

STUDIES IN PSALMS

PSALM 3

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Conspiracy, Confidence, Courage and Victory.
Chief Conspirator left Unnamed!

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, A Surprising Conspiracy. Stanza II., vers. 3, 4, Unshaken Confidence. Stanza III., vers. 5, 6, Calm Courage. A Monostich Relic of the Original Psalm—ver. 7a. Stanza IV., vers. 7b, c, 8, Final Victory.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David—

When he was fleeing from the face of Absalom his son.

- 1 Jehovah! how have mine adversaries multiplied!
multitudes are rising against me!
- 2 multitudes are saying of my soul¹—
“There is no salvation for him in God!”²
- 3 But thou Jehovah are a shield about me,
my glory and the lifter-up of my head.
- 4 With my voice to Jehovah I call,
and he answereth me out of his holy mountain.
- 5 I laid me down—and slept,
I awoke—for Jehovah still sustained me.
- 6 I will not be afraid of myriads of people—
who round about have set themselves against me:—
- 7 Arise Jehovah! save me O my God!
Surely³ thou hast smitten all my foes on the cheek!⁴
the teeth of the lawless hast thou broken in pieces!
- 8 To Jehovah belongeth salvation:
On thy people (be) thy blessing!

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician. (CMm.) On stringed instruments.

1. Or: “my person.”

2. Sep.: “in his God.”

3. Or: “For”

4. Cp. 1 K. 22:24, Job 16:10, Lam. 3:30, Mi. 5:1.

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PARAPHRASE

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A Psalm of David when he fled from his son Absalom

O Lord, so many are against me. So many seek to harm me. I have so many enemies.

2 So many say that God will never help me.

3 But Lord, You are my shield, my glory, and my only hope. You alone can lift my head, now bowed in shame.¹

4 I cried out to the Lord, and He heard me from His Temple in Jerusalem.²

5 Then I lay down and slept in peace and woke up safely, for the Lord was watching over me.

6 And now, although ten thousand enemies surround me on every side, I am not afraid!

7 I will cry to Him, "Arise, O Lord! Save me, O my God!" And He will slap them in the face, insulting³ them and breaking off their teeth.

8 For salvation comes from God. What joys He gives to all His people.

EXPOSITION

This is the first psalm ascribed to David, and it well sustains Thirtle's theory of the joint-authorship of the Psalter; which maintains that Hezekiah freely utilised the work of his famous ancestor David, adapting it to the service of the Temple in his own day; but taking care, while himself remaining anonymous, to do homage to David whenever any material portion of a psalm had come down from the father of Hebrew Psalmody. To start with the assumption that this psalm was not at all from David, is not only to pay wanton disregard to the literary headline embodying a tradition which has come down from time immemorial, but is to miss the exquisite fitness between David's known circumstances and all the earlier portion of this psalm. On the other hand, to infer that David must have composed the whole of the psalm as it now stands, is to bring ourselves into trouble before we reach the end. With David in mind as author, all is well up to the stirring outcry which opens

1. Implied.

2. Literally, "from His holy mountain."

3. Implied.

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ver. 7; but then we get into perplexity; for the next line either announces a sudden victory (surely!) in which case it is incredible that no anxiety for the safety of Absalom should have been betrayed; or (with *ki* as "For") it brings up past deliverances as a plea for present rescue, of which allusion the language contains no trace, and it is extremely unlikely, to say the least, that the writer would come so near to the contradiction of pleading, "O save! for thou hast saved!" without inserting some little word determining the accomplished salvation to the past. This perplexity is removed the instant we detect here Hezekiah's adapting hand; since every line of the final stanza suits the overthrow of the Assyrians. David, in no case, could very well have written, "Thou has smitten all my foes," without adding, "heretofore;" whereas Hezekiah, on receiving news of Sennacherib's overthrow, could write in the conviction that he had no other enemies to fear; and, moreover, if there is any fitness in the word "lawless" (cp. 1:1, note) to point to foreigners, then that is the very work Hezekiah would be likely to employ.

Thus released from all embarrassment respecting authorship, we are in a position to appreciate to the full the encouraging, yea even inspiring, spectacle of lofty confidence with which the lately fallen but now spiritually restored monarch—the hero of so many triumphs and the singer of so many songs—now faces the sore chastisements which confront him in the thorny path of discipline which he must henceforth for a long time tread. God has had mercy upon him; has restored to him the joys of his salvation; has renewed to him the gift of his ennobling Spirit. He is inwardly a new man: has had granted to him Divine healing. Hence he is now again a strong man. He can by faith behold Jehovah about him as a *shield*. He stands erect: his Divine Supporter has lifted up his head. The God whose ark he has dutifully sent back to Jerusalem is already, as by angels' mouths, sending him answers of peace from his *holy mountain*. And, thus sustained, he soundly sleeps; and, refreshed, rises without fear to confront the *myriads* of Israel who have been led astray into rebellion.

We can imagine Hezekiah's muse poising itself on that outburst of supplication from the pen of his ancestor, *Arise, Jehovah! save me O my God!*—lingering over it, as still most suitable to himself ere yet Assyria's power in the land was broken; and perhaps wondering how much of the original closing stanza could be saved from oblivion: when further uncertainty was

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obviated by the decisive rebuke of the great Eastern Power; and two good lines remain to weave into his own climax. David first and then Hezekiah would be ready to own—

To Jehovah belongeth salvation;

and both alike—nobly caring for the flock of Jehovah's pasturing—would be prepared, with a full heart, to exclaim—

On thy people be thy blessing!

Thus we need not deny ourselves the pleasure of repeating the delightful words in which Ewald and Delitzsch unite to honour David:—

“As in olden times, he still bears his people upon a loving, interceding heart. He commiserates those who have been led astray, without being angry with them. Distinctions vanish altogether from his mind when he prays for the nation as a whole. The one concluding expression of the psalm—remarks Ewald—throws a bright light into the depths of his noble soul.”

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What evidence do we have of joint-authorship except the subjective internal evidence of a man by the name of Thirtle?
2. Consider the following explanation of this psalm:

LORD, HOW ARE THEY INCREASED THAT TROUBLE ME
Psalm 3

THEME

David prays for salvation as he flees from his son, Absalom.

SETTING

Absalom has finally gained the hearts of the people and has led the rebellion of Israel against David. David flees from Jerusalem in all haste feeling that all is lost unless the Lord hears and delivers him. This Psalm expresses David's confidence that God will hear and save.

HOW ARE THEY INCREASED THAT TROUBLE ME vrs. 1-2

Although David had heard of the unrest of his people he was totally unprepared for the uprising. He knew that Absalom had won the hearts of many of his people but he didn't think that they would rebel against him. Wasn't he the Lord's

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anointed? Hadn't he led them to many victories? How surprised he was to see the vast numbers that had arisen against him. Many were saying that God had forsaken him and pointing to David's sin and suffering as proof.

THOU ARE MY SHIELD vrs. 3-6

How often in the life of David had he found God his shield? He knew that God would protect him. After all, God was his glory. His one great desire was to glorify God. His deep repentance was his sincere declaration of his determination to glorify God in righteousness. Because he had placed himself in the hands of the Lord he could lie down and sleep unafraid. Let his enemies rage about him; God was his protector.

ARISE, O LORD, SAVE ME vrs. 7-8

How natural it was for this man of God to cry out, "Save me." He knew that the eyes of the Lord were over him, and he was sure that the ears of the Lord were opened unto his prayers. God was his saviour. He was so sure that God would save him that even as he cried he stated in the affirmative that God had smitten all his enemies. There was a simplicity and yet a fullness to David's faith that was amazing.

Harrison Mathews.

Isn't it just as sensible to approach the psalm from this view point as from the one suggested by Rotherham? Discuss.

PSALM 4

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Ideal Levite's Evening Prayer.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., ver. 1, New Favour Sought in the Strength of Past Supplies. Stanza II., ver. 2, Expostulation addressed to Wealthy Worshippers, whose Taunts for the Poverty of his Office he had borne. Stanza III., ver. 2, The Levite magnifies his Office, and counts on his nearness to God to ensure an Answer to his Prayer. Stanzas IV. and V., vers. 4, 5, The Salutary Lessons which his Answer brings him. Stanza VI., ver. 6, A Shrewd Observation on a Prayer Frequently Heard in the Temple. Stanza VII., ver. 7, Grateful Praise