

The background of the cover is a photograph of a forest path covered in fallen leaves. The path leads into the distance, flanked by tall trees. The scene is captured in a warm, golden light, suggesting autumn. The entire image is framed by a large, inverted triangle with a double-line border. The text is centered within this triangle.

The Golden Psalm

**An Exposition of
Psalm 16**

C. H. Spurgeon

The Golden Psalm
An Exposition of Psalm 16
C. H. Spurgeon

Title. Michtam of David. This is usually understood to mean *The Golden Psalm*, and such a title is most appropriate, for the matter is as the most fine gold. Ainsworth calls it “David’s jewel, or notable song.” Dr. Hawker, who is always alive to passages full of savour, devoutly cries, “Some have rendered it precious, others golden, and others, precious jewel; and as the Holy Ghost, by the apostles Peter and Paul, hath shown us that it is all about the Lord Jesus Christ, what is here said of him is precious, is golden, is a jewel indeed!” We have not met with the term Michtam before, but if spared to write upon Psalms 56, 57, 58, 59, and 60, we shall see it again, and shall observe that like the present these psalms, although they begin with prayer, and imply trouble, abound in holy confidence and close with songs of assurance as to ultimate safety and joy. Dr. Alexander, whose notes are peculiarly valuable, thinks that the word is most probably a simple derivative of a word signifying to hide, and signifies a secret or mystery, and indicates the depth of doctrinal and spiritual import in these sacred compositions. If this be the true interpretation it well accords with the other, and when the two are put together, they make up a name which every reader will remember, and which will bring the precious subject at once to mind. *The Psalm of the Precious Secret.*

Subject. We are not left to human interpreters for the key to this golden mystery, for, speaking by the Holy Ghost, Peter tells us, “David speaketh concerning Him” (Acts 2:25). Further on in his memorable sermon he said, “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne; he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:29-31). Nor is this our only guide, for the apostle Paul, led by the same infallible inspiration, quotes from this psalm, and testifies that David wrote of the man through whom is

preached unto us the forgiveness of sins (Acts 13:35-38). It has been the usual plan of commentators to apply the psalm both to David, to the saints, and to the Lord Jesus, but we will venture to believe that in it “Christ is all;” since in the ninth and tenth verses, like the apostles on the mount, we can see “no man but Jesus only.”

Division. The whole is so compact that it is difficult to draw sharp lines of division. It may suffice to note our Lord’s prayer of faith, (verse 1), avowal of faith in Jehovah alone, (verses 2, 3, 4, 5), the contentment of his faith in the present, (verses 6, 7), and the joyous confidence of his faith for the future (verses 8, 11).

1. Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.

2. O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee;

3. But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.

4. Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another God: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.

5. The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.

6. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.

7. I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.

8. I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

9. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.

10. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

11. Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

1. Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.

“Preserve me,” keep, or save me, or as Horsley thinks, “guard me,” even as bodyguards surround their monarch, or as shepherds protect their flocks. Tempted in all points like as we are, the

manhood of Jesus needed to be preserved from the power of evil; and though in itself pure, the Lord Jesus did not confide in that purity of nature, but as an example to his followers, looked to the Lord, his God, for preservation. One of the great names of God is “the Preserver of men” (Job 7:20), and this gracious office the Father exercised towards our Mediator and Representative. It had been promised to the Lord Jesus in express words, that he should be preserved, Isaiah 49:7, 8. “Thus saith the Lord, the Redeemer of Israel and his Holy One, to him whom man despiseth, to him whom the nation abhorreth, I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people.” This promise was to the letter fulfilled, both by providential deliverance and sustaining power, in the case of our Lord. Being preserved himself, he is able to restore the preserved of Israel, for we are “preserved in Christ Jesus and called.” As one with him, the elect were preserved in his preservation, and we may view this mediatorial supplication as the petition of the Great High Priest for all those who are in him. The intercession recorded in John 17 is but an amplification of this cry, “Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we *are*.” When he says, “*preserve me*,” he means his members, his mystical body, himself, and all in him. But while we rejoice in the fact that the Lord Jesus used this prayer for his members, we must not forget that he employed it most surely for himself; he had so emptied himself, and so truly taken upon him the form of a servant, that as man he needed divine keeping even as we do, and often cried unto the strong for strength. Frequently on the mountain-top he breathed forth this desire, and on one occasion in almost the same words, he publicly prayed, “Father, save me from this hour” (John 12:27). If Jesus looked out of himself for protection, how much more must we, his erring followers, do so!

“*O God*.” The word for God here used is EL (Hebrew), by which name the Lord Jesus, when under a sense of great weakness, as for instance when upon the cross, was wont to address the Mighty God, the Omnipotent Helper of his people. We, too, may turn to *El*, the Omnipotent One, in all hours of peril, with the confidence that he who heard the strong crying and tears of our faithful High Priest, is both able and willing to bless us in him. It is well to study the name

and character of God, so that in our straits we may know how and by what title to address our Father who is in heaven.

“For in thee do I put my trust,” or, *I have taken shelter in thee.* As chickens run beneath the hen, so do I betake myself to thee. Thou art my great overshadowing Protector, and I have taken refuge beneath thy strength. This is a potent argument in pleading, and our Lord knew not only how to *use* it with God, but how to yield to its power when wielded by others upon himself. “According to thy faith be it done unto thee,” is a great rule of heaven in dispensing favour, and when we can sincerely declare that we exercise faith in the Mighty God with regard to the mercy which we seek, we may rest assured that our plea will prevail. Faith, like the sword of Saul, never returns empty; it overcomes heaven when held in the hand of prayer. As the Saviour prayed, so let us pray, and as he became more than a conqueror, so shall we also through him; let us when buffeted by storms right bravely cry to the Lord as he did, **“in thee do I put my trust.”**

2. O my soul, thou hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee;

“O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, Thou art my Lord.” In his inmost heart the Lord Jesus bowed himself to do service to his Heavenly Father, and before the throne of Jehovah his soul vowed allegiance to the Lord for our sakes. We are like him when our soul, truly and constantly in the presence of the heart-searching God, declares her full consent to the rule and government of the Infinite Jehovah, saying, **“Thou art my Lord.”** To avow this with the lip is little, but for *the soul* to say it, especially in times of trial, is a gracious evidence of spiritual health; to profess it before men is a small matter, but to declare it before Jehovah himself is of far more consequence. This sentence may also be viewed as the utterance of appropriating faith, laying hold upon the Lord by personal covenant and enjoyment; in this sense may it be our daily song in the house of our pilgrimage.

“My goodness extendeth not to thee.” The work of our Lord Jesus was not needful on account of any necessity in the Divine Being. Jehovah would have been inconceivably glorious had the human race perished, and had no atonement been offered. Although the life-work and death-agonies of the Son did reflect unparalleled

lustre upon every attribute of God, yet the Most Blessed and Infinitely Happy God stood in no need of the obedience and death of his Son; it was for our sakes that the work of redemption was undertaken, and not because of any lack or want on the part of the Most High. How modestly does the Saviour here estimate his own goodness! What overwhelming reasons have we for imitating his humility! “If thou be righteous, what givest thou him? or what receiveth he of thine hand?” (Job 35:7).

3. *But to the saints that are in the earth, and to the excellent, in whom is all my delight.*

“*But to the saints that are in the earth.*” These sanctified ones, although still upon the earth, partake of the results of Jesus’ mediatorial work, and by his goodness are made what they are. The peculiar people, zealous for good works, and hallowed to sacred service, are arrayed in the Saviour’s righteousness and washed in his blood, and so receive of the goodness treasured up in him; these are the persons who are profited by the work of the man Christ Jesus; but that work added nothing to the nature, virtue, or happiness of God, who is blessed for evermore. How much more forcibly is this true of us, poor unworthy servants not fit to be mentioned in comparison with the faithful Son of God! Our hope must ever be that haply some poor child of God may be served by us, for the Great Father can never need our aid. Well may we sing the verses of Dr. Watts:

***“Oft have my heart and tongue confess’d
How empty and how poor I am;
My praise can never make thee blest,
Nor add new glories to thy name.
Yet, Lord, thy saints on earth may reap
Some profit by the good we do;
These are the company I keep,
These are the choicest friends I know.”***

Poor believers are God’s receivers, and have a warrant from the Crown to receive the revenue of our offerings in the King’s name. Saints departed we cannot bless; even prayer for them is of no service; but while they are here we should practically prove our love to them, even as our Master did, for they are ***the excellent of the***

earth. Despite their infirmities, their Lord thinks highly of them, and reckons them to be as nobles among men. The title of “His Excellency” more properly belongs to the meanest saint than to the greatest governor. The true aristocracy are believers in Jesus. They are the only Right Honourables. Stars and garters are poor distinctions compared with the graces of the Spirit. He who knows them best says of them, ***“in whom is all my delight.”*** They are his Hephzibah and his land Beulah, and before all worlds his delights were with these chosen sons of men. Their own opinion of themselves is far other than their Beloved’s opinion of them; they count themselves to be less than nothing, yet he makes much of them, and sets his heart towards them. What wonders the eyes of Divine Love can see where the Hands of Infinite Power have been graciously at work. It was this quick-sighted affection which led Jesus to see in us a recompense for all his agony, and sustained him under all his sufferings by the joy of redeeming us from going down into the pit.

4. Their sorrows shall be multiplied that hasten after another God: their drink offerings of blood will I not offer, nor take up their names into my lips.

The same loving heart which opens towards the chosen people is fast closed against those who continue in their rebellion against God. Jesus hates all wickedness, and especially the high crime of idolatry. The text while it shows our Lord’s abhorrence of sin, shows also the sinner’s greediness after it. Professed believers are often slow towards the true Lord, but sinners ***“hasten after another god.”*** They run like madmen where we creep like snails. Let their zeal rebuke our tardiness. Yet theirs is a case in which the more they haste the worse they speed, for ***their sorrows are multiplied*** by their diligence in multiplying their sins. Matthew Henry pithily says, “They that multiply gods multiply griefs to themselves; for whosoever thinks one god too little, will find two too many, and yet hundreds not enough.” The cruelties and hardships which men endure for their false gods is wonderful to contemplate; our missionary reports are a noteworthy comment on this passage; but perhaps our own experience is an equally vivid exposition; for when we have given our heart to idols, sooner or later we have had to smart for it. Near the roots of our self-love all our sorrows lie, and when that idol is

overthrown, the sting is gone from grief. Moses broke the golden calf and ground it to powder, and cast it into the water of which he made Israel to drink, and so shall our cherished idols become bitter portions for us, unless we at once forsake them. Our Lord had no selfishness; he served but one Lord, and served him only. As for those who turn aside from Jehovah, he was separate from them, bearing their reproach without the camp. Sin and the Saviour had no communion. He came to destroy, not to patronize or be allied with the works of the devil. Hence he refused the testimony of unclean spirits as to his divinity, for in nothing would he have fellowship with darkness. We should be careful above measure not to connect ourselves in the remotest degree with falsehood in religion; even the most solemn of Popish rites we must abhor.

“Their drink offerings of blood will I not offer.” The old proverb says, “It is not safe to eat at the devil’s mess, though the spoon be never so long.” The mere mentioning of ill names it were well to avoid, —

“nor take up their names into my lips.” If we allow poison upon the lip, it may ere long penetrate to the inwards, and it is well to keep out of the mouth that which we would shut out from the heart. If the church would enjoy union with Christ, she must break all the bonds of impiety, and keep herself pure from all the pollutions of carnal will-worship, which now pollute the service of God. Some professors are guilty of great sin in remaining in the communion of Popish churches, where God is as much dishonoured as in Rome herself, only in a more crafty manner.

5. The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.

“The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup.” With what confidence and bounding joy does Jesus turn to Jehovah, whom his soul possessed and delighted in! Content beyond measure with his portion in the Lord his God, he had not a single desire with which to hunt after other gods; his cup was full, and his heart was full too; even in his sorest sorrows he still laid hold with both his hands upon his Father, crying, “My God, my God;” he had not so much as a thought of falling down to worship the prince of this world, although tempted with an “all these will I give thee.” We, too, can make our boast in the Lord; he is the meat and the drink of

our souls. He is our portion, supplying all our necessities, and our cup yielding royal luxuries; our cup in this life, and our inheritance in the life to come. As children of the Father who is in heaven, we inherit, by virtue of our joint heirship with Jesus, all the riches of the covenant of grace; and the portion which falls to us sets upon our table the bread of heaven and the new wine of the kingdom. Who would not be satisfied with such dainty diet? Our shallow cup of sorrow we may well drain with resignation, since the deep cup of love stands side by side with it, and will never be empty.

“Thou maintainest my lot.” Some tenants have a covenant in their leases that they themselves shall maintain and uphold, but in our case Jehovah himself maintains our lot. Our Lord Jesus delighted in this truth, that the Father was on his side, and would maintain his right against all the wrongs of men. He knew that his elect would be reserved for him, and that almighty power would preserve them as his lot and reward for ever. Let us also be glad, because the Judge of all the earth will vindicate our righteous cause.

6. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.

Jesus found the way of obedience to lead into ***“pleasant places.”*** Notwithstanding all the sorrows which marred his countenance, he exclaimed, “Lo, I come; in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” It may seem strange, but while no other man was ever so thoroughly acquainted with grief, it is our belief that no other man ever experienced so much joy and delight in service, for no other served so faithfully and with such great results in view as his recompense of reward. The joy which was set before him must have sent some of its beams of splendour a-down the rugged places where he endured the cross, despising the shame, and must have made them in some respects pleasant places to the generous heart of the Redeemer. At any rate, we know that Jesus was well content with the blood-bought portion which the lines of electing love marked off as his spoil with the strong and his portion with the great. Therein he solaced himself on earth, and delights himself in heaven; and he asks no more

“GOODLY HERITAGE” than that his own beloved may be with him where he is and behold his glory. All the saints can use the

language of this verse, and the more thoroughly they can enter into its contented, grateful, joyful spirit the better for themselves, and the more glorious to their God. Our Lord was poorer than we are, for he had not where to lay his head, and yet when he mentioned his poverty he never used a word of murmuring; discontented spirits are as unlike Jesus as the croaking raven is unlike the cooing dove. Martyrs have been happy in dungeons. “From the delectable orchard of the Leonine prison the Italian martyr dated his letter, and the presence of God made the gridiron of Laurence pleasant to him.” Mr. Greenham was bold enough to say, “They never felt God’s love, or tasted forgiveness of sin, who are discontented.” Some divines think that discontent was the first sin, the rock which wrecked our race in paradise; certainly there can be no paradise where this evil spirit has power, its slime will poison all the flowers of the garden.

7. I will bless the LORD, who hath given me counsel: my reins also instruct me in the night seasons.

“I will bless the Lord, who hath given me counsel.” Praise as well as prayer was presented to the Father by our Lord Jesus, and we are not truly his followers unless our resolve be, ***“I will bless the Lord.”*** Jesus is called Wonderful, Counsellor, but as man he spake not of himself, but as his Father had taught him. Read in confirmation of this, John 7:16; 8:28; and 12:49, 50; and the prophecy concerning him in Isaiah 11:2, 3. It was our Redeemer’s wont to repair to his Father for direction, and having received it, he blessed him for giving him counsel. It would be well for us if we would follow his example of lowliness, cease from trusting in our own understanding, and seek to be guided by the Spirit of God.

“My reins also instruct me in the night seasons.” By the reins understand the inner man, the affections and feelings. The communion of the soul with God brings to it an inner spiritual wisdom which in still seasons is revealed to itself. Our Redeemer spent many nights alone upon the mountain, and we may readily conceive that together with his fellowship with heaven, he carried on a profitable commerce with himself; reviewing his experience, forecasting his work, and considering his position. Great generals fight their battles in their own mind long before the trumpet sounds, and so did our Lord win our battle on his knees before he gained it on the cross. It is a gracious habit after taking counsel from above to

take counsel within. Wise men see more with their eyes shut by night than fools can see by day with their eyes open. He who learns from God and so gets the seed, will soon find wisdom within himself growing in the garden of his soul; “Thine ears shall hear a voice behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand and when ye turn to the left.” The night season which the sinner chooses for his sins is the hallowed hour of quiet when believers hear the soft still voices of heaven, and of the heavenly life within themselves.

8. I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

The fear of death at one time cast its dark shadow over the soul of the Redeemer, and we read that, “he was heard in that he feared.” There appeared unto him an angel, strengthening him; perhaps the heavenly messenger reassured him of his glorious resurrection as his people’s surety, and of the eternal joy into which he should admit the flock redeemed by blood. Then hope shone full upon our Lord’s soul, and, as recorded in these verses, he surveyed the future with holy confidence because he had a continued eye to Jehovah, and enjoyed his perpetual presence. He felt that, thus sustained, he could never be driven from his life’s grand design; nor was he, for he stayed not his hand till he could say, “It is finished.” What an infinite mercy was this for us! In this immovableness, caused by simple faith in the divine help, Jesus is to be viewed as our exemplar; to recognize the presence of the Lord is the duty of every believer; ***“I have set the Lord always before me;”*** and to *trust* the Lord as our champion and guard is the privilege of every saint; ***“because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.”*** The apostle translates this passage, “I foresaw the Lord always before my face;” Acts 2:25; the eye of Jesus’ faith could discern beforehand the continuance of divine support to his suffering Son, in such a degree that he should never be moved from the accomplishment of his purpose of redeeming his people. By the power of God at his right hand he foresaw that he should smite through all who rose up against him, and on that power he placed the firmest reliance.

9. Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoiceth: my flesh also shall rest in hope.

He clearly foresaw that he must die, for he speaks of his flesh resting, and of his soul in the abode of separate spirits; death was full before his face, or he would not have mentioned corruption; but such was his devout reliance upon his God, that he sang over the tomb, and rejoiced in vision of the sepulchre. He knew that the visit of his soul to Sheol, or the invisible world of disembodied spirits, would be a very short one, and that his body in a very brief space would leave the grave, uninjured by its sojourn there; all this made him say, **“my heart is glad,”** and moved his tongue, the **“glory”** of his frame, to **rejoice** in God, the strength of his salvation. Oh, for such holy faith in the prospect of trial and of death! It is the work of faith, not merely to create a peace which passeth all understanding, but to fill the heart full of gladness until the tongue, which, as the organ of an intelligent creature, is our glory, bursts forth in notes of harmonious praise. Faith gives us living joy, and bestows dying rest. **“My flesh also shall rest in hope.”**

10. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Our Lord Jesus was not disappointed in his hope. He declared his Father’s faithfulness in the words, **“thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,”** and that faithfulness was proven on the resurrection morning. Among the departed and disembodied Jesus was not left; he had believed in the resurrection, and he received it on the third day, when his body rose in glorious life, according as he had said in joyous confidence, **“neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.”** Into the outer prison of the grave his body might go, but into the inner prison of corruption he could not enter. He who in soul and body was pre-eminently God’s **“Holy One,”** was loosed from the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it. This is noble encouragement to all the saints; die they must, but rise they shall, and though in their case they shall see corruption, yet they shall rise to everlasting life. Christ’s resurrection is the cause, the earnest, the guarantee, and the emblem of the rising of all his people. Let them, therefore, go to their graves as to their beds, resting their flesh among the clods as they now do upon their couches.

“Since Jesus is mine, I’ll not fear undressing,

*But gladly put off these garments of clay;
To die in the Lord is a covenant blessing,
Since Jesus to glory through death led the way.”*

Wretched will that man be who, when the Philistines of death invade his soul, shall find that, like Saul, he is forsaken of God; but blessed is he who has the Lord at his right hand, for he shall fear no ill, but shall look forward to an eternity of bliss.

11. *Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

“Thou wilt shew me the path of life.” To Jesus first this way was shown, for he is the first begotten from the dead, the first-born of every creature. He himself opened up the way through his own flesh, and then trod it as the forerunner of his own redeemed. The thought of being made the path of life to his people, gladdened the soul of Jesus.

“In thy presence is fulness of joy.” Christ being raised from the dead ascended into glory, to dwell in constant nearness to God, where joy is at its full for ever: the foresight of this urged him onward in his glorious but grievous toil. To bring his chosen to eternal happiness was the high ambition which inspired him, and made him wade through a sea of blood. O God, when a worldling’s mirth has all expired, for ever with Jesus may we dwell *“at thy right hand,”* where *“there are pleasures for evermore;”* and meanwhile, may we have an earnest by tasting thy love below. Trapp’s note on the heavenly verse which closes the Psalm is a sweet morsel, which may serve for a contemplation, and yield a foretaste of our inheritance. He writes, “Here is as much said as can be, but words are too weak to utter it. For *quality* there is in heaven joy and pleasures; for *quantity*, a **‘fulness,’** a torrent whereat they drink without let or loathing; for *constancy*, it is at God’s right hand, who is stronger than all, neither can any take us out of his hand; it is a constant happiness without intermission: and for *perpetuity* it is for evermore. Heaven’s joys are without measure, mixture, or end.”

