

STUDIES IN PSALMS

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.

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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.

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- 4 if I have requited my friend with evil,—
 or despoiled¹ him who was mine enemy without cause
- 5 Let an enemy pursue my soul and overtake it,
 and tread to the earth my life,
 and my glory in the dust let him cause to dwell.
- 6 Oh arise Jehovah in thine anger,
 life up thyself against the furious outbursts of my foes,
 and awake for me!—justice hast thou commanded!
- 7 When the assembly of peoples gather round thee
 then above it on high oh sit enthroned!²
- 8 Jehovah judgeth peoples—do me justice³ Jehovah,—
 according to my righteousness
 and according to mine integrity⁴ upon me.
- 9 Let the wrong of lawless ones I pray come to an end,
 and wilt thou establish him who is righteous,—
 seeing that a trier of minds and motives⁵ is God the righteous.
- 10 My shield is with God—saviour of the upright in heart:
 11 God is a righteous judge—a GOD who threateneth⁶ every day.
 12 If a man turn not
 His sword he whetteth,
 His bow hath he trodden and made ready,
 13 and against him hath prepared the weapons of death,
 His arrows into burning ones he maketh.
- 14 Lo! he travaileth with trouble:
 yea he hath conceived mischief and brought forth delusion,
 15 A pit he digged and deepened it,
 and then fell into the ditch he must needs make.
 16 His mischief turneth back on his own head,
 and on his own crown his violence descendeth.
- 17 I will thank Jehovah according to his righteousness,
 and will celebrate in psalm the name of Jehovah Most High.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

(CMm.) For the Winepresses. The Feast of Tabernacles.

1. So it shd be (w. Aram. and Syr.).—Gn.

2. So Br. and others. M.T.: "return"—as Dr. and others.

3. Or: "vindicate me," as in 26:1, 43:1.

4. Or: "blamelessness," "whole-heartedness."

5. U.: "hearts and reins." "The reins are the seat of the emotions, just as the heart is the seat of the thoughts and the affections"—Del. Heart—"the organ of intellect": reins—"the organs of feeling"—Dr. Cp. Jer. 11:20, 12:2, 17:10, 20:12.

6. "If in the end God lets his anger break forth, He does so not without having previously threatened every day, viz. the godless (cp. Isa. 66:14, Mal. 1:4)"—Del.

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PARAPHRASE

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I am depending on You, O Lord my God, to save me from my persecutors.

2 Don't let them pounce upon me as a lion would and maul me and drag me away with no one to rescue me.

3 It would be different, Lord, if I were doing evil things—

4 If I were paying back evil for good or unjustly attacking those I dislike.

5 Then it would be right for You to let my enemies destroy me, crush me to the ground, and trample my life in the dust.

6 But Lord! Arise in anger against the anger of my enemies. . . Awake! Demand justice for me, Lord!

7, 8 Gather all peoples before You; sit high above them, judging their sins. But justify me publicly; establish my honor and truth before them all.

9 End all wickedness, O Lord, and bless all who truly worship God;¹ for You, the righteous God, look deep within the hearts of men and examine all their motives and their thoughts.

10 God is my shield; He will defend me. He saves those whose hearts and lives are true and right.²

11 God is a judge who is perfectly fair, and He is angry with the wicked every day.

12 Unless they repent, He will sharpen His sword and slay them. He has bent and strung His bow

13 And fitted it with deadly arrows made from shafts of fire.

14 The wicked man conceives an evil plot, labors with its dark details, and brings to birth his treachery and lies;

15 Let him fall into his own trap.

16 May the violence he plans for others boomerang upon himself; let him die.

17 Oh, how grateful and thankful I am to the Lord because He is so good. I will sing praise to the name of the Lord who is above all lords.

EXPOSITION

As this psalm is avowedly *discursive*, we need not be over-solicitous about its framework of its precise line of thought. Nevertheless, in its author and its occasion, we may find fruitful

1. Literally, "the just."

2. Literally, "the upright in heart."

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suggestions wherewith to attempt our exposition. We have no subsidiary information respecting *Cush the Benjamite*, but may infer, with some probability, that his tribe is mentioned for the very purpose of suggesting that he was a partisan of King Saul. It is plain that he had slandered David to his royal master; and it is not difficult to make out the nature of the accusations he had made—with sufficient clearness, at least, to show how untrue they were, how base, and how hard to David's noble and sensitive nature to bear. Cush had, apparently, accused David of wrongfully retaining in *his own hands* spoils which belonged to the king; of *returning evil for the good* which Saul as his early *friend* had done him; and, in some way, of *taking toll* for his professed generosity in twice over sparing Saul's life. Not only were these accusations hard to bear, but in all probability David had no opportunity to defend himself, and was satisfied that he would now be heard even if admitted into Saul's presence. Under these circumstances his whole soul turns to Jehovah as his supreme Judge; and to him he pours out his complaint.

Probably this was the chief feature of the Psalm as David first wrote it; and was well and effectively closed by those concluding stanzas which picturesquely show how wrongdoers often prepare their own punishment. That he afterwards added to it, and greatly strengthened it, is a perfectly natural supposition; and this may have occasioned the irregularity of the composition, at the same time that it materially added to its permanent value.

It is so instructive to trace the ways in which Jehovah prepares his prophetic servants to receive and make known their messages, that we may be pardoned for surmising that David's subsequent discharge of the duties of judge of Israel, and his enlarged outlook on surrounding nations, which doubtless afforded him opportunities of perceiving how often the great ones of the earth suffered justice to their subjects to be trampled in the dust,—became the educative means of enabling David to grasp some of the deeper problems involved in Jehovah's judgeship over the individuals and nations of the earth.

Be this as it may, we are struck and impressed by the strong gleams of light which are here focused upon several portions of the judicial province pertaining to the Judge of all the earth. In the first place, we observe the Divine Judge's frequent *apparent unconcern* with the moral quality of the actions of men. In his holy wisdom, he, to some considerable extent, allows

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his human creatures to do as they please, even when they are rebelling against him. We may well believe that he does this, partly to suffer the wicked to work out what is in them in the exercise of their birthright of moral freedom, and partly to discipline the righteous in patience, courage and undying faith. But, whatever his reasons, the fact is undoubted; and the consequent trial to such as are earnestly trying to please God is such as sometimes to make it appear as though Jehovah were asleep. Hence the outcries of a psalm like this:—*Arise—lift up thyself—awake for me.* In the next place, this psalmist recognizes that in Jehovah there is and must be such a fund of *holy passion for righteousness* as to ensure not only that he must ultimately do right, but that there must be in him such a cumulative storage of anger with wrong-doing as to render natural and inevitable outbursts of wrath on fitting occasions: otherwise there would be something deficient in Jehovah's personal sanction of his own holy laws. David as judge in Israel would be able to feel this. Moreover, as he himself had been *commanded* to do right, as between man and man among his people; how could he afford to lose faith in Jehovah's own observance of the *justice* which he had *commanded* to those who judicially represented him among men? Amid the throngs that gathered around him in the gates of Jerusalem from day to day, David had learned the lesson that justice to the masses demands justice to individuals; and though Jehovah had *nations* to govern and judge, David was assured that his own individual case must pass under Divine recognition—he could not be lost in a crowd before God: *Jehovah judgeth peoples—do me justice*—the transition was easy. All the more is individual judgment demanded, that Jehovah is *a trier of minds and motives*, without which outward actions cannot be accurately weighed. It is probable that the slanders of Cush the Benjamite had brought this home to David's painful experience. There may have been a colourable element of truth in every fact alleged against David by his accuser, and yet the damaging suggestions grafted upon them have been most unjust and cruel. Hence the solace derived by David from his conscious *integrity*: hence his ultimate feeling of safety as *shielded* by the *Saviour of the upright in heart*. Whether with individuals or with nations, the processes of Divine government are preparatory, educative, transitional. It is right that liberty even to rebel should be granted for a time; and yet right that it should not be allowed to continue for ever: hence the prayer of the

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psalmist should find an echo in every upright heart—*Let the wrong of the lawless, I pray, come to an end.* Wherefore should it be perpetuated for ever? Then the lawless must forsake his way and the man of iniquity his thoughts. If he will not part with his iniquity by salvation, then he must perish with it in destruction; for the decree has gone forth. GOD, however, is a *righteous judge* in the large sense that giveth mercy every chance to triumph over judgment; and therefore he is an *EL*—a Mighty One—who *threateneth every day.* His anger is not manifested in punitive action every day, or else where would be the apparent unconcern which prompted the opening outcry of this very psalm? All the more, then, that the wrath of God against sin is not every day revealed in Divine action, must the Divine word which faithfully *threatens,* be sounded forth among men. The Divine method plainly is, that scope should be given for fear to prepare the way for love.

It may be admitted that there is some doubt as to the precise way in which the two concluding stanzas of this psalm follow up those which have preceded. But if we are right in concluding that the opening words of verse 12 refer to the *pursuer* of the early part of the psalm: *If he*—the offender—*turn not* from his evil ways; then *He*—the Divine Judge—*whetteth his sword,* etc.; that is, holdeth himself ready to stop the offender's wicked course by visiting him with sudden arrest and punishment:—if, we say, this be the onward course of the psalm, then two principles are evolved which are worthy of being laid side by side; namely that, while Jehovah is prepared himself to stop evil-doers; evil-doers are preparing their own destruction: *Their mischief returneth upon their own head.* Is it possible that this is how evil will at length be swept out of the universe? and that this is the reason why it is so long permitted? We may not precipitate the teaching of the psalms; but this at least is unquestionable; namely, that the cessation of moral evil in this psalm becomes an object of desire and prayer. How will it end? Is Jehovah preparing to destroy it, by permitting it to continue until it destroys itself? The question, thus presented, is perhaps too vague to arrest the student's mind. A preliminary question is needed:—Has moral evil a personal embodiment in one who is, par excellence, The Evil One? That question will recur in the next psalm.

The main tenor of this psalm being what it is, it must be regarded as a significant coincidence, that the musical line,—

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moved up from the head of the next psalm (where its appropriateness was not evident) to the foot of this, in conformity with Dr. Thirtle's readjustment of the psalm-titles,—should so fully vindicate its new position. "The Wine-presses," reminding us of the complete ingathering of the fruits of the year, serve at once directly to anticipate the closing of Jehovah's retributive dealings with men, and at the same time to lead on to such Scriptures as Isa. 63:1-6, Joel 3:12-17, and Rev. 19:15, where this solemn subject is more fully set forth.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There are various ways God might use in saving us from our persecutors—mention three different examples.
2. There are various ways we can overcome evil with good—read the Sermon on the Mount—(Matthew 5-7) and discuss three of them.
3. Discuss two or three possible reasons for the delays in the judgments of God.
4. Are we to be perfectly confident that truth and justice will prevail in this life?
5. Sin has the seeds of self destruction in it. Show by two examples that this is true.

PSALM 8

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Jehovah's Majesty Exalted by means of Man's Dominion.

ANALYSIS

An Original Solo, vers. 3-8: Adapted to Temple Worship by Prelude and Refrain, vers. 1a, b, and 9, and by an Introductory Stanza, vers. 1c, 2.

(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 Jehovah our Sovereign Lord!
how wonderful is thy name in all the earth!
Because thy majesty hath been uplifted above¹ the heavens

1. So Sep.