

## Chapter 16

# THE INCARNATION AND VIRGIN BIRTH

## Psalm 40

### The Christmas Psalm

The true testimony of Christmas, at least to the Christian, is the incarnation. When Christ came into the world—that is, when God became man—the age-long barrier between earth and heaven was finally crossed. This grand theme, along with the great work of salvation He came to accomplish, is the message of the 40th Psalm.

Although the psalm was written by David and is in the first person, it is clear from the New Testament references to it that the person speaking is actually the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself. The context, furthermore, indicates that, most likely, it represents the inward meditation of His heart as He hung on the cross dying for the sin of the world. In this respect, it is a corollary of Psalm 22, which likewise reveals His thoughts during the hours of His darkest sufferings, when even His heavenly Father had forsaken Him (Psalm 22:1; Matthew 27:90).

The 40th Psalm seems probably to contain His testimony during the interval following the three hours of darkness on the cross, but before His actual physical demise. No longer was He separated

from His Father (Luke 23:46); the actual experience of hell (separation from God) was “finished” (John 19:30). All that remained was for Him, in the Spirit, to proclaim His victory to the wicked spirits in the heart of the earth (1 Peter 3:18,19; Matthew 12:40); to set the captives free (Isaiah 61:1; Ephesians 4:8–10); and to return to His own body resting in death in the tomb, with the very keys to death and hell, alive forevermore (Revelation 1:18).

## Testimony of Deliverance

### Verses 1–5

In His testimony, as recorded in Psalm 40, He expresses thankfulness for the great deliverance already experienced, and continues to pray for the full accomplishment of God’s purpose in His suffering. With this context in mind, let us now take a verse-by-verse journey through this marvelous psalm.

1. *“I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry.”* The Scripture admonishes: “For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise” (Hebrews 10:36). He had come to do God’s will (verse 8), and had finally accomplished it. For three long hours, especially, He had endured Hell itself, suffering patiently what others deserved to suffer, but from which they could now be freed. Finally, He uttered the sad cry of desolation, and God heard and answered.

2. *“He brought me up also out of a horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.”* When God heard, then He lifted His soul out of the darkness. All others who had died had been forced to confinement in the great abyss of Hades, the horrible pit in the depths of the earth (the fact that men ridicule the idea of such a prison enclosure far down in the earth’s core does not prove it is not there; there is ample room, and no seismic instruments yet developed can determine otherwise). Even

those who had died in faith were there, because no efficacious offering, which would purge their sins, had yet been made. But *He* could not be bound there! “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell” (Psalm 16:10). Otherwise, “what profit is there in my blood when I go down to the pit?” (Psalm 30:9).

3. *“And He hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.”* The glorious “song of the Lamb” (Revelation 15:3, 4), which we shall hear in His presence one day, is such a testimony of praise: “Great and marvelous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.” The message of salvation which His great work releases has led multitudes to trust in the Lord, everyone testifying in his own turn that he also has been delivered from the miry clay and his path established on the solid rock. “Upon this Rock I will build my church,” He said “and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18).

4. *“Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.”* This is both a personal testimony on the part of Jesus and a promise to all others. He, as the perfect Man, the second Adam, had resisted Satan, the proud one (Isaiah 14:12–14; Ezekiel 28:17) and the father of lies (John 8:44). “He that committeth sin is of the devil,” but “in Him is no sin” (1 John 3:7,8). Though he could not deceive Jesus, even in the physical weakness of His humanity (Matthew 4:10), Satan continues to this very hour as the deceiver of the whole world (Revelation 12:9), seeking to turn men away from “the true God and eternal life” (1 John 5:19,20). Yet, “blessed are all they that put their trust in Him” (Psalm 2:12).

5. *“Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to usward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would*

*declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.*” Even in the midst of His sufferings on the cross, the Lord Jesus could continually meditate on both the works and the words of the infinite God. This testimony, no doubt, includes God’s works in creation as well as those in salvation. Every system in nature—even the most insignificant microorganisms, and even the very structure of matter itself—provide further insight to the thoughts of their Creator. All are marvels of design, so that even the study of science is nothing but “thinking God’s thoughts after Him,” as some of the greatest scientists have testified. Even greater are His redemptive works. “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! ... For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory forever” (Romans 11:33, 36).

## The Prepared Body

### Verses 6–8

6. “*Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering and sin offering hast thou not required.*” We now enter the very heart of the psalm, as well as that of the Savior, as He rehearses the reason for His incarnation. Not any of the four great offerings and sacrifices of the Levitical system—the “sacrifice” (that is the “peace offering” of Leviticus 3) or the “offering” (that is, the “meat offering” of Leviticus 2) or the “burnt offering” (Leviticus 1) or the “sin offering” (Leviticus 4)—were either desired or required by God as true sacrifices for sin. They could only, as evidence of the offerer’s faith, serve as a temporary atonement (literally “covering”) for sin, but they could never really “take away sins” (Hebrews 10:4).

For this a greater sacrifice was required—“the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). But before He could take away the sin of the world, He would have to come

into the world. Though He had created man, He must Himself *become* man, then die for man, in order to save man from his sins. And for this, the Son of God must declare to His Father His willingness to become the Son of Man.

This He did, in token whereof “mine ears hast thou opened.” The symbolism of this remarkable action speaks of complete submission of one’s body to do the will of his master. When an indentured servant in ancient Israel was due to be set free following his term of service, he could instead make the decision to remain in servitude forever, if he so chose. In token of this decision, “his master shall bore his ear through with an awl; and he shall serve him forever” (Exodus 21:6). The meaning of this ritual was apparently the complete submission of the servant’s ear to the voice of his master. Whatever his master commanded, his servant would do forthwith. The Son thus completely yielded himself to do the will of His Father, and this will required Him to become man.

This is the passage quoted in the New Testament which definitely identifies the 40th Psalm as Messianic. Remarkably, however, the Holy Spirit used the Septuagint translation, which renders the clause by “a body hast thou prepared me” (Hebrews 10:5). The opening of the ear, by divine inspiration, is thus in this case interpreted as synonymous with taking on a specially prepared human body. Thus, the verse speaks of the unique work of incarnation, when God became man. “... the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us” (John 1:14).

7. “*Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me.*” After submitting Himself to the will of the Father in this way, the Son proceeded to come to earth. The testimony recorded here must have been given prior to His coming to earth, but it had been written down in the volume of the book even before that. Both the book of God’s Word (note Psalm 119:89,160—“thy word forever settled in heaven” and “thy word true from the beginning”) and the “book of

life” (see Revelation 13:8) containing the names of the redeemed were written before the foundation of the world. God the Creator does not have “second thoughts” or “after thoughts”!

But exactly how could such a remarkable transition be accomplished? How could God become man—and, especially, how could God become man without ceasing to be God? Man, ever since the Fall, has been in sin from his very birth. “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). If He were *only* man, then how could He save man?

These mysteries are resolved in the miracle of the virgin birth. “A body hast thou prepared me” (Hebrews 10:5, referring to His coming into the world). He did not enter the world at the time of the virgin birth, of course, but nine months earlier, at the time of His miraculous conception in the womb of the virgin Mary. The remarkable nature of this “preparation” of His body by God is pointed up by the fact that the same Greek word is used in the next chapter of Hebrews to tell how God created the universe—“the worlds were *framed* by the word of God” (Hebrews 11:3).

Such a body must be fully human and so must be formed from the elements of the earth as Adam’s body had been (Genesis 2:7), but it must also be free of inherent sin or genetic defects, as Adam’s body had been originally. He must “in all things ... be made like unto his brethren” (Hebrews 2:17) and be tested “like as we are, yet without sin” (Hebrews 4:15). Though He could receive no genetic inheritance from His earthly parents or ancestors (otherwise, there would be no non-miraculous way in which He would not likewise have inherited both the sin nature and its accompanying genetic defects from both his human parents), yet He must also be of the “seed of the woman” (Genesis 3:15), the “seed of Abraham” (Hebrews 2:16), and the “seed of David” (Romans 1:3). These Biblical requirements could only be met by

a perfect human body supernaturally “framed” by God and placed as a single living cell (equivalent to the cell normally formed by the penetration of the “egg” of a woman by a male “seed”) in the womb of a virgin descended from Abraham and David. In His growth from this one-celled stage, He would then share in all the experiences of mankind, from conception to death, yet be (as was the first Adam) without inherent sin.

8. *“I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.”* As the Son left the Father’s home in heaven and took up a new residence (“*dwelt [tabernacled] among us*”—John 1:14) in the body God had prepared for Him, He set forth to do the Father’s will, even though that will included the cross. God’s law was in His heart, a condition yet future for other men (Hebrews 8:10).

## Results of the Incarnation

*Verses 9–14*

9. *“I have preached righteousness in the great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O, LORD thou knowest.”* Continuing His meditation there on the cross, the Savior recalled His ministry, preaching God’s Word to God’s people—not only in the land of Israel, but also anticipating in the Spirit His future preaching throughout the world throughout the ages. As He had prayed the night before, “I have given them thy word” (John 17:14). There is also mention of this “great congregation” in Psalm 22:25, in the same connection, but looking to the future. Quite possibly it includes not only the believers of all ages, but even the holy angels (Hebrews 12:23).

10. *“I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have*

*not concealed thy loving-kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.*" No man has seen God at any time, but the Son has declared Him. Note all the magnificent attributes of God which Christ revealed: "thy righteousness, thy faithfulness, thy salvation, thy lovingkindness, thy truth," also "thy will, thy law" (verse 8), "thy tender mercies" (verse 11). What an array of testimonies! Not only had Christ told of God in word; He had Himself displayed the attributes of God in person. "... in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

11. *"Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy loving-kindness and thy truth continually preserve me."* In His perfect humanity, the Lord Jesus fully exhibited the life of prayer and trust in God that pleases Him and serves as an example for us. Even in the midst of excruciating pain and suffering, and facing imminent physical death, He trusted the overshadowing mercy and love of His Father.

12. *"For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me."* Surrounding him there at the cross was a great host of wicked spirits—the "assembly of the wicked" (Psalm 22:16), the "principalities and powers" of darkness over whom He would soon triumph in His death (Colossians 2:15). Not only so, but the sins of all the world were laid upon Him, and His "iniquities" (literally, "punishments") were so heavy and so many that His head began to sink and His heart to break. That perfect, sinless body which had been prepared for Him by God when He came into the world was now unspeakably bruised and disfigured as He was about to leave the world. "... his visage was so marred more than any man" (Isaiah 52:14). "But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our

peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5). "Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree" (I Peter 2:24). Our key passage in the tenth chapter of Hebrews says that He had come into the world to do God's will through that prepared body, "By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10).

13. *"Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me."* In His closing moments of life, the dying Savior prayed to the Father for His presence through death and the work yet to be accomplished. His body must be delivered from the wicked ones surrounding Him (and indeed, God shortly sent the loving hands of Joseph and Nicodemus to care for that body and place it in Joseph's new tomb).

14. *"Let them be ashamed ... together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil."* This prayer also was soon answered. Satan and his hosts of evil were there and no doubt believed they were gaining a great victory as they contrived to destroy His soul. But it was this very death that sealed their shame and doom forever! "Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2:14,15). "... that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14,15).

15. *"Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha."* This exclamation of His enemies is a Hebrew expression of malicious joy, with no real English equivalent. Those who take such delight in iniquity and, especially, in the suffering of the righteous, are at last to receive

their equitable reward. They will be consigned finally to "shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2).

16. *"Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified."* In contrast to the unbelieving, whether men or demons, those whose hearts are right toward God may now be satisfied and full of joy, world without end. The word "salvation" is the Hebrew *yeshuah*, essentially the same as the human name given Him when God became man. This verse could even be read: "Let such as love thy Jesus say continually, The Lord be magnified." The promise of Christmas is fulfilled in the cross! No wonder the holy angels announcing His birth spoke of tidings of great joy. "But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God" (Hebrews 10:12).

17. *"But I am poor and needy; yet the LORD thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God."* No matter how weak and helpless one may be, the Lord knows and cares. We may freely "cast all our cares upon Him" (I Peter 5:7) for He never will leave us or forsake us. If that be true, He would surely not be deaf to the prayers of His Holy One. The suffering for sin was over; He would now enter into the joy set before Him. In verse 13 was recorded His prayer for deliverance and help. In this final verse, he testified: "Thou *art* my help and deliverer." His prayer was answered. He who had waited in infinite patience as He had done the will of God (verse 1; compare Hebrews 10:36) was now ready to receive the promise fulfilled.

And so shall we! "For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry" (Hebrews 10:37).