

STUDIES IN PSALMS

4. Is the condemnation of Edom just? cf. Amos 1:11; Obadiah 10:11; Joel 3:19.
5. How was the law of retaliation applied to Babylon?

PSALM 138

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A King's Public Thanks for Advancement in Royal Dignity.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, Public Thanks for Unexpected Advancement and for the Lofty Feeling thereby imparted. Stanza II., vers. 4-6, Anticipations of the Homage of Other Kings to Jehovah, which is Traced to its Moral Cause. Stanza III., vers. 7-8, Assurance of the Coming Completion of Jehovah's Promises.

(Lm.) By David.

- 1 I will thank thee¹ with my whole heart,
before messengers divine² will I make melody unto thee:
- 2 I will bow down towards thy holy temple,³
and thank thy name for thy kindness and for thy
faithfulness;
for thou hast magnified above all thy name thy promise:⁴
- 3 In the day that I called thou didst answer me,
didst embolden me in my soul with strength.⁵
- 4 All the kings of the earth will thank thee Jehovah,
when⁶ they have heard the sayings of thy mouth;
- 5 And will sing of the ways of Jehovah,
because great is the glory of Jehovah:
- 6 Though lofty is Jehovah yet the lowly he regardeth,
but the haughty afar off doth he acknowledge.

1. Some cod. (w. Aram., Sep., Vul.) add: "Jehovah"—Gn.

2. Cp. 8:5, 29:1, 89:6-9.

3. Cp. 5:7.

4. So Del.; and cp. 119 (Table) for "promise." Well explained: "The fulfillment of Thy promise surpasses the renown of all Thy former mercies."
—Dr.

5. "Didst inspire me with courage—a lofty feeling permeated my soul"
—Del.

6. Or: "because."

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- 7 If I walk in the midst of distress thou revivest me:
over the wrath of mine enemies thou stretchest forth thy
hand,⁷
and thy right hand saveth me.
- 8 Jehovah will complete (all things)⁸ on my behalf:
Jehovah thy kindness is to the ages,—
the works⁹ of thine own hands do not discard.
(Lm.) to the Chief Musician.

PARAPHRASE

PSALM 138

Lord, with all my heart I thank You. I will sing Your praises before the armies of angels¹ in heaven.

2 I face Your Temple as I worship, giving thanks to You for all Your lovingkindness and Your faithfulness, for Your promises are backed by all the honor of Your name.²

3 When I pray, You answer me, and encourage me by giving me the strength I need.

4 Every king in all the earth shall give You thanks, O Lord, for all of them shall hear Your voice.

5 Yes, they shall sing about Jehovah's glorious ways, for His glory is very great.

6 Yet though He is so great, He respects the humble; but proud men must keep their distance.

7 Though I am surrounded by troubles, You will bring me safely through them. You will clench Your fist against my angry enemies! Your power will save me.

8 The Lord will work out His plans for my life—for Your lovingkindness, Lord, continues forever. Don't abandon me—for You made me.

EXPOSITION

The sudden reappearance of psalms ascribed *To David*, together with a survey of the literary field in which they present themselves, suggests the obvious conclusion, that an early psalter was concluded with the Hallel psalms 105-107; 111-118; 135-136; and 146-150; and that, subsequently, other psalms were

7. Some cod. (w. 2 ear. pr. edns. [1 Rabb.], Sep.): "hands" (pl.)—Gn.

8. So Dr. Cp. Ps. 57:2.

9. Some cod. (w. Syr.): "work" (sing.)—Gn.

1. Literally, "before the gods," or "before the idols."

2. Literally, "You have exalted Your word above all Your name."

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inserted among them. Of these subsequently inserted psalms, there are two groups assigned to "David"; namely, 108-110 and 138-145. Why they thus appear in two groups, rather than in one, is uncertain; but may easily have arisen from the order in which they were found, or the sources from which they were taken. The more urgent question is, how they came to be so belated in finding their way at all into the collected Praises of Israel.

Let us assume that we cannot now get to know this: is our ignorance material? There are many possible reasons why such a thing as so late a discovery of certain psalms might easily have happened. These two groups of Davidic psalms might have already appeared in other connections, and been regarded as sufficiently well preserved already; or they may have been stored at some spot or treasured in some library inaccessible to the earlier collectors of psalms. But the important point to note is, that no incident or accident of this kind is of sufficient weight to throw the smallest doubt upon the incorporated literary assignment of these psalms to David.

Because they are attributed to David, in closely-written and even continuous headlines, the presumption is that they came from his pen; and, unless we can establish the existence of an amount of Librarian carelessness or audacity which is inherently improbable, we ought not to set aside this presumption, save for good and strong cause.

Minute differences of style or orthography are seen to be insufficient reason for such discredit, as soon as proper consideration is given to the liberty known to have been taken by the Sopherim in controlling the Sacred Text. In the one known process of transliteration alone, they may have introduced orthographic peculiarities which it would be a great mistake to ascribe to a higher or earlier source, so as to disturb the question of original authorship.

Again: similarities to other psalms, may be due to such a cause as duplicate production from the author's own pen, who may have more than once given expression to similar sentiments, while in the same circumstances or in the same vein of feeling.

Once more: in some of these similar strains there may be special features which nowhere else appear: why not?

How these possibilities and cautions apply to the matter in hand will presently be seen.

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We have here more psalms attributed to David: are they sufficiently like him to allow us to accept them on their own profession? Do they dovetail into what we know of him already and into what we have from him elsewhere? In our many-sided care not to be misled, may we not justly beware of being prejudiced against an addition to our autobiographical materials? Let this be the spirit, then, in which we proceed to the consideration of this new and important batch of psalms ascribed "To David."

The first of the present series, namely the 138th, strikes us as not only an exceedingly bright and acceptable addition to those which have gone before; but as at once harmonising with what we know of David, and at the same time taking us a little beyond it.

The first stanza strikes just such a note as would be congenial to David's circumstances and sentiments soon after the communication to him of the Divine Oath by Nathan respecting the permanent continuance in his house of the Throne of Israel (2 Sam. 7). Just as here portrayed, he would then worship before the newly brought-in Ark; and it commends itself to us as eminently fitting, that such an advance in Jehovah's self-manifestation as was constituted by the new and unexpected promises contained in his newly received Covenant, should have at this time found unique expression in the line (ver. 2):

for thou hast magnified above all thy name thy promise;
as to which see Driver's excellent comment at the foot of the text above. Corresponding with this, it is easy to conceive how almost dangerously life-like was the enhanced sense of *royal importance* as, in Delitzsch's apt words, "a lofty feeling permeated his soul."

In the second stanza of the psalm, we come upon something which seems at once new and apt: a sentiment not so clearly expressed elsewhere, but which nevertheless we are glad to perceive could find lodgment in David's mind. That the kings of the earth should do homage to David's Heir—this we have already perceived, as from Pss. 72 and 89; but that those kings should, for themselves, rejoice in the *sayings of Jehovah's mouth*, and should, in the right of their own joy, *sing of his ways* because of *the greatness of his glory*—this is peculiarly acceptable: most of all acceptable, and of charming interest, because of the implied peculiarity, that such enthusiasm would be roused even in the minds of *kings* by Jehovah's supreme *regard* for

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the *lowly*. How this strikes a note not unknown to David, because probably taught him by Samuel, may be seen by reference to 18:20-27 with our Exposition thereof.

But, as the third stanza makes us feel, we have not done with David—the historical David—who, by little turns of expression peculiarly his own, lets us know that, while he is not yet finally out of *trouble*, he is confident that his covenant God *will complete all things on his behalf*. As in the earlier psalms of David which passed under Hezekiah's co-editing care, so this also is well handed over to *the Chief Musician*, which makes us feel quite at home, satisfied that the choirs will be well instructed how to deal with this addition to their Temple treasures.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is suggested by the sudden reappearance of psalms ascribed to David?
2. "There are many possible reasons" why these psalms of David are so late in appearing. Discuss at least one possible reason.
3. The literary critic is quick to see another author or redactor in any difference in expression. Show how this is a false practice.
4. This psalm well illustrates II Samuel 17. How?
5. A new thought concerning David is found in the second stanza. What is it?
6. "He who began a good work will perfect it." How does this thought apply to David?

PSALM 139

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

An Individual submits Himself to Jehovah's All-Searching Eye.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-6, Jehovah's Knowledge considered as Taking into View every Form of Human Activity. Stanza II., vers. 7-12, There is No Escaping that Knowledge by Distance or Darkness. Stanza III., vers. 13-18, Based upon the Creatorship of each Individual, Jehovah's Knowledge rises