

PSALM 44

We are not told either who was the penmen of this psalm or when and upon what occasion it was penned, upon a melancholy occasion, we are sure, not so much to the penman himself (then we could have found occasions enough for it in the history of David and his afflictions), but to the church of God in general; and therefore, if we suppose it penned by David, yet we must attribute it purely to the Spirit of prophecy, and must conclude that the Spirit (whatever he himself had) had in view the captivity of Babylon, or the sufferings of the Jewish church under Antiochus, or rather the afflicted state of the Christian church in its early days (to which v. 22 is applied by the apostle, ~~8:36~~ Romans 8:36), and indeed in all its days on earth, for it is its determined lot that it must enter into the kingdom of heaven through many tribulations. And, if we have any gospel-psalms pointing at the privileges and comforts of Christians, why should we not have one pointing at their trials and exercises? It is a psalm calculated for a day of fasting and humiliation upon occasion of some public calamity, either pressing or threatening. In it the church is taught,

- I.** To own with thankfulness, to the glory of God, the great things God has done for their fathers (v. 1-8).
- II.** To exhibit a memorial of their present calamitous estate (v. 9-16).
- III.** To file a protestation of their integrity and adherence to God notwithstanding (v. 17-22).
- IV.** To lodge a petition at the throne of grace for succour and relief (v. 22-26). In singing this psalm we ought to give God the praise of what he has formerly done for his people, to represent our own grievances, or sympathize with those parts of the church that are in distress, to engage ourselves, whatever happens, to cleave to God and duty, and then cheerfully to wait the event.

PSALM 44:1-8

CONSECRATION TO GOD

To the chief musician for the sons of Korah, Maschil.

Some observe that most of the psalms that are entitled *Maschil* — *psalms of instruction*, are sorrowful psalms; for afflictions give instructions, and sorrow of spirit opens the ear to them. *Blessed is the man whom thou chastenest and teachest.*

In these verses the church, though now trampled upon, calls to remembrance the days of her triumph, of her triumph in God and over her enemies. This is very largely mentioned here,

1. As an aggravation of the present distress. The yoke of servitude cannot but lie very heavily on the necks of those that used to wear the crown of victory; and the tokens of God's displeasure must needs be most grievous to those that have been long accustomed to the tokens of his favour.

2. As an encouragement to hope that God would yet turn again their captivity and return in mercy to them; accordingly he mixes prayers and comfortable expectations with his record of former mercies. Observe,

I. Their commemoration of the great things God had formerly done for them.

1. In general (v. 1): *Our fathers have told us what work thou didst in their days.* Observe,

(1.) The many operations of providence are here spoken of as one work — “They have told us the *work* which thou didst;” for there is a wonderful harmony and uniformity in all that God does, and the many wheels make but one wheel (²³⁰³Ezekiel 10:13), many works make but one work.

(2.) It is a debt which every age owes to posterity to keep an account of God's works of wonder, and to transmit the knowledge of them to the next generation. Those that went before us told us what God did in their days, we are bound to tell those that come after us what he has done in our days, and let them do the like justice to those that shall succeed them; thus shall *one generation praise his works to another* (⁴¹⁵⁴Psalm 145:4), the *fathers to the children shall make known his truth*, (²³⁸⁹Isaiah 38:19).

(3.) We must not only make mention of the work God has done in our own days, but must also acquaint ourselves and our children with what he did in the times of old, long before our own days; and of this we have in the scripture a sure word of history, as sure as the word of prophecy.

(4.) Children must diligently attend to what their parents tell them of the wonderful works of God, and keep it in remembrance, as that which will be of great use to them.

(5.) Former experiences of God's power and goodness are strong supports to faith and powerful pleas in prayer under present calamities. See how Gideon insists upon it (^(CITE)Judges 6:13): *Where are all his miracles which our fathers told us of?*

2. In particular, their fathers had told them,

(1.) How wonderfully God planted Israel in Canaan at first, v. 2, 3. He drove out the natives, to make room for Israel, afflicted them, and cast them out, gave them as dust to Israel's sword and as driven stubble to their bow. The many complete victories which Israel obtained over the Canaanites, under the command of Joshua, were not to be attributed to themselves, nor could they challenge the glory of them.

[1.] They were not owing to their own merit, but to God's favour and free grace: It was *through the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favour to them. Not for thy righteousness, or the uprightness of thy heart, doth God drive them out from before thee* (^(CITE)Deuteronomy 9:5, 6), but because God would *perform the oath which he swore unto their fathers,* ^(CITE)Deuteronomy 7:8. The less praise this allows us the more comfort it administers to us, that we may see all our successes and enlargements coming to us from the favour of God and the light of his countenance.

[2.] They were not owing to their own might, but to God's power engaged for them, without which all their own efforts and endeavours would have been fruitless. It was not by their own sword that they got the land in possession, though they had great numbers of mighty men; nor did their own arm save them from being driven back by the Canaanites and put to shame; but it was God's *right hand* and his *arm*. He fought for Israel, else they would have fought in vain; it was through him that they did valiantly and victoriously. It was God that planted Israel in that good land, as the careful husbandman plants a tree, from which he promises himself fruit.

See ^{<480B>}Psalm 80:8. This is applicable to the planting of the Christian church in the world, by the preaching of the gospel. Paganism was wonderfully driven out, as the Canaanites, not all at once, but by little and little, not by any human policy or power (for God chose to do it by the weak and foolish things of the world), but by the wisdom and power of God — Christ by his Spirit went forth conquering and to conquer; and the remembrance of that is a great support and comfort to those that groan under the yoke of antichristian tyranny, for to the state of the church under the power of the New-Testament Babylon, some think (and particularly the learned Amyraldus), the complaints in the latter part of this psalm may very fitly be accommodated. He that by his power and goodness planted a church for himself in the world will certainly support it by the same power and goodness; and the *gates of hell shall not prevail against it*.

(2.) How frequently he had given them success against their enemies that attempted to disturb them in the possession of that good land (v. 7): *Thou hast, many a time, saved us from our enemies, and hast put to flight, and so put to shame, those that hated us*, witness the successes of the judges against the nations that oppressed Israel. Many a time have the persecutors of the Christian church, and those that hate it, been put to shame by the power of truth, ^{<440B>}Acts 6:10.

II. The good use they make of this record, and had formerly made of it, in consideration of the great things God had done for their fathers of old.

1. They had taken God for their sovereign Lord, had sworn allegiance to him, and put themselves under his protection (v. 4): *Thou art my King, O God!* He speaks in the name of the church, as (^{<374D>}Psalm 74:12), *Thou art my King of old*. God, as a king, has made laws for his church, provided for the peace and good order of it, judged for it, pleaded its cause, fought its battles, and protected it; it is his kingdom in the world, and ought to be subject to him, and to pay him tribute. Or the psalmist speaks for himself here: “Lord, *Thou art my King*; whither shall I go with my petitions, but to thee? The favour I ask is not for myself, but for thy church.” Note, It is every one's duty to improve his personal interest at the throne of grace for the public welfare and prosperity of the people of God; as Moses, “*If I have found grace in thy sight, guide thy people,*” ^{<128B>}Exodus 33:13.

2. They had always applied to him by prayer for deliverance when at any time they were in distress: *Command deliverances for Jacob*. Observe,

(1.) The enlargedness of their desire. They pray for deliverances, not one, but many, as many as they had need of, how many soever they were, a series of deliverances, a deliverance from every danger.

(2.) The strength of their faith in the power of God. They do not say, *Work deliverances*, but *Command them*, which denotes his doing it easily and instantly — *Speak and it is done* (such was the faith of the centurion, ⁴⁰⁸⁸Matthew 8:8, *Speak the word only, and my servant shall be healed*); it denotes also his doing it effectually: “Command it, as one having authority, whose command will be obeyed.” *Where the word of a king is there is power*, much more the word of the King of kings.

3. They had trusted and triumphed in him. As they owned it was not their own sword and bow that had saved them (v. 3), so neither did they trust to their own sword or bow to save them for the future (v. 6): “*I will not trust in my bow*, nor in any of my military preparations, as if those would stand me in stead without God. No; *through thee will we push down our enemies* (v. 5); we will attempt it in thy strength, relying only upon that, and not upon the number or valour of our forces; and, having thee on our side, we will not doubt of success in the attempt. *Through thy name* (by virtue of thy wisdom directing us, thy power strengthening us and working for us, and thy promise securing success to us) we shall, we *will, tread those under that rise up against us.*”

4. They had made him their joy and praise (v. 8): “*In God we have boasted*; in him we do and will boast, every day, and all the day long.” When their enemies boasted of their strength and successes, as Sennacherib and Rabshakeh hectorred Hezekiah, they owned they had nothing to boast of, in answer thereunto, but their relation to God and their interest in him; and, if he were for them, they could set all the world at defiance. *Let him that glories glory in the Lord*, and let that for ever exclude all other boasting. Let those that trust in God make their boast in him, for they know whom they have trusted; let them *boast in him all the day long*, for it is a subject that can never be exhausted. But let them withal *praise his name for ever*; if they have the comfort of his name, let them give unto him the glory due to it.

PSALM 44:9-16

AFFLICTED CONDITION OF ISRAEL

The people of God here complain to him of the low and afflicted condition that they were now in, under the prevailing power of their enemies and oppressors, which was the more grievous to them because *they* were now trampled upon, who had always been used, in their struggles with their neighbours, to win the day and get the upper hand, and because those were now their oppressors whom they had many a time triumphed over and made tributaries, and especially because they had boasted in their God with great assurance that he would still protect and prosper them, which made the distress they were in, and the disgrace they were under, the more shameful. Let us see what the complaint is.

I. That they wanted the usual tokens of God's favour to them and presence with them (v. 9): "*Thou hast cast off; thou seemest to have cast us off and our cause, and to have cast off thy wonted care of us and concern for us, and so hast put us to shame, for we boasted of the constancy and perpetuity of thy favour. Our armies go forth as usual, but they are put to flight; we gain no ground, but lose what we have gained, for thou goest not forth with them, for, if thou didst, which way soever they turned they would prosper; but it is quite contrary.*" Note, God's people, when they are cast down, are tempted to think themselves cast off and forsaken of God; but it is a mistake. *Hath God cast away his people? God forbid,*
Romans 11:1.

II. That they were put to the worst before their enemies in the field of battle (v. 10): *Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy*, as Joshua complained when they met with a repulse at Ai (^(v. 8)Joshua 7:8): "We are dispirited, and have lost the ancient valour of Israelites; we flee, we fall, before those that used to flee and fall before us; and then those that hate us have the plunder of our camp and of our country; they spoil for themselves, and reckon all their own that they can lay their hands on. Attempts to shake off the Babylonish yoke have been ineffectual, and we have rather lost ground by them."

III. That they were doomed to the sword and to captivity (v. 11): "*Thou hast given us like sheep appointed for meat.* They make no more scruple

of killing an Israelite than of killing a sheep; nay, like the butcher, they make a trade of it, they take a pleasure in it as a hungry man in his meat; and we are led with as much ease, and as little resistance, as a lamb to the slaughter; many are slain, and the rest scattered among the heathen, continually insulted by their malice or in danger of being infected by their iniquities.” They looked upon themselves as bought and sold, and charged it upon God, *Thou sellest thy people*, when they should have charged it upon their own sin. *For your iniquities have you sold yourselves*, ^{<281>}Isaiah 50:1. However, thus far was right that they looked above the instruments of their trouble and kept their eye upon God, as well knowing that their worst enemies had no power against them *but what was given them from above*; they own it was God that *delivered them into the hand of the ungodly*, as that which is sold is delivered to the buyer. *Thou sellest them for nought, and dost not increase in their price* (so it may be read); “thou dost not sell them by auction, to those that will bid most for them, but in haste, to those that will bid first for them; any one shall have them that will.” Or, as we read it, *Thou dost not increase thy wealth by their price*, intimating that they could have suffered this contentedly if they had been sure that it would redound to the glory of God and that his interest might be some way served by their sufferings; but it was quite contrary: Israel's disgrace turned to God's dishonour, so that he was so far from being a gainer in his glory by the sale of them that it should seem he was greatly a loser by it; see ^{<281>}Isaiah 52:5; ^{<281>}Ezekiel 36:20.

IV. That they were loaded with contempt, and all possible ignominy was put upon them. In this also they acknowledge God: “*Thou makest us a reproach*; thou bringest those calamities upon us which occasion the reproach, and thou permittest their virulent tongues to smite us.” They complain,

1. That they were ridiculed and bantered, and were looked upon as the most contemptible people under the sun; their troubles were turned to their reproach, and upon the account of them they were derided.
2. That their neighbours, those about them, from whom they could not withdraw, were most abusive to them, v. 13.
3. That the heathen, the people that were strangers to the commonwealth of Israel and aliens to the covenants of promise, made them a by-word, and shook the head at them, as triumphing in their fall, v. 14.

4. That the reproach was constant and incessant (v. 15): *My confusion is continually before me*. The church in general, the psalmist in particular, were continually teased and vexed with the insults of the enemy. Concerning those that are going down every one cries, “Down with them.”

5. That it was very grievous, and in a manner overwhelmed him: *The shame of my face has covered me*. He blushed for sin, or rather for the dishonour done to God, and then it was a holy blushing.

6. That it reflected upon God himself; the reproach which the enemy and the avenger cast upon them was downright blasphemy against God, v. 16, and ^{<1208>}2 Kings 19:3. There was therefore strong reason to believe that God would appear for them. As there is no trouble more grievous to a generous and ingenuous mind than reproach and calumny, so there is none more grievous to a holy gracious soul than blasphemy and dishonour done to God.

<1417> PSALM 44:17-26

ISRAEL'S APPEAL TO GOD

The people of God, being greatly afflicted and oppressed, here apply to him; whither else should they go?

I. By way of appeal, concerning their integrity, which he only is an infallible judge of, and which he will certainly be the rewarder of. Two things they call God to witness to: —

1. That, though they suffered these hard things, yet they kept close to God and to their duty (v. 17): “*All this has come upon us, and it is as bad perhaps as bad can be, yet have we not forgotten thee, neither cast off the thoughts of thee nor deserted the worship of thee; for, though we cannot deny but that we have dealt foolishly, yet we have not dealt falsely in thy covenant, so as to cast thee off and take to other gods. Though idolaters were our conquerors, we did not therefore entertain any more favourable thoughts of their idols and idolatries; though thou hast seemed to forsake us and withdraw from us, yet we have not therefore forsaken thee.*” The trouble they had been long in was very great: “*We have been sorely broken in the place of dragons, among men as fierce, and furious, and*

cruel, as dragons. We have been *covered with the shadow of death*, that is, we have been under deep melancholy and apprehensive of nothing short of death. We have been wrapped up in obscurity, and buried alive; and thou hast thus broken us, thou hast thus covered us (v. 19), yet we have not harboured any hard thoughts of thee, nor meditated a retreat from thy service. Though thou hast slain us, we have continued to trust in thee: *Our heart has not turned back*; we have not secretly withdrawn our affections from thee, neither have our steps, either in our religious worship or in our conversation, *declined from thy way* (v. 18), the way which thou hast appointed us to walk in.” When the heart turns back the steps will soon decline; for it is the evil heart of unbelief that inclines to depart from God. Note, We may the better bear our troubles, how pressing soever, if in them we still hold fast our integrity. While our troubles do not drive us from our duty to God we should not suffer them to drive us from our comfort in God; for he will not leave us if we do not leave him. For the proof of their integrity they take God's omniscience to witness, which is as much the comfort of the upright in heart as it is the terror of hypocrites (v. 20, 21): “*If we have forgotten the name of our God*, under pretence that he had forgotten us, or in our distress have *stretched out our hands to a strange god*, as more likely to help us, *shall not God search this out?* Shall he not know it more fully and distinctly than we know that which we have with the greatest care and diligence searched out? Shall he not judge it, and call us to an account for it?” Forgetting God was a heart-sin, and stretching out the hand to a strange god was often a secret sin, ³⁸²Ezekiel 8:12. But heart-sins and secret sins are known to God, and must be reckoned for; for *he knows the secrets of the heart*, and therefore is an infallible judge of the words and actions.

2. That they suffered these hard things because they kept close to God and to their duty (v. 22): “*It is for thy sake that we are killed all the day long*, because we stand related to thee, are called by thy name, call upon thy name, and will not worship other gods.” In this the Spirit of prophecy had reference to those who suffered even unto death for the testimony of Christ, to whom it is applied, ⁴⁸⁸Romans 8:36. So many were killed, and put to such lingering deaths, that they were in the killing all the day long; so universally was this practised that when a man became a Christian he reckoned himself as a *sheep appointed for the slaughter*.

II. By way of petition, with reference to their present distress, that God would, in his own due time, work deliverance for them.

1. Their request is very importunate: *Awake, arise*, v. 23. *Arise for our help; redeem us* (v. 26); come speedily and powerfully to our relief, ^{<800>}Psalm 80:2. *Stir up thy strength, and come and save us*. They had complained (v. 12) that God had sold them; here they pray (v. 26) that God would redeem them; for there is no appealing from God, but by appealing to him. If he sell us, it is not any one else that can redeem us; the same hand that tears must heal, that smites must bind up, ^{<801>}Hosea 6:1. They had complained (v. 9), *Thou hast cast us off*; but here they pray (v. 23), “*Cast us not off forever; let us not be finally forsaken of God.*” 2. The expostulations are very moving: *Why sleepest thou?* v. 23. He that keeps Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps; but, when he does not immediately appear for the deliverance of his people, they are tempted to think he sleeps. The expression is figurative (as ^{<805>}Psalm 78:65, *Then the Lord awaked as one out of sleep*); but it was applicable to Christ in the letter (^{<802>}Matthew 8:24); he was asleep when his disciples were in a storm, and they awoke him, saying, *Lord, save us, we perish*. “*Wherefore hidest thou thy face, that we may not see thee and the light of thy countenance?*” Or, “*that thou mayest not see us and our distresses? Thou forgettest our affliction and our oppression, for it still continues, and we see no way open for our deliverance.*” And,

3. The pleas are very proper, not their own merit and righteousness, though they had the testimony of their consciences concerning their integrity, but they plead the poor sinner's pleas.

(1.) Their own misery, which made them the proper objects of the divine compassion (v. 25): “*Our soul is bowed down to the dust* under prevailing grief and fear. We have become as creeping things, the most despicable animals: *Our belly cleaves unto the earth*; we cannot lift up ourselves, neither revive our own drooping spirits nor recover ourselves out of our low and sad condition, and we lie exposed to be trodden on by every insulting foe.”

(2.) God's mercy: “*O redeem us for thy mercies' sake*; we depend upon the goodness of thy nature, which is the glory of thy name (^{<806>}Exodus 34:6), and upon those sure mercies of David which are conveyed by the covenant to all his spiritual seed.”