

Psalm 40 – Study Guide¹

Psalm 40 again serves as tutor to our prayers, worship, understanding of God, and our understanding of struggle. Its two parts demand a measure of maturity from us, too. We will gladly have the joyful first half without its more somber second half to finish the Psalm, but The LORD would have us embrace them both as they reflect the scope of our sojourning. Not all days will end with joy, but all will end with its sure arrival.

Structure

David Crowe

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John MacArthur²

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Steven Lawson³

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ALL Scripture Quotations are from the ESV Bible unless the Scripture reference is in a quote from another author – their original translation was kept.

² The MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV. Word Bibles, 1997. (Hereafter: MacArthur), Pg.777

³ Holman Old Testament Commentary: Psalms 1-75, Volume 2. Steven J. Lawson. B&H Publishing Group, 2003 (Hereafter: Lawson), Pgs.211-213

ESV Study Bible⁴

40:1-10 Many Past Mercies to Be Thankful For

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Willem VanGemen⁵

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James Boice⁶

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Derek Kidner⁷

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Historical Context

We are again limited by way of historical context beyond affirming that David is the author and that, based off of the conclusions reached in 40:7-8, he is the seated King of Israel at the time of its composition. We know that though beloved of God, David's life was riddled with struggle and hardships – both internal and external, both on account of personal offenses and the malicious acts of others. Here we appear to have a record of David's life when he is between two seasons of struggle or perhaps more accurately two seasons of deliverance.

⁴ English Standard Version Study Bible. Crossway Bibles, 2008. (Hereafter: ESV SB) Pgs.987-988

⁵ The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Revised Edition: Psalms, Volume 5. Willem A. VanGemen. Zondervan, 2008 (Hereafter: VanGemen), Pg.364

⁶ An Expositional Commentary: Psalms, Volume 1. James Montgomery Boice. Baker Books, 1994 (Hereafter: Boice), Pgs.347,351,352

⁷ Derek Kidner; Kidner Classic Commentaries: Psalms 1-72. IVP Academic (Digital Copy), 1973. (Hereafter: Kidner), Pgs.176-179

Header

The Header of Psalm 40 provides limited information. We know that the psalm was provided for corporate worship and that it was authored by King David.

40:1-4 David's Testimony of Deliverance

40:1-2 David's Deliverance

Waiting on The LORD. Note that there is a measure of frequency with which this word is translated "hope" and, while this is not necessarily indicative that the two are absolutely synonymous, it does tend to communicate very similarly, as to wait is to have an expectation inherently within it that the waiting will have both an ending point and on some measure a preferred conclusion. Therefore, it could be stated that when one is waiting on The LORD in a matter that is consistent with his character, promise, and pattern (all identified in the Scriptures), then they wait in hope. To wait for The LORD outside of these boundaries or to wait on anything or anyone else may have a hopeful dynamic, but it is in larger measure more wishful than hopeful.

With this in view I would conclude that to wait/hope patiently in The LORD should present itself with a lack of anxiety that accompanies fear or restlessness. If waiting in a context of truth, then there is a guaranteed expectation of response. However, truth may state that the awaited reward is only guaranteed when one has completely finished their course and has joined the presence of the Lord, but truth also affirms the worth of such a wait, too.

We also observe that David was crying out to The LORD and that crying out to The LORD was not indicative of a failure to wait patiently. He cried, he waited, and The LORD inclined to him.

Incline has almost an anthropomorphic quality to it without necessarily being such. It presents a picture of bending toward, of turning, or even pitching a tent. With The LORD having inclined to David and hearing his cry it all but provides a picture of The LORD bending or turning to listen to this patient petition by a beloved child. We see this image repeatedly throughout the Psalms where it is requested that The LORD will incline his ear to hear the petition/cries of his children. The cry is a cry for help - a petition of great need, the need of deliverance and The LORD has heard.

Now, as mentioned, by way of context we do not know the struggle to which David is here having testified to being delivered from. Contextually we only know that David was magnificently delivered, but John Calvin argues that David was delivered not only from danger in general, but "present death."⁸ However, I cannot be as assertive here and am content to state that he was in a terrible situation, he cried, he was patient in waiting, The LORD heard, and The LORD delivered.

Sidebar: Patiently Waiting

David frequently testifies to The LORD's faithfulness in deliverance, here he frames it in a context of having first patiently waited. Regarding this, Calvin provides a very useful, and I believe pastoral, commentary:

"In his example there is set before us this very useful doctrine, that although God may not forthwith appear for our help, but rather of design keep us in suspense and perplexity, yet we must not lose courage, inasmuch as faith is not thoroughly tried, except by long endurance. The result, too, of which he speaks in terms of praise, ought to inspire us with increased fortitude. God may succour us more slowly than we desire, but, when he seems to take no notice of our condition, or, if we might so speak, when he seems to be inactive or to sleep, this is totally different from deceit: for if we are enabled by the invincible strength and power of faith to endure, the fitting season of our deliverance will at length arrive."⁹

The pit of destruction and miry bog. Without having the historical context, we cannot address what exactly this pit/bog were, but with the provided textual context we can deduct the following:

This pit was a devastating place or circumstance for David as he identifies it as the pit of destruction. It was not a location where endurance would have prevailed, but where he would have suffered increasing, if not final, harm upon remaining

⁸ John Calvin; Calvin's Commentaries, Volume 5 – Joshua-Psalms 36-92. Baker Books, 2003. (Hereafter: Calvin), Pg.89

⁹ Calvin, Pg.90

here. David apparently needed divine intervention to be delivered from his pit; so while it certainly could have been an exceptionally bad physical pit to have been entrapped within, it is more reasonably a metaphorical image of another natural event, a spiritual reality, or some combination of both. Having experienced The LORD's deliverance from the pit/bog David is not only drawn out, but his feet are set upon a rock with the details that his steps were made secure. Presuming that this was not a literal pit/bog the image is the stability of the rock in contrast to the instability of the pit/bog. With this in view it was a full/restorative deliverance - David was not just taken out, but taken out and secured. As John MacArthur states it: "God by His grace had taken him from no footing to sure footing."¹⁰

If the pit of destruction and the miry bog were a joint picture it may have been an empty cistern containing not water but sinking and suction-like mud. A clear picture of this and its associated danger can be observed in Jeremiah 38:6-13 where the prophet literally suffers this temporary fate before himself being delivered by others.

"So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king's son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and Jeremiah sank in the mud. When Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, a eunuch who was in the king's house, heard that they had put Jeremiah into the cistern—the king was sitting in the Benjamin Gate— Ebed-melech went from the king's house and said to the king, 'My lord the king, these men have done evil in all that they did to Jeremiah the prophet by casting him into the cistern, and he will die there of hunger, for there is no bread left in the city.' Then the king commanded Ebed-melech the Ethiopian, 'Take thirty men with you from here, and lift Jeremiah the prophet out of the cistern before he dies.' So Ebed-melech took the men with him and went to the house of the king, to a wardrobe in the storehouse, and took from there old rags and worn-out clothes, which he let down to Jeremiah in the cistern by ropes. Then Ebed-melech the Ethiopian said to Jeremiah, 'Put the rags and clothes between your armpits and the ropes.' Jeremiah did so. Then they drew Jeremiah up with ropes and lifted him out of the cistern. And Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard."

Not all concur on the cistern image. The pit of destruction has been disputed regarding its intended image and this is in no small measure on account of the Hebrew words used – whether they require or intend to communicate rushing waters or not. Calvin appears to be among the minority that see this as a pit with rushing water and it is this lexical conclusion that contributes to his conclusion that David was in imminent danger for his life.¹¹

40:3-4 Praise and Blessing of Trusting The LORD

David testifies in conjunction with his deliverance that The LORD put a new song in his mouth.

We do not have an abundance of information regarding this "new song" – details such as whether The LORD literally gave or inspired David to craft a new song, in what way it was a new song, or why a new song is simply not provided. It appears to be a demonstration provided by David who in such a magnificent way understood that a preeminent element of worship is a heart erupting in songs of thanksgiving and praise to The LORD. Remember this is a man who, having an extraordinary affection for his God, was particularly gifted in the area of music and song. He like few others would have understood this eruption of praise to God who by his very deliverance found that his soul was compelled to move his lips in a new song to The LORD.

Whereas someone else expressing your thoughts is said to have "taken the words out of your mouth," David is testifying to the very words that he would have longed to express having been put into his mouth.

David is praising God for his deliverance and stability, deliverance that it appears that he cried to The LORD for and then waited patiently to receive. David cried. David waited. The LORD delivered. The LORD gave David a song of praise. Now... Many will see and fear and put their trust in The LORD. This worshipful response and thanksgiving has served an effectual example to others who themselves will also now fear and trust The LORD.

¹⁰ MacArthur, Pg.777

¹¹ Calvin, Pgs.90-91

A New Song

Of its seven Old Testament references, "new song" is recorded six of those times in the Psalms. Psalm 33:3 a psalm of abundant praise to God

Psalm 40:3

Psalm 96:1 A psalm of abundant praise to God.

Psalm 98:1 A psalm of abundant praise to God.

Psalm 144:9 A psalm of praise in deliverance and good provision.

Psalm 149:1 A psalm of abundant praise to God.

Isaiah 42:10 A context of The LORD's might and kindness in restoration/care.

Regarding Worshipful Singing

We would do well to remember that while needing nothing, what The LORD would expect/desire in response to deliverance is praise and thanksgiving. This is not only proper, but its absence is all but unnatural. "As often, therefore, as he bestows benefits upon us, so often does he open our mouths to praise his name."¹²

Regarding Testimony Before Others

Recall the petitions of David in Psalm 22:3-5 where David was in the place of seeing and observing The LORD's faithful dealings with the fathers and the expectations that provided him to also be heard. So here he is himself now in the place of example and others will see The LORD's delivering of him and many in turn will, "...see and fear and put their trust in the LORD."

From being a witness bearing song declaring worshiper of God in a context of thanksgiving in deliverance, David declares the blessed condition of all who trust The LORD. He states clearly that the man who makes The LORD his trust is blessed and it appears that he is identifying those who in 40:3 who saw, feared, and put their trust in The LORD and that these persons are blessed.

Blessed: Happy with full contentment and joy, an inviolable or favored condition

Blessed: "To be blessed is to be filled with abundant happiness and overflowing joy."¹³

To further clarify what it is to wholly trust The LORD David demonstrates that this trust is to the exclusion of all others, particularly the counterfeits of the proud and of lies. He is providing an image reminiscent of Psalm 1 and the blessed condition of delighting in God's law and disassociating with the company of the wicked.

This appears very straight forward, but in our fallen condition we have a regretful appetite for both pride and lies.... Calvin address this matter well.

"In short, pride and vanity are opposed to the holy confidence which lies upon God alone; for there is nothing more difficult to the flesh than to trust in God alone, and the world is always full of proud and haughty men, who, soothing themselves with vain allurements, would soon corrupt the mind of the godly, if this arrest were not laid upon them, to restrain, as with a bridle, their erroneous and extravagant opinions."¹⁴

40:5-6 The Incomparable Excellences of The LORD

40:5 Abundance of Praiseworthiness

Almost appearing to give a peek into this new song that has erupted from his delivered soul and has been placed in his mouth by The LORD David testifies to the innumerable magnificence of The LORD.

¹² Calvin, Pg.91

¹³ Lawson, Pg.212

¹⁴ Calvin, Pg.94

David is serving as the anointed King of the covenant witness bearing nation of Israel who were declared by promise, birthed by promise, have conquered by promise, have thrived by promise, and who continued in The LORD's kindness to see and experience the wondrous deeds of The LORD (including deliverance). They are a people who could both testify to The LORD's magnificent dealings with their fathers and with themselves. They could also testify with a sure confidence of their posterity being able to testify to these same wondrous deeds of keeping and caring by The LORD.

The LORD's wondrous deeds and thoughts toward them (possibly providential leading and care) have been multiplied. Therefore, "none can compare with you!"

David's exuberant testimonial praise is qualified with "yet" - tempering it on account of it being beyond his capacity to fully proclaim. It is here that when singing O For A Thousand Tongues To Sing we can find a point of relation to David's limitation. Eternity itself will provide our best context of offering proper praise, but even in this anticipated context it will not be a problem of limitation of ability so much as a superabundance of source material.

The LORD's wondrous, marvelous, special, extraordinary deeds are testified in a context of praise/thanksgiving throughout the Psalms.

- Psalm 9:1 "I will give thanks to the LORD with my whole heart; I will recount all of your wonderful deeds. "
- Psalm 26:6-7 "I wash my hands in innocence and go around your altar, O LORD, proclaiming thanksgiving aloud, and telling all your wondrous deeds."
- Psalm 71:17 "O God, from my youth you have taught me, and I still proclaim your wondrous deeds."
- Psalm 72:18 "Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things."
- Psalm 75:1 "We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds."
- Psalm 78:4 "We will not hide them from their children, but tell to the coming generation the glorious deeds of the LORD, and his might, and the wonders that he has done."
- Psalm 86:10 "For you are great and do wondrous things; you alone are God."
- Psalm 96:3 "Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples!"
- Psalm 98:1 "Oh sing to the LORD a new song, for he has done marvelous things! His right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him."
- Psalm 105:2 "Sing to him, sing praises to him; tell of all his wondrous works!"
- Psalm 107:8,15,21,31 "Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love, for his wondrous works to the children of man!"

"...however diligently a man may set himself to meditate upon the works of God, he can only attain to the extremities or borders of them."¹⁵

40:6 Greater Than Sacrifices

This is an exceptionally challenging verse and should provoke several questions from good Bible students.

Is there an implicit qualification for The LORD not delighting in sacrifice and offering?

Are the sacrifices being given with malicious intent?

Are the worshippers not addressing their sin(s) first?

Is there a wrong understanding regarding the heart/intent of these elements of worship?

Psalm 51:19 appears to restore The LORD's delight in "right sacrifices," "burn offerings," and "whole burn offerings." Is there a like balance here?

How does this fit with 40:8 where David talks of delighting to do God's will and the law is within his heart - were these sacrifices not major elements of the will and Law of God?

¹⁵ Calvin, Pg.97

Note that numerous other questions could and should be asked in the course of critical study, but the consistent theme to these questions is the operating presumption that *God does delight in sacrifices* in their proper context and execution. One must recall that this verse was not the overlooked thread that if pulled would undo Judaism or at the least the sacrificial system. Further, Jesus provides no merit to such an underlying fallacy that one is justified to jettison sacrifices based on this statement by David in this immediate historical context. Now... we are not a people who are called upon or required to worship in a sacrificial system. Hebrews 10 will speak to this through these very verses. However, we must first let Psalm 40 speak for itself and in its historical context of having an intended message of truth that preceded the cross by hundreds of years and that gladly endorsed a residual sacrificial system.

Regarding the sacrifices addressed in our passage Keil & Delitzsch's commentary provided some insight into these elements, stating that they are addressed first according to their material and second according to their function. The function of the more general sacrifice/burnt offering being to turn one to the good pleasures of The LORD and the offering/sin offering being to turn one away from divine displeasure.¹⁶

Calvin also addressed the included elements and stated that he sees the four terms as four separate sacrifices and as a way to express the full comprehensive sweep of all the sacrifices.¹⁷

Pleasure or Delight in Sacrifice and Offerings:

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| 1 Samuel 15:21-24 | <p>"But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the LORD your God in Gilgal.' And Samuel said, 'Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.' Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice.'</p> <p>The rejected sacrifice was one in which the context was overt rebellion birthed out of a fear of man rather than covenant obedience with a proper fear of God.</p> |
| Isaiah 1:11-13 | <p>"What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly."</p> <p>This context is not so much an incident, but a full immersion of offense. Judah's offense is so pronounced and absolute that their offerings are not sincere, pure, or birthed out of faithfulness, delight, or worship. Even these exercises of worship are tainted and full of offense to The LORD.</p> |
| Hosea 6:6 | <p>"For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings."</p> <p>The problem is not the sacrifice(s) or the sacrificial system in these contexts, but the heart. A heart in rebellion, indifference, and unfaithfulness has no legitimate sacrifice that it can offer. Jesus makes this absolutely clear in his citing of this verse in both Matthew 9:13 and 12:7. The Pharisees, while not indulging in some vulgar idolatry, they nevertheless missed the very heart of God.</p> |
| Psalm 51:19 | <p>"...then will you delight in right sacrifices, in burnt offerings and whole burnt offerings; then bulls will be offered on your altar."</p> <p>A Psalm of David addressing the same matter of sacrifices not delighted in by God, but with some internal balance provided.</p> |

¹⁶ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch; Keil & Delitzsch: Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume 5 – Psalms. Hendrickson Publishers, 2001. (Hereafter: Keil & Delitzsch), Pg.301

¹⁷ Calvin, Pg.98

Matthew 23:23

“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”

The finer elements are not being discarded, but they should not be emphasized at the expense of the weightier elements.

In terms of the contexts, the problem is not one of the sacrifices proper, but the heart of the one carrying them out – a vain and even vulgar exercise when detached from a heart of affectionate and faithful obedience.

An Open Ear

MacArthur states, “This pictures obedience and dedication.”¹⁸

The English Standard Version Study Bible states that this is indicative of one who, “...is ready to listen to and obey God’s words.”¹⁹

Keil & Delitzsch’s commentary states that this is expressing that The LORD has, “...formed the sense of hearing, bestowed the faculty of hearing, and given therewith the instruction to obey.”²⁰ It is further clarified and with contextual strength stated, “...to hear the word of God, and to obey that which is heard. God desires not sacrifices but hearing ears, and consequently the submission of the person himself in willing obedience.”²¹

The consensus appears to be that this was a way of expressing obedience, presumably obedience from the heart as it is framed in contrast to the sacrifices that are not pleasing and that are not required.

40:7-10 Delighting in the Will of The Unsuppressable Praiseworthy Deliverer

40:7-8 Delighting to do God’s Will

After a difficult section on a proper view of sacrifice the psalm transitions to what almost appears to be a conversation in midstride, “Then I said...” This begins another unique and challenging section for a variety of reasons: the statement that David has now come, the reference to his being addressed in the scroll of the book, and the testimony of the law being within his heart.

There does not appear to be a parallel, precedent, or explanation for the language here in 40:7 in other texts, which makes this more challenging with the information provided in the immediate context being so limited. I state this with the recognition that Hebrews 10 has a direct treatment of this verse, but as it applies to the Son of David and not David himself. Psalm 40 would first require us to understand David and then as the Progress of Revelation is made clear it has its chief application in the Son of David.

Regarding the immediate context there was clarifying help secured through friends such as MacArthur and others who provided a very helpful insight that is contextually sound with both the immediate and larger context. The said clarification came from recognizing that in terms of the immediate historical context David was the King of Israel, and in terms of the larger context there were specific prescriptions and instructions for the man who would serve as the anointed king of The LORD’s covenant people. These prescriptions and instructions were recorded in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, in the scroll of the book, secured in the Torah for God’s people.

Note that Deuteronomy 17:19-20 most precisely applies to Psalm 40:8.

“When you come to the land that the Lord your God is giving you, and you possess it and dwell in it and then say, ‘I will set a king over me, like all the nations that are around me,’ you may indeed set a king over you whom the Lord your God will choose. One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the Lord has said to you, ‘You

¹⁸ MacArthur, Pg.778

¹⁹ ESV SB, Pg.987

²⁰ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.302

²¹ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.302

shall never return that way again.' And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. 'And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel."

Deuteronomy 17:14-20

David as the anointed King of Israel and a man who sought to walk in covenant obedience before The LORD was identifying himself as a king who cherishes and submits to the Scriptures because he cherishes and submits to the God of the Scriptures. He was identifying himself as a Psalm 1 man, too. He not only was committed to the Scriptures, but was a man who wholly gave himself to them, delighted in them, and in turn was one who could and did offer sacrifices with a proper disposition and faithfulness (as opposed to the aforementioned rejected sacrifices). Further, David was testifying to a work in the heart that would be a hallmark feature of the New Covenant Believer – delighting to do The LORD's will as his law is within his heart.

"Blessed is the man... his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night." Ps.1.1-2

40:9-10 Praise That Cannot Be Restricted

Deliverance is consistently translated Righteous or Just and this is the manner in which other notable translations have used it in this same verse.

NASB "95 "I have proclaimed glad tidings of righteousness..."

KJV "I have preached righteousness in the great congregation..."

NET "I have told the great assembly about your justice."

In view of this I am persuaded that it is reasonable to conclude that the testified righteousness/justice here is The LORD having delivered David and it would appear that he has the opening rescuing from the pit/bog in mind (40:1-3), though he clearly recognizes he has innumerable wondrous deeds for which he could also give thanks (40:5).

This righteous/just/deliverance is glad news, not a far cry for the very identification of the gospel (good news), and David is giving public declaration to the God who has and does deliver - his gospel rich God. Further, with such magnificent news in view David testifies that he has not restrained his lips – he has not pressed them into an unnatural restriction of failing to serve their highest good of giving testimonial praise to The LORD who is a righteous/just-deliverer.

40:10 appears to be the second part of a unit of David affirming his diligence to proclaim The LORD's delivering him. He stated this in both direct and indirect affirmation: 40:9 "I have told" and "I have not restrained," and now 40:10 "I have not hidden," "I have spoken," and "I have not concealed." The focus is on his deliverance and testifying to it.

Note the consistency with the affirmatives (verbal proclamation):

"I have told" and "I have spoken"

Note the consistency with the negative affirmations (no hiding this)

"I have not restrained," "I have not hidden," and "I have not concealed"

40:9 Deliverance

40:10 Deliverance, Faithfulness, Salvation, Steadfast Love, and Faithfulness

Note the second use of the phrase "within my heart" – what David has hidden in his heart is God's law (40:8) what he has not hidden in his heart is the public affirmation of praise due the Deliverer (40:10). There is that which the heart is to conceal as treasure and that which it is proclaim out of unrestrained praise.

Sidebar: Two Hearts

Now, to be as clear as possible it should be noted that two words for “heart” are used. The “heart” here is more of the traditional/standard use of heart, particularly as it appears to be used in the Scriptures, but the “heart” referenced in 40:8 appears to be more of a raw inner man. In terms of translation and communicating intent, “heart” is an accurate and sufficient term for both instances and I am persuaded is consistent enough to express the above continuity.

Among the elements of David’s public testimony of praise is The LORD’s faithfulness. This term for “faithfulness” (40:10a) has a use in Exodus 17:12 that provides a wonderful picture for what this can look like. In Exodus 17 it is translated “steady” and was used in reference to Moses’ hands being made steady as Aaron and Hur held them up for him after they grew weary.... The LORD’s faithfulness is a steadiness that needs no external support, but is enduringly strong, notably in its covenant surety.

Faithfulness and salvation... David is exuberant about the God who saves!

David also address The LORD’s steadfast love, framing the faithfulness and salvation that he has experienced in God’s covenant love – a context that, while including David, would expand to the whole of the great congregation.

Undoubtedly the surety of The LORD’s faithfulness was a substantial, if not the primary, means by which David was able to have the confidence to be patient in 40:1. This kind of surety would and does provide a confidence to wait patiently as there is a sure outcome.

40:11-17 The Continued Need for the Praiseworthy Deliverer

40:11 Testimony to The LORD’s Faithfulness

From a section focusing on David’s actions the shift returns to The LORD’s actions, “As for you, O LORD....”

Note the continued used of the terms: restrain, steadfast love, faithfulness, and the addition of mercy.

Here we observe that while David would not restrain his lips from praising and acknowledging The LORD’s deliverance, so The LORD would not restrain his mercy. Again, David did not restrain, withhold, or restrict his testimony of The LORD’s deliverance, righteousness, justice; and The LORD did not restrain, withhold, or restrict his mercy toward David - not in response, but in consistency with being a merciful God.

Sidebar: Mercy

Mercy is the compassion of God in not applying what immediate justice would require, but affording its satisfaction by means beyond the capacity of the receiver of mercy. Ultimately mercy is satisfied when justice is satisfied. This is accomplished on the cross or by eternal condemnation. For David and others who are redeemed children of God, the surety of mercy is a precious expectation and one for which worshipful thanksgiving is due.

David continues that The LORD’s (covenant) steadfast love and faithfulness will ever preserve him. These are the very elements that he was just affirming with thanks before the congregation in 40:10 "...I have not concealed your steadfast love and faithfulness from the great congregation."

"...your steadfast love and your faithfulness will ever preserve me!"

Preserve, Guard, Keep

Here a shift in the psalm occurs.

From testimonies of praise and thanksgiving for deliverance, salvation, and help to a renewed plead that these blessing again might prevail in his circumstances of internal offenses and external oppositions.

The general consensus is that beginning with 40:11 a new struggle was being addressed. VanGemerer concludes that there is a new struggle and an important element of his argument is recognizing that mercy has now been introduced into the psalm as there is a renewed need for mercy with the renewed presence of struggle.²²

With the introduction of new struggle David is drawing from the truth that he has just affirmed in 40:5,9,10: proclaiming The LORD's wondrous deeds and thoughts, telling of deliverance, speaking of his faithfulness and salvation, and not concealing his steadfast love and faithfulness.

Finally, this next section is difficult because it comes at the end and not the beginning. It is as though we have gone from resolution to conflict rather than conflict to resolution. Such are the complexities of our sojourning on this earth. David has experienced deliverance after much patience, he has given The LORD exuberant praise, and now he has found himself returning to petition for deliverance (and if possible an expedited deliverance at that). It is a tragic misnomer of faith to presume that one victory will carry the day indefinitely. Until the Lord Jesus returns we can wholly expect troubles from within and from without. David in some measure was dealing with his sin again (recall Paul detailing our own struggles in Romans 6-7 where we are victors over sin and yet in unceasing combat with it). David is also dealing with his enemies again (recall that though we are not national Israel in a Theocratic Kingdom context, we are unwelcome in the world, John 16:33).

40:12 Overwhelmed with Personal Iniquities

The reintroduction of struggle begins with, "for, or because" (looking back to the mercy and preservation of God) evils have now encompassed me beyond number.

It appears that part of the tie in between the encompassed evils and his personal offenses are the innumerable nature of the evils and the offenses being more than the hairs of his head and the overpowering nature of both (encompassed and overtaken).

Sidebar: "My Iniquities"

How is this personal declaration of offense reconciled with the law of God in David's heart? Perhaps in the same way that the New Covenant believer has the indwelling Spirit of God within him and yet persists in struggling with sin... The problem is clear enough – one's struggle with sin will persist until the day in which the sanctifying work of God is completed in his immediate presence. Until such a time we must daily mortify the flesh, putting off the old man, put on the renewed man, cry out for mercy, rejoice in our deliverance(s), and persevere until the work is complete.

Evil, Wickedness, Harm, Trouble are in such an innumerable abundance that David is all but wholly consumed by them. David then goes on to state that it is his own iniquities or guilt that have overtaken him, they have effectually pursued him - he did not outrun or evade them.

He cannot see... Keil & Delitzsch state that David is stating that he cannot see because he is so closely encompassed on all sides so tightly that his vantage point is restricted.²³

His heart fails. Heart failure: an absolute dejection - a humbling of the soul

Sidebar: David's Sin or Israel's Sin (1 of 2)

VanGemerer consistently ties the first person of David back to his role as the king and argues that in the context of a Theocratic Kingdom that David serves as a figurehead for the nation and may be assuming this role when using the first person. In view of this he states, "Though the king speaks of 'my sins,' he may personify the national sin as his own. As a theocratic leader, he takes on himself the sin of the nation and pleads for the Lord to show compassion on the nation. The consequences of sin had a paralyzing effect on the king and his ability to rule over God's people."²⁴ Interestingly,

²² VanGemerer, Pg.369

²³ Keil & Delitzsch Pg.303

²⁴ VanGemerer, Pg.370

immediately after making his case for this being David speaking on behalf of the nation as a whole, VanGemeran then ties this verse back to 40:6-8, which appear very clearly to address the king, but the personal charge and responsibilities of the king and not necessarily a representative role. Perhaps the two should be viewed synonymously.

40:13 David's Plead for Expedient Help

While 40:1-11 was a testimony of deliverance by David, the remainder of the psalm is a fresh request for deliverance, from both himself and his enemies. So here David made petition that The LORD would be pleased to deliver him (as The LORD acts for his own good pleasure and rightly so).

Keil & Delitzsch as well as others draw out an important detail to David's petition here, that he crouches the petition in dependence on The LORD's pleasure, his will and desire.²⁵ David has no standing outside of The LORD's good pleasure and while the petition is consistent with a Redeemer and Deliverer who redeems and delivers he is nevertheless making his petition in a proper humility and submission to the desires/will of The LORD. It is this disposition that, when delivered (again), fuels exuberant testimony with new songs and unrestrained sharing.

David's request was also rather urgent, asking for a speedy result... this appears a bit antithetical to 40:1 where he was waiting patiently for The LORD.... But a plead for a hasty response does not inherently negate trusting. He has spoken truth to himself and others and for whatever the reasons may have been he asks that The LORD would be pleased with a quick deliverance. There is also good reason to conclude that if he did not experience such a delivery that he would then conduct himself with patience until deliverance would come again.

Sidebar: Psalm 70

For reasons that were not articulated with any complete satisfaction these final petitions for deliverance are all but identically repeated in Psalm 70.

40:14-15 David's External Adversaries

Now as clear as the evils articulated in 40:12 appear to be David's own transgressions, he also spoke very strongly about his enemies here in 40:14-15.

These adversaries are delighting in the same evils/harms that David bemoaned as overwhelming him in 40:12. David and this company could not be further in their dispositions before The LORD and their fellow man - he grieves his offenses and they would seek that his life be swept away.

David's request for these enemies:

40:14 "Let those be put to shame..."

40:14 "let those be turned back..."

40:15 "Let those be appalled..."

Sidebar: David's Sin or Israel's Sin (2 of 2)

Note that consistent with his argument addressed with 40:11 VanGemeran sees the context as larger than David personally and therefore the enemies are not so much his personal enemies, but the enemies of the covenant people of God as well as their anointed king. It is in view of this that there can be an expectation of righteous vindication.²⁶ I do not know that I could or would even want to argue with VanGemeran regarding the personal/national identification of Psalm 40, but it would appear that the grounds for expectation for The LORD to hear, answer, and intervene could also be personal as the personal is also ultimately rooted in the larger covenant community context.

²⁵ Keil & Delitzsch, Pg.304

²⁶ VanGemeran, Pg.371

40:16 The Joy and Praise of The Beloved

By way of contrast with the aforementioned enemies we now have another seeker (not those who would seek another's life, but ones who seek after God). David is petitioning that all who seek The LORD that they would rejoice and be glad. This is in direct contrast with what would befit the wicked: shame, disappointment, being turned back, and being dishonored.

Note that it is not an independent rejoicing and being glad, but specifically a rejoicing and being glad in The LORD. David is petitioning that all who love The LORD's salvation (presumably those who have either directly experienced it or joined in its worshipful thanksgiving) - that they might continually say "Great is the LORD!"

David is expressing that The LORD has and continues to demonstrate praiseworthiness and greatness in his salvific work.

The Wicked and Righteous In Contrast

David here provided a contrast between the wicked and the righteous. The wicked seek and say. The righteous seek and say. The wicked seek to take his life. The righteous seek The LORD. The wicked say taunts with their words. The righteous say "The LORD be exalted!"

Therefore, while the wicked will endure shame, confusion, and disgrace the righteous will rejoice and be glad.

40:17 David's Continual Dependence on the Deliverer

Again, by way of contrast, David appears to be setting himself apart from the other believers, presumably only in that he is addressing his personal context and not a general petition.

While expressing this dejected position of being poor and needy by contrast David also stated that the Lord takes thought for him. He then goes further to again affirm that The LORD is his help and deliverer (consistent theme). However, it appears in affirming this he was also requesting help and deliverance.

David finished with the same tension that was present in 40:13 by requesting, "do not delay." Whatever the details of this circumstance we know that David had identified himself as poor/needy and that he was in need of a Deliverer/Rescuer. This makes for a difficult ending after such a delightful beginning. However, like David we can have confidence that he was heard, that The LORD showed himself faithful, and that rejoicing was only a season away – perhaps a long season, but only a season in the scope of faithfulness.

Psalm 40 and Hebrews 10

“For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near. Otherwise, would they not have ceased to be offered, since the worshipers, having once been cleansed, would no longer have any consciousness of sins? But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins. Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, ‘Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’ When he said above, ‘You have neither desired nor taken pleasure in sacrifices and offerings and burnt offerings and sin offerings’ (these are offered according to the law), then he added, ‘Behold, I have come to do your will.’ He does away with the first in order to establish the second. And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” Hebrews 10:1-10

Sacrifices

Whereas the immediate context of Psalm 40 was addressing the vanity of sacrifice without a proper heart the author of Hebrews references this same language to declare the infinite supremacy of Christ’s once for all sacrifice of himself. The shadows of the Old Testament’s sacrifices were only a means of declaring their own insufficiency and forcing sincere hearts to groan for a sufficient sacrifice that might wholly and truly accomplish restoration and forgiveness. It was in the prepared body of Jesus that this sacrifice was secured. Once and for all – faithfully executing the will of the Father, abolishing the first and establishing the second.

Ears or Body

You have given me an open ear verses a body you have prepared for me. The “open ears” is the wording of the Hebrew Old Testament, and the “body prepared” is from the LXX (Septuagint) or Greek translation of the Old Testament, which was authoritatively sighted in the New Testament.

MacArthur provides the following explanation of the word choices and their acceptable consistency: “Psalm 40:6 read, ‘My ears you have opened.’ This does not represent a significant alteration in the meaning of the psalm, as indicated by the fact that the writer quoted the LXX version of the Heb. Idiom, which was an accurate representation for Greek readers. The Greek translators regarded the Heb. Words as a figure of speech, in which a part of something signified the whole, i.e., the hollowing out of ears was part of the total work of fashioning a human body. And ears were selected as the part to emphasize because they were symbols of obedience as the organ of the reception of God’s Word and will (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22). Christ needed a body in order to offer Himself as the final sacrifice (2:14).”²⁷

²⁷ MacArthur, Pg.1913