

Psalms 40 — Lo, I Come — The Pit, the New Song, and the Son's Willing Offering

Psalm 40: a psalm of David to the chief Musician — a thanksgiving for rescue from a horrible pit that turns, at its very center, into one of the Old Testament's clearest oracles of the Messiah's willing self-offering ('Lo, I come... I delight to do thy will'), then pivots into fresh petition when trouble closes in again. David's own tenth-century-BC deliverance and continued need (scriptural chronology c. 1000 BC) become, in Hebrews 10, the words the Son speaks as he enters the world to replace the animal sacrifices with the offering of an obedient body.

Psalm 40 does something most of us do in prayer without noticing we are doing it: it looks back on a rescue with astonished gratitude, and then, in almost the same breath, asks to be rescued again. It is a thanksgiving that turns into a petition. And that shape is not a flaw in the psalm — it is the truth about a life of faith, where yesterday's deliverance and today's fresh trouble share the same page.

Hebrew Word Studies

bor (H953) / tit (H2916) (בֹּרַת / טִית) — pit, cistern, dungeon / clay, mire, mud v. 2. Two words for one predicament. *Bor* is a pit or cistern — a hole cut for water, but just as often the Old Testament's image of the dungeon and the grave: Joseph is thrown into a *bor* by his brothers (Gen. 37:24), Jeremiah is lowered into one and left to sink (Jer. 38:6), and the Psalms repeatedly use it for the nearness of death, "them that go down into the pit" (Ps. 28:1). *Tit* is the clay or mire at its bottom — the same word for the mud of the streets (Isa. 10:6) and, tellingly, the mire a man cannot walk out of. Put them together and you have the perfect emblem of trouble that resists effort: not a wall you can climb, but a mud that grips harder the more you struggle. That is why the verbs of rescue in this verse all belong to God, never to the man — "he brought me up," "set my feet," "established my goings." The theology is in the grammar. A man in the *tit* of the *bor* is not lifted by trying harder; he is lifted by a hand reaching down. It is the pit David knows firsthand and the pit the Atonement finally answers — "he descended below all things" (D&C 88:6) precisely so that no pit would be deeper than the reach of the One who came down into it.

shir chadash (H7892 / H2319) (שִׁיר חָדָשׁ) — a new song / new, fresh, unprecedented v. 3. *Shir* is simply "song"; the freight is carried by *chadash*, "new." But Hebrew *chadash* is not merely "recent" — it is *renewed*, freshly made, the word for the new moon that is the old moon made new again, and the word behind Ezekiel's promise of "a new heart" and "a new spirit" (Ezek. 36:26). So the "new song" is not a replacement tune but the song of a renewed person — praise that could only be composed on the far side of a rescue. The phrase becomes a refrain of the redeemed across scripture: "Sing unto the LORD a new song" (Ps. 96:1; 98:1; 149:1), and at the end of the story the living creatures and elders in heaven "sung a new song" before the Lamb who "hast redeemed us to God by thy blood" (Rev. 5:9). The pattern never changes — the new song follows the deliverance, and its subject is always the Deliverer. The Restoration names this same music with unusual tenderness: the redeemed "shall fall down at his feet, and shall worship him for ever and ever... and shall sing the song of redeeming love" (D&C 84:98–102). You cannot fake this song; it is put *in* the mouth (v. 3), not worked up by the singer. Which means the surest evidence that a rescue was real is that a new song shows up afterward — unbidden, and aimed at others: "many shall see it... and shall trust in the LORD."

ozen (H241) / karah (H3738) (אָזֵן / כָּרָה) — ear / to dig, excavate, open, hollow out v. 6. "Mine ears hast thou opened" is, in Hebrew, *oznayim karita li* — literally "ears thou hast dug for me." *Ozen* is the ear as the organ of obedience; in Hebrew, hearing and heeding are one word-world, which is why "hear, O Israel" (*shema*, Deut. 6:4) means "obey, O Israel." *Karah* is startling here: it is the verb for digging a well (Gen. 26:25), digging a pit (Ps. 7:15), hewing out a place. God has *excavated* the servant's ears — hollowed them open so his word can get in and come out as action. It is the ear of the willing bondservant of Exodus 21, whose ear is bored through at the doorpost as the permanent sign "I will not go out free... I love my master" (Ex. 21:5–6): the opened ear is the mark of chosen, lifelong obedience. So the line is not about anatomy; it is about a life tuned to do the will of God. The Septuagint, followed by Hebrews 10:5, renders the sense as "a body hast thou prepared me" — reading the dug-open, wholly-obedient ear as the whole obedient body offered up. Both point at one truth: the sacrifice God wanted was never the animal but the obedient self, and in Christ that obedient self took flesh — a prepared body, given.

chaphets (H2654) / ratson (H7522) (חָפֵץ / רָצוֹן) — to desire, delight, take pleasure in / will, pleasure, acceptance, favour vv. 6, 8. One passage, one root, twice — and the repetition is the whole point. In verse 6, God "didst not *desire*" (*chaphets*) sacrifice and offering. In verse 8, the servant answers, "I *delight* (*chaphets*) to do thy will." The identical verb crosses the aisle: what God does not delight in (mere ritual blood) is answered by what the servant *does* delight in (doing God's will). The

offering God wanted was a matching delight. Then verse 8 names that will: *ratson* — God's "will," but a word soaked in the idea of what is *pleasing* and *acceptable*, the very word for a sacrifice God will "accept" (Lev. 22:19–21). So the servant's delight is aimed exactly at God's good pleasure; the two words interlock. This is obedience without gritted teeth — not duty endured but will *enjoyed*, the law "within my heart" rather than over his head. It is the disposition the Savior showed from the council onward, "Father, thy will be done" (Moses 4:2), and in Gethsemane, "not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). And it is the disposition offered to every disciple: King Benjamin's people, whose "mighty change" left them with "no more disposition to do evil, but to do good continually" (Mosiah 5:2), had learned to *chaphets* — to delight in — the will of God. The whole of sanctification is the slow work of God's will becoming our delight.

***tsedeq* (H6664) / *basar* (H1319) (צֶדֶק / בָּשָׂר) — righteous, justice, rightness / to bear good news, announce, preach glad tidings v. 9.** "I have *preached righteousness*." *Tsedeq* is righteousness as rightness — the moral straightness of God, his just and faithful dealing, the standard by which crooked things are made straight; it is the root behind Melchizedek, "king of righteousness" (Heb. 7:2), and behind Jehovah's covenant title, "THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Jer. 23:6). The verb *basar* is the treasure of the verse: it means to bear tidings, and specifically *good* tidings — it is the word in "how beautiful... are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings" (Isa. 52:7), and the Hebrew ancestor of the whole idea of *gospel*. So "I have preached righteousness" is closer to "I have announced the good news of God's righteousness." The rescued man is not lecturing about ethics; he is publishing good news — that the God who lifts men out of pits is *righteous*, faithful to save. This is the same commission the risen Christ presses on the Nephites: "this is the gospel... that I came into the world to do the will of my Father" (3 Ne. 27:13) — good news to be declared, not hidden. Every believer who has been drawn up out of the miry clay inherits both the *tsedeq* to proclaim and the *basar* impulse to proclaim it; the new song of verse 3 becomes the open testimony of verse 9.

***ani* (H6041) / *ebyon* (H34) / *chashab* (H2803) (אֲנִי / עֲבֹיֹן / חָשַׁב) — afflicted, poor, lowly / needy, destitute, beggar / to think, reckon, account, plan v. 17.** The last verse sets a man's emptiness against God's attention, and the three words carry the whole weight. *Ani* is the afflicted one, bowed down, the poor whom the law protects and God defends (Ex. 22:25; Ps. 34:6, "this poor man cried"). *Ebyon* is stronger still — the destitute, the beggar, the one in want of everything; the two words together ("poor and needy") are the Old Testament's standard pairing for total dependence (Deut. 15:11; Ps. 72:13). This is the singer's honest self-assessment: nothing in hand, no leverage, unable even to look up (v. 12). And then *chashab* — "the Lord *thinketh* upon me." *Chashab* is to reckon or account, to devise and plan; it is the verb behind God's great promise, "I know the thoughts that I think toward you... thoughts of peace, and not of evil" (Jer. 29:11), and behind the reckoning of righteousness — Abraham "believed in the LORD; and he *counted* it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6). So the destitute man's one asset is that he is *reckoned*, held in the deliberate thought of God. It is the same comfort the Book of Mormon presses: "he remembereth every creature of his creating" (Mosiah 27:30, in spirit; cf. Alma 26:37, "God is mindful of every people... his bowels of mercy are over all the earth"). You may be *ani* and *ebyon* — afflicted and empty — and still the whole ground of hope holds, because the Lord *chashab*: he thinks upon you, by name.

From the Chapter's Architecture

The one thing the psalm does not have is a strict chiasm, and it would be dishonest to impose one. Its shape is a forward movement — rescue, oracle, proclamation, fresh plea — with the willing-offering vow set like a jewel in the center of the first half. The artistry is in that placement: the deepest truth of the psalm, "Lo, I come... I delight to do thy will," sits not at the triumphant end but at the quiet middle, framed on one side by a rescue already received and on the other by a rescue still being begged for. Which is exactly where the Son's willing obedience belongs — at the center of everything, holding the whole of it together.