

PSALM 84 AND 85

Revelation; and the subjective instrument of its production being faith in a Perfect God, therefore, *O Jehovah of hosts,—thyself that Perfect One—how happy the man who trusteth in thee!*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Rotherham describes the circumstances behind this psalm in a most effective way. Retell them in your own words.
2. What particular desire of the heart is satisfied in the worship of God?
3. The sparrows were no distraction to the psalmist. Would they be to others? Should they be?
4. How could we apply verse 4 to our situation?
5. Who do you know who has claimed the promise of verse 11?

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DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Praise, Prayer and Prophecy lead up to the
Reconciliation of Earth and Heaven.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3, Praise to Jehovah for what he has Already Done.
Stanza II., vers. 4-7, Prayer for what Remains to be Done. Stanza III., vers. 8, 9, A Divine Word Sought by the Prophet. Stanza IV., vers. 10-13, The Final Reconciliation Announced.

(Lm.) Psalm.

- 1 Thou hast shewn favour Jehovah to thy land,
thou hast restored the fortunes¹ of Jacob,
- 2 Thou hast forgiven² the iniquity of thy people,
thou hast covered all their sin,
- 3 Thou hast withdrawn all thine indignation,
thou hast turned thee from the glow of thine anger.
- 4 Restore us O God of our salvation,
and break off thy vexation with us:
- 5 To the ages wilt thou be angry with us?
wilt thou prolong thine anger to generation and generation?

1. Or: "turned the captivity."

2. Or: "taken away."

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- 6 Wilt not thou thyself again give us life,
that thy people may rejoice in thee?
- 7 Shew us Jehovah thy kindness,
and thy salvation wilt thou give to us?
- 8 Let me hear what the Mighty One³ Jehovah will speak:
surely he will speak peace
unto his people
and unto his men of kindness
and unto such as turn their hearts unto him.⁴
- 9 Assuredly near unto such as revere him is his salvation,
so shall glory abide in our land.
- 10 Kindness and truth have met together,
Righteousness and Peace have kissed each other:
- 11 Truth out of the earth doth spring forth,
and Righteousness out of the heavens hath looked down:
- 12 Yea Jehovah giveth that which is good,
and our land yieldeth her increase:
- 13 Righteousness before him marcheth along,
and Peace hath made a path of his steps.

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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Lord, You have poured out amazing blessings on this land!
You have restored the fortunes¹ of Israel,

2 And forgiven the sins of Your people—yes, covered over
each one,

3 So that all Your wrath, Your blazing anger, is now ended.

4 Now bring us back to loving You,² O Lord, so that Your
anger will never need rise against us again.

5 (Or will You be always angry—on and on to distant
generations?)

6 Oh, revive us! Then Your people can rejoice in You
again.

7 Pour out Your love and kindness on us, Lord, and grant
us Your salvation.

8 I am listening carefully to all the Lord is saying—for He

3. Heb: *ha el*.

4. So it shd. be (w. Sep. and Vul.)—Gn.

1. Literally, "brought back the captivity."

2. Or, "Turn to us."

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speaks peace to His people, His saints, if they will only stop their sinning.

9 Surely His salvation is near to those who reverence Him; our land will be filled with His glory!

10 Mercy and truth have met together. Grim justice³ and peace have kissed!

11 Truth rises from the earth and righteousness smiles down from heaven.

12 Yes, the Lord pours down His blessings on the land and it yields its bountiful crops.

13 Justice goes before Him to make a pathway for His steps.⁴

EXPOSITION

There is a marked difference between the Praise with which this psalm opens and the Prayer which follows thereon. The Praise says—*Thou hast withdrawn all thine indignation*: the Prayer says—*How long shall thine anger continue?* How is this apparent contradiction to be removed? Some critics have proposed a *time* solution, by rendering—*Thou hadst withdrawn it*; but (as it has returned again)—*How long shall it continue?* And this is a possible reconciliation; since a season of Divine favour may be followed by one of Divine displeasure, and under the displeasure the former favour may be pleaded as a reason for its restoration. But perhaps a *dramatic* solution may be more commended, by supposing two parties to be successively represented: first those who are elated with what has already been done by restoring mercy, and who simply give thanks; and, second, those who are oppressed with the burden of what yet remains to be done, and who, in view of that, can scarcely believe that Jehovah's displeasure has yet been turned away. To the successive representation of these two classes—the optimists and the pessimists—the well-known antiphonal character of the Temple-worship would easily lend itself; and, after one Choir had offered the Praise, another might give expression to the Prayer, and thus both classes be assisted to address Jehovah in the language which lay nearest their hearts. Perhaps what chiefly commends this *dramatic* solution of the difficulty is, that it thus gives occasion for a prophetic soloist to intervene with a proposal to seek a new Divine word which shall meet the whole present situation—*Let me hear what the Mighty One, Jehovah,*

3. Literally, "righteousness."

4. Or, "set us in the way of His steps."

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will speak; and then, in turn, this solo, in form as well as effect, furnishes a strong lead up to what in any case must be regarded as the climax of the psalm. The soloist says in effect—“*Let me hear a new Divine word to meet our present need, about which we so greatly differ*”; and then, in ver. 10, the Divine Pronouncement begins—perhaps voiced by the united choirs—*Kindness and Faithfulness have met together*.

It is submitted that such a setting as this sends us back to what we have called the *prophetic solo* with new zest, to admire its comprehensive fulness: *Surely he will speak peace, well-being, prosperity, (shalom)*; and that, with a graciously manifold inclusiveness, *unto his people, Israel, as a whole; And unto his men of kindness*, the Levites, in particular, in the centre of his people, to whom many promises await fulfilment (cp. Intro., Chap III., “Kindness”); *And*—thanks to Dr. Ginsburg for the regrouping of the Hebrew letters whereby we are enriched with this new clause—*unto such as turn their hearts unto him*; including, not only the Ten Tribes, but all in any nation who seek him, especially as the concluding description, *such as revere him*, is in the New Testament the favourite phrase for denoting the reverers of Israel’s God lying on the outside of Israel. There is still another hint included in this significant solo which mightily helps us upwards to the high level of the coming climax; and it is found in the words—*So shall Glory abide in our land*; as to which, we could imagine how it would quiver on the lips of Hezekiah, Asaph, Micah and Isaiah in those days of intense excitement, when as yet the *Glory* of the Divine Presence had not departed! Right clearly then follows the climax at last, which assuredly lacks nothing of sublime beauty to render it worthy of being so regarded; namely, as the Divine Response to the Soloist’s appeal. We seem to have reached a land of Beulah, in which Angels are hovering around. *Kindness and Faithfulness have met together*—as if after fulfilling divergent missions, or serving opposing interests—have met for friendly parlance at last. *Yea righteousness*—if anything, sterner than “Faithfulness,” and *Peace* if anything more serene and practical than “Kindness,” have fallen into each other’s embrace, *and kissed each other*. The harmony of divergencies, the reconciling of opposites, is the clear note struck, and far resounding. Full many a time when *Kindness* has cried, “Forgive!” *Faithfulness* has had to protest, “Punish! Thou hast threatened!” When *Righteousness* reminds that there can be no peace

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while wrongs continue, *Peace* meekly pleads that the wrongs be stayed, that evil be overcome of good. And here, see, these heavenly messengers embracing and kissing each other! There can be no mistaking the significance of the representation. But it may be thought: "Yea, as Divine Attributes these are all harmonisable in God." As if to check such a relinquishment of the human and practical, the figure is broken, and the personification of *Faithfulness* is dropped, for the express purpose of conveying the conception of the impartation of the Divine Quality of faithfulness to the hearts and lives of men. Divine faithfulness therefore now becomes a seed for earthly sowing and human growth—rapid, vigorous growth: *Faithfulness out of the earth doth spring forth*. No wonder that when this point is reached *Righteousness*, the sterner brother of Faithfulness, retaining his personality, the better to suit his intelligent survey of the fruitful earth, *looks down from heaven*, with satisfied and delighted gaze on the fair prospect. Nor is all this mere poetic sentimentality: it is spoken to a nation which for the sins of their souls were being punished by the overthrow of their houses and the trampling down of their soil by the hands and feet of invading hosts. And therefore, not to mock such a nation, in whose history the heavenly and the earthly have ever gone hand-in-hand, the advancing promise condescends upon temporalities, first in general terms, seeing that the words *that which is good* will include earthly blessings as well as heavenly, political as well as social; and seeing further that this inclusion of temporalities is further made certain by the specific promise. *And our land shall yield her increase*. The great Reconciling Promise then runs onward in the further proviso, *Righteousness before him*—our heavenly King—*marcheth along*, seeing that nothing less can please him, nothing less durst meet his face; *And Peace*—if so, with Briggs, we should respell the words—*And Peace hath made a path of his steps*: so that as in this inspection of his inheritance he shews himself to be, so all his servants must be also: they must become imitators of Him.

A splendid climax—a worthy ideal—a practical standard—an inspiring prophecy! Yet, alas! largely unfulfilled! "Glory" once essayed to dwell in the land; but there was no room for it: it was veiled, and by the majority it was mistaken for Shame! Such of us as have caught a glimpse of him, as the glory of the Father, feel that all holy Reconciliation lies embosomed in Him. His life and teaching, his Death and Resurrection, and

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Spirit-ministry from Heaven, have in them the potent charm of the embrace and kissing of Angels. And for the rest we are content to work and wait.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. "There is a marked difference between the Praise with which this psalm opens and the Prayer which follows thereon." What is it? How can we reconcile the thoughts?
2. Discuss "the prophetic solo" as here used.
3. Graham Scroggie says of this psalm: "The psalm reflects the feelings of Judah shortly after the return from Babylonian captivity, and with it we should read *Haggai* and the early part of *Zechariah*. The people had expected much from their deliverance, but the harsh realities of their enterprise had stripped off its imaginative charm". Discuss this possibility.
4. Rotherham considers verses 8 through 13 as "the Divine Response to the Soloist's appeal"—is this reasonable? Discuss.
5. Verse six of this psalm is a request of perennial need: "Wilt thou not revive us again; that thy people may rejoice in Thee?" How can this prayer be answered today?

PSALM 86

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Prayer of a Tried and Faithful Servant of Jehovah.

ANALYSIS

The Psalmist prays to be Heard and Answered and for his Life to be Preserved because of his Need (ver. 1), his Devotion and Trust (ver. 2), his Pleading (vers. 3, 4), Adonai's Goodness (vers. 5, 6), and Incomparable Character and Doings (ver. 8); which are So Great that All Nations will Come and Worship (vers. 9, 10). Pleading for Guidance, he Promises Praise (vers. 11, 12) and Bethinks him of a Past Rescue of His Life (ver. 13), which (life) seems to be Again in Danger from Insolent Foes (ver. 14): in view of whom he Pleads the Character of Jehovah as set forth in "THE REFRAIN of the Bible" (ver. 15). He prays for Favour, Strength and Salvation, in view of his own Devotion and that of his Mother (ver. 16); asking for Such a Token as shall Shame his Enemies (ver. 17).