

STUDIES IN PSALMS

PSALM 44

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Israel Suffers for God.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-8, The Psalmist, Encouraging himself by Jehovah's Past Favour in Giving Israel their Land, Emboldens himself to Expect Further Victories. Stanza II., vers. 9-16, Sudden Reverses Confound Israel, and cause the Psalmist to feel the Deepest Shame. Stanza III., vers 17-22, Expostulation based on Israel's Fidelity. Stanza IV., vers. 23, 24, and V., vers., 25, 26, Impassioned and Plaintive Appeals for Divine Interposition.—Psalm probably written by David on a defeat of Israel by Edom (inferred from a comparison of 2 Sam. 8:13 with I K. 11:15, and the inscription to Ps. 60), and Adapted to a Later Occasion by Hezekiah.

(Lm.) An Instructive Psalm.

- 1 O God! with our own ears have we heard—
our fathers have told us,
the work thou didst work in their days—
the days of aforetime:
- 2 Thou thyself with thine own hand didst dispossess nations
and plant them,
didst afflict peoples—
and spread them out.
- 3 For not by their own sword possessed they the land,
nor did their own arm win victory for them;
But thine own right hand and thine own arm,
and the light of thy face, in that thou didst take pleasure in
them.
- 4 Thou thyself art my king, my God,
the commander¹ of the victories² of Jacob.
- 5 By thee at our adversaries will we thrust,
in thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us.
- 6 For not in mine own bow will I trust,
nor can mine own sword give me victory.

1. So Sep., Syr., Br. and others.

2. Or: "great salvation" (pl. intensive).

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- 7 For thou hast saved us from our adversaries,
and them who hate us hast thou put to shame.
- 8 In God have we boasted all the day,
and unto thy name unto the ages will we give thanks.
- 9 But nay! thou hast rejected and confounded us,
and art not going forth with our hosts;
- 10 Thou turnest us back from the adversary,
and they who hate us have plundered at will:
- 11 Thou dost give us up like sheep to be devoured,
and amongst the nations hast thou scattered us:
- 12 Thou dost sell thy people for no-value,
and hast not made increase by their price:
- 13 Thou dost make us a reproach unto our neighbours,
a mockery and derision to them who are round about us:
- 14 Thou dost make us a by-word among the nations,
a shaking of the head among the peoples.
- 15 All the day is mine ignomy before me,
and the shame of my face hath covered me:
- 16 At the voice of him who reproacheth and revileth,
At the face of the foe and avenger.¹
- 17 All this hath come upon us yet had we not forgotten thee,
neither had we dealt falsely with thy covenant:
- 18 Our heart had not turned away backward,
neither had our steps declined from thy path:—
- 19 That thou shouldst have crushed us down in the place of
jackals,
and covered us over with deep darkness.
- 20 If we had forgotten the name of our God,
and had spread forth our palms to the GOD of a foreigner
- 21 Would not God have searched into this,
since he knoweth the secrets of the heart?
- 22 Surely for thy sake have we been slain all the day,
we have been accounted as sheep for slaughter.
- 23 Oh arouse thyself!—wherefore shouldst thou sleep Sovereign
Lord?²
oh awake! do not reject altogether.
- 24 Wherefore thy face shouldst thou hide?
shouldst forget our humiliation and our oppression?
- 25 For our soul hath sunk down to the dust,

1. Cp. 8:2.

2. Some cod. (w. 2 ear. pr. edns): "Jehovah"—Gn.

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our body¹ hath cleaved to the earth.

- 26 Oh arise as succour for us,
and ransom us for thy kindness' sake.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

(CMm.) For lilies = Passover. For the sons of korah =
"patriarchs of song."

Cp. Intro., Chap. II., 3.

PARAPHRASE

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O God, we have heard of the glorious miracles You did in the days of long ago. Our forefathers have told us how You drove the heathen nations from this land and gave it all to us, spreading Israel from one end of the country to the other.

3 They did not conquer by their own strength and skill; but by Your mighty power and because You smiled upon them and favored them.

4 You are my King and my God. Decree victories for Your people!

5 For it is only by Your power and through Your name that we tread down our enemies;

6 I do not trust my weapons! They could never save me.

7 Only You can give us the victory over those who hate us.

8 My constant boast is God. I can never thank You enough!

9 And yet for a time, O Lord, You have tossed us aside in dishonor, and have not helped us in our battles.

10 You have actually fought against us and defeated us before our foes. Our enemies have invaded our land and pillaged the countryside.

11 You have treated us like sheep in a slaughter pen, and scattered us among the nations.

12 You sold us for a pittance. You valued us at nothing at all.

13 The neighboring nations laugh and mock at us because of all the evil You have sent.

14 You have made the word "Jew" a byword of contempt and shame among the nations, disliked by all.

15, 16 I am constantly despised, mocked, taunted and cursed by my vengeful enemies.

1. Ml.: "belly." Heb. *betan*. Cp. 31:9.

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17 And all this has happened, Lord, despite our loyalty to You. We have not violated Your covenant.

18 Our hearts have not deserted You! We have not left Your path by a single step.

19 If we had, we could understand Your punishing us in the barren wilderness and sending us into darkness and death.

20 If we had turned away from worshiping our God, and were worshiping idols,

21 Would God not know it? Yes, He knows the secrets of every heart.

22 But that is not our case! For we are facing death threats constantly because of serving You! We are like sheep awaiting slaughter.

23 Waken! Rouse Yourself! Don't sleep, O Lord! Are we cast off forever?

24 Why do You look the other way? Why do You ignore our sorrows and oppression?

25 We lie face downward in the dust.

26 Rise up, O Lord, and come and help us. Save us by Your constant love.

EXPOSITION

It is quite possible that, in the course of adaptation and transmission, this valuable psalm has suffered some disturbances of its outward form as regards both metre and stanza. It is doubtful, however, whether successful attempts can now be made to restore the original symmetry which may well have existed. For example, it is not unlikely that the psalm was a trimeter throughout, including the opening lines, which now appear as pentameters. But it would not only take a bold hand to reduce the lines to a severer metre, but that bold hand might strike off accretions which are equally authentic with the original verse, as may appear when once the principle of joint-authorship is admitted. If Hezekiah's harp could adapt itself to those grand pentameters which open the psalm as we now have it—and, we may add, which appear to have offered themselves to the ancient Greek translators—who are we, and what know we of any rigidity in harping exigencies, that we should deliberately lop off syllables which, at all events, are very ancient. Similar caution must stay our hand from undue meddling with the stanzas. They are slightly irregular, as it is, undoubtedly; but

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we may justly refuse to mutilate the psalm, especially when the very lines we should sacrifice might prove of the highest value in bringing the historical occasion of its production into clear perspective.

That this psalm was written by David, notwithstanding the absence of his name from the inscription, at once becomes in the highest degree probable by merely comparing it with Ps. 60, which bears witness to the occasion which gave it birth. Then, when we ponder the weighty fact that, when this psalm was written, Israel was *free from the taint of idolatry*; and come to realize, for *that* reason, our choice lies between a very early and a very late date—the time of David, on the one hand, and the time of the Maccabees, on the other; we shall perhaps find, at every step, how reasons multiply for preferring the early date. The very changes which literary criticism plausibly suggests, and the adaptations to after occasions which historical criticism more strongly claims, all required time before they originally appeared. Public texts are not modified in a day: especially where copies are few, and for the most part are jealously preserved in royal libraries. So that, if we assume that changes had already been made in the days when the Septuagint was executed, it is but reasonable to allow those changes ample time in which to appear—which requires us rather to push back authorship than to draw it forward. Besides all which the more the Davidic authorship of this psalm is candidly examined, the more does it commend itself.

Let us now recall the undoubted fact, that the work of Joshua was left for David to complete. What more natural, then, than that David should strengthen himself in God for the arduous work that remained, by steeping his spirit in remembrances of the work Divinely done now so long ago? Those brave ancestors drew the sword, indeed; but it was their God who gave them the victory: *Not by their own sword possessed they the land; but thine own right hand—thine own arm—the light of thy face*—these were the sources of strength by which Joshua and his men had gone on from victory to victory. And David realises that it still is so:

Thou thyself art my King my God,
The commander of the victories of Jacob.

It is David all over:—the intense personal faith—the fellowship with his brethren: in swift alternation, first the man, then his

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people, then himself again: *our adversaries, our assailants; mine own bow, mine own sword.* The stripling who before Goliath strengthened himself in his God, and boasted of him, do so still.

In God have we boasted all the day.

And unto thy name unto the ages will we give thanks.

Then comes the sudden reverse, the astounding fact of disaster: in the portrayal of which some otherwise excellent critics have failed to see David. In particular, they think that the language of the second stanza indicates something more than temporary defeat. Thus Perowne says: "The language of the psalm is altogether too large to be applied to a sudden attack. It describes a more serious and lasting calamity." But it is respectfully submitted that this estimate of the poet's language results from some failure to apprehend the psychological elements in the situation. David was nothing if not intense. He believed his mission to be Divine. If *his God* failed him, no general could save him. If Jehovah failed him *once*, he might fail him *again*: if he continued to fail him, all would be lost. The present reverse was evidently most serious: David's men had been slain and captured and sold as slaves. The small surrounding nations were on the watch, ready to join in the fray as soon as they deemed it safe. The larger nations at a distance were being kept well-informed and ready to point the finger of contempt at valiant little Israel. Then see how the profoundly moved monarch took it all home to himself:

All the day is mine ignominy before me,
The shame of my face hath covered me;
At the voice of him who reproacheth and revileth,
At the face of the foe and avenger:

using the very language of the 8th psalm. Moreover, the 19th verse, graphic as it is, describes rather one terrible defeat than a long series of reverses. One can see the individual battle-field, whereupon the defeat happened: the carcasses of David's men consumed by *jackals*: calamitous enough to David—who was only used to victory, and only expectant of it—to make him feel how *deep* was the *darkness* which for the moment *covered* Israel: "for the moment!" yes, but that moment was equal to days of mortal agony. Intensifying the agony and turning it into

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temporary despair, was the mystery of it: there had been no unfaithfulness on the national *covenant*—no drawing back to idolatry.

And so was learned the lesson, to be learned again and again through the ages, that Israel may be called upon to suffer even where Israel has not sinned. It is comparatively a new lesson, leading up to a higher level than that hitherto frequented by mortal feet; but it is a lesson which God's saints are to be privileged to learn; and, therefore, so beloved a man as David must have his share. By-and-by, one of his descendants will be called upon to drink more deeply of the cup of undeserved—and therefore Divine—suffering; and, finding this psalm in the royal library, will be able to appreciate its teaching, and will be moved to add to it a few words growing out of an experience of which David has had little or no share: words pointing to the peculiar combination of sorrows due to the fact that when *the soul hath sunk down to the dust* under the weight of public calamity, *the body also hath cleaved to the earth* under a loathsome though only temporary and comparatively undeserved disease; imparting an additional pathos to the plea that God would arise to *succor* and *ransom* by a new display of his well-known *kindness*. On the whole, we may deem this to have formed a grand passover psalm, in the musical execution of which *the patriarchs of song* could most appropriately take a conspicuous share.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Consider this outline of the psalm: (1) *Praise* for past deliverance. vs. 1-3; (2) *Hope* for the future deliverance. vs. 4-8; (3) *Disappointment* at present defeat. vs. 9-16; (4) *Innocence* claimed of guilt for present trouble, vs. 17-22; (5) Prayer for help. vs. 23-26.

(As adapted from G. Scroggie)

Does this outline have any similarity to our experience? Who hasn't followed this same pattern? Discuss.

2. Supposing this did happen to David—When and where? Discuss. Read Psalm 60 for a suggestion.
3. Why would anyone feel this psalm was written in the Maccabean period? Read verses thirteen and fourteen for a suggestion. Discuss.

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4. Read verses 22 through 26, and discuss the two-fold application.
5. Read verses 10-14, and notice the use of the term "thou". What circumstances are attributed to God?

PSALM 45

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Royal Marriage.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., ver. 1, The Psalmist bespeaks Attention to his Poem. Stanza II., ver. 2, The King's Surpassing Beauty and Gracious Discourse bring down upon him an Abiding Divine Blessing. Stanza III., vers. 3-7, The King is Suddenly Summoned to War: his Throne, Sceptre, Character and Anointing. Stanza IV., vers. 8, 9, Ready for the Marriage Ceremony. Stanza V., vers. 10-12, Address to the Bride. Stanza VI., vers. 13-15, The Queen and her Attendants brought into the King's Palace. Stanza VII., vers 16, 17, Final Words to the Queen and to the King.

(Lm.) An Instructive Psalm—a Song of Love.

- 1 Astir is my heart with a theme that is good,
Recite I my poem concerning a king:
My tongue be the pen of a scribe that is skilled!
- 2 Beautiful beautiful!¹ thou art, beyond the sons of men!
a gracious charm hath been set on thy lips;²
Therefore hath God blessed thee to the ages.
- 3 Gird thy sword upon thy thigh O hero!
in thy majesty and thy state:

1. The same word as that used of the Queen in ver. 11, but here reduplicated.

2. "Graciousness is shed over thy lips"—Dr. "Over his lips there is poured, viz., from above, *hen*, charm or graciousness, inasmuch, as even without his having to speak, the very form of his lips and every one of their motions awaken love and trust; but it is self-evident that from such lips, full of *charis* ('grace'), there must also proceed *logoi tees charitos* ('words of grace'), Lk. 4:22, Ec. 10:12"—Del.