# Psalms - Commentaries by Nicolas Simon

Incidents In David's Life As Seen Through The Psalms, 1 Samuel 22:5; 23:14-18 – Psalm 63

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5And the prophet Gad said unto David, Abide not in the hold; depart, and get thee into the land of Judah. Then David departed, and came into the forest of Hareth.

14And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand. 15And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood. 16And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. 17And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth. 18And they two made a covenant before the Lord: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.

A psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah. 1 O God, Thou art my God; early will I seek Thee: my soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is; 2 To see Thy power and Thy glory, so as I have seen Thee in the sanctuary. 3 Because Thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee. 4 Thus will I bless Thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in Thy name. 5 My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise Thee with joyful lips: 6 When I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches. 7 Because Thou hast been my help, therefore in the shadow of Thy wings will I rejoice. 8 My soul followeth hard after Thee: Thy right hand upholdeth me. 9 But those that seek my soul, to destroy it, shall go into the lower parts of the earth. 10 They shall fall by the sword: they shall be a portion for foxes. 11 But the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by Him shall glory: but the mouth of them that speak lies shall be stopped.

It is not merely that David has been driven from his home, but also the sanctuary of God: "Thou shalt bring them in, and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, in the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thee to dwell in, in the Sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established" (Ex. 15:17). In keeping with this exile (and with the character of the psalms of the second book), it is not now Jehovah, the name of covenant relationship, but it is God, Elohim, on whom David calls. And yet, it is my God! No circumstance can break that personal relationship; nothing can take away from the knowledge that God is my God. "My God shall supply all your need" (Phil. 4:19).

A wilderness is known for its complete lack of resources, but is it water or food that David desires? No! It is the spiritual wilderness that David laments; it is the vision of the power and glory of God in the sanctuary that he craves. "My soul thirsteth for Thee, my flesh longeth for Thee" (vs. 1). Despite his circumstances, there is no sense of David having been forsaken in this psalm. "Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise Thee" (vs. 3). He has the sense of God's presence with him. Far from finding leanness in David's soul, we find it satisfied with marrow and fatness; joy is on his lips (vs. 5). Whether resting — "He giveth His beloved sleep" (Psa. 127:2) — or watching, David meditates upon his God. "I remember Thee upon my bed, and meditate on Thee in the night watches" (vs. 6).

It is not a question of Saul's finding David, but of God's not delivering him into his hand (1 Sam. 23:14). The circumstances that come into our lives come as God sees fit. Jonathan may return to his house, but David takes refuge in the shadow of the wings of His God (vs. 7). Will we, like Israel of old, decline that safe haven? "How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!" (Luke 13:34). Oh, that we might, like Ruth, recognize the security of that place practically in our lives: "spread therefore thy skirt [wings] over thine handmaid" (Ruth 3:9). The soul that cleaves to God has a clear sense of His right hand upholding him (vs. 8). When we pull away, doubts plague us, and yet, as we read in another psalm of David: "though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with His hand" (Psa. 37:24).

There is one that seeks the destruction of our soul (vs. 9); the devil was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44). For the unsaved, this is solemn, for "it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Heb. 9:27). For the saved, we know that Satan can never take away the life we now possess — "I give them life eternal; and they shall never perish, and no one shall seize them out of My hand" (John 10:28 JND). He can, however, destroy our testimony. "Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death" (James 1:14-15). Evil temptations come from within, and Satan, just as in the Garden of Eden, is ever the enticer.

The world is a wilderness, and though we have the assurance of God's presence with us individually (Luke 24:15), it is never our home. David speaks of the king in the third person: "the king shall rejoice in God; every one that sweareth by Him shall glory" (vs. 11). Though the king is undoubtedly David himself, it looks beyond to Israel's Messiah. We do not look for an earthly kingdom, but we do "await His Son from the heavens" (1 Thess. 1:10 JND). Furthermore, we do not await Christ's return as king, though He will be that, but rather, we look for the coming of the Bridegroom for His bride.

No doubt there were many who, like Saul, spoke lies concerning David. It is good to remember that Satan is also the father of lies (John 8:44). In such situations it is invariably a question of our word against theirs, and it is best if we leave it all with the righteous Judge. The Lord never answered His accusers a word. Their own contradictory accounts only demonstrated the dishonesty of their accusations (Mark 14:55-59). One day the mouth of those that speak lies will be stopped (vs. 11).

Incidents In David's Life As Seen Through The Psalms, 1 Samuel 19:11-18 – Psalm 59

11 Saul also sent messengers unto David's house, to watch him, and to slay him in the morning: and Michal David's wife told him, saying, If thou save not thy life tonight, tomorrow thou shalt be slain. 12 So Michal let David down through a window: and he went, and fled, and escaped. 13And Michal took an image, and laid it in the bed, and put a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster, and covered it with a cloth. 14And when Saul sent messengers to take David, she said, He is sick. 15And Saul sent the messengers again to see David, saying, Bring him up to me in the bed, that I may slay him. 16And when the messengers were come in, behold, there was an image in the bed, with a pillow of goats' hair for his bolster. 17And Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped? And Michal answered Saul, He said unto me, Let me go; why should I kill thee? 18 So David fled, and escaped, and came to Samuel to Ramah, and told him all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and dwelt in Naioth.

To the chief Musician, Altaschith, Michtam of David; when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill him. 1 Deliver me from mine enemies, O my God: defend me from them that rise up against me. 2 Deliver me from the workers of iniquity, and save me from bloody men. 3 For, lo, they lie in wait for my soul: the mighty are gathered against me; not for my transgression, nor for my sin, O Lord. 4 They run and prepare themselves without my fault: awake to help me, and behold. 5 Thou therefore, O Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel, awake to visit all the heathen: be not merciful to any wicked transgressors. Selah. 6 They return at evening: they make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. 7 Behold, they belch out with their mouth: swords are in their lips: for who, say they, doth hear? 8 But Thou, O Lord, shalt laugh at them; Thou shalt have all the heathen in derision. 9 Because of His strength will I wait upon Thee: for God is my defence. 10 The God of my mercy shall prevent me: God shall let me see my desire upon mine enemies. 11 Slay them not, lest my people forget: scatter them by Thy power; and bring them down, O Lord our shield. 12 For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak. 13 Consume them in wrath, consume them, that they may not be: and let them know that God ruleth in Jacob unto the ends of the earth. Selah. 14And at evening let them return; and let them make a noise like a dog, and go round about the city. 15 Let them wander up and down for meat, and grudge if they be not satisfied. 16 But I will sing of Thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of Thy mercy in the morning: for Thou hast been my defense and refuge in the day of my trouble. 17 Unto Thee, O my strength, will I sing: for God is my defense, and the God of my mercy.

While Saul was seeking to kill David, David was praying to the Lord for deliverance (vss. 1-2). In this situation David could confidently say that it was not for his transgression or for his sin (vs. 3). "Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God" (1 John 3:20). Paul likewise knew that though bound as an evildoer, his conscience was clear: "wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound" (2 Tim. 2:9). No matter what man may do to us, God's plan will prevail; His word is not bound.

David does not ask the Lord to kill his enemies, lest the people should forget (vs. 11). Is it not true, when afflicted we are the closest to the Lord? Sometimes, however, we feel as if our enemies are pressing down upon us like a pack of dogs, roaming and howling in the night. For they say, "who hears?" (vs. 7). God hears! The world may mock and laugh now, but, solemnly, the Lord will ultimately hold this world in derision (vs. 8; Psa. 2:4).

It is because of His strength that we have confidence in His deliverance (vs. 9). Let us not look inwards, as the world would insist, for our strength.

David does not question the Lord's loving kindness toward him. Satan delights for us to question the goodness of God. Sometimes we fall into the error of thinking that God is against us; this is Satan's lie.

It is good to be reminded, as has often been said, that happiness is a state of soul and not a question of circumstances. Indeed, David sings! "I will sing aloud of Thy loving-kindness in the morning" (vs. 16). Does not this remind us of another verse of Scripture? "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is Thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23). Oh, to remember this in the midst of our trials!

David not only sings of God, but to God — do we know God well enough to sing to Him? I may sing of a person, but to sing to someone is quite another thing. To sing to God implies an intimate relationship with Him.

Sadly, Michal, David's wife (and Saul's daughter), does not enter into any of this. She loved her mighty warrior (1 Sam. 18:20), but she was not of a kindred spirit when it came to spiritual things. It is important that we marry someone with whom we can share the things of God. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Michal used deceit and lies to hide David's escape. Did she need to? No, God is our defense and refuge (vs. 17). This is the world's way of doing things: the end justifies the means in their eyes.

Incidents In David's Life As Seen Through The Psalms, 1 Samuel 21:10-12 – Psalm 56

10And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. 11And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands? 12And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

To the chief Musician upon Jonathelem-rechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath. 1 Be merciful unto me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresseth me. 2 Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High. 3 What time I am afraid, I will trust [confide] in Thee. 4 In God I will praise His word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me. 5 Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. 6 They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul. 7 Shall they escape by iniquity? In Thine anger cast down the people, O God. 8 Thou tellest my wanderings: put Thou my tears into Thy bottle: are they not in Thy book? 9 When I cry unto Thee, then shall mine enemies turn back: this I know; for God is for me. 10 In God will I praise His word: in the Lord will I praise His word. 11 In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me. 12 Thy vows are upon me, O God: I will render praises unto Thee. 13 For thou hast delivered my soul from death: wilt not Thou deliver my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?

In the lead up to this event, David lies (1 Sam. 21:2), eats the holy bread that was for the priests alone (1 Sam. 21:6; Lev. 24:9), arms himself for protection (1 Sam. 21:8), and flees to the Philistines! What a pitiful refuge they proved to be — "man would swallow me up" (vs. 2). The

servants of Achish recognized David as the one who had slain his ten thousands (1 Sam. 21:11). Secure in their midst, with no obvious means of escape, David was much afraid. The sword of Goliath, the Philistine, was of no help.

In his extremity David remembers that fear can only be countered by confiding in God (vss. 3, 11). When I place my trust in God, when my confidence is such that I can praise His word, then I will not fear what flesh can do unto me (vs. 4). “The fear of man bringeth a snare: but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25).

People may take and twist our words and look for opportunities to destroy us (vss. 5-6), but we can leave them with God knowing that their judgment ultimately rests with Him (vs. 7). Do we trust His word? Can we say with the Apostle, “For I know whom I have believed” (2 Tim. 1:12)?

God has not promised to take us out of all difficulty especially when it is the result of our own doing. May we never forget that sinful behavior has consequences; “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” (Gal. 6:7). But God has promised to be with us, though the sense of His presence may well be lost upon us. All my wanderings are inscribed in His book. Not one shed tear goes unnoticed — He stores my tears in His bottle. “Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee” (Isa. 43:1-2). Though written for Israel in a day yet to come, we can draw comfort from these verses, and how much more so, for we have that present assurance of Christ’s love for us — who indeed “shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (Rom. 8:35).

Many years ago there was a particularly dark time in my life: an aunt died, my grandfather died, an uncle died, all in addition to other funerals that I attended that gloomy year. When my grandfather’s manufacturing business was sold, many items were auctioned. Among those goods was a small, green glass laboratory bottle with a glass stopper — a particularly fine specimen. A cousin of mine, one who had not so long before lost her mother, bid on that item. The price went up, and up, until finally she obtained her prize! The next day — the Lord’s Day — I saw it on her dresser with a note card leaning against it. On that card was one verse: “put Thou my tears into Thy bottle” (vs. 8).

When I undertake to fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12) in my own strength, with my own carnal weapons (2 Cor. 10:4), I will fail. It is only when I cry unto the Lord that my enemies are turned back (vs. 9).

Can I say with David, “this I know, for God is for me” (vs. 9)? When we think that all are against us, we do well to meditate on this verse. It was the goodness of God that led me to repentance; and it is His goodness that sustains me in the Christian path (Rom. 2:4; 2 Cor. 12:9). If David could say, “I know,” so much more can we. “What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (Rom. 8:31-32).

Like the previous psalm, this one also ends in praise, praise to a God that alone can keep our feet from falling. Furthermore, it is praise that rests upon His word. Our confidence in God is founded upon a revelation from Him and not on our own wishful thinking. It reminds me of Jude’s doxology at the close of his short exhortation to the saints of God, when the darkness of apostasy seems to be overwhelming. “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen” (Jude 24-25).

Incidents In David's Life As Seen Through The Psalms, 1 Samuel 23:19-29 – Psalm 54

19 Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? 20 Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king’s hand. 21And Saul said, Blessed be ye of the Lord; for ye have compassion on me. 22 Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there: for it is told me that he dealeth very subtilly. 23 See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah. 24And they arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon. 25 Saul also and his men went to seek him. And they told David: wherefore he came down into a rock, and abode in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. 26And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them. 27 But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. 28 Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines: therefore they called that place Selahammahlekoth. 29And David went up from thence, and dwelt in strong holds at Engedi.

To the chief Musician on Neginoth, Maschil, A psalm of David, when the Ziphims came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us? 1 Save me, O God, by Thy name, and judge me by Thy strength. 2 Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. 3 For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them. Selah. 4 Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul. 5 He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in Thy truth. 6 I will freely sacrifice unto Thee: I will praise Thy name, O Lord; for it is good. 7 For He hath delivered me out of all trouble: and mine eye hath seen His desire upon mine enemies.

We have already seen several references to “His name” in the psalms that we have considered. David waits on “His name” in (Psa. 52), he lifts up his hands in “His name” (Psa. 63), he exalts “His name” (Psa. 34), he praises “His name” (Psa. 142), and now he cries unto God to save him by “His name” (vs. 1). Recently a law was passed requiring all citizens of the United States traveling internationally to carry a passport. This created a considerable backlog of applications. It was not just vacations that were being jeopardized, but honeymoons, business plans and the like. Many tried to have their applications expedited but found it impossible to speak to anyone. As a last resort, they consulted their senators or congressmen for help. When the passport processing office received a call in the name of the senator or congressman, what a difference that made! The name of God takes in all that He is as revealed to man — God alone is our strength.

In verse one, it is not so much the thought of God's judging David, but, as it is alternatively translated, "by Thy strength do me justice" (vs. 1 JND). When we find ourselves in a position where justice seems impossible, it is good to remember there is One who has the strength to vindicate us; and yet, should we expect wrongs to be righted in this world where, through the grossest of injustices, the Lord of Glory was crucified? "The servant is not greater than his lord" (John 15:20). Again, Christ is our example: "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judgeth righteously" (1 Pet. 2:23).

God hears prayer! He has an ear that hears (vs. 2). This is the language of Scripture; when we deviate from it, we lose the simplicity of faith. Nevertheless, we should be mindful that prayer is neither for ordering God about nor for making wishes. Indeed, we are told, "this is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us" (1 John 5:14). When we do not ask according to His will, are we the losers for it? No! Prayer completes the armor of God (Eph. 6:18). Does a soldier go into battle without his Captain's orders? Our hearts are knit together with Him through prayer, and when our Father says, No, My child, we have a greater understanding of His will for us.

Though strangers had risen up against David, betraying him to the very one who sought his life, David's confidence is in God: "Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul" (vs. 4). It is good to remember whose side we are on! Can we lack confidence if we understand that? I recall a story that I heard of a miner who was pressured to join the union; his very job was at stake. His reply? As a child of God, it would be to his Father that they would have to answer. He was never harassed again. Oh, but David does not stop there. In his deliverance, David worships God and praises, not now the name of God, but the name of Jehovah: "I will freely sacrifice unto Thee: I will praise Thy name, O Lord [Jehovah]; for it is good" (vs. 6).

While the sentiments of verse five were appropriate for David in his day, in this dispensation of grace it should not be our desire to see God destroy our enemies with His truth. We have a new nature whose wishes are in agreement with those of a Saviour-God; He desires "all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:4). Alas, too often the flesh rises up within us, and our thoughts towards those who have hurt us are not in agreement with God's thoughts. Like the disciples, we tend to want to bring down fire upon the heads of our enemies (Luke 9:54).

The words, "His desire" (i.e., the desire of his eye) in verse seven are in italics and are not in the original. David simply looked upon his enemies. Without David's having to do anything at all, God ordered circumstances to distract Saul, and David is delivered — he could gaze upon their departing backs. David now departs to Engedi in the wilderness of eastern Judea; an oasis in the desert, an area well known for its springs, waterfall, and caves. In, relatively speaking, more modern times, we see a parallel in the distraction of the Ottoman Empire, which prevented the emperor Charles V from devoting his full attention to the antics of one, Martin Luther. If only these men of the Reformation had maintained their simple trust in God and not governments and armies.

Incidents In David's Life As Seen Through The Psalms, 1 Samuel 22:7-18 – Psalm 52

7 Then Saul said unto his servants that stood about him, Hear now, ye Benjamites; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds; 8 that all of you have conspired against me, and there is none that sheweth me that my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you that is sorry for me, or sheweth unto me that my son hath stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? 9 Then answered Doeg the Edomite, which was set over the servants of Saul, and said, I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. 10And he enquired of the Lord for him, and gave him victuals, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine. 11 Then the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests that were in Nob: and they came all of them to the king. 12And Saul said, Hear now, thou son of Ahitub. And he answered, Here I am, my lord. 13And Saul said unto him, Why have ye conspired against me, thou and the son of Jesse, in that thou hast given him bread, and a sword, and hast enquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as at this day? 14 Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king's son-in-law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honorable in thine house? 15 Did I then begin to enquire of God for him? Be it far from me: let not the king impute any thing unto his servant, nor to all the house of my father: for thy servant knew nothing of all this, less or more. 16And the king said, Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, thou, and all thy father's house. 17And the king said unto the footmen that stood about him, Turn, and slay the priests of the Lord; because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled, and did not shew it to me. But the servants of the king would not put forth their hand to fall upon the priests of the Lord. 18And the king said to Doeg, Turn thou, and fall upon the priests. And Doeg the Edomite turned, and he fell upon the priests, and slew on that day fourscore and five persons that did wear a linen ephod.

To the chief Musician, Maschil, A psalm of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, David is come to the house of Ahimelech. 1 Why boastest thou thyself in mischief, O mighty man? The goodness of God endureth continually. 2 Thy tongue deviseth mischiefs; like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. 3 Thou lovest evil more than good; and lying rather than to speak righteousness. Selah. 4 Thou lovest all devouring words, O thou deceitful tongue. 5 God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, He shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah. 6 The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him: 7 Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness. 8 But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever. 9 I will praise Thee for ever, because Thou hast done it: and I will wait on Thy name; for it is good before Thy saints.

What a sad scene presents itself in this chapter. Saul, the anointed of the Lord, in league with Doeg the Edomite! Saul's outward profession does not hide his complete lack of faith. Bribery — "will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds" (1 Sam. 22:7) — is exactly the principle upon which Satan acts. He assumes that man responds to God because there is the promise of reward; that is how Satan deceived Eve. Faith operates on the very opposite principle; it believes without having seen. "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 12:1). "Be of good cheer: for I believe God" (Acts 27:25). Without faith man is self-centered — "there is none of you that is sorry for me" (1 Sam. 22:8). The state Saul found himself in was a consequence of his own behavior, yet, refusing to accept responsibility for his circumstances, he accuses his own son: "my son hath made a league with the son of Jesse ... my son hath stirred up my servant against me" (1 Sam. 22:8). Sadly, Jonathan, who was a man of faith,

was never willing to break the natural bonds that bound him to his father and to suffer the reproach of being with David.

If Saul is the professing man, Doeg is the profane man. There was no pretense with him; he boasted in mischief (Psa. 52:1). His tongue was a sharp razor, honed to speak deceit (vs. 2). He loved evil more than good and lying rather than righteousness (vs. 3). We live in a day when all pretense has been discarded, a day when restraint has been thrown off. “Where there is no vision the people cast off restraint” (Prov. 29:18 JND). The answer to the solemn question, “What shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God?” (1 Pet. 4:17) — is given in our psalm, “God shall likewise destroy thee for ever, He shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living” (vs. 5). The world stands in judgment of the very God whose existence they deny and blasphemously ask, “How can a loving God be so cruel?” Yet, “this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness” (vs. 8). Having spent their lives without reference to God, they curse the thought of being eternally separated from Him!

In contrast, the Lord was a root out of dry ground (Isa. 53:2) and all who place their trust in Him will flourish like a green olive tree (vs. 8). Whereas the wicked will be rooted up, those who receive the grace of God are planted in the house of God. This is our place where we might grow in separation from this world and produce fruit for Him through the Holy Spirit. “A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse; a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. Thy plants are an orchard of pomegranates, with pleasant fruits; camphire, with spikenard, spikenard and saffron; calamus and cinnamon, with all trees of frankincense; myrrh and aloes, with all the chief spices: a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out. Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat his pleasant fruits” (Song of Sol. 4:12-16).

Faith rests upon the God of mercy and waits upon His name, “for it is good before Thy saints” (vs. 9). Despite the boasts of vain man, “The goodness of God endureth continually” (vs. 1).

Incidents In David's Life As Seen Through The Psalms, 1 Samuel 21:13-15 – Psalm 34

13And he changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. 14 Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? 15 Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?

A psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed. 1 I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. 3 O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together. 4 I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears. 5 They looked unto Him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. 6 This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. 7 The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him, and delivereth them. 8 O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in Him. 9 O fear the Lord, ye His saints: for there is no want to them that fear Him. 10 The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing. 11 Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good? 13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. 14 Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. 15 The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and His ears are open unto their cry. 16 The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth. 17 The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. 18 The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. 19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all. 20 He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken. 21 Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. 22 The Lord redeemeth the soul of His servants: and none of them that trust in Him shall be desolate.

This occasion must have been one of the most humiliating times in David’s life. The mighty warrior, the anointed one, acts the mad man with spit drooling down his face to escape Achish, the king of Gath. Though we don’t read it in the historic account, we know from the psalm that David cried unto the Lord — “I sought the Lord, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears” (vs. 4). Having gotten into a scrape, it requires true humility to say, “I am wrong.” Furthermore, we may be required to yield a good deal more than such an admission; in this case it was David’s dignity. One of the things we learn with David — and it is evidence that he, unlike Saul, was a man of faith — he submitted to the chastening hand of God, no matter the cost to himself.

We feel the exuberance of David after his escape — a deliverance that he fully credits to Jehovah (vss. 1-10). Oh, if man would only taste of the wonderful provision that God has made in His grace, then he, too, would rejoice in His goodness (vs. 8). “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation” (Heb. 2:3)? It is one thing to speak of others, but do we feel it? Can we sing with David, “I will bless the Lord at all times: His praise shall continually be in my mouth” (vs. 1)? It is not a question of blessing the Lord when things go our way, but at all times.

The lion cubs may go hungry, but the child of God “shall not want any good thing” (vs. 10). Two sparrows may be sold for a farthing and five may be had for the bargain of two farthings, but “ye are of more value than many sparrows” (Luke 12:7). A mother may indeed forget her nursing child, but the Lord cannot forget us: “Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of My hands” (Isa. 49:16).

Having been taught a valuable lesson, though it was learned at his own expense, David is not afraid to share it with his family (vs. 11). Speaking evil and deceit gains us nothing (vs. 13). However, keeping the tongue — and what an unruly member it is (James 3:8) — is only the start and not the end of the path. We are to walk in separation from evil and to do good; we are not only to seek peace but also to pursue it (vs. 14).

Isn’t it true, having schemed and contrived, only to be caught out in the end, we feel the utter futility of it to our shame? Contrariwise, when in desperation we call upon the Lord and He answers our cry, our hearts overflow with His goodness. Why then do we fall in the same ditch the next time around? Indeed, “many are the afflictions of the righteous” (vs. 19), but it seems to take us a lifetime to learn that the Lord delivers us out of them all.

Not only is there a right path, but there is also the correct attitude: “the Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit” (vs. 18). Self gets in the way. What grinding it takes to break the stubborn heart of man and to crush his proud spirit; God will not break one bone though — such are His tender mercies (vs. 20).

However, we must surely take our eyes from self and look upon the precious Saviour, of whom it is said, “a bone of Him shall not be broken” (John 19:36). Can we not hear the Spirit of Christ in this psalm? The One who was humbled for me, upon whom men spat? “Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth: who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, He threatened not; but committed himself to Him that judgeth righteously: who His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:23-24). We hear it again so clearly in Psalm 22: “I will declare Thy name unto My brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee ... for He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath He hid His face from Him; but when He cried unto Him, He heard” (Psa. 22:22, 24).

Incidents In David's Life As Seen Through The Psalms, 1 Samuel 22:1-2 – Psalm 142

1 David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father’s house heard it, they went down thither to him. 2And every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.

Maschil of David; A Prayer when he was in the cave. 1 I cried unto the Lord with my voice; with my voice unto the Lord did I make my supplication. 2 I poured out my complaint before Him; I shewed before Him my trouble. 3 When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. 4 I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. 5 I cried unto Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living. 6Attend unto my cry; for I am brought very low: deliver me from my persecutors; for they are stronger than I. 7 Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name: the righteous shall compass me about; for Thou shalt deal bountifully with me.

The heading that accompanies Psalm 142 indicates that David wrote it during his time of refuge, when he was in the cave. We believe this to be the cave of Adullam. It is described as a prayer. Its opening is particularly poignant. A very literal translation reflecting the structure of the psalm might read:

My voice, unto Jehovah, I cry.My voice, unto Jehovah, I supplicate.I pour out, before Him, my complaintMy trouble, before Him, I show.

In fleeing Saul, David turned to the king of Gath, only to find that there could be no refuge with him. Cast out of his presence, David is alone and without human resource. The world is not a refuge for the Christian; God would not have us lean upon its leaders or institutions for help, particularly when it comes to matters of faith. David found, as he does at other times in his life, that the world’s assistance comes at a price, the compromise of faith. With no protection in Gath there was only One to whom David could turn, and that One already knew his path — “thou knewest my path” (vs. 3). Enemies may secretly lay snares for us (vs. 3), but the Lord sees it all.

David looked on his right hand but no man would know him; no man cared for his soul. There was no way for him to flee (vs. 4). How little we like to be found in such circumstances. At this time there was no great deliverance, just a cave and the Lord. “Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living” (vs. 5). We may find ourselves in similar circumstances. The Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, “all they which are in Asia be turned away from me” (2 Tim. 1:15). When he stood before Caesar at the time of his second imprisonment, he relates, “no man stood with me, but all men forsook me” (2 Tim. 4:16). Though people will fail us, God will never let us down. The Apostle goes on to say, “the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me” (2 Tim. 4:17). Sometimes the Lord provides us with nothing more than a sense of His presence in a quiet place, a moment of solitude in a world of turmoil. Could we ask for anything more?

David is very low (vs. 6). His persecutors are stronger than he. The Lord alone can release the imprisoned soul that it might once again praise God. His confidence is expressed at the last: “the righteous shall compass me about; for Thou shalt deal bountifully with me” (vs. 7). David’s hope was well founded; his brethren and his father’s house upon hearing of David’s plight went down to him. In all, 400 men joined him in that cave. It would appear that David resorted to the cave of Adullam at other times as well, and on at least one of those occasions, we find three of his mighty men there with him (2 Sam. 23:13).

Another group could be found gathered to David in that cave. They were in distress, they were in debt, and they had embittered spirits; they were without resource and in the depths of despair, and with whom do they find their refuge? They join themselves to a rejected David, the anointed one. Does this not remind us of our precious Saviour? Does not this scene also remind us of someone else? Only when we have reached the end of ourselves, when we came to ourselves (Luke 15:17), it was then that a rejected Saviour drew us to Himself.

Five different Hebrew words are rendered “refuge” in the King James translation, two of which appear in this psalm. The number five conveys the thought of weakness. We have five digits on each hand and foot; David chose five smooth stones (1 Sam. 17:40); Paul would rather have spoken five words with his understanding, than ten thousand words in a foreign language (1 Cor. 14:19).

In verse four of our present psalm we read, “refuge failed me.” This could have been translated, “a way to flee eluded me,” for the word derives from the verb “to flee.” The world affords us no refuge; to whom can we flee? We join with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life” (John 6:68).

A different word is used in verse five: “thou art my refuge.” It also appears in the first verse of Psalm 46, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Psa. 46:1). It means a place of hope and trust and is translated this way elsewhere. Well might we recall the lines of the hymn, “My hope on nothing less is built than Jesus, and the blood He spilt.”

The third word is also found in Psalm 46, “the Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psa. 46:7). This word is frequently translated “defense” or “high tower” which most suitably describes the place of safety spoken of. In Psalm 59 it is used with the first word we considered: “Thou [God] hast been my defence [refuge] and refuge [a way to flee] in the day of my trouble” (Psa. 59:16). What better place to flee than to a high tower, and who is higher than God? “From the end of the earth will I cry unto Thee, when my heart is overwhelmed: lead

me to the Rock that is higher than I” (Psa. 61:2).

The fourth refuge is found in Deuteronomy 33, “the eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (Deut. 33:27). Here, the word means a den or dwelling place; Moses could pray, “Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations” (Psa. 90:1). Conversely, in this world we have “no certain dwellingplace” (1 Cor. 4:11).

The fifth and final word is used in Numbers 35; here we find the cities of refuge, or asylum, that the children of Israel were to appoint. These cities are alluded to in Hebrews, chapter six, where a number of these thoughts come together — a way to flee; an asylum; a place of hope and trust — “who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast” (Heb. 6:18-19). Incidentally, this is the only instance where we find “refuge” in the King James translation of the New Testament.

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