

STUDIES IN PSALMS

his royal library, must have been acquainted with the songs of his predecessors. What if,—in providing for his Great Passover, to which he was so anxious to bring, in reunion, all Israel,—what if he discovered and brought into passover use this song of Jehoshaphat's days, weaving it into the service, with probably some of his own compositions,—would not such an appropriation of this psalm help to fix it in the "Hallel" for ever?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What evidence of independent origin is found in this psalm? Read II Chr. 20.
2. This psalm was used for a very special occasion—what was it?
3. Rotherham seems very confident as to the historical circumstances for the original use of this song. Where and when?
4. Hezekiah could have made special use of this psalm. How?

PSALM 116

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Individual Thanks for Deliverance from Peril of Death.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, With Profession of Love the Psalmist Describes his Peril and Prayer. Stanza II., vers. 5-9, In Glowing Terms describes Jehovah's Answer. Stanza III., vers. 10-14, Reviewing his Trial, he Desires to Return Public Thanks. Stanza IV., vers. 15-19, The Costliness of Death Intensifies his Desire for Publicity in Thanksgiving.

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah.

- 1 I love—
For Jehovah heareth my voice my supplications;
- 2 For he hath inclined his ear unto me,
and throughout my days will I call.¹
- 3 There encompassed me the meshes of death,
and the straits of hades overtook me;
distress and sorrow I found:

1. Or: "invoke."

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- 4 And with the name of Jehovah I called,²
 "Ah now! Jehovah! oh rescue my soul!"
- 5 *Gracious*³ is Jehovah and righteous,
 and our God is *compassionate*;³
- 6 Preserver of the simple-minded is Jehovah:
 I was brought low and to me he brought salvation.
- 7 Turn in O my soul to thine abiding rest,⁴
 for Jehovah hath dealt bountifully with thee
- 8 For he hath rescued my soul from death,
 mine eyes from tears,
 my foot from thrusts:⁵
- 9 I will walk to and fro⁶ before Jehovah,
 in the broad land⁷ of the living.
- 10 I have kept my faith so I will speak:
 I was humbled greatly,—
- 11 I said in mine alarm:
 "All mankind are a delusion!"⁸
- 12 How can I repay Jehovah
 all his benefits upon me?
- 13 The cup of deliverances⁹ will I lift,
 and with the name of Jehovah will I call;
- 14 My vows to Jehovah will I pay,—
 may it be before all his people!
- 15 Costly in the eyes of Jehovah
 is death to his men of kindness:
- 16 Ah now! Jehovah for I am thy servant,
 I am thy servant the son of thy handmaid,—
 thou hast loosened my bonds.
- 17 To thee will I sacrifice a sacrifice of thanksgiving,
 and with the name of Jehovah will I call.
- 18 My vows to Jehovah will I pay,
 may it be before all his people!

2. Or: "invoked."

3. Exo. 34:6.

4. *Ml.* "rests"—prob. pl. of intensification.

5. *Cp.* 56:13.

6. "The *Hithpa*, '*ethhalek* denotes a free and sprightly walking along"—

Del.

7. *Ml.* "lands."

8. *Cp.* Isa. 58:6.

9. Or: "a great salvation" (pl. intensive).

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- 19 In the courts of the house of Jehovah,
in the midst of thee O Jerusalem!

(Nm.)¹⁰

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 116

I love the Lord because He hears my prayers and answers them.

2 Because He bends down and listens, I will pray as long as I breathe!

3 Death stared me in the face—I was frightened and sad.

4 Then I cried, "Lord, save me!"

5 How kind He is! How good He is! So merciful, this God of ours!

6 The Lord protects the simple and the childlike: I was facing death and then He saved me.

7 Now I can relax. For the Lord has done this wonderful miracle for me.

8 He has saved me from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling.

9 I shall live! Yes, in His presence—here on earth!

10, 11 In my discouragement I thought, "They are lying when they say I will recover."¹

12 But now what can I offer Jehovah for all He has done for me?

13 I will bring Him an offering of wine² and praise His name.

14 I will publicly bring Him the sacrifice I vowed I would.

15 His loved ones are very precious to Him and He does not lightly let them die.³

16 O Lord, You have freed me from my bonds and I will serve you forever.

17 I will worship You and offer You a sacrifice of thanksgiving.

18, 19 Here in the courts of the Temple in Jerusalem,

10. See Ps. 117 (beginning).

1. Literally, "the cup of salvation" i.e., the thank-offering of wine for saving me.

2. Literally, "I said in my alarm, all men are liars."

3. Literally, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." See context for validity of the paraphrase.

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before all the people, I will pay everything I vowed to the Lord.
Praise the Lord.

EXPOSITION

The personal note running through this psalm is so clearly that of an individual as distinguished from the *people* (vers. 14, 18), and so vividly recalls the known experiences of King Hezekiah, that we may fairly be excused from going any further in quest of the probable author. The modernisation of the original language to suit a later time (to which critics call attention), is so well within the editorial freedoms known to have been taken by the ancient Sopherim, as not to raise an argument in favour of a later origin. Starting from the presumption that Hezekiah wrote this psalm, we soon meet with indications confirming this conclusion; and those indications afford help to the more complete understanding of this deeply experimental composition.

The opening line has greatly puzzled critics by reason of its abruptness. May not that abruptness,—probably amounting to a broken construction,—be best accounted for as a manifestation of overwhelming affection? *I love*, says the writer, and then as good as says—“How MUCH I love, let the following song reveal.” The circumstance that he presently uses language closely akin to that which stands at the opening of Ps. 18, to which we have already seen cause to think Hezekiah prefixed a line expressive of tender affection, makes us the more persuaded that this psalm is his.

Then, too, there is a line further on (ver. 11) which, even as conceived in bitter disappointment, seems—as usually translated—to contribute very little to general edification. It is quite true that either Hezekiah, or any other tried saint, *might* by repeated betrayals have been tempted to conclude that “All men are false.” But if we put this to the test, by asking whether it is *likely* that Hezekiah, either as prince or king, had ever been so utterly bankrupt of trusty friends as this utterance of despair seems to imply,—we are compelled to admit it to be very unlikely indeed. So, apprehending some error in translation, we hail from the pen of Aglen, in Ellicott's Commentary, the suggestion of quite a different turn to the passage: “In an ecstasy of despair, I said, ‘The whole race of mankind is a delusion.’” And again—“Once in distrust I thought that God did not care for man, and that the whole of humanity was a

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failure." Well, take this hint, and transplant it into the circumstances of Hezekiah; and then say, whether it does not savour of a very possible temptation. Childless, facing death, the Davidic heirship and covenant in peril of extinction and dishonour; and if the promise to David fail, where will be that to Abraham; what will become of the promise to the Race? "Is not the whole race of mankind a delusion?" Diseased thought, illogical, gratuitous? Yes! but—as a *temptation*, to be afterwards recalled with shame, and only to be divulged when faith has consciously revived,—is it not possible, with a verisimilitude which remarkably well fits the extraordinary circumstances?

Once more: there are those singular lines—*Costly in the eyes of Jehovah Is death to his men of kindness* (ver. 15). A glimmer of their meaning has dawned on several commentators; but how that meaning is intensified when the lines are put into a Hezekian setting! "It is no light thing," says Perowne, "in the sight of God that his servants should perish." With clearer apprehension, Delitzsch observes: "The death of His saints is not cheap to God; He does not lightly suffer matters to come to such a pass; He does not suffer His own to be torn from Him by death." True, in no case, can it be said that his saints are "torn from him by death, since their spirits return to him, and remain in his safe-keeping; nevertheless, they are certainly "torn" from his kingdom here on earth; and the point is that he rightly estimates the sacrifice. It is a *costly* process to let them die as they do: their service is lost, their praises are hushed, their complete personalities are in abeyance until the Resurrection. To forget this would be to unlearn and practically contradict the close of the psalm (115) we so lately studied; and it would be prematurely, yea and violently, to cut ourselves adrift from the keen and clear perception possessed by Hezekiah himself, as seen in Isa. 38:18, 19, that it is the especial function of THE LIVING—not of the dead—to praise Jehovah. Reverting to the *costliness* of death in the eyes of Jehovah,—two reflections appeal to us forcibly: How incalculable is the price which Jehovah is paying by permitting so many generations of his saintly ones to die—must it not be with a view to some commensurate end? And, again, if Jehovah counts *costly* the death of his ordinary, imperfect *men of kindness*; how costly does he reckon the death of Him who was the perfect reflection of this love and who He raised from the dead?

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QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is a very personal psalm. Who wrote it?
2. How has the apparent abruptness of the opening of the psalm been explained?
3. Rotherham seems to think verse eleven expresses a thought not compatible with the experience of Hezekiah (or anyone else). What is the thought? Do you agree?
4. There seems to be much indication of a lack (or at best fluctuating) of faith in the psalms. Why so? We either believe or we do not believe. Discuss.
5. Verse 15 offers a good proof-text for the death of some faithful, fruitful servant of the Lord. "The death of His saints is not cheap to God." Discuss this beautiful thought. Read Isa. 38:18, 19.

PSALM 117

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

All Nations Invited to Join in Israel's Tribute of Praise.

ANALYSIS

By Synonyms of Unmistakable Universality, All Nations are Invited to Praise Jehovah for his Kindness and Faithfulness to Israel.

(P.R.I.) Praise ye Yah!

- 1 Praise Jehovah all ye nations,
laud him all ye tribes of men:
- 2 For his kindness hath prevailed over us,
and the truth of Jehovah is to the ages.

(Nm.)¹

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 117

Praise the Lord, all nations everywhere. Laud Him, all the peoples of the earth.

2 For He loves us very dearly, and His truth endures. Praise the Lord.

1. See Ps. 118 (beginning).