

“I acted this way for these reasons,” meaning, “I necessarily did it for these reasons.”

Then, to bring out the reasonableness of hope in God, he goes on to say *Let your mercy be shown to us, Lord, as we have hoped in you* (v. 22): let your lovingkindness therefore be upon us, as we too have hoped. Now, what is the meaning of *as we have hoped*? Since he said above, We waited for assistance from you as a helper, as a protector, as one able to provide joy, he went on, Provide us with your mercy as we have hoped—that is, As helper, as protector, as one giving joy to our hearts, as one being our all and supplying us with all, so now, too, be favorable to us. After all, we thus hoped in you, and it is right for us to be accorded your gift given in consequence of our hope.

PSALM 34

Here, too, he prophesies things in accord with the psalm before this, taking the part of Hezekiah in offering up this psalm as some sentiments of thanksgiving to the Lord.¹ On the basis of the present theme he instructs everyone, even if surrounded by troubles, to look to God for help, through whom they will always attain good things. He also at this point declares blessed those hoping in God, since hope in God is capable of providing them with many good things. | He offers also a catechetical exhortation, teaching all those to

1. In addition to this introduction from Codex Coislinianus, Devreesse offers also one from other Greek MSS that he considers “better adapted to the theme” (*Le commentaire*, 157), as follows: “After the exhortation from Hezekiah, as it were, he cites his own story in support of the exhortation and states how God will assist them if they are careful to hope in him, using the present theme and the events affecting Hezekiah to explain the manner of assistance that God doubtless will supply to those hoping in him. Hence, he says that the angel of the Lord will encircle those who fear him and will rescue them.”

practice reverence who would feel the influence of God's providence as a result of it and be rescued by him from troubles, even if often tested in the midst of perils.

I shall bless the Lord at every moment (v. 1). By *I shall bless* he means "I shall praise, sing praise," and by *at every moment*, "in times both of relaxation and of tribulation." Now, this is particularly applicable to Hezekiah: even when in trouble, with the Assyrians surrounding him, he turned to prayer to God. So it was right to apply *at every moment to him*, even after the victory, since even at the time of calamity he did not forget hymn-singing to God.² *Praise of him always in my mouth*: I shall continue singing his praises always, giving my mouth no respite from this. The sequel explains why he is so earnest in hymn-singing.

In the Lord my soul will be commended (v. 2), by *commended* meaning "glorified, admired," and *my soul* meaning "I," referring to the whole person by soul as in the verse "Jacob went down into Egypt with seventy-five souls."³ Hence, he is saying, I shall sing his praises incessantly, since with his help I have emerged as the cynosure of all eyes. It made sense for him to say this: it was inevitable that, after God had slain so many on account of his care for him and the deed had been bruited abroad, he would be the object of everyone's commendation for the Lord's taking retribution on so many in one fell swoop. Then, after giving the reason for the unceasing thanksgiving, he proceeds to bring out the greatness of the deed. | *Let the gentle hear and*

2. Cf. Isa 38:10–20.

3. Cf. Gen 46:27 LXX.

4): because I sought help from him, and I received what I sought. *And from the midst of all my tribulations he rescued me:* and he freed me from all the troubles besetting me.⁴ So why does he say this to the gentle? Because on asking, you received help from him, and so they sing with you.

Approach him and be enlightened (v. 5): it is possible also for you likewise, when you approach him and ask help from him, to attain help and support. By *be enlightened* he means “enjoy his help,” and by *enlightenment* he refers here to support in being released from tribulation, which can envelop one in depression like darkness. *And your faces will not blush:* nor is it possible for you when expecting and looking forward to help from him to be disappointed in your hope in him. He said *your faces*, since whenever we expect someone, we normally lift up our faces in expectation of that person’s arrival. *This poor man cried out, and the Lord hearkened to him, and saved him from all his tribulations* (v. 6). Once again he reverts to himself, right throughout the exhortation providing a proof of what was said from his own situation. It is clear, he is saying, that there is no doubt that he assists those hoping in him, among whom is this insignificant and lowly person. What he means is, I cried to the Lord, and was heard and rescued from all my tribulation. Now, he refers to himself as *poor* for the reason of his being most poor in his own power and the insignificance of his subjects when compared with the power of the Assyrians, who | were notorious for the size of their army

4. Theodore clearly is reading the verse in the Antioch form of the LXX (*pace* Devreesse), as do Diodore and Theodoret, in which “tribulations” occurs.

and famous for the number of their horses.

Then he continues on the same theme in what follows. *An angel of the Lord will encamp round those who fear him, and will rescue them* (v. 7). He promises that an angel of God will be an ally surrounding and assisting them, and thus rescuing them from every tribulation (by *encamp* meaning “be an ally,” since the divine Scripture normally calls armies “encampments”). Now, this happened in the case of Hezekiah: an angel of the Lord struck the Assyrians⁵ and freed his people from their troubles. The term *round* means that great security would come to them from the angel’s help—a claim made on the basis of those on the inside and surrounded by the security of a wall or people being invulnerable to the adversaries. After addressing himself above simply to the gentle, here he says *round those who fear him*, lest you should think that his remarks are addressed simply to all the insignificant rather than to all who adopt lowliness of heart by choice and are fond of physical insignificance while evincing fear of the Lord.

He then promises those hoping in God that if they are the object of the enemies’ schemes, help will be provided by the angel, since such a thing happened also in the case of Hezekiah, and by mention of what was said strictly of him it provided a proof and guarantee of the promise. He says *Taste and see that the Lord is good* (v. 8): for proof that this is so and that an angel is an ally to those fearing him and freeing them from every tribulation, receive confirmation from recent events. The word *taste*—that is, receive confirmation from the facts—comes from honey and wine and such things as are sweet to taste or the opposite for those experiencing them. After saying *taste and see* by way of proof of the angel’s assistance, he goes on to say *the Lord is good*, meaning that in his goodness and kindness he provides the angel’s assistance to the recipients of his favor. | *Blessed is the man who*

5. Cf. 2 Kgs 19:35.

hopes in him. After the proof of what was said he did well to deliver the beatitude when to the listeners the beatitude did not seem to be ambiguous: after recommending hope in God, saying that they doubtless would gain help, and confirming the truth of the matter as if by proof, he went on to say *Blessed is the man who hopes in him*, meaning that, with things as they were, the one hoping in God was considered blessed in being the recipient of such great help.

Fear the Lord, all you his holy ones (v. 9). He refers to the same people as *gentle, fearing the Lord* and *holy*, by *gentle* referring to the person who becomes such by simplicity of behavior and is necessarily like this from fear of the Lord. It is clear that the one who fears the Lord is a careful observer of his commandments and naturally shares also in his holiness. Now, there is a definite order in his statements: he first bid them praise God with him, since God doubtless saves such people, and they necessarily enjoy his grace while being vouchsafed the gift that is in keeping with their behavior. Next, he exhorts them and strengthens their hope in God, hope being needed for those due to glorify God with him for such things so as with a strong hope thus to give thanks for what occurred, believing that they also would be granted similar things at the right time. Hence, by also making their hope stronger, he convinces them of it with proofs from past events and with appropriate beatitudes. After the strengthening of their hope and the exhortation to hymn-singing he bids them also fear the Lord in the words *Fear the Lord, all you his holy ones* to bring out the need for hymns, hope, and fear—hymns to show themselves thankful also for what has already occurred, hope to prove themselves worthy of what is to come, and fear so as to be attentive to virtue. Because those who fear him *want for nothing*—that is, the fear of God is not without benefit to those who possess it, but is very advantageous, since they lack no good thing. |

teach you the fear of the Lord was well put: since he had said above *Fear the Lord, all you his holy ones*, lest he seem to confine the fear of the Lord to the holy ones, he invites all to attention in the words *Come, learn fear*—in other words, acquaintance with fear is necessary and useful for everyone. Hence, when he mentions holy ones, he says not *I shall teach you*, but simply *Fear*, such people requiring only a reminder, whereas when he gives his exhortation to everyone, then he adds *I shall teach*, since they are in need of teaching, this being required by the general run of people.

Who is the person who chooses life, who loves to see good days? (v. 12). After the invitation and promise to teach, he necessarily proposes this before the teaching, relating the outcome to each one's purpose. If there is someone, he therefore is saying, who is longing for life and desirous of *good days*—that is, relaxation and enjoyment of good things from God—let them be instructed in what is said. He shows that along with his teaching there is need also of each person's enthusiasm, and from this the response comes to the one who is willing. He then goes on to supply the teaching itself. |

Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking guile (v. 13). Since he intended on the basis of what happened to Hezekiah to mention both God's beneficence and his punishment, naturally in forbidding evil he particularly forbade them that which was committed by the Assyrians and brought them the heavy sentence of punishment. So renounce every inopportune word, he is saying, and be careful to rid yourself of all guile. This vice in particular, in fact, was committed by Rabshakeh, who was saying vile things when with arrogant tongue he threatened to destroy the city and claimed that God was powerless, and even stated that the king of the Assyrians controlled everything and God was incapable of protecting them, as the power of their gods had been of no benefit to the other nations.⁶ He spoke falsehood when he promised to give them enjoyment of a wealthy land and a taste of many good things if they surrendered the city and accepted the king.

Turn away from evil and do good (v. 14): not only desist from evil, this not being enough, but take care also about doing good. *Seek peace and go after it*. Everywhere the inspired author blames the Assyrians for being bellicose; so he is consistent in also forbidding this passion to them, as it was for being addicted to it in particular that the former suffered the heaviest punishment. So he urges them to be peaceable and friendly toward all, and to hate war, disputes, and the like. Why it is necessary to desist from evil with great earnestness and in the future pursue whatever is good he explains by commenting on what happened in the case of the Assyrians and the Israelites as something done by God in every such case. |

6. Cf. 2 Kgs 18:28–35.

The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous (v. 15): God takes care of the righteous (by *eyes* referring not simply to sight but also to what is done by God in beneficence and providence). *And his ears open to their appeal*: he also accepts their requests. *But the face of the Lord is on evildoers* (v. 16): but he has an eye also for the wicked, though not in the same way as for the good. To what effect? *To destroy remembrance of them from the land*: so this is the reason for you to be devoted to righteousness, because God gives evidence of great care for the righteous, accepting their supplication while completely disregarding those guilty of wrong actions and inflicting destruction on them. The facts explain what is the proof of this; the reason for his saying that this was done by God was to confirm the reality of the words by mention of it.

The righteous cried aloud, and the Lord hearkened to them; he rescued them from all their tribulations (v. 17). By *the righteous* here he refers to the Israelites, in customary manner referring to them in this way by contrast with the Assyrians on the basis of their knowledge. Lo, he hearkened to those who cried out, he is saying, freeing them from every tribulation. *The Lord is near to the contrite of heart* (v. 18): God will also take extraordinary care of all the lowly, being anxious to make them his own (by *near* referring to his disposition and attitude, and calling the lowly *contrite of heart*, since they entertain no overweening thoughts, having instead an estimation of themselves as insignificant and feeble, and forming no exalted notion of themselves, since it is our habit to refer to weakness as contrition). |

And he will save the lowly in spirit (v. 18). Here he said the same thing more clearly, showing that he did not apply the terms *lowly* and *contrite of heart* simply to those reduced to this condition from the disasters, but to those in this condition by intent and resolve. Even if tested by disasters, on the basis of their lowliness of intent they thought that they received their just deserts, asked God with due reverence for help, and received it by gift. So it clear from this that even by saying above *Let the gentle hear and be glad* he refers neither to those humbled of necessity by disasters nor to those in this condition by nature, whom the general run of good people like to think gentle, but to those in this condition in heart and purpose, who emerge by their zeal in bearing nobly the wrongs done them since they look to God for help. This, in fact, is gentleness, not being insensitive nor keeping complete silence while ignoring sensation even in situations that are often unavoidable, when it is possible to effect a greater good.

Next, since he had made an unconditional promise of God's help supplied to the righteous, whereas it often happens that the righteous are put to the test in extreme troubles and severe tribulations, he logically proceeded to say *Many are the tribulations of the righteous, and from them all he will rescue them* (v. 19): even if they are tested by many troubles and many tribulations, God allowing this to their advantage, he nevertheless definitely frees them from the troubles, not allowing them to be overcome by the disasters in the end. And since he said that even if the righteous are tested by the tribulations, God definitely will deliver them, though he allows the person tested by many tribulations, insofar as he gains help from God, also to suffer something else from the great number of tribulations. So he went on to say *The Lord protects all their bones, not one of them will be broken* (v. 20): far from simply allowing even those in tribulations to suffer under those distressing them, he rescues them after allowing the tribulations for a while to their advantage, keeps those in the midst of tribulations free from harm, and preserves their strength completely. This is the meaning of *all their bones*—that is, so that they incur no severe risk. Hence, *will not be broken* was well put, meaning “they will incur no risk,” since what is broken naturally meets with complete destruction. |

Sinners come to a bad end (v. 21). He was right to introduce the word *bad* at this point, as if to say that such people have a bad death: as he says in the case of the righteous that he will guard them even in tribulations lest they suffer any dangerous or irremediable trouble (thus explaining the extent of the providence shown them), so also in the case of sinners he says the opposite, that their death is not that of the rest of humankind or similar to theirs, but involves some further and more severe element. He explains this by reference to the way it took place in the present circumstances: whereas those in the company of blessed Hezekiah were tested by tribulation and distress when the Assyrians besieged the city yet suffered no dire or unbearable fate, the Assyrians for their part even met with a fearful death, being struck down so suddenly by the angel's assault. *Those who hate the righteous will come to grief*: not only do sinners meet such a fate, but also those hostile to the righteous will fall foul of troubles. Now, he says this to bring out the extent of the providence that God shows for the righteous. *Will come to grief* means that they will stumble, will trip up, will fail in their hostile intent against the righteous by being punished by God, *come to grief* meaning "missing the mark," which means failing to achieve a purpose and intent at odds with that prescribed—hence our calling a wrong action a sin as being at odds with the proper intention.

He asks for what purpose does this happen. *The Lord will ransom the souls of his servants* (v. 22): since the Lord frees his own servants from every calamity, it follows that those with hostile and aggressive attitudes toward them will meet with punishment. *Will ransom* means "will set free"—an expression taken from people rescuing from slavery with payment those held in captivity and enslaved undeservedly, such payments being called ransoms. | *And all who hope in him will not come to grief*: hence, those who

are hostile toward the righteous will fail in their purpose and fall foul of disasters, whereas those hoping in the Lord, kept free of every trouble, will not fail or be disappointed in their hope.

PSALM 35

In this psalm blessed David prophesies the events concerning Jeremiah. Adopting his point of view in the inspired composition, he gives voice to what he probably would have said in the situation. He employed this usage in particular in many cases, saying what was appropriate for the people to say with whom the composition deals.¹ Except for the viewpoint adopted, this psalm is no different from those dealing with the people in Babylon: the prophet lived at the same time and foretold from close at hand | the future

1. The introduction to this psalm at great length makes the point that Jeremiah is in focus; the syntax is also irregular, as comparison with the extant Latin version discloses. Diodore likewise had seen Jeremiah in focus; Theodoret, by contrast, will ignore the supposed resemblance to Jeremiah, instead relating the psalm briefly to troubles in David's own life.