

## STUDIES IN PSALMS

another in the world, is one of the characteristic features of the Psalms of David written at the time of his persecution by Saul"—Del. Hence, in passing, the importance of holding fast the true Davidic origin of these psalms; hence moreover, the cogency of the reminder, in this final stanza, that David is being Divinely enabled to grasp the issues involved. Not without a struggle, but with it; not without prayer, but with it and through it, does David here rise to the assurance that he shall yet be *brought out* of this *Dungeon*, for such literally it is; that, for his deliverance, he will *give thanks unto Jehovah's name*; and that *the righteous*, who, though conspicuous by their absence from Saul's Court, are nevertheless to be found scattered throughout the land, shall joyfully acknowledge how *bountifully* Jehovah hath *dealt* with the hero who is now leading them on to the abiding victory of faith and patience.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Why is David in a cave? Which one?
2. Why such a loud protest? Song becomes a grand vehicle for prayer, praise, soliloquy, instruction, etc? How do we personally (not congregationally) use it today?
3. Show the connection and meaning of stanza two, three, and four.
4. Stanza five indicates the very real danger involved. Discuss.
5. David has assurance of ultimate victory, but not because of himself—nor by his own efforts. Discuss.

## PSALM 143

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Continued Concealment in the Cave: its Grievs and its Gains.

### ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, Remarkable Pleadings and Deprecation. Stanza II., vers. 3, 4, How the Trial Tries. Stanza III., vers. 5, 6, How the Student Studies. Stanza IV., vers. 7-12, How the Petitioner Perseveres in Prayer.

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(Lm.) Psalm—By David.

- 1 Jehovah hear thou my prayer,  
oh give ear unto my supplications,—  
in thy faithfulness answer me in thy righteousness;

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- 2 And do not enter into judgment with thy servant,  
for no one living can appear just before thee.
- 3 For a foe hath pursued my soul,<sup>1</sup>  
hath crushed to the earth my life;  
hath made me dwell in dark places—  
like the ancient dead;<sup>2</sup>
- 4 And my spirit hath fainted upon me,  
in the midst of me astounded is my heart.
- 5 I have remembered the days of aforetime,  
I have talked to myself of all thy doings,—<sup>3</sup>  
on the works<sup>4</sup> of thy hand I soliloquise:
- 6 I have spread out my hands unto thee,  
my soul is like<sup>5</sup> a weary land for thee. ☞☞
- 7 Haste thee answer me Jehovah, my spirit languisheth,—  
do not hide thy face from me,  
or I shall be made like them who are going down into the pit.
- 8 Let me hear in the morning thy kindness,  
for in thee do I trust:  
Let me know the way wherein I should walk,  
for unto thee have I uplifted my soul.
- 9 Rescue me from my foes Jehovah!  
for thee have I waited.<sup>6</sup>
- 10 Teach me to do thy pleasure for thou art my God,  
let thy good spirit<sup>7</sup> lead me in a level land.<sup>8</sup>
- 11 For the sake of thy name Jehovah wilt thou revive me?  
in thy righteousness wilt thou bring forth out of distress  
my soul?
- 12 And in thy kindness wilt thou exterminate my foes,  
and destroy all the adversaries of my soul:  
because I am thy servant.

(Nm.)

1. Or: "person."

2. Or: "like the dead of (by-gone) ages."

3. So (pl.) some cod. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn., Aram., Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.  
M.T.: "doing" (sing.)

4. So (pl.) some cod. (w. 3 ear. pr. edns., Aram., Sep., Vul.)—Gn.  
M.T.: "work" (sing.)

5. So M.T. Some cod. (w. 7 ear. pr. edns.): "in"—Gn.

6. Or: "hoped"—so *Gt.* M.T. (obscure).

7. *ML.*: "Thy spirit a good one."

8. Some cod. (w. 1 ear. pr. edn.): "way." Others (w. Syr.): "path."  
Cp. 27:11—Gn.

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### PARAPHRASE

#### PSALM 143

Hear my prayer, O Lord; answer my plea, because You are faithful to Your promises.<sup>1</sup>

2 Don't bring me to trial! For as compared with You, no one is perfect.

3 My enemies chased and caught me. They have knocked me to the ground. They force me to live in the darkness like those in the grave.

4 I am losing all hope; I am paralyzed with fear.

5 I remember the glorious miracles You did in days of long ago.

6 I reach out for You. I thirst for You as parched land thirsts for rain.

7 Come quickly, Lord, and answer me, for my depression deepens; don't turn away from me or I shall die.

8 Let me see Your kindness to me in the morning, for I am trusting You. Show me where to walk, for my prayer is sincere.

9 Save me from my enemies, O Lord, I run to You to hide me.

10 Help me to do Your will, for You are my God. Lead me in good paths, for Your Spirit is good.

11 Lord, saving me will bring glory to Your name. Bring me out of all this trouble because You are true to Your promises.

12 And because You are loving and kind to me, cut off all my enemies and destroy those who are trying to harm me; for I am Your servant.

### EXPOSITION

This psalm is obviously an advance upon the previous. The psalmist is still *dwelling in dark places*; but his continued hiding among the rocks leads him to compare himself with *the ancient dead*, forgotten of their old associates. The protraction of this state of things brings peculiar trials and special exercises of mind. It is one thing to take flight from foes, and put forth those active powers of mind which are roused to meet emergencies as they arise; but quite another thing to remain for some time in banishment. When long-looked-for deliverance is delayed, the most heroic may become impatient; and a more leisurely

1. Literally, "answer me in faithfulness and righteousness."

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consideration of the causes and ends of protracted trial may favour an anxious weighing of problems not before pondered. It is evident that David found it so; and, accordingly, this psalm gives tokens of the stress and strain upon his mind; and, amidst the overhanging gloom, freshness of thought is seen in exercise, grappling with old problems in new forms and pondering questions not before considered.

Stanza I. of this psalm urges pleas which have not quite lately come before us; and one, besides, which, when let into David's living and connected history, may be regarded as newly projected into his experience. In other words, the pleas that Jehovah would be *faithful* and *righteous* in delivering his servant, may on reflection be recognised as forms of thought with which the psalter has already made us familiar. Even when blessings sought originate in purest favour, as soon as they are held forth in *promises*, the holder of the promises may plead with Jehovah to be "faithful" to his word. And where, as in David's case in contrast with that of Saul, loyal devotion is regarded as putting Jehovah to the test, to sustain the devotion he himself has called into exercise, even a humble petitioner may wax bold to remind Jehovah of his "righteousness," as a reason for not failing to rescue him from trials which fidelity has occasioned. So far we readily recall reflections which make us feel to be on familiar ground.

It is true that *the sense of sin which shrinks from the severity of Divine justice* is, in like manner, not at all a new concept to the student of the psalter; for this is only the last of a *series* of penitential psalms. But the point of our present reflection is, that, though last in the order of place in the book, this penitential psalm is probably the first in the order of experience in the life of the psalmist—so far as we can judge. David is yet a young man. The great and deplorable sins of his later life have not yet cast their shadows over his soul. But here, in the gloom of the rocks amongst which he is hiding, the seeming delay of Jehovah to deliver him, drives him into himself with such heart-searching as to draw from him the protest, that, when all comes to all, *no one living can appear just before a holy and heart-searching God*. It is well to note this psychological moving force, in estimating the contribution which the psalter makes to our knowledge of the human soul and Jehovah's general dealings with the consciences of men.

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Stanza II. sharply recalls us to the actual world in which David lived. To all appearance, his *foe*, Saul—of whom it would be pedantic not to think in this connection—has the upper hand of him: it is *he* who is *crushing his life to the earth* and driving him to hide in these *dark places*. At times his *courage* forsakes him: his *mind* is bewildered. Was it for this that he had been anointed of Samuel; for this, that the Spirit of Sacred Minstrelsy had so oft and so mightily come upon him?

Stanza III. widens our outlook: it reveals the banished young soldier as a man of meditation. How many of its treasures Sacred History had laid at his feet we know not; but a sufficient selection of them, evidently, to enable him to *remember the days of aforetime*. Some familiarity with the contents of the Book of Exodus, would warrant him to say to Jehovah—*I have talked to myself of all thy doings*; and a similar general knowledge of the story of Genesis, complemented as it must have been by his own open-air observations of nature by day and by night, would naturally prepare him to add—*On the works of Thy hands I soliloquise*. With oriental proneness to gesture in devotion, and with a shepherd's alertness to observe when a land wants water and how barren it is without it,—his meditations prompt his prayers as he adds—*I have spread out my hands unto thee, my soul is like a weary land for thee*. Very natural—if the devoutness was there, to awaken his thoughts and unseal his lips.

We may not be too sure that the mysterious word *Selah*, which our sign ☞ represents, has yet yielded up its secret; but, assuming, as our sign by its form is intended to suggest, that it somehow has practically the effect of at once pointing backwards and forwards, as if to say, "These things being so, then note well what follows," we are entitled to note how suggestive is the translation which is now made in the psalm (Cp. Intro., Chap. III., "Selah"). All, so far, may be regarded as preliminary; but now, with rapid movements of desire, petition follows petition, at the rate of two per verse, to the very end of the psalm,—which, therefore, we have not cared to subdivide: *Haste thee answer me—do not hide—let me hear—let me know — rescue — teach — lead — revive — bring forth — exterminate —destroy*: each petition being sustained by a cogent reason why it should be granted; and all wound up with the crowning reason, which explains so much: *because I am Thy servant*. There are several salient points in this volley of petitions: among which

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should be noted the firm grip taken of facts, for, to all seeming, David and his men were *at death's door*; the care with which conduct is placed under Divine direction—"Shall I go further away? remain where I am? or hope shortly to return?" *Let me know the way wherein I should walk*; and the facility with which the psalmist's mind ascends to the high level of Divine teaching, which, under the circumstances, cannot mean less than—"So may *thy spirit* influence my spirit, that my ways, in the whole scope and drift of them, may *please thee*; and I meanwhile may find the *way* of Duty to be *plain and accessible*." For the most startling thing of all, we are by this time measurably prepared: To David's quick vision, it by this time began plainly to appear, that either he or Saul must be slain. How far he was, by word or deed, from himself moving a finger to slay Saul; how far from tolerating the doing of the deadly deed by others; all this we well know. All the same, as surely as he knew he was *Jehovah's servant*, and his cause Jehovah's cause, so surely is now borne in upon him the conviction, irresistibly intensified into a prayer: *And in Thy kindness wilt thou exterminate my foes, and destroy all the adversaries of my soul, because I am thy servant*. Let no man repeat this prayer until he is as sure as David was that no other issue is possible. Nevertheless, let no man shrink from appropriating and administering the spiritual tonic consisting in the assurance, soon to come before us in the most benevolent and sympathetic of Spiritual Songs: *Jehovah preserveth all them who love Him—but all the lawless He destroyeth*.

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In this psalm, David is still hiding in a cave, but he has problems here not before considered. What are they?
2. There are two concepts in stanza one with which we are familiar and one we have not before considered. Discuss them.
3. Saul surely seems to have the advantage, mention two or three.
4. David evidently had a copy of the law of the Lord with him in the cave. What indications are there that this is true?
5. The word "Selah" seems to signal the expression of the deepest meaning or purpose of this psalm. Discuss.
6. There is in this psalm a veritable valley of petitions. List three or four of them.

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7. David's basic problem was not that he was hiding in a cave. As to his future, what did he need to know?
8. At this time, it evidently became clear to David that to overcome his foe, what must finally take place?

## PSALM 144

### DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

From David's Psalms are Selected Strains, by one of his Sons,  
Emboldening him to Plead for Deliverance from Foreigners.  
An Appendix anticipates Happy Times.

### ANALYSIS

Stanza I, vers. 1, 2, Blessing rendered to Jehovah in language taken from Psalm 18. Stanza II, vers. 3, 4, Confession of Man's Insignificance and Frailty, as found in Psalms 8 and 39. Stanzas III. and IV., vers. 7-11, Petitions for Deliverance from Foreigners in Terms Suggested by Psalm 18 and rising to *Refrain* fervour. Stanza V., vers. 12-15, An Appendix, picturing the Temporal Benefits Resulting from the Realisation by a People that Jehovah is Their God.

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(Lm.) By David.

- 1 Blessed be Jehovah my rock!  
who teacheth my hands to war,  
my fingers to fight:
- 2 My kindness and my fastness,  
my lofty retreat and my deliverer—mine,  
my shield and he in whom I have taken refuge,  
who subdueth my people<sup>1</sup> under me.
- 3 Jehovah! what was an earth-born that thou shouldst  
acknowledge him?  
the son of a mere man that thou shouldst take account  
of him?<sup>2</sup>
- 4 An earth-born resembleth a vapour,<sup>3</sup>  
his days are like a shadow that passeth away.

1. A sp. vr. (sevir): "subdueth peoples" (pl.). In some cod. (w. Aram. and Syr.): "peoples" is both written and read. Cp. 18:47—Gn.

2. Cp. 8:4.

3. Or: "breath."