabbirim), $\hat{\text{a}}$ powerful men. The Vulgate, Septuagint, Ethiopic, Syriac, Arabic, and Anglo-Saxon have the same reading. Houbigant approves of this; and indeed the sense and connection seem to require it. My old Psalter reads: - The Ryche had nede; and thai hungerd: but sekand Lard sal nocht be lessed of alle gode. That es, says the paraphrase, with outen lessyng thai sal have God; that es alle gode; for in God is al gode.

Verse 11

Come, ye children - All ye that are of an humble, teachable spirit.

I will teach you the fear of the Lord - I shall introduce the translation and paraphrase from my old Psalter; and the rather because I believe there is a reference to that very improper and unholy method of teaching youth the system of heathen mythology before they are taught one sound lesson of true divinity, till at last their minds are imbued with heathenism, and the vicious conduct of gods, goddesses, and heroes, here very properly called tyrants, becomes the model of their own; and they are as heathenish without as they are heathenish within.

Trans. Cummes sones heres me: bred of Lard I sal gou lere.

Par - Cummes with trauth and luf: sones, qwam I gette in haly lere: heres me. With eres of hert. I sal lere you, nocht the fabylys of poetes; na the storys of tyrauntz; bot the dred of oure Larde, that wyl bryng thou til the felaghschippe of aungels; and thar in is lyfe. I need not paraphrase this paraphrase, as it is plain enough.

Verse 12

What man is he that desireth life - He who wishes to live long and to live happily, let him act according to the following directions. For a comment upon this and the four ensuing verses, see the notes on 1 Peter 3:10-12 (note).

Verse 17

The righteous cry - There is no word in the present Hebrew text for righteous; but all the versions preserve it. I suppose it was lost through its similitude to the word tsaaku , they cry tsaaku tsaddikim , the righteous cry.

Verse 18

A broken heart - nishberey Web , the heart broken to shivers.

A contrite spirit - dakkeey ruach , the beaten-out spirit. In both words the hammer is necessarily implied; in breaking to pieces the ore first, and then plating out the metal when it has been separated from the ore. This will call to the reader's remembrance Jeremiah 23:29: "Is not my word like as a fire, saith the Lord? And like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces? The breaking to shivers, and beating out, are metaphorical expressions: so are the hammer and the rock. What the large hammer struck on a rock by a powerful hand would do, so does the word of the Lord when struck on the sinner's heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. The broken heart, and the contrite spirit, are two essential characteristics of true repentance.

Verse 19

Many are the afflictions of the righteous - No commander would do justice to a brave and skillful soldier, by refusing him opportunities to put his skill and bravery to proof by combating with the adversary; or by preventing him from taking the post of danger when necessity required it. The righteous are God's soldiers. He suffers them to be tried, and sometimes to enter into the hottest of the battle and in their victory the power and influence of the grace of God is shown, as well as their faithfulness.

Delivereth him out of them all - He may well combat heartily, who knows that if he fight in the Lord, he shall necessarily be the conqueror.

Verse 20

He keepeth all his bones - He takes care of his life; and if he have scars, they are honorable ones.

Verse 21

Evil shall slay the wicked - The very thing in which they delight shall become their bane and their ruin.

They that hate the righteous - All persecutors of God's people shall be followed by the chilling blast of God's displeasure in this world; and if they repent not, shall perish everlastingly.

Verse 22

The Lord redeemeth - Both the life and soul of God's followers are ever in danger but God is continually redeeming both.

Shall be desolate - Literally, shall be guilty. They shall be preserved from sin, and neither forfeit life nor soul. This verse probably should come in after the fifth. See the introduction to this Psalm.