

## PSALM THIRTY-NINE AND FORTY

5. The brevity of life is described with some very graphic figures: (1) A hand breadth (2) A breath (3) A shadow. Discuss the meaning to life now.
6. The *only hope* of man is in the Lord. How eternally—presently—personally true this is! Discuss by reading verses seven through eleven.
7. David says of man that he is a “house guest” of God. Read verses 12 and 13 and discuss.

## PSALM 40

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Three Stirring Reminiscences of King David's History.

### ANALYSIS

Part I., Significant Memorials of David's Coronation. Stanza I., vers. 1-3, A highly Figurative Description of David's Deliverance from being an Outlaw to being King. Stanza II., vers. 4, 5, Felicitations to All who Trust in Jehovah, prompted by David's Own Experience, awaken Glad Memories of the Past, and Adoring Anticipations of the Future. Stanzas III. and IV., vers. 6-9, 10, 11, David's Profound Apprehension of his Kingly Calling makes of him a Proclaimer of Jehovah's Righteousness to an ever-Enlarging Assembly.

Part II., A Significant fragmentary Memento of David's Sin, ver. 12.

Part III., King David in Trouble. Stanza I., vers. 13-15, Prayer against his Enemies. Stanza II., vers. 16, 17, Prayer in Favour of his Friends. In both stanzas the Note of Urgency is struck.

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(Lm.) By David—Psalm.<sup>1</sup>  
(Part I.)

- 1 I waited intently for Jehovah—  
and he inclined unto me,<sup>2</sup>
- 2 And brought me up out of the roaring<sup>3</sup> pit—  
out of the swampy mire;  
And set up on a cliff my feet—  
making firm my steps;

1. Some cod.: “Psalm—By David”—Gn.

2. M.T. adds: “and heard my cry for help.”

3. See Intro., Chap. III., “Earth.” According to a slightly different reading: “destroying.”

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- 3 And put in my mouth a new song—  
 praise unto our God:  
 Many will see and revere—  
 and trust in Jehovah.
- 4 How happy the man  
 who hath made Jehovah his trust,  
 And hath not turned aside to vanities—<sup>1</sup>  
 nor to such as are falling away to falsehood!
- 5 Many things hast thou done—  
 thou Jehovah my God!  
 Thy wondrous works and thy plans—<sup>2</sup>  
 there is no setting in order:<sup>3</sup>  
 I would tell and would speak—  
 they are too numerous to be told.
- 6 Peace-offering and grain-offering thou didst not delight in—  
 then was there a covenant for me,<sup>4</sup>  
 Ascending-sacrifice and sin-bearer thou didst not ask—  
 then didst thou command<sup>5</sup> me:
- 7 Lo! I am come—  
 in the written scroll is it prescribed to me,
- 8 Thy pleasure I delight in—  
 and thy law is in my deepest affections,<sup>6</sup>
- 9 I have heralded the good-tidings of righteousness<sup>7</sup> in a large  
 assembly—<sup>8</sup>  
 behold my lips!
- 10 I will not withhold O Jehovah thou knowest—  
 thy righteousness  
 I have not covered in the midst of my heart—  
 thy faithfulness and thy salvation;  
 I say—I have not concealed thy kindness and thy truth—  
 from a large assembly:<sup>9</sup>

1. Or: "vain idols"—reading (w. Br. and O.G.) *h b l* instead of *r h b*.  
 M.T.: "the proud."

2. M.T.: "for us"; but not in Sep.

3. M.T.: "unto thee"; and then render (w. Del. and Dr.): "there is none to be compared unto thee." But not in Sep.

4. So, in substance, Br., endeavouring to get behind, and account for, the divergence between M.T. ("ears hast thou digged for me") and Sep. ("a body hast thou fitted for me") quoted Heb. 10:5.

5. So Br., by a very slight change from M.T. For such use of 'amar, see 105:31, 34, 2 Ch. 29:24.

6. Ml.: "in the midst of mine inwards."

7. Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "righteousness."

8. Cp. 22:25, 35:18, and ver. 10 below.

9. Cp. ver. 9 above.

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- 11 Thou Jehovah wilt not withhold thy compassions from me,  
Thy kindness and thy truth will continually preserve me.

(Part II.)

- 12 Surely there closed in upon me misfortunes—  
till they were without number,  
Mine iniquities overtook me—  
and I could not see,  
More numerous were they than the hairs of my head—  
and my heart failed me.

(Part III.)

- 13 Be pleased Jehovah to rescue me—  
Jehovah to help me oh make haste!
- 14 Put to shame and abashed together be they who are seeking  
my life<sup>1</sup>  
Turned back and confounded be they who are taking pleasure  
in my hurt,
- 15 Astounded as a reward of their own shame be they who are  
saying of me—"Aha! Aha!"
- 16 Glad and joyful in thee be all who are seekers of thee,  
Let them say continually—"Jehovah be magnified" who are  
lovers of thy salvation.
- 17 Since I am humbled and needy may my Sovereign Lord<sup>2</sup>  
devise for me!  
Since my help and deliverer thou art my God! do not tarry.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

## PARAPHRASE

### PSALM 40

I waited patiently for God to help me; then He listened and heard my cry.

2 He lifted me out of the pit of despair, out from the bog and the mire, and set my feet on a hard, firm path and steadied me as I walked along.

3 He has given me a new song to sing, of praises to our God. Now many will hear of the glorious things He did for

1. U.: "soul." M.T. adds: "to snatch it away." Not in 70:2.

2. Some cod. (w. 7 ear. pr. edns.): "may Jehovah"—Gn.

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me, and stand in awe before the Lord, and put their trust in Him.

4 Many blessings are given to those who trust the Lord, and have no confidence in those who are proud, or who trust in idols.

5 Our Lord my God, many and many a time You have done great miracles for us, and we are ever in Your thoughts. Who else can do such glorious things? No one else can be compared with You. There isn't time to tell of all Your wonderful deeds.

6 It isn't sacrifices and offerings which You really want from Your people. Burnt animals bring no special joy to Your heart. But You have accepted the offer of my lifelong service.<sup>1</sup>

7 Then I<sup>2</sup> said, "See, I have come, just as all the prophets foretold.

8 And I delight to do Your will, my God; for Your law is written upon My heart!"

9 I have told everyone the Good News that You forgive men's sins.<sup>3</sup> I have not been timid about it, as You well know, O Lord.

10 I have not kept this Good News<sup>2</sup> hidden in my heart, but have proclaimed Your lovingkindness and truth to all the congregation.

11 O Lord, don't hold back Your tender mercies from me! My only hope is in Your love and faithfulness!

12 Otherwise I perish, for problems far too big for me to solve are piled higher than my head. Meanwhile my sins, too many to count, have all caught up with me and I am ashamed to look up. My heart quails within me.

13 Please, Lord, rescue me! Quick! Come and help me!

14, 15 Confuse them! Turn them around and send them sprawling—all these who are trying to destroy me. Disgrace these scoffers with their utter failure!

16 But may the joy of the Lord be given to everyone who loves Him and His salvation. May they constantly exclaim, "How great God is!"

17 I am poor and needy, yet the Lord is thinking about me right now! O my God, You are my helper; You are my Savior; come quickly, and save me. Please don't delay!

1. Literally, "My ears You have dug."

2. This verse was quoted by Christ as applying to Himself. See John 4:34.

3. Literally, "Your righteousness."

## PSALM FORTY EXPOSITION

Not only is there no sufficient internal evidence to throw doubt upon the Davidic authorship of this psalm; but the assumption of the correctness of the superscription *By David* probably leads to a clearer insight into the bearing of the different parts, and a firmer grasp of the unity of the whole, than can by any other means be obtained. Who ever *waited* more *intently* for anything than David for the kingship of Israel? How could more suitable images be found to picture the trials through which he had to pass on his way to the kingdom, when endlessly harassed by King Saul, than those of the *swampy mire* and the *engulfing pit*? How can he better represent the completeness of his deliverance from these trying delays, than to represent him as having his feet at length *set high upon a cliff* and a *new song put into his mouth*,—his exaltation being seen and known of all men? Moreover the very figures employed strongly remind us of David's great song preserved in Psalm 18. Assuredly David could speak from experience of the *happiness* of *trusting* in *Jehovah*—he never turned aside to the *vanities* and *falsehood* of *idolatry*; and, when once finally delivered, how *many things* had he to tell of signal mercies in the past—things already done,—and *wonderful plans* yet to be carried forward into fulfilment! It is, however, when we reach the stanza (III.) regarding *sacrifices*, that we are most impressed. It was on this rock of sacrifice, that David's predecessor Saul struck his foot to his grievous injury: he could not trust *Jehovah's will* as prophetically made known to him through Samuel, and so he took the priestly law into his own hand, and brought on himself the severe reprimand of Samuel:—

Doth that which is pleasing unto Jehovah consist in  
ascending-offerings and sacrifices,  
So much as in hearkening unto the voice of Jehovah?  
Lo! to hearken is better than sacrifice,  
And to give heed, than the fat of rams.

We must surely be short-sighted not to discover in these ringing tones of remonstrance the very *motif* of the stanza before us: the which, indeed, sounds like a glorified revulsion from the sin of Saul. For a king after his own heart, Jehovah has other and nobler work to do, than the slaughter of animals in ritual worship. He has to set before priests and people the sublimer

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example of loving Jehovah's will supremely, and doing it; *delighting* in it, embedding it *in his deepest affections*, and heralding the good-tidings of it to such a *large assembly* as a king could easily command, whether at Hebron or at Jerusalem. This, indeed, had been prescribed to him in the *written scroll*: how he was to write out the law, that he might have it ever by him, and read therein daily, and revere Jehovah his God, and keep his statutes, and not be lifted up above his brethren (Deu. 17:18-20); and now he solemnly *covenants* that he will do it—that it will be his *delight* to do it; yea, moreover, he *proclaims* his delight in an *assembly so large*, that those who cannot hear his voice may at least witness the movements of his covenanting lips—*Behold my lips!* Moreover, the very *righteousness* which he pledges himself to proclaim is glorified on his covenanting lips; for it is no longer merely the obedience of Israel to the *law*, but the *faithfulness* of God to Israel. First and foremost, it is Jehovah's faithfulness to himself, in giving him the kingship at last, after so long keeping him waiting for it. And so law is turned into Gospel: David declares that the righteousness which he will herald, will be *good-tidings*. And so it will; and therefore his eagerness to proclaim it overflows into another stanza: that he may call Jehovah to witness that he will not *conceal* such a *righteousness* as falls nothing short of *kindness, faithfulness and salvation*. Sure the singer is: That if he *withhold* not his testimony to Jehovah's law and providence, so neither will Jehovah *withhold* his *compassions, his kindness, his truth, his preservation*. And if that does not amount to a Coronation Oath and a Kingly *Covenant*,—we may boldly ask what would. And before a *large assembly* too!

Thus freely have we woven into our Exposition the word *covenant* as shrewdly conjectured by Dr. Briggs to have been the word originally employed by the psalmist in the place where now the M.T. and the Sep. unfortunately differ; and, indeed, when the consonants of *krth* and *brth* (which are in question in the doubtful place in the text), are compared in Hebrew as coming extremely near to each other, there need be little surprise felt that such a transcriptional error should have crept in. At any rate, the word *covenant* bids fair to fill so effectively the place here assigned it, that still another covenant strain of thought is now in addition suggested, as extremely pertinent to this very juncture in David's life and this precise place in his writings: *then had I a covenant*. When David came to the

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throne, then was granted to him the covenant concerning his seed—reaching out to and including the Messiah—which the prophet Nathan propounded according to 2 Sam. 7. As much as to say: The grand purpose of Jehovah, even in ordaining sacrifices, being to educate Israel to love and practise his will; and then, in providing an approved King, his purpose being still the same; there was vouchsafed to that King the covenant to bring forth out of his family the Messiah, who should still further throw animal sacrifices into the shade, and still further commend and advance the grand principle of doing and delighting in Jehovah's will, as his people's highest satisfaction and blessedness. So much for the first Part of our psalm.

Turning now to the second Part (ver. 12), which we have not hesitated to call a mere fragment,—it is obvious to observe what an important fragment it is, and what an essential link it furnishes in any comprehensive survey of David's reign. *Misfortunes closed in upon him*, even after he had become Israel's king:—wherefore? Alas! *his iniquities overtook him*; and the sad fact was that he had committed them. And they dimmed his spiritual vision—*he could not see*. It may be, that the larger offences brought to mind the smaller which had opened the door to the larger; and were in turn followed by the smaller though very grievous sins of persistence, impenitence, denial, prevarication, hardness of heart, disparagement of spiritual blessedness; until at length, now that remorse is setting in, they appear *more numerous than the hairs of his head*. And when to all things else the humbled man adds his confession that *his heart failed him*, we are probably to understand—not merely that his courage failed him, which may very well have been included, but—that his *mental powers* failed him, for such is the comprehensiveness of the Hebrew word for *heart*. And, perhaps, it is precisely to this dimming of spiritual vision, this failure of mental power, that we are to attribute that spiritual vacillation—that failure to hold steadfastly to Messianic hopes—which at the close of Ps. 39 struck us as so remarkable.

Happily, the humbled and forgiven soul returns to its God; and though troubles abound, and enemies appear, and base souls point the tongue and finger of scorn at the late offending monarch, yet prayer is once more brought into active exercise; and if there are men who rejoice in iniquity, there are also men who sympathisingly rejoice in the truth: the scoffers may, to their shame, cry "Aha! Aha!"; but the godly and considerate

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exclaim, to the increase of holy joy, *Jehovah be magnified!* And so the *humbled and needy* king is encouraged to seek with new faith and hope for *speedy help* from the God of his *salvation*.

Satisfactory as it thus appears to trace each successive part of the psalm to David's own composing, it is by no means certain that David himself brought them together into one psalm as they now appear. In fact the selection of the pieces for permanent Temple worship, and the welding them into one, seem naturally to fall to Hezekiah, whose practised judgment would on the one hand suggest that Parts I. and III. required Part II. to unite them; and on the other hand recommend the detachment of Part III. as now Ps. 70 for occasional separate use.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The fortieth psalm above many others lends itself to what should be, and could be the testimony of every Christian. Discuss this possibility.
2. In what horrible pit had David found himself? There are two outstanding possibilities. Show how God delivered him. The deliverance was not by man's time, nor method.
3. David had often sung of God's deliverance—but this time it was to be a "new" song. Discuss the uniqueness of this song. Cf. Ps. 18.
4. There is no power like that of the personal testimony of deliverance from the power of sin. Men of the world have from the beginning "marvelled"—Does this have meaning for everyone? How did this especially apply to David?
5. We can catch a glimpse of the type of man God had in David—it would have been easy to listen to the promptings of pride that he, David, had done nothing amiss in the pursuit by Saul—and therefore the only language Saul could understand was to meet force with force—why didn't David thus respond? Discuss.
6. Read John 4:34, as related to this psalm—and also Rotherham's comments as they relate these verses (6-8) to David. Discuss their possible two-fold application.
7. "The Lord asks not for oblation, but for obedience". Read Hebrews 10:5-9 for an example. Why do we hesitate to obey? Is it too dull to obey and too exciting not to? Will we miss something if we do not disobey? Discuss this: The Devil's biggest and oldest lie.



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8. The words of Scroggie are so good as related to the last section of this psalm—(11-17)—“If life were but one battle (and how we often wish it were) we could put off our armor when it was won, but as life is a campaign we can never afford to do that; we must be *ever* watchful, and *ever* prayerful, an *dever* hopeful.” (*Ibid* p. 235) Read these verses and discuss how the above comment applies.

## PSALM 41

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Regretting that Enemies and Friends should meanly Rejoice in his Sickness, the Psalmist nevertheless Perseveres in Prayer for Pardon and Recovery.

### ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, The Blessings that Might have been Won by being Considerate to a Sick Man. Stanza II., ver. 4, The Sick Man Prays for Pardon and Healing. Stanza III., vers. 5-9, How both Enemies and a Particular Friend have turned against him in his Affliction. Stanza IV., vers. 10-12, Prayer for Restoration Rises to Strong Assurance. *Doxology* (ver. 13).

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 How happy is he who is considerate towards the helpless!<sup>1</sup>  
in the day of calamity Jehovah will deliver him,  
2 Jehovah will preserve him and keep him alive—  
he shall be called happy in the land.  
Do not then give him up to the desire<sup>2</sup> of his enemies!  
3 Jehovah will sustain him on a bed of sickness:  
All his lying down hast thou transformed in his disease!  
4 I have said—“Jehovah! be gracious unto me,  
heal thou my soul<sup>3</sup> for I have sinned against thee.”  
5 Mine enemies keep saying—“It is bad with him!<sup>4</sup>  
when will he die and his name perish?”

1. “Or, perhaps, *the weakly*”—Dr. “The afflicted”—Del.

2. U.: “Soul.” Cp. Intro. Chap. III., “Soul.”

3. Or: “person.” “The soul is the man’s whole ‘self’; the living personality which results from the union of spirit and flesh”—Kp.

4. M.T. “me.” Only the difference (in the length of a stroke) between *yod* and *waw*.