

PSALMS 123 AND 124

palm which says "Bring," the beckoning movement which says "Come"; so, says the psalmist, even with such profound respect and watchful attention are *our eyes unto Jehovah our God, until that he be gracious unto us*. Surely, a comparison as suggestive as it is beautiful. Such servants know their master's or mistress's ways—the meaning of each familiar gesture. They need no loud word of formal command: all they require is, to catch the slightest hint of the superior's WILL as the sufficient signal for obedience. And so, the least word from Isaiah for instance, would be intimation enough for both the King and his people:—without (say) going to the Pentateuch, or to Mount Sinai, for a formal "Thus saith the Lord."

This adjustment of the mental attitude of the worshipping nation towards Jehovah is then at once merged in importunate entreaty. The plea is pointedly put—*Be gracious unto us, O Jehovah*,—and emphatically repeated—*be gracious unto us*; and then weighted with a reason: *for greatly are we sated with contempt*. "Oh! we have had enough of this vile and blaspheming Rabshakeh and his imperious master." We all know the story. Fancy the foreigner on our own soil; and ourselves at the time in certain and miraculously attested covenant relation with the Maker of heaven and earth! and should *we* not have importuned our God in some such strains as these?

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. This is a "response psalm"; a response to what?
2. A beautiful court scene is here given—i.e. a scene in the court of King Jehovah. What is involved?
3. How beautifully is obedience to God here suggested. Discuss.
4. What is meant by the phrase ". . . greatly are we sated with contempt"?

P S A L M 1 2 4

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Sudden and Complete Deliverance Acknowledged
as Jehovah's Own Work.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-5, Israel taught to Recognize and Remember the Extent

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of her Danger as figured by On-rushing Waters. Stanza II., vers. 6-8, Praise offered for Deliverance as from a Beast of Prey and from a Fowler's Trap.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 "If it had not been Jehovah who was for us"—
oh let Israel say—
- 2 "If it had not been Jehovah who was for us,
when man rose up against us
- 3 Then alive had they swallowed us up
in the glow of their anger against us;
- 4 Then the waters had washed us away,
the torrent had gone over our soul;
- 5 Then had gone over our soul the waters so proud."
- 6 Blessed be Jehovah!
who gave us not over as a prey to their teeth.
- 7 Our soul like a bird hath escaped from the trap of the
fowlers,
the trap is broken and we are escaped.
- 8 Our help is in the name of Jehovah,
maker of heaven and earth.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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If the Lord had not been on our side (let all Israel admit it), if the Lord had not been on our side,

2, 3 We would have been swallowed alive by our enemies,
destroyed by their anger.

4, 5 We would have drowned beneath the flood of these
men's fury and pride.

6 Blessed be Jehovah who has not let them devour us.

7 We have escaped with our lives as a bird from a hunter's
snare. The snare is broken and we are free!

8 Our help is from the Lord who made heaven and earth!

EXPOSITION

Of the three conceivable situations which have been thought of as originating this striking and beautiful psalm, the first fits not at all, the second fits but awkwardly, the third fits admirably—as glove to hand for which it was made. The

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first, is the deliverance from Babylon; the second, that from the conspiracy of the little surrounding nations to Nehemiah and his brethren after their return to the homeland; and these, it will be perceived, are exilic and post-exilic: of comparatively late date for inclusion in Israel's Psalter. The third, is the deliverance of Judah from the Assyrian invader Sennacherib, which carries back the psalm into Hezekiah's times, and places it alongside of its companions, the other "Songs of the Steps."

As to the first of these occasions, suffice it to say that Judah was not about being *swallowed up* in Babylon since they had long sojourned there, had built houses, and practised their religion in their foreign home; and on the other hand their return from Babylon was not in the least like being snatched from the teeth of a beast of prey or being set free from a broken *trap* or *snare* with an instant and complete liberation. Kirkpatrick plainly sees this, and his words are worth recording here. "It is commonly supposed," says he, "to be the thanksgiving of the returned exiles for deliverance from the Babylonian captivity. No less event, it is urged, could have evoked such strong emotion." It is well that he notes this strong emotion. "But the language of the psalm," he continues, "points rather to some sudden danger which had been providentially averted, than to a blow which had actually fallen." And then he goes on to emphasise "the danger which menaced the restored community when Nehemiah was rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem." But neither was this danger so sudden, nor was deliverance so definite, instant, and complete as to answer to the description of the psalm. Turn back to the deliverance from the Assyrian invasion and the Divine overthrow of Sennacherib's army in a single night, and then how apt and impressive the Psalmist's description of both danger and deliverance; how abundantly justified the "strong emotion" which the psalm unmistakably betrays. More than this. The invasion of Palestine by Assyria had been actually foretold by Isaiah (8:6-8) in terms precisely similar to those of the first stanza of this psalm; so that when the psalmist speaks of *the waters so proud* which had threatened to engulf Judah, he may excusably be thought to have had the very terms of Isaiah's prediction in mind, as he had spoken of "the waters strong and many of the River (Euphrates)," rolling on throughout Judah, overflowing and passing along "till unto the neck he shall reach." Thirtle is amply justified in thus commenting upon the psalm before us:—"It is all true

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of Hezekiah and his experiences during the Assyrian invasion. The first four verses reflect the desperate character of the situation, when there was no resource but Jehovah. David was enabled to effect many escapes; the great escape of Hezekiah is outlined in his remarkable story. That it was comparable to a bird securing its freedom after being imprisoned in a cage (ver. 7a) may be gathered from the boastful words of Sennacherib himself, as appearing in the well-known Taylor cylinder ('Records of the Past,' Second Series, vol. vi., pp. 90, 91): 'Hezekiah of Judah . . . I shut up like a caged bird in Jerusalem, his royal city . . . He was overwhelmed by the fear of the brightness of my lordship (lines 11-30)'—Thirtle, "Old Testament Problems," pp. 41, 42.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are the three possible situations for the setting of this psalm?
2. Show how the first and second situations could not fit the psalm.
3. Even archeology confirms Rotherham's position on this psalm. Discuss.

PSALM 125

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Trust in Jehovah Encouraged in Presence of the Invader.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Jerusalem Safe under Jehovah's Protection. Stanza II., ver. 3, The Sceptre of the Lawless One will be Removed. Stanza III., vers. 4, 5, Prayer for the Good, a Threatening for Such as Yield to the Enemy, and a Benediction on Israel.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 They who trust in Jehovah
are like Mount Zion which cannot be shaken.
- 2 To the ages sitteth Jerusalem enthroned—
mountains round about her;