

STUDIES IN PSALMS
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. We are again considering that "man after God's own heart." What period in David's life does this cover?
2. This little outline will help:
 - I The King 1-4
 1. His personal desire 1, 2;
 2. His relative determination 3, 4
 - II The Kingdom 5-8
 1. The citizens must be worthy 5, 6
 2. The center must be clean 7, 8 (Scroggie)Relate this to David and then to yourself.
3. When God is God in our own home we will be able to make Him God in every other place. Read verses 3, 4 and relate to your own home as David did to his home.

PSALM 102

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Prayer of a Humbled One brings a
Threefold Answer of Peace.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-11, A Humbled One's Complaint. Stanza II., vers. 12-17, The FIRST CONCLUSION, Adapting the psalm to the Close of the Captivity in Babylon. Stanza III., vers. 18-22, The SECOND CONCLUSION, Adapting the psalm to a Future Generation. Stanza IV., vers. 23-28, The Original Conclusion now placed at the Close of the Composite Psalm.

(Lm.) Prayer—By the Humbled One when he fainteth and
before Jehovah poureth out his Soliloquy.¹

- 1 Jehovah! oh hear my prayer,
and let my cry for help unto thee come in.
- 2 Do not hide thy face from me,
in the day of my distress incline thine ear unto me;
in the day I keep calling haste thee answer me;
- 3 For vanished in² smoke are my days,
and my bones like a hearth are burned through.³

1. Or: "murmuring," "complaint."

2. Some cod. (w. Aram., Sep., Vul.): "like"—Gn.

3. So Dr., Del.

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- 4 Smitten like herbage and withered is my heart,
for I have forgotten to eat my bread.
- 5 By reason of the noise of my groaning
cleaveth my bone to my flesh.
- 6 I am like a pelican of the desert,
I am become like an owl of the ruins :
- 7 I have watched and moaned⁴ like a solitary bird on a roof.
- 8 All the day have mine enemies reproached me,
they who are mad against me by me have sworn.⁵
- 9 For ashes like bread have I eaten,
and my drink with my tears have I mingled,—
- 10 Because of thine indignation and thy wrath;
for thou hast lifted me up and flung me away.
- 11 My days are like a shadow that is stretched-out,
and I myself like herbage shall dry up.
- 12 But thou Jehovah to the ages sittest (enthroned),
and thy memorial⁶ is to generation after generation.
- 13 Thou wilt arise and have compassion upon Zion.
for it is time to shew her favour⁷ for the set time hath come :
- 14 For thy servants take pleasure in her stones,
and on her dust look with favour.
- 15 So will the nations revere the name of Jehovah,
and all the kings of the earth thy glory :
- 16 Because Jehovah hath built up Zion—
hath appeared in his glory,
- 17 Hath turned unto the prayer of the destitute—
and hath not despised their prayer.
- 18 Let this be written for a generation to come,
and let a people to be created offer praise unto Yah :
- 19 That he hath looked forth from his holy height,⁸
Jehovah from the heavens unto the earth hath directed his
gaze :
- 20 To hear the groaning of the prisoner,⁹
to loose such as are appointed to die:¹⁰

4. So *Gt.* Cp. Ps. 55:17—*Gn.*

5. Cp. Isa. 65:15, Jer. 29:22, "He who swears by one in misfortune says 'May I bear the like if I break my faith.'"—T.G. 802.

6. Cp. Exo. 3:15. Some cod. "thy throne"—*Gn.*

7. Or: "to be gracious unto her."

8. Cp. Isa. 63:15.

9. Isa. 42:7, 61:1, Ps. 79:11.

10. *ML.*: "the sons of death."

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- 21 That they may tell in Zion of the name of Jehovah,
and his praise in Jerusalem:
- 22 When the peoples are gathered together,¹¹
and the kingdoms to serve Jehovah.
- 23 He hath humbled¹² in the way my¹³ strength,¹⁴
he hath shortened my days.
- 24 I say—"My GOD! do not take me away in the midst of my
days,
through the generation of generations are thy years:
- 25 Of old the earth thou didst found,
and the work of thy hands are in the heavens:¹⁵
- 26 They shall perish but thou shalt endure,
and they all like a garment shall wear out,—
as a vesture shalt thou change them and they shall vanish;
- 27 But thou art the Same,¹⁶
and thy years shall have no end:
- 28 The sons of thy servants shall abide,
and their seed before thee shall be established."

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 102

A prayer when overwhelmed with trouble.

Lord, hear my prayer! Listen to my plea!

2 Don't turn away from me in this time of my distress.
Bend down Your ear and give me speedy answers,

3, 4 For my days disappear like smoke. My health is
broken and my heart is sick; it is trampled like grass and is
withered. My food is tasteless, and I have lost my appetite.

5 I am reduced to skin and bones because of all my groan-
ing and despair.

6 I am like a vulture in a far-off wilderness, or like an owl
alone in the desert.

7 I lie awake, lonely as a solitary sparrow on the roof.

8 My enemies taunt me day after day and curse at me.

11. Isa. 60:4.

12. The Heb. word here may be either "humbled" or "answered."

13. Ancient authorities are divided between "my" and "his."

14. For the effect of these variations see Exposition.

15. Cp. Isa. 48:13, 44:24.

16. Ml.: "he" "That is He who is (as opposed to the transitory fabric
of the world)"—Dr. Cp. Deu. 32:39, Isa. 41:4, 43:10, 46:4, 48:12.

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9, 10 I eat ashes instead of bread. My tears run down into my drink because of Your anger against me, because of Your wrath. For You have rejected me and thrown me out.

11 My life is passing swiftly as the evening shadows. I am withering like grass.

12 While you, Lord, are a famous King forever. Your face will endure to every generation.

13 I know that You will come and have mercy on Jerusalem—and now is the time to pity her—the time You promised help.

14 For Your people love every stone in her walls and feel sympathy for every grain of dust in her streets.

15 Now let the nations and their rulers tremble before the Lord, before His glory.

16 For Jehovah will rebuild Jerusalem! He will appear in His glory!

17 He will listen to the prayers of the destitute, for He is never too busy to heed their requests.

18 I am recording this so that future generations will also praise the Lord for all that He has done. And a people that shall be created shall praise the Lord.

19 Tell them that God looked down from His Temple in heaven,

20 And heard the groans of His people in slavery—they were children of death—and released them,

21, 22 So that multitudes would stream to the Temple to praise Him, and His praises were sung throughout the city of Jerusalem; and many rulers throughout the earth came to worship Him.

* * * * *

23 He has cut me down in middle life, shortening my days.

24 But I cried to Him, "O God, You live forever and forever! Don't let me die half through my years!

25 In ages past You laid the foundations of the earth, and made the heavens with Your hands!

26 They shall perish, but You go on forever. They will grow old, like worn-out clothing, and You will change them as a man putting on a new shirt and throwing away the old one!

27 But You Yourself never grow old. You are forever, and Your years never end.

* * * * *

28 But our families will continue; generation after generation will be preserved by Your protection.

STUDIES IN PSALMS EXPOSITION

The marked structural peculiarities of this psalm are probably best explained by the supposition that it was at first the soliloquy of an individual, and was afterwards adapted for national use on two successive occasions. The first and last stanzas (vers. 1-11 and 23-28) in all likelihood constituted the original psalm. The former of these is mainly a prolonged *complaint*, which may well have been written by or for King Hezekiah, since it strikingly meets his case, and runs closely parallel with his prayer as preserved in Isaiah 38. Throughout this stanza the personal note predominates—it is *I* and *me* all the way through; and the observable thing is, that there is no return to this personal note until verse 23 is reached, on the recurrence of which, however, we are again reminded of Hezekiah,—for, who so likely as he to have said—*Take me not away in the midst of my days!* and although, even then, the psalm does not close exactly as we might have expected Hezekiah to close it, yet nothing inconsistent comes in: the personal note still prevails, though only in the lofty strain which sets the abiding personality of Jehovah over against the frail and fleeting personality of the suppliant. Precisely how this contrast could have seemed to be a pertinent Divine response to the long drawn-out wail of the personal sufferer, it may be that a sacrificed line or phrase would have clearly shewn. As a working hypothesis, however, we can easily assume that these two personally dominated stanzas formed the original Hezekian psalm.

Time rolls on. The great exile to Babylon for seventy years takes place. Towards the close of this period, some gifted scribe observes the striking *parallel* between the afflicted *king* and the afflicted *nation*; and, to adapt the old psalm to new conditions, especially to hearten and prepare his people for a return to the Fatherland to restore and rebuild Jerusalem, he introduces the present Second Stanza (vers. 12-17). It would seem to be prejudiced and arbitrary *not* to suppose some such occasion for the touching allusions to Jerusalem's *stones* and *dust*, and especially the inspiring belief that the *set time to compassionate Zion* had now arrived, which this stanza includes. Looking again through this second stanza with these thoughts in mind, we are, on the one hand, no longer surprised to find in it no further reference to the original suppliant King; but, on the other hand, we easily realise how perfectly in keeping it is with the national intention suggested that the psalmist should indulge

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in a purely national outlook; a sort of glorified forecast of the grand things now to be expected by the redeemed and renewed Chosen People. The poet rises to a prophetic anticipation of those coming good things, when not only should Zion have been *re-built*, but *Jehovah* have *appeared in his glory*, and in every way have signally *turned to and not despised* the prayer of the as yet *destitute* nation.

But as time passes, it is realised that the *Return itself* is only feebly and by instalments accomplished; and especially that, as yet, there are no signs of the friendly *gathering of nations* to witness *Jehovah's glory* and to *serve him* which the prophets—especially Isaiah—had led them to expect. Hence a further addition is made to this now national psalm, by a significant intimation that the main fulfilment of it awaits a *coming generation*: even if a new Israel has to be *created* to witness its complete accomplishment, the promises of *Jehovah* shall be ultimately fulfilled. *Jehovah*, meanwhile, is not indifferent; but wherever, under the whole heavens, there are prisoners belonging to Israel crying to him in their misery, there his eye rests, thence the cry comes into his ears. The prisoners are to be released—to come to Zion—to rehearse in Jerusalem *Jehovah's* praise under circumstances most auspicious: *When the peoples are gathered together, And the kingdoms to serve Jehovah*. No doubt the picture is an *ideal* one: only to be made *real* after unforeseen delays. For, as Kirkpatrick well says, in abatement of our surprise that, “As a matter of fact the return was an insignificant event, and no startling results immediately followed it”:—“*Prophecy constantly combines in one view the nearer and the remoter future, depicting the eventual result, without indicating the steps by which it is to be reached.*”

Another easy movement, and the structure of the whole psalm is accounted for. After the two additions contained in Stanzas II. and III. had been made, it may then have been observed by a final editor that the original close of the personal psalm still held good, furnishing a most fitting conclusion for the whole composite psalm; which was therefore added,—quite possibly by Ezra, with or without a finishing touch to complete the unification of the whole as one of the Songs of Zion.

Probably there are but few present-day readers of the psalms who cannot find assistance in some such modest theory of origin of this psalm as the foregoing. Better far so to apprehend how the psalm *may* have assumed its present form, than to

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be driven to the unwelcome conclusion that it is radically and irremediably incoherent; seeing especially that such a conclusion is likely to foster the deplorable habit of regarding Holy Scripture as a mere fetish, whose chief value lies in a meaningless repetition of sounds in which sense is at a discount.

The reasons for regarding ver. 23 as originally continuous with ver. 11 will become more and more evident on examination. Not only does the personal element then reappear after being so long in abeyance, but it reappears with the same theme uppermost: ver. 11 is speaking of *my days*, and it is to *my days* that ver. 23 returns.

It is no doubt a little disconcerting to observe that, just where this junction reveals itself, there some difficulty should appear as to both "rendering" and "reading." As to "rendering," attention may be called to the undoubted fact that the very first word in verse 23 (*'anah*) may be rendered either "humbled," as in this translation, or "answered," as in the ancient Greek version, the Septuagint. As to "reading," it is not to be denied that on the length of a single down-stroke it depends whether the affixed pronoun to the noun "strength" be "my" or "his"—"my strength" or "his strength." If the latter were clearly ruled out by the context, we might serenely disregard it; and, as a fact, it is declined in this translation on the ground of a smaller amount of probability in its favour. Yet by no means so decisively declined as to make it unworthy of further notice. Not only is there the circumstance to be reckoned with that in some Hebrew copies and in the Sep. and Vul. versions the pronoun "his" is preferred; but there is the further stubborn fact to be admitted that the Septuagint has woven out of the two doubtful elements an entirely different result from that which appears above and in our public versions (A.V., R.V., and P.B.V.); the Septuagint rendering being as follows: "He answered him in the way of his strength: tell me the shortness of my days. Do not take me away," &c. It is perhaps impossible to be quite sure that there is nothing of importance in this ancient result; although, of course, it *may* be merely an ancient mistake in construing the original Hebrew text: hence it is here passed on for the respectful consideration of candid critics; and the more readily, because of a slight misgiving that something further than now appears originally stood here—something *possibly* tending to set forth Hezekiah as a type of the Messiah in respect of *the shortening* of his *days*. Suffice it to have called

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attention to this remarkable variation; in order now to resume a working assurance, sincerely felt, that in the "rendering" and "reading" followed in the text of this translation, as near an approach to absolute truth is made as our present means admit. It may be reassuring to observe that nothing further is here at stake than simply the precise terms in which verse 23 should appear as the original continuation of verse 11. Even the Septuagint rendering could still be said to resume the *personal* strain of the psalm in respect of the *days* of the individual sufferer. These nice points being thus disposed of, we are fairly entitled to review the psalm as a whole in regard to its larger outstanding features.

The one thing which nothing can hide is the grandeur of the psalm: the way in which it sets over against the afflictions of the man and the afflictions of the nation, the eternity and elevation of Jehovah. Because of the stability of his throne and the inexhaustible resources of his being, there is hope for the nation; and because of the eternity of his years, there is solace for the individual—though *this* is implied rather than expressed in the present psalm. It seems to be implied in the sudden transition made by the suppliant (in ver. 24) from his own *days* to the eternal *years*: as much as to say—"Why needest thou, whose *years* run on from generation to generation, cut down by one half my allotted *days*, few as they are at most?" That, after all, the hope of the individual should be left thus, rather implied than expressed, may be attributed to the fact that as yet "life and incorruption have not been illumined by the Gospel."

No such feebleness of expression can be affirmed of this psalm as regards the *national* hope. It is marvellous how strongly these holy men of old assert and reassert this. Zion is to be so favoured as to cause *the nations to revere the name of Jehovah, and all the kings of the earth his glory*. Not only will Jehovah *build up Zion*, but he himself *will appear in his glory*. When the imprisoned Israelites are released, they will come to Zion and rehearse their story. Concurrently with this—so the psalmist intimates—there will be *a gathering of peoples of kingdoms—to serve Jehovah*. The significance of these assurances ought on the face of them to be beyond dispute or doubt; especially when viewed in the light of Isaiah's predictions and of the Theocratic psalms (92-99) which we have lately studied. To allege that these foretellings are now being fulfilled in the Church,

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is not only to rob Israel, but it is to degrade the Church from her heavenly calling and to throw all scripture into confusion. It is respectfully submitted that Christian theologians ought to know the Pauline Epistles better than thus to teach.

The above allusion to the "Theocratic Psalms" suffices to remind us that, here as well as there, what is affirmed of Jehovah in the psalm is in the Epistle to the Hebrews alleged to have been spoken "of the Son." Some expositors of the Psalms have shewn solicitude to discover this reference to the Son in this psalm as clearly as by the statement in the Epistle it might seem it ought to be discoverable; and it was partly from sympathy with that expectation, that care was taken to admit that all doubt could not at present be said to have been conclusively set at rest as to the exact terms of the original resumption of Hezekiah's psalm at verse 23. One able critic, at any rate, sees in the circumstance that the Divine name in verse 24 is *El* rather than *Elohim*, a probable note of transition to "the Son." However this may be, it will probably be a relief to plain Christians to rest in the apparently well-warranted conclusion, that the radical significance of the *Memorial* name *Jehovah*—as "Yahweh," "the Becoming One," renders the transition easy, when context and circumstance require it, to Him who in the fulness of time "*became* flesh and tabernacled among us." As already suggested when expounding the Theocratic psalms, whenever visible Divine Manifestation is implied, then some veiling of Absolute Deity must also be understood; and this veil Christians already possess in Jesus on whom our Apostle Paul explicitly teaches "was graciously bestowed The Name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Please try to appreciate the historical circumstances of this psalm. Discuss possibilities.
2. Evidently at least three persons had a part in writing this psalm and three periods in the history of Israel are contemplated. Discuss.
3. "One thing which nothing can hide is the grandeur of the psalm: ". . . just what is involved in this grandeur and how is it expressed?"
4. Just what is (or was) the national hope of Israel? Discuss Rotherham's view point and others.

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5. What is said of God here is said of the Son in Hebrews. What is the significance of this?

PSALM 103

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Bless Jehovah; for He is Worthy.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-5, Bless Jehovah: For his Personal Dealings. Stanza II., vers. 6-10, For his Revealed Character. Stanza III., vers. 11-14, For his Kindness, Forgiveness, Compassion, and Considerateness. Stanza IV., vers. 15-18, For the Continuity of his Dealings, in Contrast with Man's Frailty. Stanza V., vers. 19-22, For the Permanence and Universality of his Kingdom, let All his Creatures Bless Him.

(Lm.) By David

- 1 *Bless Jehovah O my soul,*
and all within me his holy name:
- 2 *Bless Jehovah O my soul,*
and forget not any of his dealings:—
- 3 who pardoneth all thine iniquities,¹
who healeth all thy diseases,
- 4 who redeemeth from the pit thy life,
who crowneth thee with kindness and compassions,
- 5 who satisfieth with good thy desire,²
thy youth reneweth itself like an eagle.³
- 6 A doer of acts of righteousness is Jehovah,
and acts of vindication for all who are oppressed:
- 7 Who made known his ways to Moses.
to the sons of Israel his doings:—
- 8 *Compassionate and gracious is Jehovah,*
*slow to anger and abundant in kindness.*⁴

1. So (pl.) some cod. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn., Sep., Vul.)—Gn. M.T.: "iniquity" (sing.)

2. So Sep. "Supplication"—Del. "Age"—Carter. "Spirit"—Leeser.

3. Or: "vulture." So Dr.

4. Cp. Exo. 34:6, 7. The Refrain of the Bible (see "The Emphasised Bible").