

STUDIES IN PSALMS

their *terrible incisors!* The best thing they can do, is to disappear *like water* that drieth up; *like grass* for which the sun is too hot, whose luxuriating hours are done; *like snails* crawling away and wasting as they go. Otherwise, if they will not be admonished, let them beware lest they be suddenly made like unto *thorns*; yea, even though they be like *green brambles*, lest the *fierce fire* and *strong wind* of Divine wrath scorch and scatter them as in a storm of retribution!

Is it terrible? Yea, but it is just? Is it unmerciful? Nay, for they are thus publicly warned. The tempest will clear the air, and bring about health and peace. Justice is the foundation of grace. The common *man* has to be cared for. Well-doers must be encouraged—must have given back to them the conviction, that *there is fruit for a righteous man*: that, as there are visible *representatives of God judging in the land*, so there is an invisible God judging on the earth and in heaven.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If we relate this psalm to David who are the judges here described? . . .
2. Does verse three teach “hereditary total depravity”? If not what does it teach?
3. W. Graham Scroggie divides this psalm into three parts: (1) The sin, vs. 1-5; (2) The sentence, vs. 6-9; (3) The satisfaction (of the righteous at the overthrow of the wicked) vs. 10, 11. List and discuss the various characteristics and cause for the sin of injustice as set forth in verses one through five.
4. The sentence of David against such corrupt leaders is indeed “terrible”; is it “just”—even “merciful”? Discuss.
5. We must not, we cannot, we will not read vindictiveness into the justice of God—why not? What then shall we say? Discuss—especially as related to verses ten and eleven.

PSALM 59

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Beleaguered Psalmist Prays for Rescue and Avenging.

PSALM FIFTY-NINE
ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-5, In Praying for Rescue, the Psalmist Describes the Character and Conduct of his Enemies, and Protests his Own Innocence. Stanza II., vers. 6-9, Further Describing his Enemies, he Anticipates a Divine Mockery of the Nations, and Rises to a *Refrain* of Praise for Divine Protection. Stanza III., vers. 10-13, In his Confidence, he Prays for the Monumental Preservation, and Ultimate Destruction of his Enemies, to the Praise of Jehovah as Universal Ruler. Stanza IV., vers. 14-17, With the Disappointment of his Enemies, he contrasts His Own Anticipated Joy, and Repeats his *Refrain* of Praise.

(Im.) By David—A Tablet—when Saul sent,
and they watched the house to kill him.

- 1 Rescue me from my foes, O my God,
from them who rise up against me shalt thou set me on high:
- 2 Rescue me from the workers of iniquity,¹
and from the men of bloodshed save me.
- 3 For lo! they have lain in wait for my life,²
mighty ones keep gathering against me,—
not for transgression of mine; nor for sin of mine O Jehovah!
- 4 Without iniquity of mine do they run and station
themselves,—
oh rouse thyself to meet me and see:
- 5 Yea thou Jehovah of hosts God of Israel³
oh awake to visit all the nations,—
do not be gracious unto any mischievous traitors.
- 6 They return at even they growl like a dog they surround the
city.
- 7 Lo! they pour forth with their mouth,
swords are in their lips,—
“For who can hear?”
- 8 But thou Jehovah wilt laugh at them,
thou wilt mock at all nations,⁴
- 9 O my⁵ Strength! unto thee will I make melody,⁶
for God is my lofty retreat.

1. Or: “mischief” (“naughtiness”—Dr.).

2. U.: “soul.” Cp. Intro., Chap. III., “Soul.”

3. M.T. (as rendered by Dr.): “And thou, Jehovah God of hosts, the God of Israel.” Br. has simply: “Thou Yahweh, Sabaath.”

4. Cp. 2:4.

5. So some cod. *read* (w. Sep. and Vul.)—Gn.

6. So it shd. be. Cp. ver. 17—Gn. M.T.: “over thee will I keep guard”—Dr.; “upon thee will I wait”—Del.

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- 10 My God of kindness will come to meet me,
God will let me gaze on my watchful foes.
- 11 Do not slay them lest my people forget,
cause them to wander by thy hosts¹ and prostrate them,—
our Shield! Sovereign Lord!
- 12 The sin of their mouth is the word of their lips,
let them then be captured in their pride,—
both for the oath and for the deception they recount.
- 13 Bring to a full end in wrath, bring to a full end that they
may be no more:
that (men) may know there is a God in Jacob
who is ruling to the ends of the earth.²
- 14 Then let them return at even let them growl like a dog let
them surround the city.
- 15 They will be suffered to prowl about for food,
and if not satisfied then let them whine!
- 16 But I will sing thy strength,
I will ring out in the morning thy kindness;
For thou hast become a lofty retreat for me,
and a place to flee to when I am in a strait.
- 17 O my strength! unto thee will I make melody,
for God is my lofty retreat my God of kindness.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

(CMm.) For the "lily of testimony" = The feast of weeks.

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 59

(Written by David at the time King Saul set guards at his home to capture and kill him. I Samuel 19:11)

O my God, save me from my enemies. Protect me from those who have come to destroy me.

2 Preserve me from these criminals, these murderers.

3 They lurk in ambush for my life. Strong men are out there waiting. And not, O Lord, because I've done them wrong.

4 Yet they prepare to kill me. Lord, waken! See what is happening! Help me!

5 (And O Jehovah, God of heaven's armies, God of Israel,

1. Or: "army," "force"—earthly or heavenly.

2. "That the God of Jacob ruleth the ends of the earth"—Sep.

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arise and punish the heathen nations surrounding us.) Do not spare these evil, treacherous men.

6 At evening they come to spy, slinking around like dogs that prowl the city.

7 I hear them shouting insults and cursing God, for "No one will hear us," they think.

8 Lord, laugh at them! (And scoff at these surrounding nations too.)

9 O God my Strength! I will sing Your praises, for You are my place of safety.

10 My God is changeless in His love for me and He will come and help me. He will let me see my wish come true upon my enemies.

11 Don't kill them—for my people soon forget such lessons—but stagger them with your power and bring them to their knees. Bring them to the dust, O Lord our shield.

12, 13 They are proud, cursing liars. Angrily destroy them. Wipe them out. (And let the nations find out too that God rules in Israel and will reign throughout the world.)

14, 15 Let these evil men slink back at evening, and prowl the city all night before they are satisfied, howling like dogs and searching for food.

16 But as for me, I will sing each morning about Your power and mercy. For You have been my high tower of refuge, a place of safety in the day of my distress.

17 O my Strength, to You I sing my praises; for You are my high tower of safety, my God of mercy.

EXPOSITION

Most of this psalm answers well to the historical occasion named in its superscription; and though, both in form and in substance, it suggests subsequent and adaptations and additions, yet these are comparatively unimportant, and need not divert us from the fruitful reflections which spring from the origin of this striking composition as a whole.

The writer is beset by enemies: just such enemies as we know David had in the court of King Saul—*workers of iniquity, men of bloodshed, foreigners* who had taken the *oath* of allegiance to Israel and yet could boast of the *deception* they had practised in accepting it; probably, like Doeg, the Edomite, rich and powerful, with ready access to the ear of Saul, and more willing than

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David's fellow-Hebrews to become the tools of that fickle and jealous monarch. Such men, in David's intensely patriotic eyes, would appear like unclean *dogs*, ravenous, cruel, dangerous.

At the hands of these enemies, the writer is now in imminent danger. They have been *lying in wait* for him, keep *gathering together against* him, saying *false and cruel things* about him, thereby converting their *tongues* into *swords*; they not only gather against him, but *watch*, one or two by day and a larger number by night, *surrounding the city*, so as to guard every avenue of escape. So far, a graphic picture of the way in which Saul's emissaries would seek David for the purpose of *killing* him.

There is surely little cause for wonder that so much importance should be attached to the active use of their *tongues* in hunting for David. For though scouts and watchers when thus on duty would naturally do that part of their work in silence and by stealth; yet the most effective part taken by these men, would be their use of their tongues when they had Saul's ear, and when rallying their own and David's fellow-servants to join in the pursuit and the waylaying. No doubt there would be times of actual watching, when their policy would be silence; but there would be times of discovery that they had lost their prey, when volleys of cursing would be *poured forth by their mouth*; and when compelled to return to their master with the confession that the young Bethlehemite had escaped them, it is likely that their crestfallen looks and abject words made them appear not a little like curs *whining* as if in fear of a beating. And, if David could foresee their shame overtaking them, he might very well say: *If not satisfied, then let them whine!* Whether it be supremely dignified or not, at least it is life-like! So far, both the conditions presupposed by the psalm, and the movements evident therein, are unmistakably such as suit the crisis named in the superscription.

But, in two places of the psalm, it must be admitted to be open to question whether we have an original sentiment, or a later addition. These two places are at vers. 5 and 8 respectively. At the former point, there is the outburst of the prayer—*Awake to visit all nations*; and at the latter, there is the positive assurance—*But thou, O Jehovah, will laugh at them, Thou wilt mock at all nations*. Here it may, plausibly, be contended, we have traces of a later time. And it may be so. It may be, that it is too soon yet for the antagonism of Gentile nations to Jehovah

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and of His antagonism to them to be thus anticipated. Such a forecast would more naturally become the later times of Hezekiah, when Sennacherib came against Israel with his Assyrians; or of Jeremiah, when Nebuchadnezzar was coming with his Babylonian hosts; or, still more, the troublous times of the return from the Exile when the little Gentile nations around Israel were so persistent and so malicious in their conspiracies and attacks on Israel. These outbursts in the psalm against Gentiles may very plausibly be attributed to such a later time. And there we might be content to leave the problem; especially as not raising any real objection against the Davidic authorship of the main body of the psalm, when the known habit of adapting psalms to later occasions has due allowance made for it.

On this point we should not have lingered, but for the desire of protesting that even this concession to the probability of a later date for a few lines in this psalm cannot be compelled. It is probable—no more. It may have been given to David himself, thus early in his prophetic career, to catch glimpses of later events in the history of Israel: to be led on to catch such glimpses from nothing more developed than the antagonism and treacheries of a few Doegs among the retainers of Saul.

Worthy of observation is that unique prayer in ver. 11 of this psalm: *Do not slay them, lest my people forget, cause them to wander.* On the one hand this reminds us of Pharaoh, who instead of being at once slain, was preserved to permit him to develop all the obstinacy that was in him—to the brighter manifestation of the glory of Jehovah; and, on the other hand, it quickens our inquisitiveness to learn from later prophecies whether or not the restored Israel of the future may not be similarly *kept in mind* by the monumental sparing of enemies who would otherwise be summarily destroyed (cp. Dan. 7:12).

“They—let them whine; but I will sing”: a contrast, almost harsh in its sharpness; yet how suggestive. Ours be the faith in the Right, and in the God of Rightness, that by detestation of all meanness, and the wholehearted love of nobleness, we may know how to escape the *whine* and ensure the *song*.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What particular experience of David forms the background for this psalm? (Cf. I Sam. 19:11-18) Discuss the problem of verses five and eight where mention is made of “nations”.

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2. Consider carefully the *Analysis* of this psalm and then read this from Scroggie: "In structure the Psalm is highly artificial. There are two main divisions, 1-9 and 10-17. Each of these ends with a refrain in which the Psalmist speaks of God as his *strength* and *high tower* (9, 17). Each of these main divisions has two stanzas divided by a *Selah* (5, 13) and the second stanza in each division begins in the same way (6, 14). The two main divisions closely resemble one another, but each has its characteristics" (*Ibid.* p. 55). Discuss the structure of this psalm.
3. Discuss the import of the description the psalmist gives of his enemies—as in verses one through five and verses six through nine?
4. What is meant by the little phrase in verse eleven "slay them not lest my people forget"? Discuss its application to our day.
5. When does God laugh? (Cf. vs. 8) What kind of laugh is it? Discuss.

PSALM 60

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

An Outcry of Anguish, Expostulation and Entreaty,
under a Severe Reverse.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, Lamentation over a Defeat. Stanza II., vers. 5-8, Prayer for Victory, based on an Ancient Oracle. Stanza III., vers 9-12, In Order to Victory, Divine Guidance and Presence Besought.

(Lm.) A Tablet—By David—To instruct—When he waged war with Aramneharaim and with Aram-zobah, and Joab returned and smote of Edom in the Valley of Salt twelve thousand.¹

- 1 O God thou hast rejected us—hast broken out upon us,
Thou hast been angry—wilt thou not take us back?²
- 2 Thou hast shattered the land—hast split it open,
Heal thou the fractures thereof—for it hath tottered.

1. Cp. 44, text and Exposition.
2. So O.G. 998b.