

Messianic Psalms Psalm 41

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Welcome to this “Truth for Today” message. Before we start considering Psalm 41, let us remind ourselves about the ‘Book of Psalms.’ The ‘Book of Psalms’ consists of five sub-divisions known also as books, and Psalm 41 is the last psalm in the first book of the sub-divisions.

There are 150 psalms in total, and it is generally accepted that there are 16 psalms considered to be Messianic. Now the psalms are often known as the “Songs of Israel”, and many are written to the Chief Musician (Choir master). As a general theme the psalms reflect Old Testament attitudes such as vengeance upon the enemies of Israel, not a Christian attitude which is to show love to all people regardless of their attitude to God, Christians, and Christianity.

The psalms reflect the experiences of the writers, but as with all Scripture, the Holy Spirit not only guides the writing to reflect those experiences but often gives other teaching. Such teaching has been taken up to give comfort and encouragement to believers down the ages. Also there are those psalms that have a direct bearing upon the Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ, hence the term Messianic psalms. Some psalms may be totally Messianic, whilst others may only have one verse, but all fit into the life of the Lord Jesus either while he was in this world as the lowly man of Nazareth, or are linked to His coming glory. Psalm 41 fits in with the former, and verse 9 was fulfilled just before the Lord Jesus was crucified. Before proceeding further, the Scriptures quoted will be from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

The setting of Psalm 41

This psalm was written by King David to the Chief musician, therefore it would be sung or chanted by a choir. The content of the psalm is linked with the time when his son Absalom had turned the people of Israel away from David in order to rebel and overthrow his own father and claim the throne for himself.

The end of the previous psalm, again David the writer, mentions that he is “poor and needy.” There it has the thought of being oppressed, whereas as we open Psalm 41, David is considering those who are not well off and in need of support financially or in some other way. It is about showing kindness and we can well identify with this attitude today with ‘food banks’ and other schemes to support those not so well off, and the unemployed. The Jewish people were expected to help those who had fallen upon hard times. At the same time the LORD would look favourably upon those who acted in a kind and charitable way. David was therefore expecting the LORD to now help him in his time of trouble. The first verse is a clue to the bearing of the psalm.

Let us read v1.

“TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID. Blessed is the one who considers the poor! In the day of trouble the LORD delivers him” (Psalm 41:1).

This aspect of David’s life is not seen in the historical books where David is mainly presented as the warrior king defeating the enemies of his God and of the people of Israel. But now he considers that he needs help from the LORD to be delivered from his enemies. As we move to verse 2, we have this theme continues.

“The LORD protects him and keeps him alive; he is called blessed in the land; you do not give him up to the will of his enemies” (Psalm 41:2).

David has the confidence of the LORD’s protection, keeping him alive and that he will not be handed over to the will of his enemies. It will be as well to state again at this point that David’s enemies were being led by his own son Absalom. Absalom had turned the hearts of the people after himself, and as we will see he picks a time to start his revolt when his father David is weak. But David has a resource which Absalom did not have, the LORD was on his side, v.3.

“The LORD sustains him on his sickbed; in his illness you restore him to full health” (Psalm 41:3).

We are not told about the illness that had afflicted David but again his confidence is in the LORD for recovery and that the rebellion will be put down. We can see how Absalom uses this very time to rebel against his father. Absalom knows full well that his father is a man of war, see (2 Samuel 17:8 & 1 Chronicles 28:3) but lying ill in bed is not a suitable way to lead an army into battle! Absalom thinks he has picked the ideal time for the rebellion because his father is sick, and David’s loyal men of war will be leaderless. Verse 4 states,

“As for me, I said, “O LORD, be gracious to me; heal me, for I have sinned against you!”” (Psalm 41:4).

Here in verse 4, David may well be referring back to his crime of murder against his faithful servant Uriah the Hittite, even though God has forgiven him, or to the disorder in his own house regarding crimes which went unpunished. But this is the cry of a repentant man who falls upon the grace of the LORD to bring healing into his life. The words, “heal me”, in the Hebrew, mean “heal my soul.” So, this sickness that had come upon David went deeper than physical ill health, it touches upon his spiritual relationship with the LORD. Very possibly David was out of communion with the LORD and his life was just drifting along. Today we might say that David was like those who have forsaken meeting together in happy fellowship with other ‘likeminded’ believers.

In verse 5 David continues talking to the LORD,

“My enemies say of me in malice, “When will he die and his name perish?”” (Psalm 41:5).

David’s illness would seem to be severe that those who were his enemies expected him to die and not only die but that his name would be forgotten. The enemies of David were expecting a new reign to come about and the old order of things to fade into history. This is compounded by David’s enemies actually coming to see him, as verses 6 – 8 show.

“And when one comes to see me, he utters empty words, while his heart gathers iniquity; when he goes out, he tells it abroad. All who hate me whisper together about me; they imagine the worst for me. They

say, "A deadly thing is poured out on him; he will not rise again from where he lies"" (Psalm 41:6-8).

In these three verses there are those who are plotting to overthrow king David. They come to see him and utter empty platitudes but once they leave the bedside of the king the wickedness of their hearts manifests itself. They are happy to spread the rumours about David that something deadly has come upon him, and they say he will not rise from his sickness. So, they are expecting his death at any moment. Finally, in verse 9 we find that David is aware of one he considered to be his friend siding with the rebellion.

"Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9).

David describes this person as a close friend, they fellowshiped together enjoying each other's company at mealtimes. David had trusted him and had possibly discussed matters of state with him, seeking his advice. Now David realises that he is one of the conspirators who is seeking his downfall. David is probably referring here to Ahithophel as we find in 2 Samuel 15:12,

"And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel, David's counsellor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing" (2 Samuel 15:12).

Chapter 15 outlines for us the conspiracy led by Absalom as it grows stronger and he seeks out David's counsellor and friend, Ahithophel. Absalom wants inside information about David and how he is likely to react to the rebellion. We will see later that Ahithophel had his own reasons for hating David. From 2 Samuel 15:13 David realises that the rebellion is taking place after having received a messenger who reports the uprising. At this point David decides to leave the city Jerusalem with all who are loyal to him to go into the wilderness for safety. As this was happening news comes to David regarding Ahithophel. David's responds with prayer.

"And it was told David, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." And David said, "O LORD, please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness"" (2 Samuel 15:31).

In this verse we get David's prayer to bring the counsel of Ahithophel to nothing or foolishness. It is in 2 Samuel 17 that David's loyal counsellor, Hushai, is used to bring down the counsel of Ahithophel. In the same chapter Ahithophel realises that his counsel has been rejected, returns home and, after putting his house in order, hangs himself. Ahithophel probably always had a desire to revenge the wrong done to his family because Bathsheba was his granddaughter. David had had an adulterous relationship with Bathsheba and had arranged for her husband to be murdered. We get the connection when we bring two Scriptures together.

"And David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"" (2 Samuel 11:3).

"Eliam the son of Ahithophel of Gilo" (2 Samuel 23:34).

Eliam and Uriah are two of David's mighty men, warriors of great prowess but this does not stop David giving way to his lustful passion. In chapter 23 above we have the link to Ahithophel. In our psalm David describes Ahithophel's action that he "lifted his heel against me." We might describe his actions as a stab in the back. David's response is in verse 10.

“But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them!” (Psalm 41:10).

Once again in Psalm 41 David’s turns to the only sure resource and seeks the LORD’s gracious help to be raised up to health and strength that he may repay his enemies. Verse 11 further describes David’s confidence in the LORD.

“By this I know that you delight in me: my enemy will not shout in triumph over me” (Psalm 41:11).

In this way David will know that the LORD delights in him and that there will be no victory for his enemies. Although David had failed many times, yet he can with confidence say, in verse 12,

“But you have upheld me because of my integrity, and set me in your presence forever” (Psalm 41:12).

David is described as a man after God’s own heart (1 Samuel 13:14). He knew he was right with his God, no matter what happened, and looked forward to being in God’s presence forever. Finally, verse 13 is a fitting burst of praise to both close this Psalm and the first book in the Psalms. So, with this burst of praise we see David anticipating the answers to his requests before they come about.

“Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen” (Psalm 41:13).

Messianic Application

Now that we have looked at the historical setting of the Psalm, let us consider which verses apply to our Lord Jesus Christ in His life down here upon earth. There is one verse that aligns itself with Judas Iscariot, verse 9, which historically spoke of Ahithophel. However, there are other verses that were true of the Lord in His life here. For example verse 1, “Blessed is the one who considers the poor!” reminds me of the answer the Lord Jesus gave to the disciples of John the Baptist.

“And he answered them, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them”” (Luke 7:2).

There are five groups of people who have lost something, their sight, ability to walk, health and hearing, the dead, and some are impoverished. The sixth group are lacking in financial means. Five groups of people have restored to them their physical loss and the sixth group are given the treasure that can bring the wealth of heaven to them. In terms of the Saviour himself He seems to have been without money as on one occasion He asks the people to show Him a coin to press home the point of rendering to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and to God the things that are God’s. Another occasion, in relation to taxes He directs Peter to go and fish, Peter then finds a coin in the mouth of a fish to pay the tax for both himself and Lord.

The general tenor of the Psalmist’s enemies in some of the verses in this Psalm can be seen in the hatred that the chief priests and scribes, Sadducees and Pharisees had for the Lord Jesus. Verse 5, “When shall he die and his name perish” could be linked with John 18:14.

“It was Caiaphas who advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people” (John 18:14).

We now come to the verse which brings us clearly to Judas Iscariot. Verse 9 speaks of David's friend, and how David must have felt the betrayal despite the link between Bathsheba and Ahithophel. But David's experience is but a faint illustration of the hurt felt by the Lord Jesus regarding Judas.

Whenever we have the disciples listed in the synoptic gospels, Judas is always placed last and referred to as the one who would betray the Lord Jesus or as having a devil. However, Judas was given every opportunity to truly believe in the Lord Jesus as the other disciples had. At some point he was given the responsibility of being the Lord's treasurer. He was used by the Lord to go out with the other eleven disciples to proclaim the good news of the kingdom and to heal the sick. However, even this did not touch the heart of Judas. Matthew 26 records the turning point in the life of Judas.

“Then one of the twelve, whose name was Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, “What will you give me if I deliver him over to you?” And they paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he sought opportunity to betray him” (Matthew 26:14-16).

John 13:2 states,

“During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him” (John 13:2).

This shows how much the devil had control over Judas. In this next Scripture we have a clearest link to Psalm 41.

““I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.” After saying these things, Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and testified, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” The disciples looked at one another, uncertain of whom he spoke. One of his disciples, whom Jesus loved, was reclining at table close to Jesus, so Simon Peter motioned to him to ask Jesus of whom he was speaking. So that disciple, leaning back against Jesus, said to him, “Lord, who is it?” Jesus answered, “It is he to whom I will give this morsel of bread when I have dipped it.” So, when he had dipped the morsel, he gave it to Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot. Then after he had taken the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. Some thought that, because Judas had the money bag, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast,” or that he should give something to the poor. So, after receiving the morsel of bread, he immediately went out. And it was night” (John 13:18-30).

In this Scripture we have the Lord Jesus quoting from Psalm 41:9. Where David referred to Ahithophel, the Lord refers to Judas. In the above Scripture the Lord clearly told Judas that He knew what he was going to do and yet this did not make him stop and think seriously about his intended actions. Up to the point of leaving the upper room Judas could have repented, but he did not. So, there was no going back for this traitor. [Matthew records that Judas was aware of what he was going to do, and the Lord also knew of his treacherous intentions.](#)

“When it was evening, he reclined at table with the twelve. And as they were eating, he said, “Truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me.” And they were very sorrowful and began to say to him one after another, “Is it I, Lord?” He answered, “He who has dipped his hand in the dish with me will betray me. The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that man if he had not been born.” Judas, who would betray him, answered, “Is it I, Rabbi?” He said to him, “You have said so”” (Matthew 26:20-25).

The next time we encounter Judas is in the garden coming with a great multitude to apprehend the Lord Jesus.

“While he was still speaking, Judas came, one of the twelve, and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; seize him.” And he came up to Jesus at once and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” And he kissed him. Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him” (Matthew 26:47-50).

The Lord was taken away to appear before the religious leaders. By now Judas was a bystander to the events up to the point when Jesus was condemned and led away to the Roman governor Pilate. Now Judas realises that the Lord Jesus was not going to free Himself from this situation. Matthew records,

“When morning came, all the chief priests and the elders of the people took counsel against Jesus to put him to death. And they bound him and led him away and delivered him over to Pilate the governor. Then when Judas, his betrayer, saw that Jesus was condemned, he changed his mind and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders, saying, “I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.” They said, “What is that to us? See to it yourself.” And throwing down the pieces of silver into the temple, he departed, and he went and hanged himself” (Matthew 27:1-5).

Just as Ahithophel saw that his counsel was rejected, he returned home setting his affairs in order before hanging himself, so here, Judas seeing that the events were not turning out as he thought, tried to reverse the situation by returning the thirty pieces of silver. But the chief priests would not be turned from their evil plans, and so Judas goes out and hangs himself. In so doing Judas launches himself into a lost eternity forever condemned.

Lessons to learn

Judas made a great show of appearing to be a true follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. As treasurer he stole money that he was given. He had observed how Jesus could remove Himself from dangerous situations in the past. No doubt putting these two things together, he may well have thought that Jesus would do the same again and that he could cover up his theft with the thirty pieces of silver so no one would know he had been stealing. What he did not realise was that this was the hour that had been appointed for the Lord to deal with the issue of sin, which is so abhorrent to God, as well as a barrier to the true and lasting salvation available for people who would truly believe on Jesus.

Many people believe that when they die that they will automatically go to heaven because God is a loving God. But this does not take account of how God hates sin, and that the solution is Jesus,

the only way to obtain salvation. Salvation is only available while we are alive, it is then that we can make the choice of confessing our sins and accepting Jesus into hearts. We cannot live how we like and assume everything will be alright for us after we have died. Therefore, for anyone listening to this broadcast who has not trusted Jesus as their Saviour, now is the time to do so.

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