

STUDIES IN PSALMS

8. There are four personal characteristics of Jehovah. Name them and discuss their application to Israel and to you.
9. In what way does our Lord deal with us like sons?
10. Is our frailty ever an excuse for sin?
11. The brevity of life is a great source of discouragement. How is it overcome?
12. The heavens are peopled or populated. Of what comfort is this to us?
13. Who are the messengers of our God? What is their ministry? How does it relate to us?

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DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Creation Hymn.

ANALYSIS

It is difficult to frame an Analysis of this psalm. The course of thought and observation followed therein bears Some Resemblance to the Method Pursued in Gen. 1:1—2:3; but the Differences are Considerable. So far as the psalm submits itself to external measurement, it may be said that 10-line stanzas prevail; but two out of the six run up to 20 and 17 lines respectively. The chief *refrain* of the previous psalm is repeated here. There is here no Superscribed Line, as to the previous psalm there was no Subscribed Line: probably furnishing evidence that the Two Psalms at an early time became Practically One.

(Lm. None)

- 1 *Bless Jehovah O my soul!*
Jehovah my God thou art exceeding great,
Majesty and state hast thou put on:
- 2 Wrapping thyself in light as a mantle,
stretching out the heavens as a tent-curtain:
- 3 who layeth in the waters the beams of his upper-chambers,
who maketh the clouds his chariot,
who walketh on the wings of the wind:
- 4 Making his messengers winds,¹
his attendants fire and flame.¹

1. Or: "Making his messengers of winds His attendants of fire and flame."

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- 5 He hath founded the earth on its bases,
it shall not be shaken to the ages and beyond :
- 6 With the deep as a garment hast thou covered it,
above the mountains the waters take their stand :
- 7 At thy rebuke they flee,
at the voice of thy thunder they hurry away—
- 8 Mountains rise valleys between them sink—
into the place which thou hast founded for them :
- 9 A boundary hast thou set they shall not overpass,
they shall not again cover the earth.
- 10 Who sendeth forth springs into the torrent-beds,
Between the mountains they flow along :
- 11 They give drink to all the wild beasts of the plain,
the wild asses break their thirst :
- 12 Above² them the bird of the heaven settleth down
from amidst the foliage they utter a voice.
- 13 He watereth³ the mountains out of his upper chambers,
of the fruit of thy works the earth taketh her fill.
- 14 He causeth⁴ grass to spring up for the cattle,
and herb for the service of man,⁵
that he may bring forth⁶ bread out of the earth ;
- 15 And wine rejoiceth man's heart,
that he may cause⁷ [his] face to shine with oil;
and bread sustaineth man's heart.
- 16 The trees of Jehovah take their fill,
the cedars of Lebanon which he hath planted :
- 17 Where the birds build their nests,
as for the stork fir trees⁸ are her house :
- 18 Mountains that are high are for the wild-goats,
the crags are a refuge for the rock-badger.⁹
- 19 He hath made the moon for stated seasons,
the sun knoweth his place for going in :
- 20 Cause thou darkness and it becometh night,
in it creepeth forth every wild beast of the forest :

2. Or: "Beside."

3. Ml.: "Watering."

4. Ml.: "Causing."

5. Or: "mankind."

6. Or simply: "To bring forth."

7. Or Simply: "To cause."

8. Or: "cypresseses."

9. So Del. (adding "rather *Hyrax syriacus*") "Rock-rabbit"—Dr.

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- 21 The young lions are roaring for prey,
and seeking from GOD their food:
- 22 Let the sun arise they withdraw,
and in their lairs they lay them down:
- 23 Forth goeth man to his work,
and to his labour until evening.
- 24 How many are thy works O Jehovah!
all of them in wisdom hast thou made;
the earth is full of thy possessions.¹⁰
- 25 Yonder is the sea great and broad on both hands,
There are gliding things innumerable;
Living things small with great:
- 26 There ships sail along,
leviathan¹¹ which thou hast formed to play therein:¹²
- 27 All of them for thee do wait,
that thou mayest give [them] their food in its season:
- 28 Thou givest unto them they gather,
thou openest thy hand, they are satisfied with good:
- 29 Thou hidest thy face they are dismayed,
thou withdrawest their spirit¹³ they cease to breathe,
and unto their dust do they return:
- 30 Thou sendest forth thy Spirit¹³ they are created,
and thou renewest the face of the ground.
- 31 Let the glory of Jehovah be age-abiding,
let Jehovah rejoice in his works:
- 32 Who looketh on the earth and it trembleth,
he toucheth the mountains and they smoke.
- 33 I would fain sing to Jehovah while I live,
I would harp to my God while I continue:
- 34 Pleasing unto him be my soliloquy,
I myself will rejoice in Jehovah.
- 35 Let sinners come to an end¹⁴ out of the earth,
and lawless ones no longer exist.
Bless Jehovah O my soul!

(Nm.)¹⁵

10. Or: "acquisitions." Or (Dr.) "productions." Some authorities have the word in the sing.

11. "Whale"—O.G. "A general term for all 'sea-monsters'"—Per.

12. Or: "with him."

13. Or: "breath"—so Dr. and Per. twice. Shd. be both alike.

14. "Be consumed"—Per., Dr. "Vanish"—Del.

15. See 105 (beginning).

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PARAPHRASE
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I bless the Lord: O Lord my God, how great You are! You are robed with honor and with majesty and light! You stretched out the starry curtain of the heavens,

3 And hollowed out the surface of the earth to form the seas. The clouds are His chariots! He rides upon the wings of the wind!

4 The angels¹ are His messengers—His servants of fire!

* * * * *

5 You bound the world together so that it would never fall apart.

6 You clothed the earth with floods of waters covering up the mountains.

7, 8 You spoke, and at the sound of Your shout the water collected into its vast ocean beds, and mountains rose and valleys sank to the levels You decreed.

9 And then You set a boundary for the seas, so that they would never again cover the earth.

* * * * *

10 He placed springs in the valleys, and streams that gush from the mountains.

11 They gave water for all the animals to drink. There the wild donkeys quench their thirst,

12 And the birds nest beside the streams and sing among the branches of the trees.

13 He sends rain upon the mountains and fills the earth with fruit.

14 The tender grass grows up at His command to feed the cattle, and there are fruit trees, vegetables and grain for man to cultivate,

15 And wine to make him glad, and olive oil as lotion for his skin, and bread to give him strength.

16 The Lord planted the cedars of Lebanon. They are tall and flourishing.

17 There the birds make their nests, the storks in the firs.

18 High in the mountains are pastures for the wild goats; and rock-badgers burrow in among the rocks and find protection there.

1. Literally, "spirits."

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19 He assigned the moon to mark the months, and the sun to mark the days.

20 He sends the night and darkness, when all the forest folk come out.

21 Then the young lions roar for their food; but they are dependent on the Lord.

22 At dawn they slink back into their dens to rest,

23 And men go off to work until the evening shadows fall again.

24 O Lord, what a variety You have made! And in wisdom You have made them all! The earth is full of Your riches.

25 There before me lies the mighty ocean, teeming with life of every kind, both great and small.

26 And look! See the ships! And over there, the whale You made to play in the sea!

27 Every one of these depends on You to give them daily food.

28 You supply it, and they gather it! You open wide Your hand to feed them and they are satisfied with all Your bountiful provision.

29 But if You turn away from them, then all is lost. And when You gather up their breath, they die and turn again to dust.

30 Then You send Your Spirit, and new life is born² to replenish all the living of the earth.

31 Praise God forever! How He must rejoice in all His work!

32 The earth trembles at His glance; the mountains burst into flame at His touch.

33 I will sing to the Lord as long as I live! I will praise God to my last breath!

34 May He be pleased by all these thoughts about Him, for He is the source of all my joy.

35 Let all sinners perish—all who refuse to praise Him. But I will praise Him. Hallelujah!

EXPOSITION

In the words of Perowne, "here we have a picture which for truth and depth of colouring, for animation, tenderness, beauty, has never been surpassed." Leaving the reader to mark and admire the poetic features of the psalm for himself, atten-

2. Literally, "created."

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tion may be called to the weighty theological lessons here taught.

1. In the *first* place: Jehovah is here represented as BEFORE, ABOVE AND BEYOND his works. The *honour and majesty* in which he reveals himself are external to himself—he *puts* them on; *light* is the *mantle* in which he *enwraps himself*. Yet there are means by which he makes himself known; and they suggest the idea of eyes needed to observe them, minds susceptible of being impressed by them—they are relative terms.

2. In the *next* place: Jehovah is revealed as PRESENT in the midst of his works. The space curtained in by the outspread heavens is his tent, wherein he dwells; for no other Presence is suggested in that connection. Yet he is himself unseen. The wind itself we see not, save in its effects: how much less can we behold him who *walks* on its *wings*. Even this tent, indeed, cannot contain him: he has *upper chambers* into which our eyes cannot penetrate.

3. Nevertheless, it is HERE that the interest of the psalm is CONCENTRATED. This sun and moon, these stars, these mountains, yonder sea, together with the living creatures large and small thus brought under our notice: these are sufficient to impress the psalmist with their *number*, with the *wisdom* displayed in their formation, with the *richness* of their Creator in possessing them, and with the *pleasure* he takes in them. It would be rash to infer, alone from this concentration of interest, that this world is eternal; but assuredly we are led to expect that it is destined to become the theatre of important Divine dealings.

4. Noting, in passing, that the position assigned to MAN in this psalm is—if not exactly a subordinate one—certainly one less exalted than that assigned him in the Genesis account—it becomes the more observable how prominent a place is given to the ANIMAL WORLD. It is not simply that animals are here seen lovingly gathered around their Creator, feeding as it were out of *his hand*; but that, in them, the alternations of life and death are illustrated in a remarkably suggestive manner. Animals are sentient beings; they are breathing creatures, whose breath is in their nostrils; and in these respects they are akin to man. It would almost appear as though their kinship with man were utilised to furnish object-lessons for man himself. Animals live as long as they breathe: so do men. The breathing power of animals is a divine gift; and, when it is *withdrawn*, they *cease to breathe*: so it is with men. Man's breath or spirit, answers to, or is correlated with God's breath or spirit. The same word

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ruah expresses either "breath" or "spirit" or both. The consecutive use of the term in this psalm is profoundly suggestive; because the law of continuity strongly operates to bring the breath of the creature into line with the breath of the Creator; and the breath of the Creator is itself creative. *Thou withdrawest their ruah they cease to breathe: thou sendest forth thy ruah they are created*. It does not matter which English word is used, provided the continuity is kept up. Say—"their breath . . . thy breath," then the phrase "thy breath" is uplifted into the significance of "thy life-giving spirit," for it cannot be less than that. Say—"their spirit" . . . thy spirit," then "spirit" in the former member of the sentence must be lowered sufficiently to allow animals to partake of it, *at least as a loan from God*. To deny "spirit" to animals is to deny them life. To assert that, because man has "spirit," therefore he is deathless, is by consequence to assert far too much of animals, unless we are prepared to affirm that they too are immortal. Beyond all this lies the weighty question—How far "spirit" enters into the individuality of animals—the personality of men: as to which, Biblical evidence must be elsewhere sought. But just here, in this and similar texts, the alphabet of the subject is to be found—at least if it is Biblical psychology we seek.

5. Of like interest and value is the side-light here thrown on the essential meaning of the word "CREATION": *Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; Thou renewest the face of the ground*. This is startling: it is nothing less than subversive of certain popular but very superficial views on the subject of creation. If creation is essentially *the making of something out of nothing*, then creation denies procreation; and assumes that every new generation of animals comes direct from God, without parentage after its kind; inasmuch as we have here presented, not the original stocking of the earth with animal life, but the *renewal* which is continually supplying the vacancies caused by death. The fact is, that God holds all life in his own hand: all living things "live and move and have their being in him." If this is true of animals, much more is it true of men. God is "the God of the spirits of *all flesh*": in every living thing save the first, concur both procreation and creation, the parental contribution and the divine. God is the father of our spirits. I am God's creature, as well as my parent's child. If to create is to make a new thing—to embody an original idea—then there is something new and distinctive in every creature which

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Jehovah has made. Probably no two animals were ever perfectly alike: one may feel certain that no two men ever were. The differentia of men should amplify as well as radiate the glory of God.

6. There is something singularly IMPRESSIVE in the last stanza of this magnificent psalm. Therein the personality of the psalmist starts forth afresh into bold relief. The psalm started with emotion, brought over from the previous psalm. Then for a moment it flashed forth (in 1b and following lines) with a direct address to Jehovah, so supplying an element remarkably wanting in the foregoing psalm. But, having offered this personal greeting to his God, the psalmist's own personality quietly falls into the background; and, though you follow the pointing of his finger as he directs you to look at object after object, and do just perceive the vibration of his voice as he bursts out in adoration at ver. 24, he gives you no time to turn round and look him in the face. Now, however, at ver. 31, pent-up feeling rises to the poet's lips, seeking an utterance which it scarce can find. As if apprehensive that Jehovah might lose some of the glory which is his due and in some way be grieved with his own handiwork, he adopts the language of *desire*: *Let the glory of Jehovah be age-abiding, Let Jehovah rejoice in his works.* As if admonished of the lowering possibility of Divine displeasure, he introduces a couplet which sounds like a dark hint: *who looketh on the earth, and it trembleth; He toucheth the mountains, and they smoke.* It is like the muttering of distant thunder, while as yet the sky is all blue. Then, as if unable to endure the thought of a hiding of Jehovah's face, he moves himself, by the significant "cohortative" mood, to keep voice and harp attuned to high praise: *I would fain sing to Jehovah while I live, I would harp to my God while I continue. Pleasing unto him be my soliloquy, I myself will rejoice in Jehovah,*—drinking in my joy at the fount of his joy—only let *him* rejoice: but are there, then, works in which he cannot rejoice? *I myself*, he says with formal emphasis, *I myself* will rejoice—whatever *others* may do. So then, alas! there *may be*—there *are*—others not likeminded! Out of the blue, the bolt falls: *Let sinners come to an end out of the earth, And lawless ones no longer exist.* It was remarked above that the trend of this whole psalm seemed to betoken that this earth is designed to be the theatre of important Divine dealings. This ominous couplet confirms that impression: unless, indeed, we are war-

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ranted in thinking of sinners as merely banished to some other place, as if there were some such place not included in Jehovah's dominions (cp. 103:19). Still, that is not what is either said or suggested in this psalm; and it would seem dutiful to accept the natural interpretation of the solemn words before us. Suffice it that "there is a future for the righteous" (Ps. 37, 73); and that the overthrow of moral evil will so be accomplished as to call forth the self-incited refrain—*Bless Jehovah, O my soul!*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the theme of this psalm?
2. What purpose is seen in creation?
3. What is meant by saying "Jehovah is here represented as *before, above, and beyond* his works"?
4. What figures of speech are used to show God is present in His creation? Why suggested?
5. This earth is made very important in this psalm. If it is all to be burned up, why so much emphasis?
6. Do animals have a spirit? Are they the same as man? Discuss.
7. This psalm could give a new meaning to the word "creation". Discuss.
8. What is impressive about the last stanza of the psalm?
9. There is "a dark hint" of what?
10. Are we to unavoidably conclude that this earth will be the theatre of God's activities for all future time?

PSALM 105

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Hymn of Praise to Jehovah for Giving Israel a
Covenant Land in which to Observe His Law.

ANALYSIS

The Main Design of this Psalm is clearly to Endear the Land to the People for whom it was designed, that therein they should Observe Jehovah's Law. To attain this end the History of their First Fathers is traced as Circling Round this Land, and then the Steps are Traced by which the Nation was Brought Into the Land to Dwell There.