

STUDIES IN PSALMS

how the land-covenant, introduced as early in the psalm as the eighth verse, is reintroduced as far on as at the forty-second verse, so leading up to the unifying theme and climax of the psalm—the LAND as the Divinely ordained sphere of the full and unmolested observance of the LAW.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What particular value are these historical psalms?
2. Why was there a need to repeat the events of the past?
3. There seems to be several purposes in the historical psalms: (78, 105, 106). Give the purpose of each.
4. An intense devotional attitude can be developed by following the appeals here made: there are eleven of them. Try two or three and see.
5. A very strong nationalistic spirit is here generated—why?

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DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Humbled Israel Confessing Her Sins as a Nation.

ANALYSIS

Enclosed within an Introduction of Praise and Prayer, vers. 1-5, and a Conclusion of Prayer and Doxology, vers. 47, 48, stands a National Confession of Sin, vers. 6-46, Relieved only by the Merciful Deliverances of Jehovah, the Intercession of Moses, ver. 23, the Interposition of Phinehas, ver. 30, and the Compassion of Israel's Captors, ver. 46. The Sins Confessed are chiefly the following:—Incredulity, ver. 7; Murmuring for Food and Drink, ver. 13; Rebellion against their Leaders, ver. 16; Worship of the Golden Calf, ver. 19; Refusal of the Land, ver. 24; Worship of the Moabitish Baal, ver. 28; Rebellion against Moses and Aaron, ver. 32; Non-Extermination of Idolatrous Peoples, and the Taking Part in their Licentious and Cruel Idolatry, vers. 34-40.

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah!¹

- 1 Give ye thanks unto Jehovah *for he is good,
for to the ages is his kindness.*²

1. Cp. 105 notes at beginning and end.

2. Cp. refrain of 136; also I Ch. 16:34, Ezra 3:11, Jr. 33:11.

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- 2 Who can express the mighty deeds of Jehovah?
cause to be heard all his praise?
- 3 How happy they who observe justice,
he that doeth³ righteousness at all times!
- 4 Remember me⁴ O Jehovah when thou favourest thy people,⁵
visit me⁵ with thy salvation:
- 5 That I⁶ may gaze upon the good things of thy chosen ones,
may rejoice in the rejoicing of thy nation,
may glory with thine inheritance.
- 6 We have sinned⁷ with our fathers,
we have acted perversely have been lawless:
- 7 Our fathers in Egypt heeded not thy wondrous works,
they remembered not the abundance of thy kindnesses,
but rebelled against the Most High⁸ at the Red-sea.⁹
- 8 Yet saved he them for the sake of his name,
to make known his heroic might:
- 9 So he rebuked the Red-sea and it dried up,¹⁰
and he led them in the deeps as a wilderness.¹¹
- 10 Thus saved he them from the hand of a hater,
and redeemed them from the hand of a foe;
- 11 And the waters covered their adversaries,
not one from among them was left:
- 12 So they believed in his words,¹²
they sang his praise.¹³
- 13 They soon forgot his works,¹⁴
they tarried not for his counsel:
- 14 But longed a longing in the desert,
and put GOD to the proof in the waste;¹⁵

3. Some cod. (w. Aram., Sep., Syr., Vul.): "they that do"—Gn.

4. Some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.): "us"—Gn.

5. "When thou again (cp. ver. 47) showest thyself gracious unto them"

—Del.

6. Or: "we" (according to the pronoun adopted above).

7. Here begins the confession of sin. Cp. I K. 8:46-53, Neh. 9

8. So *Gt.* Cp. 78:17, 56—Gn. So also Br.

9. Cp. Exo. 14:11, 12.

10. Exo. 14:21-29.

11. Isa. 63:13.

12. Exo. 14:30, 31.

13. Exo. 15.

14. Or: "doings."

15. Exo. 15, 16, 17; Num. 11.

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- 15 And he gave them their request,
and sent them food¹⁶ to their desire.¹⁷
- 16 And they were jealous of Moses in the camp,
of Aaron the consecrated one of Jehovah:¹⁸
- 17 Earth opened and swallowed up Dathan,
and covered the company¹⁹ of Abiram;
- 18 And a fire consumed their company,¹⁹
a flame licked up the lawless ones.
- 19 They made a calf in Horeb,²⁰
and bowed down to a molten image;
- 20 And changed my²¹ glory
for the similitude of an ox eating herbage.
- 21 They forgot GOD their saviour,
though he had done²² great things in Egypt,
- 22 Wondrous works in the land of Ham,
fearful things at the Red-sea.
- 23 Then would he have commanded to destroy them,
had not Moses his chosen
stood forth in the breach before him,
to turn back his wrath from inflicting ruin.
- 24 Moreover they refused the desired land,²³
they believed not his word;
- 25 And they murmured in their tents,
they hearkened not unto the voice of Jehovah.
- 26 Then lifted he his hand unto them,—
that he would let them fall²⁴ in the desert;
- 27 And would disperse²⁵ their seed among the nations,
and would scatter them through the lands.

16. So Br. "The most probable reading of a difficult passage" [*mazon* for *razon*]. Maclaren, content with *razon* ["leanness," "wasting"] smartly says: "Full-fed flesh makes starved souls."

17. Ml.: "soul." Cp. 78:18.

18. Num. 16, 17.

19. U.: "congregation."

20. Exo. 32; Deu. 9:8-12.

21. So it was originally; but was changed by the Sopherim to "their glory." G. Intro., 360. Cp. *ante*, Intro., Chap. I., Obs. 1.

22. Ml.: "Doing."

23. Num. 13, 14.

24. The permissive *hiphil*. There is no need to introduce active causation here.

25. So it shd. be (w. Syr.; cp. Eze. 20:23)—Gn.

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- 28 And they joined²⁶ themselves to Baal-peor,²⁷
and did eat the sacrifices of the dead:
- 29 So they gave provocation by their doings,
and a plague made a breach among them.
- 30 Then stood forth Phinehas²⁸ and interposed,
and stayed was the plague;
- 31 And it was accounted to him as righteousness,
to generation after generation unto the ages.
- 32 And they gave provocation at the waters of Meribah,
and it fared ill with Moses for their sakes;
- 33 For they embittered his spirit,
and he spake rashly with his lips.²⁹
- 34 They did not destroy the peoples,
of whom Jehovah had spoken to them;³⁰
- 35 But had fellowship with the nations,
and learnt their doings.
- 36 And they served their idols,
and they³¹ became to them a lure;
- 37 And they sacrificed their sons
and their daughters unto demons.³²
- 38 And they poured out innocent blood,
the blood of their sons and their daughters,—
whom they sacrificed unto the idols of Canaan,
and polluted was the land with bloodshed:
- 39 And they became unclean in their deeds,
and unchaste in their practices;
- 40 And the anger of Jehovah was kindled against his people,
and he abhorred his inheritance.
- 41 So he gave them over into the hand of the nations,
and they who hated them ruled over them;
- 42 And their enemies oppressed them,
and they had to bow down under their hand.
- 43 Many times he rescued them,

26. Points to the prostitution with which Baal Peor, this Moabitish Priapus, was worshipped"—Del.

27. "Baal of Peor"—Dr. Num. 25:2-5.

28. Num. 25:7-13.

29. Num. 20:11f, Deu. 1:37, 32:51.

30. Exo. 23:32, 34:12, Deu. 7:16, Judg. 1:36.

31. Some cod. (w. Sep., Vul.): "it"—Gn.

32. "Unto Shedim": Or: "*demi-gods*; mentioned besides only in Deu. 32:17"—Dr. Cp. Deu. 12:31.

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- but they rebelled in their counsel,
and sank low in their iniquity.
- 44 Then looked he on the strait they were in,
when he heard their piercing³³ cry;
- 45 And he remembered for them his covenant,
and was moved to pity according to the abundance of his
kindnesses;³⁴
- 46 And gave them to be objects of compassion
before all their captors.
- 47 Save us Jehovah our God,
and gather us from among the nations:
to give thanks unto thy holy name,
to make our boast of thy praise.
- 48 Blessed be Jehovah God of Israel,
from antiquity even unto futurity!³⁵
and let all the people say—"Amen."³⁶

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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Hallelujah! Thank You, Lord! How good You are! Your love for us continues on forever.

2 Who can ever list the glorious miracles of God? Who can ever praise Him half enough?

3 Happiness comes to those who are fair to others and are always just and good.

4 Remember me too, O Lord, while You are blessing and saving Your people.

5 Let me share in Your chosen ones' prosperity and rejoice in all their joys, and receive the glory You gave to them.

6 Both we and our fathers have sinned so much.

7 They weren't impressed by the wonder of Your miracles in Egypt, and soon forgot Your many acts of kindness to them. Instead they rebelled against You at the Red Sea.

33. U.: "ringing." "As in I K. 8:28 . . . *rinnah* is a loud lamentation"—Del.

34. Authorities divided between singular and plural.

35. Ml. (as at the close of Book I, Ps. 41): "From the age (concealed duration in the past) even unto the age (concealed duration in the future)."

36. M.T.: "Praise ye Yah" (not found in Sep. or Syr.—Gn.) carried forward to head of next psalm. See notes at beginning and end of Ps. 105.

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8 Even so You saved them—to defend the honor of Your name and demonstrate Your power to all the world.

9 You commanded the Red Sea to divide, forming a dry road across its bottom. Yes, as dry as any desert!

10 Thus You rescued them from their enemies.

11 Then the water returned and covered the road and drowned their foes; not one survived.

12 Then at last His people believed Him. Then they finally sang His praise.

13 Yet how quickly they forgot again! They wouldn't wait for Him to act,

14 But demanded better food,¹ testing God's patience to the breaking point.

15 So He gave them their demands, but sent them leanness in their souls.²

16 They were envious of Moses; yes, and Aaron, too, the man anointed³ by God as His priest.

17 Because of this the earth opened and swallowed Dathan, Abiram and his friends;

18 And fire fell from heaven to consume these wicked men.

19, 20 For they preferred a statue of an ox that eats grass, to the glorious presence of God Himself.

21, 22 Thus they despised their Savior who had done such mighty miracles in Egypt and at the Sea.

23 So the Lord declared He would destroy them. But Moses, His chosen one, stepped into the breach between the people and their God and begged Him to turn from His wrath, and not destroy them.

24 They refused to enter the Promised Land, for they wouldn't believe His solemn oath to care for them.

25 Instead, they pouted in their tents and mourned and despised His command.

26 Therefore He swore that He would kill them in the wilderness

27 And send their children away to distant lands as exiles.

28 Then our fathers joined the worshipers of Baal at Peor and even offered sacrifices to the dead!⁴

29 With all these things they angered Him—and so a plague broke out upon them

1. Literally, "lusted exceedingly."

2. Or, "but sent a plague to punish them."

3. Literally, "the holy one of Jehovah."

4. Or, "to lifeless idols."

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30 And continued until Phineas executed those whose sins had caused the plague to start.

31 (For this good deed Phineas will be remembered forever.)

32 At Meribah, too, Israel angered God, causing Moses serious trouble,

33 For he became angry and spoke foolishly.

34 Nor did Israel destroy the nations in the land as God had told them to,

35 But mingled in among the heathen and learned their evil ways,

36 Sacrificing to their idols, and were led away from God.

37, 38 They even sacrificed their little children to the demons—the idols of Canaan—shedding innocent blood and polluting the land with murder.

39 Their evil deeds defiled them, for their love of idols was adultery in the sight of God.

40 That is why Jehovah's anger burned against His people, and He abhorred them.

41, 42 That is why He let the heathen nations crush them. They were ruled by those who hated them and oppressed by their enemies.

43 Again and again He delivered them from their slavery, but they continued to rebel against Him, and were finally destroyed by their sin.

44 Yet, even so, He listened to their cries and heeded their distress;

45 He remembered His promises to them and relented because of His great love,

46 And caused even their enemies who captured them to pity them.

47 O Lord God, save us! Regather us from the nations so we can thank Your holy name and rejoice and praise You.

* * * * *

48 Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Let all the people say, "Amen!" Hallelujah!

EXPOSITION

Attention has already been called to this psalm (see Exposition of 105) as not only one of a series of historical psalms—and as such serving an important purpose in the training of the people,—but especially as a national confession of sin. This

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characteristic is so marked, and morally so significant, as to be worthy of further thought. Not only are our minds arrested by the evident honesty of the nation, and especially its prophets, in thus recording their own shame; but we are made to pause and ponder in presence of this spiritual phenomenon. If we try to conceive of this psalm as being originated earlier than the Exile, we shall probably fail. We can easily imagine an Isaiah or a Jeremiah charging sin home upon the people; but we find the greatest difficulty in representing it to ourselves as possible that they could have led the way in a national confession such as this psalm supplies. The time was not ripe for this: the atmosphere of public confession did not yet exist. As we read the great national confession of sin preserved in Nehemiah 9, or that found in the early part of Daniel 9 which though not national in form is nevertheless intensely and intentionally national in spirit, we feel at home in the prayer and realise that the prayer is at home in its historical and literary surroundings. It fits in with the time: is the genuine product of the strange and startling events which have come to pass in Israelitish history. There had been earlier invasions of the holy land, and the lessons of Divine providence had sunk deep into the best and most thoughtful minds in Israel; but nothing like this had happened before: that Jerusalem itself should be overthrown, and the whole land permanently brought under the heel of the Foreigner. The effect on the minds of the people must have been profound. There was no denying the great, sad fact of Hebrew humiliation; and though many of the people may have shrewdly and stoically adapted themselves to this revolutionary change in their environment, yet the moral only needed to be pointedly drawn and strongly driven home by prophetic voices in and after the Babylonish Exile, to carry home conviction to the average Hebrew mind. This is not to say, that the spiritual sense of humiliation was equally deep in all minds; but it is to say, that when prophets declared—"Our sins as a nation have brought these evils upon us," the general conscience must have responded—"There is no denying it!" This acquiescence in the undeniable, it was, which created the atmosphere in which public confession of national sin could live; for it should be well noted that both these elements—that the confession is public and the sin national—are involved in the case now before us. Its being publicly made with general consent silences cavil; and the sins being national lifts them up to the level of undeniable notoriety. From this point of view, survey

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the long catalogue of sins, beginning with the first protests of incredulity in Egypt, down to the latest practices of licentious cruelty perpetrated in Palestine. Imagine the humiliation and severe spiritual discipline involved in reciting so many national sins in a single psalm. What spiritual authority in these Western Isles would dare to draw up such a catalogue of national offences against the laws of God and man? How can we picture to ourselves congregations throughout our land publicly humbling themselves under the piled-up iniquities of many centuries? The attempt to conceive these things may open our eyes to something of the startlingly unique spiritual phenomenon which the ancient temple-use of this psalm presents to our view. No man can study the Hebrew nation successfully who does not study its solidarity; and no man can appreciate its solidarity in the highest realm of the spirit, who does not bend his mind to the spectacle of a nation confessing the sins it had committed from the Exodus to the Exile. That is the spectacle we have here.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the major emphasis of this psalm?
2. How is the element of honesty of the nation and their prophets seen?
3. At about what time was this psalm originated?
4. What other texts seem to be like this psalm?
5. There seems to be the most profound of impressions involved in this psalm. Why?
6. When the prophets said: "Our sins as a nation have brought these evils upon us"—what was the response?
7. Catalogue the sins of Israel and relate them to America. What should be our attitude?
8. Rotherham cannot imagine the British Isles confessing their sins in 1909. What has happened since should teach us something. Discuss.