

STUDIES IN PSALMS
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Is there some relationship between this psalm and the 14th?
2. Where is the tabernacle of God and His holy hill?—then and now.
3. What advantages would there be in finding refuge and shelter in the tabernacle of God?
4. Who said the morals of the Old Testament are lower than those of the New? How shall we account for the code of ethics here delineated?
5. Discuss the positive and negative thinking suggested in this psalm.

PSALM 16

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

An Ideal Israelite's Triumph over Death.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-4, Prayer for Preservation: offered in Dependence on Jehovah, Discernment of his Doings, and Detestation of Idolatry. Stanza II., vers. 5-8, Contentment with Jehovah as a Present Portion, under Divine Counsel creates Confidence for the Future. Stanza III., vers. 9-11, Exultant Expectation of Escape from Death and Entrance upon Heavenly Delights.

(Lm.) Tablet¹—By David

- 1 Preserve me O God, for I have taken refuge in thee.²
- 2 I have said³ to Jehovah—"My Sovereign Lord art thou, for my well-being goeth not beyond⁴ thee."

1. So Sep. With this well agrees Thirtle's suggestion: "The term *Michtam* seems best explained by a *personal* or *private* prayer or meditation. A "tablet" would well serve such a purpose. "Seems to mean primarily an inscription"—Del.

2. "This short introit is without any parallel clause, and is therefore nonostichi—a sigh that expresses everything in few words"—Del.

3. So some cod. (w. 2 ear. pr. edns., Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.; and so Del., Per., Dr., Kp., Br., M.T.: "thou saidst" ("O my soul" prob. understood).

4. Ml.: "upon," "over." "That is, 'in addition to thee, beside thee,' equivalent in meaning to 'apart from thee,' or 'without thee'"—Del.

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- 3 To the holy ones who are in his land
 Jehovah is making wonderful his delight in them.¹
- 4 They will multiply their sorrows who backwards do hurry:²
 I will not pour out their drink-offerings because of bloodshed,
 nor will I take their names upon my lips.
- 5 Jehovah is my share my portion and my cup,
 Jehovah is the maintainer of my lot for me.³
- 6 The measuring lines have fallen for me in pleasant places,
 verily! mine inheritance is mighty over⁴ me.
- 7 I will bless Jehovah who hath counselled me,
 yea! in the dark night have mine impulses⁵ admonished me:
- 8 I have set Jehovah before me continually,
 because he is on my right hand I shall not be shaken.
- 9 Therefore doth my heart rejoice in Jehovah
 and my glory⁶ exulteth in my God⁷
 even my flesh shall dwell securely:
- 10 For thou wilt not abandon my soul to hades,
 neither⁸ wilt thou suffer thy man of kindness⁹ to see the pit:

1. So it shd. be (w. Sep.)—Gn. M.T. (as rendered in R. V. text): "As for the saints that are in the earth, They are the excellent in whom is all my delight." Delitzsch's rendering is striking: "I say to Jahve: 'Thou are the Lord, Besides thee there is for me no weal,' and to the saints that are on the earth: 'These are the excellent, in whom is all my delight.'" So is Driver's: "I have said unto Jehovah, 'Thou are my Lord; my good is not beyond(?) thee.' As for the holy ones that are in the land, they are the nobles in whom is all my delight." But, for the text as emended above, see "Exposition."

2. So, in substance, Br. "Their anguish shall be multiplied who have taken an idol in exchange"—Del. "Their sorrows are multiplied that take another in exchange (for Jehovah)."

3. So Br. M.T. (R.V.): "The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: Thou maintainest my lot." On which Del. beautifully says: "The very thing which the tribe of Levi exhibits in a national and external manner is true in its whole spiritual depth of every believer; it is not the earthly, the visible, the created, the material that has been assigned him as his possession and enjoyment, but Jahve, He alone; in Him, however, also perfect satisfaction."

4. So Sep. "The Sep. gives a well-known word, a usual construction and an appropriate meaning"—Br. Cp. 117:2.

5. U.: "reins": Lit. "kidneys." "Regarded by the Hebrews as the springs of feeling"—Dr. "Conceived of as the seat of the blessed feeling of the possession of Jahve"—Del.

6. For "glory" in like sense, see 30:12, 57:9, 108:2. And see "Exposition."

7. Thus (but with "Yahweh" twice) does Br. gain a line here and fill up the stanza. Del., keeping to the shorter M.T., calls the *seven* lines "seven rays of light."

8. So some cod. (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.

9. Written "men": read "man" (sing.) Some cod. (w. 8 ear. pr. edns.) both write and read: "man" (sing.)—Gn.

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11 For thou wilt make known to me the path of life,—
fulness of joy is with thy face,¹
delightfulness is at² thy right hand evermore.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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Save me, O God, I have come to You for refuge.

2 I said to Him, "You are my Lord; I have no other help
but Yours."

3 I want the company of the godly men and women in the
land; they are the true nobility.

4 Those choosing other gods shall all be filled with sorrow;
I will not offer the sacrifices they do or even speak the names
of their gods.

5 The Lord Himself is my inheritance, my prize! He is my
food and drink, my highest joy! He guards all that is mine.

6 He sees that I am given pleasant brooks and meadows as
my share!³ What a wonderful inheritance!

7 I will bless the Lord who counsels me; He gives me wisdom
in the night. He tells me what to do.

8 I am always thinking of the Lord; and because He is so
near, I never need to stumble or to fall.

9 Heart, body, and soul are filled with joy.

10 For You will not leave me among the dead; You will not
allow Your beloved one to rot in the grave.

11 You have let me experience the joys of life and the
exquisite pleasures of Your own eternal presence.

EXPOSITION

This is the language of an Ideal Israelite, as a glance at
Stanza II. will show. Of the spirit of the Ideal Israelite, it is
needless to say, both David and Hezekiah largely partook. For
that very reason, they must have been predisposed to accept and
utilise any worthy psalmody-contributions from Levite-Seers. If

1. "In association with, in communion with the divine face or pres-
ence"—Br. "In thy presence"—Del., Per., Leaser, Carter. Dr.

2. "On"—Br. "At"—Per. "In"—Del., Dr. (*viz.*, to distribute: cf.
Prov. 3:16.)

3. Literally, "The boundary lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places."

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the writer of the present psalm was literally a Levite—a priest—then his protest against idolatry at the close of Stanza I. would assume an aspect of personal repugnance of much the more intense; and suggests the possibility that in the days of declension into idolatry, from the days of Ahaz and onwards, the same men may have sometimes been expected to act both as priests to Jehovah and as priests to idols.

Stanza I. as here critically emended by Ginsburg and Briggs, has in it several features of great interest. The very opening word, in view of the ending of the psalm, challenges a deeper significance than usual: *Preserve me*, save me from death, hold me in being. *I said to Jehovah*: "the Becoming One," who has yet more and more of the riches of his own immortal being to communicate: *My Sovereign Lord art thou*: I am at thy disposal. *My welfare*, my blessedness, *is not without thee*: has no independent existence. Make of me what thou wilt: I have no blessedness but in thee. A Christian's mind is irresistibly carried along to think what these words must have meant to the youthful Jesus of Nazareth; and once our thoughts reach that point of departure, we are naturally led on to conceive of the joy with which the Messiah would note how *the holy* men and women in the days of his manifestation on earth would perceive that *Jehovah was making wonderful his delight in them*, and in their kinsfolk and neighbours, as they were taught and healed. We pretend not to give to the words of the psalm any such exclusive application; for they apply to every visitation of Israel and every deliverance wrought in their midst, from the day they were written. *Jehovah ever delighted in his holy ones*, and on many occasions made his delight appear *wonderful*. The reference to idolatry in ver. 4, no doubt received its exactest fulfilment in the latter days of the monarchy, before idolatry had received its great check by the punishment of the Exile. Yet, still, we cannot think of that young Nazarene, save as entering into a fellowship of spirit with the faithful priests who in the times long before his coming had stedfastly refused to lend themselves to idolatrous rites; to which we may add the reflection that the occasional contact of Galileans in later times with caravans of idol worshippers, would be sufficient to keep alive in Northern Israel a whole detestation of the cruel customs of heathenism. We frankly admit that it is in foresight of what follows in this psalm that we thus early begin to breathe the Messianic spirit.

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It is, however, when we rise to the spiritual elevation of Stanza II. that we become more positively conscious of the Messianic atmosphere. And, indeed, it is just *as an atmosphere* that its penetrating and elevating energy is felt. It is here that the ideal Israelite submits himself to our admiring gaze. *Jehovah* is his *portion* and in his portion he delights; nor his portion only, but the *maintainer* and defender of it. Then he thinks of *the measuring lines* which have marked out his portion for him, as if with mental reference to the broad acres which such lines have mapped out for others: leaving him still perfectly contented with his own *lot*. Thus he reflects on his *inheritance* until it becomes *mighty over him*, throws over him a mighty spell. Again we say: How can a Christian help thinking of words which fall in line as fulfillment? How can he restrain his thoughts from One of whom he has read in a primitive Christian document: "Who, in consideration of the joy lying before him, endured a cross, shame despising; and on the right hand of the throne of God hath taken his seat?" That, surely, was an *inheritance* worthy to become *mighty over* even the Messiah. This Ideal Israelite still further lays bare his inmost being as he allows us to see that he discovers the *counsels of Jehovah* in, or by means of, the *impulses of the dark night*, when silent reflection causes the activities of the day to stir the inmost springs of being. In this case, however, the impulses are so chastened and purified as to call forth *blessings on Jehovah* who uses them to unveil his will. We can never in this world know how mighty and timely was the nightly training of Him, who after being thronged through the day with the multitudes coming and going, spent whole nights in prayer. As dangers thickened and enemies became more bitter and determined, he *set Jehovah before him continually*, *Because he was on his right hand, he was not shaken* from his purpose to go up to Jerusalem, and there become obedient as far as death.

In advancing now to the third stanza of this psalm we can scarcely fail to bring with us the one outstanding observation: That it is the moral elevation of the second stanza which prepares the way for the victory of the third. *Therefore*: because *Jehovah himself is my portion*; because I am fully content with mine inheritance, and it has a mighty influence over me; because night and day I follow Divine counsel and unreservedly place myself under Divine guidance for the future; *therefore* my heart

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is glad,—and in the strength of my joy I am led on to victory over death.

If the moral elevation of the second stanza is unique—as we think it is—if, in its own way, there is nothing quite equal to it elsewhere in the Psalms; then we need not be surprised to be led on to a more complete analysis of the human constitution than is to be found anywhere else in the Old Testament. Such an analysis does, indeed, appear to await us. The triumph to be realised is sufficiently complete that the WHOLE MAN, in the most exhaustive analysis of him, should be summoned to rejoice in it: *therefore, my heart—my glory—my flesh* are marshalled to advance to its realisation,—*my heart*, that is, my intelligent nature; *my glory*, that is, my spirit, God-given, God-related, the recipient of Divine impressions, the spring of emotional force; *my flesh*, that is, my body, with its well-known uses, wants, weaknesses and susceptibilities. Each of these is coupled with a suitable verb: my heart *rejoices* with intelligent joy; my glory *exulteth* with joy intensified into ecstasy; my flesh *shall rest*,—fatigued with stress and strain, shall rest; weakened by work and weariness, shall rest and be still; shall rest and be refreshed and renewed. For some cause, the “flesh” lags behind the “heart” and the “glory;” “my heart *already* rejoiceth” (verb in the complete tense); “my glory *already* exulteth” (verb again practically in the complete tense—imperfect with *waw* conversive); but “my flesh shall rest” (verb in the incomplete or incipient tense). Further, an element of surprise is introduced along with the flesh: ‘*aph* “even,” “implying, something surprising or unexpected” (O.G. p. 65)—“Yea,” “moreover,” “even” (=“surprising to say”) my flesh shall rest securely. Then, too, the noun, “flesh,” in being set before its verb, is by a well-known rule emphasised. There was good cause for the surprise—good cause for the emphasis. For “the flesh” was in danger: in danger of corruption! in danger, because the contingency supposed was the event of death. *It must have been death*; otherwise there would have been no entrance into hades, and consequently the promise of not being *abandoned to hades* would have been superfluous. When Dr. Burney wrote in *The Interpreter* for July 1907, p. 375, that “my flesh is only employed of the *living* body,” he must have forgotten Job 19:26 and Psalm 79:2. “Flesh,” clearly, may mean the dead body; and that it does so mean here, naturally follows from the surprise and the emphasis

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already noted; and, we may add,—forms the allusion to danger made by the adverb “securely;” for why should the “flesh” alone be represented as in danger, but for the assumed fact of its exposure to early decay by death?

The point to which the danger extends is the point at which victory commences. This godly man dies, yet even his flesh rests securely. Why?

For thou wilt not abandon my soul to hades. My soul may here be taken to include the whole personality, according to the most common usage of the word throughout the Old Testament; and this brings it into parallelism with the term *hasith* in the next line:—

Thou wilt not abandon my soul (that is, ME) to hades,
Neither wilt thou suffer thy *hasith* (=thy man of
kindness=thine Ideal Israelite=thy Levite=ME,
bearing as I do that character) to see the pit.

It is, of course, implied that he, the man, would *enter* hades; although he, the man, would not be *abandoned* to it. He would not, with the wicked, see the pit *in* hades: that is expressed. He would not, in his flesh, suffer harm; seeing that his flesh would dwell securely. The dominion of hades over him would be harmless, and therefore presumably brief. He would not remain long in hades. He would not suffer harm in hades. His whole personality would come safely through hades. As much as this, the words naturally convey: we need not press them to signify more. It is obvious how completely they were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth by his early resurrection.

Less than resurrection cannot be intended; for resurrection is the true and complete antithesis to death. If Jesus had not been raised bodily, to that extent he would have been abandoned to hades—which includes the grave.

Besides, *the path to life* naturally starts from the lowest point to which Jehovah's loved and loving One was permitted to descend. If he was suffered to lay aside his body, then he was permitted to take it again. Not only does the path of life lead up out of the underworld inclusive of the grave, but it leads up into heaven. It matters not, in this connection, where heaven is; but it matters much that it is where Jehovah most gloriously manifests his presence and unveils his face. *Fullness of joy*, for redeemed man, is “in communion with the divine face or

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presence." *Delightfulness*—more than "pleasure" (rather an abused word), more than "beauty" or "loveliness" to the eye, more than "sweetness" to the taste: all combined, and unspeakably more. The general thought is that man's utmost capacity for happiness will be satisfied *in the Divine Presence, or with* (the unveiling of) the *Divine face*, to behold which he is invited, and to which under the guidance of Redeeming Love he tends.

"The original situation is provided in 1 Sam. 26. For 'hasten after another' (4) see *v.* 19; for 'maintainest my lot' (5), see *v.* 25; for 'heritage' (6), see *vv.* 19, 25; for 'the Lord before him' (8) see *vv.* 16, 19, 20, 24; for 'deliverance' (1, 10, 11), see *v.* 24. On verse 11, cp. 1 Sam. 26:10. The whole was also remarkably appropriate for the reign of Hezekiah, and doubtless the psalm was adopted on that account. The delineation is found in Isa. 57 (which is attributed to Isaiah of Jerusalem), wherein whoredom (*vv.* 3, 4, 8) expresses the 'hastening after another.' In the words of this psalm, in *vv.* 4, 5, the pious of Judah were enabled to dissociate themselves from abominations specifically described by the prophet. The 'drink offerings' of the depraved people are repudiated; and over against their 'portion' and 'lot,' another is made the subject of boasting (cp. Isa. 57:6). As for *vv.* 8-11 of the psalm, they are remarkably appropriate for the man who was brought to the gates of death and then raised to newness of life (Isa. 38:18-20; cp. Ps. 17:15; 140:13)"—Thirtle, "Old Testament Problems," pp. 313, 314.

It will be seen, from the giving of the above liberal extract, how far these "Studies" are from ignoring the existence of typical prophecy in the Psalms. Whenever, and to whatever extent, foreshadowing types can be found, their employment in exposition is helpful. Nevertheless, as protested in dealing with Ps. 2, it is conceived that we should dutifully expect now and then examples of the bounding away of the Spirit of Foresight into things to come. These adjustments being borne in mind, the present writer has no need to excuse himself for having in the above Exposition felt himself at once carried away to think of Jesus of Nazareth as the Great Fulfiller.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The word "save" and "salvation" are often used in the psalms—what is its particular meaning? Does it have application to us?

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2. Please read Acts 2:25 ff and discuss.
3. Oh—that the expression of the psalmist in verse 5 were ours—! How can we obtain this personal relationship with our God?
4. How does the 23rd psalm compare with verse 6?
5. Discuss the Messianic and personal aspects of this psalm.

PSALM 17

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

One who is Righteous Prays, in Great Trouble,
for Divine Deliverance and Manifestation.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, The Prayer of Righteousness. Stanza II., vers. 3, 4, The Proving of Righteousness. Stanza III., vers. 4-6, The Precaution of Righteousness! Stanza IV., vers. 6-8, Prayer for Attention, Kindness and Tender Care. Stanza V., vers. 9, 10, Refuge sought from Greedy, Cross and Arrogant Enemies. Stanza VI., vers. 11, 12, Invaders Advancing, Surrounding, Encamping, and Waylaying. Stanza VII., vers. 13, 14, Arise, Confront, Bring down, Deliver, Slay! Stanza VIII., vers. 14, 15, Punishment invoked on Three Generations—Reward counted upon by a Hoped-for Satisfying Vision of God.

(Lm.) Prayer—By David

- 1 Oh hear Jehovah one who is righteous—attend to my piercing cry,
oh, give ear to my prayer—without lips of deceit:
- 2 from thy presence let my sentence come forth—that mine¹ eyes may behold it.
- 3 With equity hast thou tried my heart—hast inspected me by night,
hast proved² me thou findest in me no evil purpose—my mouth transgresseth not:
- 4 as for the doings of men by the word of thy lips (do I regard them).
I have watched the paths of the violent one;
- 5 my steps hold fast to thy tracks—my footsteps slip not

1. So. Sep.

2. "Zaraph, smelt, refine, test"—O.G.