

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

So let all Israel's enemies be vanquished, like these Assyrians, who have been *put to shame and have retreated backward* (comp. 2 K. 19:36). And now, further, Assyria is paid back in her own coin: she had spoken of the nations who were unable to resist her might as "grass on the housetops" (2 K. 19:26, Isa. 37:27); and here she is herself made the object of the contemptuous comparison, with an additional stroke of wit at her expense: *Let the haters of Zion be as the grass of the house tops, which before it hath unsheathed doth wither*. Assyria had not unsheathed her sword against Jerusalem! And no friendly greetings were likely to congratulate her on the harvest she had reaped in Jehovah's inheritance.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. There is something very pathetic about this psalm—What is it?
2. Why compress all the history of Israel into one sad memory picture? i.e. What was the immediate cause for this?
3. Compare II Kings 19:36; Isaiah 39:27 and show how it relates to verses five through eight.

## PSALM 130

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Ransomed out of the Depths.

### ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-2, The Fact of Supplication Narrated. Stanza II., vers. 3-4, The Terms of the Supplication Stated. Stanza III., vers. 5-6, The Urgency of the Supplication Described. Stanza IV., vers. 7-8, An Extension of the Supplication Urged.

(Lm.) Song of the Steps.

- 1 Out of the depths called I upon thee Jehovah!
- 2 "Sovereign Lord oh hearken unto my voice,  
let thine ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications:—
- 3 If iniquities thou shouldst mark<sup>1</sup> O Yah!  
Sovereign Land!<sup>2</sup> who could stand?

1. Ml.: "watch." "Retainest"—Del.; "treasure up"—Leeser; "Wilt be extreme to mark what is done amiss"—P.B.V.

2. Some cod. (w. 2 ear. pr. edns.): "Jehovah"—Gn.

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- 4 Surely with thee is Pardon—<sup>3</sup>  
to the end thou mayest be revered.”<sup>4</sup>
- 5 I awaited Jehovah—  
my soul waited for his word:<sup>5</sup>
- 6 My soul shewed her hope for Jehovah—  
more than watchers for the morning—  
watchers for the morning.
- 7 Hope thou O Israel for Jehovah;  
for with Jehovah<sup>6</sup> is Kindness,<sup>7</sup>  
and plenteously with him is there ransoming:
- 8 He himself then will ransom Israel from all his iniquities.  
(Nm.)

## PARAPHRASE

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- O Lord, from the depths of despair I cry for Your help:  
2 “Hear me! Answer! Help me!”
- 3, 4 Lord, if You keep in mind our sins then who can ever  
get an answer to his prayers? But You forgive! What an awe-  
some thing this is!
- 5 That is why I wait expectantly, trusting God to help, for  
He has promised.
- 6 I long for Him more than sentinels long for the dawn.
- 7 O Israel, hope in the Lord; for He is loving and kind,  
and comes to us with armloads of salvation.
- 8 He Himself shall ransom Israel from her slavery to sin.

## EXPOSITION

This psalm is known as one of the Seven Penitential psalms. It is in fact penitential, and therefore this classification need not be disturbed; but it might as accurately have been described as a Plea for Ransom, and in any case has characteristics all its own.

The course of our Expositions hitherto has specially prepared us for this psalm. Presuming that King Hezekiah wrote or selected it for a place in his series of “Songs of the Steps,”

3. *Ms.*: “the pardon”—*qy.* supply: “which we need.”

4. *Cp.* 119:38. And see Exposition.

5. Here shd. be the verse division.—*Gn.*

6. So some *cod.* (w. 1 *ear. pr. edn.*)—*Gn.*

7. *Ms.*: “the kindness”—*qy.* supply: “on which we rely.”

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we have only to turn to his commemorative "Writing" preserved in Isaiah 38, to discover a note harmonising with the present composition, in the grateful acknowledgement there preserved: "Thou hast cast, behind thy back, all my sin." The "sin" acknowledged there, prepares us for the *iniquities* presupposed here. Moreover, when we were led to attribute the authorship of Ps. 119 to Hezekiah, it was impossible not to be impressed with the well-known phenomenon of a good man passionately devoted to "Jehovah's will," and yet bearing about with him a chastening memory of personal sin. These two lines of observation respecting Hezekiah prepare us to expect that no collection of psalms would be considered by him even approximately complete, that did not include at least one penitential psalm.

Reaching the present psalm thus, by a path which quickens our expectation of discovering something fresh and valuable, we are not disappointed. It is indeed a remarkable composition: simple, beautiful, profound. It says but little, but it implies more than we can easily grasp. Its most striking feature is its twofold reference, first to an individual, and then to a nation. Neither of these references can justly be denied; although, in point of fact, the former has been strangely doubted, and the latter is perhaps seldom pressed home to its legitimate conclusion.

The precise nature of the junction between the national lesson and the individual, is perhaps not demonstrably clear. Did the psalmist leave his own petitions in the waiting stage, as requests not as yet answered; and so incite his people to join him in blended pleading for answers yet to be vouchsafed both to him and to them? Or does he, rather, as we incline to think—from his somewhat exuberant lingering over the *watchers for the morning*—give us leave to interpolate *there* his own implied reception of an answer of peace; in the inspiring strength of which he at once proceeds strongly to urge Israel to take heart and plead for *national redemption*? It is a nice point, but important to the translator; who, according to his solution of it, may, in ver. 1, say *called*, as of petitions by this time answered; or else, "have called," as of petitions still urged before the Divine throne. Again, in ver. 5, he may either say *I awaited*, as though now "awaiting" no longer, or "I have awaited"—implying the undertone, "and am awaiting still." Notwithstanding the fact that thus, throughout the psalm, there are delicate shades of meaning needing to be discriminated with unusual care, it would

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be quite a mistake to infer that there are no broad lessons plainly conveyed.

At every turn, there are suggestions which instantly strike and deeply impress, notwithstanding an affluence of meaning which is not put into words. For example: the familiar term *mark* referring to *iniquities* in ver. 3, seems to be as good a word as can be selected; and yet it is seen by every thoughtful reader to convey nothing less than this: "to *mark*, in order to remember; and to remember, in order to punish."

So, again, there is an exquisite fineness of implication in the delightful turn of the phrase *with thee*, which the Hebrew emphasises by the position assigned to it: *with thee is Forgiveness*, rather than, "thou dost forgive," or "thou canst forgive." No, *with thee*. It is as though Jehovah had a store of forgivenesses, as though he had a cherished delight in forgiving; as though it were just *like* him. And so, in the last stanza: with *Jehovah is kindness*, and *plenteously with him is there ransoming*—a little awkward, perhaps, in English; yet how richly suggestive: it seems to tell of that, *and the like of that*, continually going on. Phases of truth, these, which penitent souls sorely need to make their own.

Of another order, perhaps, is the profound statement of design in the Divine forgiving: *to the end thou mayest be revered*. We should not have been surprised to read, "to the end thou mayest be LOVED"; but *revered!*—that demands a little thought. Is it that we poor erring ones could not think of mere Infinite Power without hardening our hearts? As soon, however, as we admit the concurrent conception of Infinite Pity, then we dare *think*, then our adoration rises, then we *revere!*

Already we have caught a foreglimpse of the weighty close of the psalm. It is indeed a worthy close. Sudden is the transition from the individual to the nation, and yet not so sudden and strange as to throw doubt on the unity of authorship. Indeed, it is easy to see, that the mind at work in the second stanza is at work in the fourth; and that the *Forgiveness* of the second is worthily matched by the *Ransoming Kindness* of the fourth. Still, it is a climax. The forgiven individual ascends to a mighty daring when he addresses his *nation* in such terms as these. He has experience—he has faith—he has inspiration. He clearly means his own nation; for he beholds them laden with their own long-accumulated national burden of *iniquities*. What other nation under the sun would consent to be charged with those in-

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iquities? It is only as the poet suns himself in the conception of *ransoming being at home with Jehovah*, that he rises to the crowning thought that *Jehovah himself* will ransom Israel from all his iniquities; and, if from his iniquities,—then why not also from his shame before the nations, his long, long exile from his own land?

Of the two great Old Testament words for redeeming, one (*ga'al*) “implies relationship” (O.G. 145), and the other (*pa dhah'*, that used here) carries with it the “underlying thought of payment” (O.G. 804). Jehovah is Israel's Kinsman-Redeemer; and he who of old gave Egypt for Israel's ransom (Isa. 43:3) will be able to find if he has not already “found a ransom” of such abiding worth that—in view of it, as a public justification —“Israel shall be saved in Jehovah with salvation to the ages” (Isa. 45:17, 25).

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why include this psalm of repentance at this juncture?
2. This psalm implies much more than it says—give two examples.
3. How is both the individual and national need preserved and answered?
4. Why is the term “revered” used?
5. What is the climax and close of the psalm—how related to us?

## PSALM 131

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Sinking of Self in Seeking Israel's Welfare.

### ANALYSIS

Stanza I., ver. 1, Direct Protestation of Humility. Stanza II., ver. 2, The Weaning from Selfishness. Stanza III., ver. 3, Israel again Encouraged to Hope.

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(Lm.) Song of the Steps—By David.

1. Jehovah! not haughty is my heart—  
nor lofty are mine eyes;