

## PSALM FORTY AND FORTY-ONE

8. The words of Scroggie are so good as related to the last section of this psalm—(11-17)—“If life were but one battle (and how we often wish it were) we could put off our armor when it was won, but as life is a campaign we can never afford to do that; we must be *ever* watchful, and *ever* prayerful, an *dever* hopeful.” (*Ibid* p. 235) Read these verses and discuss how the above comment applies.

## PSALM 41

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Regretting that Enemies and Friends should meanly Rejoice in his Sickness, the Psalmist nevertheless Perseveres in Prayer for Pardon and Recovery.

### ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, The Blessings that Might have been Won by being Considerate to a Sick Man. Stanza II., ver. 4, The Sick Man Prays for Pardon and Healing. Stanza III., vers. 5-9, How both Enemies and a Particular Friend have turned against him in his Affliction. Stanza IV., vers. 10-12, Prayer for Restoration Rises to Strong Assurance. *Doxology* (ver. 13).

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 How happy is he who is considerate towards the helpless!<sup>1</sup>  
in the day of calamity Jehovah will deliver him,  
2 Jehovah will preserve him and keep him alive—  
he shall be called happy in the land.  
Do not then give him up to the desire<sup>2</sup> of his enemies!  
3 Jehovah will sustain him on a bed of sickness:  
All his lying down hast thou transformed in his disease!  
4 I have said—“Jehovah! be gracious unto me,  
heal thou my soul<sup>3</sup> for I have sinned against thee.”  
5 Mine enemies keep saying—“It is bad with him!<sup>4</sup>  
when will he die and his name perish?”

1. “Or, perhaps, *the weakly*”—Dr. “The afflicted”—Del.

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

3. Or: “person.” “The soul is the man’s whole ‘self’; the living personality which results from the union of spirit and flesh”—Kp.

4. M.T. “me.” Only the difference (in the length of a stroke) between *yod* and *waw*.

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

- 6 And if one hath come in to see me unreality<sup>1</sup> he speaketh,  
his own heart gathereth mischief<sup>2</sup> to itself:  
7 he goeth forth outside—he telleth everything.  
Against me whisper together all that hate me,  
Against me reckon they—"It is bad with him,—<sup>3</sup>  
8 an infliction of the Abandoned One hath been fixed<sup>4</sup> on him;  
and now that he hath lien down he will not again rise!"  
9 Even the great man I used to salute—in whom I trusted—  
accustomed to eat my bread hath lifted against me a high  
heel!<sup>5</sup>  
10 But thou Jehovah be gracious unto me and raise me up,  
and I will repay them!  
11 By this I know that thou delightest in me.  
that mine enemy shall not shout over me.<sup>6</sup>  
12 But as for me in my blessedness<sup>7</sup> hast thou held me fast,  
and hast caused me to stand before thee to the ages.  
13 Blessed be Jehovah God of Israel,  
From antiquity even unto futurity!<sup>8</sup>  
Amen and Amen!

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

(CMm.) For the sons of korah—"the patriarchs of song."<sup>9</sup>

## PARAPHRASE

### PSALM 41

God blesses those who are kind to the poor. He helps them out of their troubles!

2 He protects them and keeps them alive; He publicly honors them and destroys the power of their enemies.

3 He nurses them when they are sick, and soothes their pains and worries.<sup>10</sup>

1. That is: insincerity.

2. Or "trouble" ("naughtiness" Dr.)

3. M.T. "me." Only the difference (in the length of a stroke) between *yod* and *waw*.

4. Ml.: "molten," "cast."

5. Cp. 55:12, 20.

6. Cp. 55:23.

7. Or: "devotion," "whole-heartedness," "integrity": ml. "my wholeness," "entirety."

8. Ml.: "From the age (concealed duration in the past) even unto the age (concealed duration in the future)."

9. These two instructions transposed and brought here by readjustment of titles based on Thirtle. Cp. Intro., Chap. II., 3.

10. Literally, "You make all his bed in his sickness."

## PSALM FORTY-ONE

4 "O Lord," I prayer, "be kind and heal me, for I have confessed my sins."

5 But my enemies say, "May he soon die and be forgotten!"

6 They act so friendly when they come to visit me while I am sick; but all the time they hate me and are glad that I am lying there upon my bed of pain. And when they leave, they laugh and mock.

7 They whisper together about what they will do when I am dead.

8 "It's fatal, whatever it is," they say. "He'll never get out of that bed!"

9 Even my best friend has turned against me—a man I completely trusted; how often we ate together.

10 Lord, don't You desert me! Be gracious, Lord, and make me well again so I can pay them back!

11 I know You are pleased with me because You haven't let my enemies triumph over me.

12 You have preserved me because I was honest; You have admitted me forever to Your presence.

13 Bless the Lord, the God of Israel, who exists from everlasting ages past—and on into everlasting eternity ahead. Amen and Amen!

## EXPOSITION

By substituting the word "helpless" for "poor" in the first line of this psalm, we at once obviate the appearance of self-righteousness, which would have been seen and been in no wise welcome as a commencement to the psalm. It would have appeared to say, "I have always been considerate of the 'poor,' and therefore might have hoped for better treatment than I am receiving." The word "poor" would have seemed to refer to others than himself, and so the line would have looked like sounding his own praise. But the moment we substitute the equally correct rendering "helpless," then we detect a pathetic reference to himself as confessedly in a deplorably "helpless" bodily condition, and can credit the psalmist with a genuine feeling of regret that he had not received such commiseration under his "stroke" as would have called forth from him the blessings on his comforters which in this stanza he amplifies.

It must be admitted, however, that although this corrected keynote seems well fitted to introduce the psalm, yet the sound

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

of the keynote appears rather muffled by lines 4 and 6; because line 4 sounds like a wish weakly inserted amidst assurances strong enough to bear out the initial exclamation "How happy:" "How happy—because Jehovah will deliver him," &c., &c. Line 6 seems to disturb the stanza for an opposite reason: it is too strong: it is too much an announcement of prayer already answered: as a further reason for felicitating the considerate man it equally disturbs the stanza. One has only to think of Hezekiah as adapting the psalm to his own circumstances, and interpolating first line 4, and then, after his recovery, adding line 6,—to feel how naturally these disturbances might have occurred, and yet how unspeakably too precious they are to be removed for mere symmetrical reasons.

The emphasis on the pronoun "I" at the head of ver. 4 has, after the foregoing introduction, a welcome effect. It appears to stand out in anticipatory contrast with what his enemies have to say, as recorded in the following verse: as much as to imply—"Whatever mine enemies have to say about me, what before thee, O Jehovah, I have to say of myself, is this, That I have sinned, and implore the healing which thou alone canst bestow." This, indeed, is a welcome note to catch from the psalmist. His sin has many times of late come before us, and it materially contributes to our edification to observe that, however naturally he resents blows from enemies and friends which they might have spared him, yet at the same time, before God there is no equivocation, no sparing of himself. Before Jehovah, he lies in the dust crying for mercy.

The picture given of the visits of perfidious enemies coming to visit the psalmist with hypocritical professions of friendship on their lips, their malicious eyes closely noting everything that might be construed to the Royal Sufferer's disadvantage, and then their lips divulging every damaging appearance and incident to those outside waiting for the verdict,—is far too lifelike to need much comment. That a trusted counsellor—for doubtless it was Ahithophel—should have given his late Master an insidious blow—this was one of the hardest things to bear; and the thing which most tended to make David, as shamefully betrayed, a type of his Son and Lord (John 13:18 and 17:12).

We should be glad to think, with Dr. Briggs, that the purpose of retaliation expressed in ver. 11 was an interpolation; but there is just enough reason to suppose that, in his public capacity, David felt compelled to punish so glaring an offence, to make us

## PSALM FORTY-ONE

hesitate to omit a clause which the ancient versions with the Massoretic text retain; and therefore we are content to remind ourselves that *we* may not curse, but must overcome evil with good!

Before closing our comments on this series of psalms, satisfaction may be expressed that so able an expositor as Kirkpatrick admits how weak are the objections which can be urged against the belief that King David really did suffer the terrible infliction of bodily disease which sufficiently comes to light in these psalms. He says: "It is true that the narrative in 2 Samuel makes no reference to an illness such as here described; but that narrative necessarily passes over many details. Such an illness would account for the remissness in attending to his official duties, which Absalom's words to the suitors for justice seemed to imply (2 Sam. 15:3). It would account also for the strange failure of David's natural courage which his flight from Jerusalem at the first outbreak of the rebellion appears to indicate. Unnerved by sickness, in which he recognized a just punishment for his sins, David watched the growing disloyalty of his courtiers, and in particular of Ahithophel, without feeling able to strike and crush the conspiracy before it came to a head. Compare generally Psalm 55." Compare, further, the "Exposition" of Ps. 38, *ante*. In a word, it is impossible to overestimate the moral gain to revealed truth rendered by restoring David to his proper place in these penitential psalms. Every one knows how grievously David sinned: nothing can blot out the sad story from the historical records of the time. Let everyone equally know how ignominiously he suffered; how severely he had to be chastised before he repented. Let us be permitted in these psalms to hear his groans, not indeed to our pleasure, but to our lasting profit. Our honour—the honour of our God—the honour of the whole history of Redemption—is bound up with the sincerity of David's repentance. Grant us, then, the melancholy and yet salutary opportunity of becoming witnesses to its genuineness and its depth. There is no gain, but much loss, to be had by transferring these penitential psalms bodily to the nation, as their primary subject. And therefore we hope that those critics who have been teaching us to date their origin in and after the exile, will show willingness to revise their conclusions; will not only admit how greatly transmissional and historical evidence is against them, but also how strongly exegetical considerations appeal to us to find their *authors* in men

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

whom we know, and in *occasions* clearly indicated for us by evidence which can be no longer overlooked.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Read II Samuel, chapters eleven through sixteen. Also Psalms 32 and 51, to give adequate background for this psalm.
2. Certain circumstances almost necessitate a sickness on the part of David as a punishment for his sin with Bathsheba. Read I Samuel 15:3 to catch another detail.
3. Rotherham has a most clever way of relating this whole psalm to the personal experience of David. How does he relate verses one through three to David? Do you agree?
4. "I said, Lord, be merciful unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee" (vs. 4). How full of meaning this verse is for everyone—notice: (1) Until we admit and confess our sin there can be no healing. (2) We must accept mercy—no justification or vindication or rationalization—just guilt and mercy. Mercy is the personal application of forgiveness. (3) Our soul needs healing much more than our bodies—The soul is the heart—the essential part of man—unless we are whole within we shall be sick without—make me clean—pure—whole within. (4) It is against the one who has made us; who died for us;—who loves us better than any other that we have sinned—Sin as here defined (or applied) is an action against nature—we have taken poison into our system—when will we begin to define sin as the "unnatural" thing to do? The laws of nature are the laws of God. The laws of moral conduct are the laws of nature (God)—we do not break them, we simply break ourselves by violating them. Present day doctors will agree that 75% or more of physical sickness is caused by the sin of the soul.
5. David was suffering the results of his sin—why complain about the attitudes of those who came to visit him? Discuss.
6. Verse nine is a prophesy—fulfilled in John 13:18. The writers of the New Testament were so saturated with the Old Testament, that at least 180 references or allusions are made to the psalms in the N. T.—97 of the 150 psalms are quoted. Every New Testament book but I Thess., II John, Philemon and Jude contain references to the psalms—is this an example or ideal for us? Discuss.