

PSALM FIVE AND SIX

3. Does God indeed hate the evil deeds of sinners? How is this hatred expressed?
4. Did David believe he was going to receive some special treatment from Jehovah? What was it—how or why was it given?
5. Discuss the principle of self-destruction implicit within all steadfast sinning. Give examples—not the least of which is Absalom.

PSALM 6

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

A Prayer for Deliverance from Sickness and Death.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, Prayer for Favour instead of Anger. Stanza II., vers. 4-7, For Life instead of Death. Stanza III., vers. 8-10, In the Strength of a Divine Answer, Mischief-makers are Dismissed.

(Lm.) Psalm—by David.

- 1 Jehovah! do not in thine anger correct me,
nor in thy wrath chastise me;
- 2 Be gracious unto me Jehovah! for languishing am I,
heal me Jehovah! for dismayed are my bones,—
- 3 yea my soul¹ is dismayed exceedingly;
And thou Jehovah how long?
- 4 Oh return Jehovah rescue my soul,
save me for Thy kindness' sake;
- 5 For in death there is no memorial of thee,
in hades who can give thanks² unto thee?
- 6 I am weary with my sighing,
I soak every night my couch,
with my tears my bed I drench:
- 7 Shrivelled from vexation is mine eye,
it hath aged, because of all mine adversaries.

1. The sphere in which various emotions . . . come into consciousness"
—Dr. P. B. V. Glos. I. "Soul."

2. "Own or acknowledge publicly and openly"—Dr.

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- 8 Depart from me all ye workers of iniquity;¹
For Jehovah hath heard the voice of my weeping,
9 Jehovah hath heard my supplication,—
Jehovah doth accept my prayer:
10 Shamed and sorely dismayed will be all my foes,
they will turn back will be shamed in a moment.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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- No, Lord! Don't punish me in the heat of Your anger.
2 Pity me, O Lord, for I am weak. Heal me, for my body
is sick,
3 And I am upset and disturbed. My mind is filled with
apprehension and with gloom. Oh, restore me soon.
4 Come, O Lord, and make me well. In Your kindness
save me.
5 For if I die I cannot give You glory by praising You.
before my friends.²
6 I am worn out with pain; every night my pillow is wet
with tears.
7 My eyes are growing old and dim with grief because of
all my enemies.

* * * * *

- 8 Go, leave me now, you men of evil deeds, for the Lord
has heard my weeping
9 And my pleading. He will answer all my prayers.
10 All my enemies shall be suddenly dishonored, terror-
stricken, and disgraced. God will turn them back in shame.

EXPOSITION

This is the first of a series of psalms of profound importance in the inward and spiritual history of redemption; inasmuch as, among them, they disclose a fact never formally stated in David's history nor made obtrusive in his psalms. David's lamentable fall being in any case notorious, it has ever been a satisfaction to the spiritual-minded to be able to point to his penitential

1. "Naughtiness"—Dr.

2. Literally, "In the grave, who shall give You thanks?" Isaiah 57:1, 2 may indicate that Old Testament saints believed in a conscious and pleasant hereafter for those who love God.

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psalms as proof that, if he sinned wickedly, he repented very humbly and sincerely. Had it been otherwise, his eminence as a king and as a psalmist would have been a stumbling-block to the superficial and unwary. His penitential psalms, therefore, have been made none too prominent. They have served as a salutary warning to morally weak souls, who have been only too ready to stumble at David's great offence, if not also to extenuate their own errors under the specious cover of his example.

This invaluable lesson is susceptible of being all the more strongly enforced when the disclosure to which we have alluded becomes evident. It is, that before David repented, he had to be severely chastised. Not only was he soon after punished by the death of his child, the fruit of his illicit connection with Bathsheba; not only was he long held under chastisement by the various retributions in kind which for years served to remind him of his own guilt; but, as it would seem, even before the death of that child, he had to endure a severe infliction from the hand of his offended God, which smote him in his own person, disfigured his otherwise noble face, caused him excruciating and long protracted pain, compelled him to make midnight outcries of agony which spread consternation through his palace, not unattended by the aversion of some of the members of his household and the evil surmisings and whisperings of others. Indeed, it is tolerably clear that these whisperings reached the ears of his courtiers, some of whom were moved thereby into base though cloaked disloyalty.

The evidence of this comes out little by little, partly in the lines and partly between the lines, of the series of psalms of which that before us is the first. Attribute to David the psalms to which his name is prefixed—render them fearlessly and consistently—read them one after another with the apprehensiveness which the known circumstances of David's life are fitted to suggest, and the conclusion emerges, with a cogency which candour cannot resist, that the very punishment threatened on David's sons in the event of their transgressing (2 Sam. 27), actually fell on himself—and he, David, for a time, though perhaps none about him dare say it save with bated breath—became a leper! This explains many words and facts which are otherwise inexplicable.

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From this point of view, this sixth psalm falls into its place, as the first of a series which have liturgically and conveniently been called "penitential." In truth there is in this psalm no actual confession of sin—rather an awkward circumstance, one might think, considering the frankness which becomes avowed confession, but which is fully explained when we remember that the name "penitential" is in this case purely conventional, and that what we miss here we find explicit enough later on. Nevertheless, there is this convenience in the classification—that by bringing back to this psalm what we learn from subsequent evidence, we are rewarded by the discovery of a richer meaning in these words than we might otherwise have detected.

Well might David apprehend that his present pains were a token of Divine *displeasure*: well might he feel as though he were carrying in himself the sentence of *death*: well might he be quite unable, under the circumstances, to rise above the more gloomy views of *hades* which were current in his day (cp. Intro. Chap. III. "Hades"), intensified by the contrast between the silence of the underworld, as usually apprehended, and the musical and joyful *memorial* of *thanksgiving* now being daily rendered in Jerusalem under the fostering care of his own inventive genius: well might the discovered presence at his court of *adversaries* add to the bitterness of his shame that he could not conceal from them its visible as well as audible manifestations. And now to think that these adversaries to his person were plotting *mischief* to his throne and realm, on the assumption that his demise could not long be delayed,—this was perhaps the bitterest ingredient in his cup. From this point of view, the psalm before us becomes intensely dramatic.

The suddenness and completeness with which the scene changes, in the last stanza, would appear psychologically puzzling in the last degree, had the writer of the psalm been any other than David. No prophet with a message of peace comes on the scene; and yet the storm within is hushed in a moment. It is instant peace, which brings active power; the Divine healing simultaneously penetrates and pervades body and mind. Somehow, the petitioner knows in a moment that he is heard. His courage rises commensurately as in a kingly soul accustomed to command. *Depart*, says he, to the faithless cowards who were secretly gloating over his ignominious humiliation; and, with prophetic glance, he apprehends the completeness of their overthrow, rendered certain by his recovery.

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How is this? How has it come about? David KNEW, as his three-fold assurance, twice of the *hearing*, and then—with changed emphasis—of the *hearer* of his prayer—attests. How did he know?

He was a prophet. He had been long ago anointed with the Holy Spirit. His spirit had for years been responsive to God's Spirit. Full many a time had the Divine Artist's invisible fingers swept over the chords of his soul, calling forth music which he knew well had come from heaven. And, however obstinately slow he had been to perceive it, at length his loss of spiritual power had become to him too painfully evident. Hence, when just now he had exclaimed, *Oh return, Jehovah!* there was a conscious void, the refilling of which had behind it a background of experience which made it most real, most certain, most invigorating. Jehovah's restored presence was its own witness; and, once more, "Jehovah's word" of prophetic certainty "was on his tongue."

Hence this psalm fills us also with a chastened joy. We are instructed, that the spiritual life is no imaginary thing; that our Heavenly Father has efficacious means at his command whereby to make his absence felt when we willfully and persistently offend him; and again, at his command, when he would restore unto us the joy of his salvation. And though we are not prophets, and may not in some ways be as directly conscious of Divine activities upon our spirits as though we could pour forth prophetic strains admittedly given from above, yet is there a residuum of identity between the influences of the one Divine Spirit on all men in all ages. The Spirit of Jehovah is always and everywhere a holy spirit, both demanding and creating holiness where he dwells: demanding it in David, demanding it in ourselves. Hence psalms like these have a value that is perennial.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. David felt he richly deserved punishment—is this "guilt complex" a good thing? Discuss.
2. Does sin and guilt make a man sick? Specify some physical ailments produced by sin and guilt.
3. Why are some wicked sinners healthy and still other sinners happy?
4. There is no soundness of body and mind like that produced by a heart wholly committed to God through Christ—Discuss.

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5. Read Isaiah 57:1, 2 and see if you agree that it speaks of a happy life after death. Now read verse 5 of this psalm and discuss its meaning.
6. Are we to understand from verse 6 that David was weeping over his sin or because of pain?
7. Why be so overwhelmed with apprehension (as in verse 7) when our trust is in God? Discuss.
8. Why the sudden change of attitude in verse 8? We are not prophets—where can we find assurance?
9. Are we to propose a plan and ask God to approve it—or to seek God's plan and accept it? Discuss.
10. Show how David's enemies were defeated even as verse 10 indicates.

PSALM 7

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

One Wrongfully Accused Commits his Vindication to the Righteous Judge of All the Earth.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-2, Appeal to Jehovah for Safety. Stanza II., vers. 3-5, False Accusations Indignantly Denied. Stanza III., vers. 6-11, The Interposition of Jehovah as Judge Invoked. Stanza IV., vers. 12, 13, The Divine Pursuer Lying in Wait for the Human Pursuer. Stanza V., vers. 14-16, The Author of Trouble brings it back on his Own Head. Stanza VI., ver. 17, A Refrain Couplet, Promising Praise.

(Lm.) A Discursive Song—By David—
Which he sang to Jehovah over the words of Cush the Benjamite.¹

- 1 Jehovah my God in thee have I taken refuge,
save me from all who pursue me and deliver me:
- 2 Lest he² tear in pieces like a lion my soul,
and there be no deliverer³ to rescue.
- 3 Jehovah my God if I have done this,—
if there be iniquity in my hands,—

1. Prob. a courtier in the court of Saul: incident otherwise unknown.

2. Prob. alluding to Saul himself.

3. So it shd be (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.). Cp. Lam. 5:8—Gn.