

STUDIES IN PSALMS

which might fall from David's lips: no emissaries were waiting to run and report them to Absalom; and, if there had been, Absalom had not yet obtained any power to avenge them. By throwing the scene back to the days of Saul, all is changed; and the feasibility of thus obtaining a suitable situation to call forth the psalm is so patent as to render inexcusable the resort of some critics to a post-exilic period, and the violent expedient of turning the suppliant of the psalm into a nation. Leave the individualistic feature of the psalm intact; and the nation can then help itself by appropriating its own condition whatever it finds likely to contribute to its edification.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the definable similarity between this psalm and the preceding one?
2. What is the dark plot of these enemies of David's?
3. What real purpose did these men have in their plot? Who were the possible perpetrators?
4. How had David (possibly) unwittingly put himself in their power?
5. "Scattered are our bones at the mouth of hades"—how shall we understand this expression. Discuss.
6. David feels even his devotion could be a danger to him—how so?
7. The thought of daily personal devotions—i.e. prayer and the meditation on His Word is assured as the practice of David and others. Are we less in need than they? Why do we fail in this privilege?
8. What a sore temptation are social obligations! As with David so with us. How shall we protect ourselves from them?
9. There seems to be an enigmatic stanza in this psalm. Where is it? What does it mean?
10. Show how other possible solutions as to the setting of this psalm fail to properly interpret it.

PSALM 142

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Loud Outcries in a Cave Succeed Guarded Petitions at Court.

PSALM 142
ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, A Loud-Voiced Prelude. Stanzas II. and III., vers. 3, 4, Severity of the Late Trial at Court. Stanza IV., ver. 5, Final Prayer before Flight. Stanza V., ver. 6, Want Before, Pursuers Behind. Stanza VI., ver. 7, Faith Brightens the Prospect.

(Lm.) An Instructive Psalm—By David—
When he was in the Cave—a Prayer.

- 1 With my voice¹ to Jehovah I cry,
with my voice¹ to Jehovah I make supplication:
- 2 I pour out before him my complaint,²
my distress before him I declare.
- 3 Though my spirit fainted upon me
yet thou approvedst my path:
In the way which I was accustomed to walk
they had hidden a trap for me.
- 4 I looked to the right-hand and saw—³
that there was none who for me had regard.
Escape had vanished from me,
there was none to care for my life.⁴
- 5 I cried unto thee O Jehovah,
I said "Thou art my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."
- 6 Oh attend unto my piercing cry,
for I am brought very low:
Rescue me from my pursuers,
for they are stronger than I.
- 7 Oh bring forth out of the dungeon my soul,
to give thanks to thy name.
For my sake will the righteous wear crowns,⁵
for thou wilt deal bountifully with me.

(Nm.)

1. Or: "aloud."

2. Or: "murmuring," "soliloquy."

3. "The ancient versions, nearly without exception, have here the first person"—Per. The imperative—which Per. himself, after Jerome, approves—brings forward the request into the cave, and thereby renders it so unmeaning as to discredit the ancient headline. See our Exposition.

4. U.: "soul." See Intro., Chap. III., "Soul."

5. "On account of me the righteous shall adorn themselves with crowns, i.e., they shall triumph on account of me"—Del. "Crown themselves because of me"—R.V. (marg.). "Put out crowns because of me (i.e., appear wearing crowns, fig. for 'triumph')"—Dr.

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PARAPHRASE

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How I plead with God, how I implore His mercy, pouring out my troubles before Him.

3 For I am overwhelmed and desperate, and You alone know which way I ought to turn to miss the traps my enemies have set for me.

4 (There's one—just over there to the right!) No one gives me a passing thought. No one will help me; no one cares one whit what happens to me.

5 Then I prayed to Jehovah. "Lord," I pled, "You are my only place of refuge. Only You can keep me safe.

6 Hear my cry, for I am very low. Rescue me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me.

7 Bring me out of prison, so that I can thank You. The godly will rejoice with me for all Your help."

EXPOSITION

This psalm triumphantly vindicates its library head-line, both as to author and as to occasion. The slandering of David to his master had already done its deadly work, and probably led to previous flights from Saul's presence. But now, to slanders, have succeeded flatteries, and deep-laid schemes to involve David in conspiracy, as revealed in the previous psalm. To aggravate the perils of David's position, Jonathan seems to have been absent from Court, probably sent on some expedition which kept him away from Saul's *right-hand*, and deprived David of the one friend at Court on whom he could rely. Under these circumstances, David—no doubt with a chosen band of men around him—betook him to flight: this time probably to the caves of En-ge-di (1 Sam. 24), if we may assume that his resort to the cave of Adullam (1 Sam. 22) had fallen earlier in his chequered career. It is surprising how thoroughly this psalm yields up its varied contents to our apprehension when once it is let into a situation substantially such as is thus indicated. Each stanza contributes something to the verisimilitude of the whole.

Stanza I. is a mere prelude, but at once affords a contrast to the extreme caution in prayer revealed in the foregoing psalm. That prayer, we may well believe, was uttered, not only in circumspect words, but in subdued tones; but the caution of that prayer now gives place to the abandon of this, and twice

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over we are assured that this psalm was uttered *aloud*. Far away among the south-eastern hills, interned in the far-reaching caves of En-ge-di (according to Del., "such a labyrinthine maze of passages and vaults, that the torches and ropes of explorers have not to the present time been able to reach the end"), his faithful scouts ready to give him warning of the least appearance of danger, the psalmist could here sweep his strings with a will and plainly reveal in words the varying moods of his deeply exercised mind.

Stanza II. records from the recent past a violence of mental disturbance consistent with an instinctive and almost unreasoned but strong concentration of resolve, taking the short form: "Not treason, but flight." That plot was too infamous for parleying: flight only could be trusted to parry the insidious blow.

Stanza III. strikingly suggests, that, if only Jonathan had been at his father's *right-hand*, the extremity of flight might have been averted, or at least postponed. Who, that remained, *cared* for the Bethlehemite's *life*?

Stanza IV., which gives meaning to the flight, suggests, by its unexpected brevity, the connecting link between the past and the present in the form of an unexpressed sequel, furnishing a strong lead up to what is to follow: As much as to say: "My flight, O Jehovah, is into thine own arms: because thou art *my refuge*, I thus take refuge in thee; because thou art *my portion in the land of the living*, my trust is, that I shall not find these caves to be the caves of death: therefore am I here."

Stanza V. picks up the thread. Companions in arms cause their leader anxious care. Among rocks and caves, provisions soon run short. Of this, David is well aware; and his trust is in Jehovah for his men as well as himself. But the emergency is great, and prayer becomes a *piercing cry*; for, says the careful commander, *I am brought very low*. Besides, discovery by Saul's soldiers might mean unequal battle or renewed flight. *Rescue me from my pursuers, for they are stronger than I*. All is vivid: realistic. This is no child's play. These are not dreams.

But Stanza VI. reminds us that, in this prolonged conflict, great moral issues are at stake. Saul stands for force and self-will: David, for faith and the will of Jehovah. "The poet's way of looking at his own fate and that of his enemies in a not merely ideal, but in a divinely ordained causal, connection with the general end of the two powers that are opposed to one

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another in the world, is one of the characteristic features of the Psalms of David written at the time of his persecution by Saul"—Del. Hence, in passing, the importance of holding fast the true Davidic origin of these psalms; hence moreover, the cogency of the reminder, in this final stanza, that David is being Divinely enabled to grasp the issues involved. Not without a struggle, but with it; not without prayer, but with it and through it, does David here rise to the assurance that he shall yet be *brought out* of this *Dungeon*, for such literally it is; that, for his deliverance, he will *give thanks unto Jehovah's name*; and that *the righteous*, who, though conspicuous by their absence from Saul's Court, are nevertheless to be found scattered throughout the land, shall joyfully acknowledge how *bountifully* Jehovah hath *dealt* with the hero who is now leading them on to the abiding victory of faith and patience.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is David in a cave? Which one?
2. Why such a loud protest? Song becomes a grand vehicle for prayer, praise, soliloquy, instruction, etc? How do we personally (not congregationally) use it today?
3. Show the connection and meaning of stanza two, three, and four.
4. Stanza five indicates the very real danger involved. Discuss.
5. David has assurance of ultimate victory, but not because of himself—nor by his own efforts. Discuss.

PSALM 143

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Continued Concealment in the Cave: its Grievs and its Gains.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Remarkable Pleadings and Deprecation. Stanza II., vers. 3, 4, How the Trial Tries. Stanza III., vers. 5, 6, How the Student Studies. Stanza IV., vers. 7-12, How the Petitioner Perseveres in Prayer.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 Jehovah hear thou my prayer,
oh give ear unto my supplications,—
in thy faithfulness answer me in thy righteousness;