

STUDIES IN PSALMS
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. "This is one of the gloomiest psalms in the book, and one of the most touching; if not, also, one of the most encouraging"—how can this be?
2. Why is it thought the affliction of the writer is leprosy?
3. *Why* does the psalmist pray against death?
4. Is it not true that the dead cannot or do not praise God? How is it that such is stated here?
5. What hope was there for this sufferer?

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DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

The Covenant with David Contrasted with the
Present Dishonour of David's Heir.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1, 2, The Keynotes of the psalm—Jehovah's Kindness and Faithfulness. Stanza II., vers. 3, 4, Brief Summary of Jehovah's Covenant with David. Stanzas III.-VII., vers. 5-14, The Character, Court Works and Dominion of the Covenant God. Stanza VIII., IX., vers. 15-18, The Happy Estate of the Covenant People. Stanzas X.-XIX., vers. 19-37, The Provisions of the Covenant, Poetically and Prophetically Amplified. Stanzas XX.-XXIII., vers. 38-45, The Dishonour Permitted to David's Heir Pathetically Described. Stanzas XXIV., XXV., vers. 46-51, Remonstrance against the Continuance of this Dishonour, urged by the Shortness and Vanity of Life, the Certainty of Death, the Memory of Former Kindnesses, and the Unanswerable Insults heaped on David's Heir—Jehovah's Anointed.

(Lm.) An Instructive Psalm—By Ethan the Ezrahite.

- 1 The kindness of Jehovah to the ages let me sing,
to generation after generation let me make known thy
faithfulness with my mouth.
- 2 For I have said¹ "To the ages shall kindness be built up,
the heavens—thou wilt establish thy faithfulness therein."
- 3 "I have solemnised a covenant for my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant:

1. Some cod. (w. Sep., Vul.): "thou saidst"—Gn. Following this reading, some begin the Divine speech here, with the necessary changes.

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- 4 'Unto the ages will I establish thy seed,
and will build up to generation after generation thy throne.'"
5 And the heavens will confess² thy wonder O Jehovah,
yea thy faithfulness in the assembly of thy holy ones.
6 For whom in the skies can one compare to Jehovah?
can liken to Jehovah among the sons of the mighty?³
7 A GOD inspiring awe⁴ in the great circle of the holy ones,
and to be feared above all who are round about him.
8 Jehovah God of hosts! who like thee is potent O Yah?
with thy tokens of faithfulness surrounding thee?
9 Thou rulest the proud swelling of the sea,⁵
when its waves rise high thou stillest them.
10 Thou didst crush—as one deadly wounded—Rahab,
with thy strong arm thou didst scatter thy foes.
11 Thine are the heavens yea thine the earth,
the world and its fulness thou didst found them:
12 North and south thou didst create them,
Tabor and Hermon in⁶ thy name ring out their joy.
13 Thine is an arm [endued] with might,
thou strengthenest thy hand exaltest thy right hand:
14 Righteousness and justice are the foundation of thy throne,
kindness and truth come to meet thy face.
15 How happy the people who know the sacred shout!
Jehovah! in the light of thy face they firmly march along,⁷
16 In thy name they exult all the day,
and in thy righteousness are they exalted.⁸
17 For the beauty of their strength⁹ art thou,
and by thy favour thou exaltest our horns;¹⁰
18 For to Jehovah belongeth our shield,
and to the Holy One of Israel our king.
19 Then spakest thou in vision to thy men¹¹ of kindness and
didst say:—

2. Or: "celebrate" (so Dr.).

3. Or: "God." Heb.: 'elim.

4. Or: "fear-inspiring."

5. "It is Thou that tamest the insolence of the sea"—Del.

6. "At"—Dr., Del.

7. "Said of walking along in a self-assured, solemn manner"—Del.

8. Gt.: "they ring out their joy."

9. "Their strength, which turns out, proves, to be their ornament"—Del.

10. So (pl.) in many MSS., and in 4 ear. pr. edns.; but "horn"
(sing.) in 7 ear. pr. edns.—Gn.

11. So (pl.) in many MSS., 3 ear. pr. edns., Aram., Vul.; but "man"
(sing.) in some cod., w. 7 ear. pr. edns.—Gn.

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- "I have laid help¹² on a hero,
I have exalted one chosen from the people.
- 20 "I have found David my servant,
with my holy oil have I anointed him:
- 21 With whom my hand shall be established,
yea mine own arm shall strengthen him.
- 22 "An enemy shall not make exactions of him,
nor a son of perversity humiliate him:
- 23 But I will shatter from before him his adversaries,
and them who hate him will I smite.
- 24 "And my faithfulness and my kindness shall be with him,
and through my name shall his horn be exalted;
- 25 And I will set on the sea his hand,
and on the rivers¹³ his right-hand.
- 26 "He shall cry out to me—"My father art thou,
my GOD and my rock of salvation,"
- 27 I also will grant him to be first-born,
most high¹⁴ to the kings of the earth.
- 28 "To the ages will I keep for him my kindness,
and my covenant is made sure to him;
- 29 And I will appoint to futurity his seed,
and his throne as the days of the heavens.
- 30 "If his sons forsake my law,
and in my regulations do not walk:
- 31 If my statutes they profane,
and my commandments do not keep
- 32 "Then will I visit with a rod their transgression,
and with strokes¹⁵ their iniquity;
- 33 But my kindness will I not break off¹⁶ from him,
nor falsify my faithfulness.
- 34 "I will not violate my covenant,
nor that which hath issued out of my lips will I change.
- 35 One thing have I sworn by my holiness,
surely unto David will I not be false:—
- 36 "His seed to the ages shall remain,
and his throne be as the sun before me:

12. *Gt.*: "a crown" (cp. 132:18); or "strength"—Gn.

13. "A poetic generalisation of the 'River' (i.e., the Euphrates); cp. Exo. 33:31 and Ps. 72:8"—Dr.

14. Cp. 87:5.

15. "Scourges"—Del. N.B., the word associated with leprosy: Lev. 13, 14; 2 Sam. 7:14, Pss. 38:11 (note), 39:10.

16. Some cod. (w. Aram., Syr.): "take away." Cp. 2 Sam. 7:15—Gn.

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- 37 As the moon be established to the ages,
and the witness in the skies is faithful.”
- 38 Yet thou thyself hast cast off and rejected,
thou has been indignant with thine Anointed :
- 39 Thou hast spurned the covenant of thy servant,
thou hast profaned to the ground his crown.
- 40 Thou hast broken down all his fences,
thou hast laid all his fortresses in ruins :
- 41 All the passers by the way have plundered him,
he hath become a reproach to his neighbours.
- 42 Thou hast exalted the right hand of his adversaries,
hast gladdened all his enemies :
- 43 Yea thou turnest back the edge of his sword,
and hast not made him stand in the battle.
- 44 Thou hast made him lose his lustre,¹⁷
and his throne to the ground hast thou hurled :
- 45 Thou hast shortened the days of his youth,
thou hast wrapped him about with shame.
- 46 How long Jehovah wilt thou hide thyself utterly?
[how long] shall thy wrath burn like fire?
- 47 Remember Sovereign Lord¹⁸ what duration is,
for what unreality hast thou created all the sons of men!¹⁹
- 48 Who is the man that shall live and not see death,
that shall deliver his soul from the hand of hades?
- 49 Where are thy former kindnesses Sovereign Lord,
which thou didst swear to David in thy faithfulness?
- 50 Remember Sovereign Lord the reproach of thy servants,²⁰
I have put in my bosom the insult²¹ of the peoples :
- 51 Wherewith thine enemies have reproached O Jehovah,
wherewith they have reproached the footsteps²² of thine
Anointed!

17. By emendation: “Thou hast taken away the sceptre of majesty”—
Br.

18. So several critics, by supplying a letter. “O remember how short my
time is”—Dr. “Remember I—how short my time is!”—Del. “Of what
duration I am”—O.G.

19. Or: “Adam.”

20. Some cod. (w. Syr.): “servant” (sing.)—Gn.

21. So it shd. be (w. Aram.). Cp. Eze. 36:15—Gn.

22. “Pursue and persecute him, wherever he goes and whatever he
does”—Del.

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Blessed be Jehovah to the ages!²³
Amen and Amen!

(Nm.)

PARAPHRASE

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Forever and ever I will sing about the tender kindness of the Lord! Young and old shall hear about Your blessings.

2 Your love and kindness are forever; Your truth is as enduring as the heavens.

3, 4 The Lord God says,¹ "I have made a solemn agreement with My chosen servant David. I have taken an oath to establish his descendants as kings forever on his throne, from now until eternity!"

5 All heavens shall praise Your miracles, O Lord; myriads of angels² will praise You for Your faithfulness.

6 For who in all of heaven can be compared with God? What mightiest angel³ is anything like Him?

7 The highest of angelic powers² stand in dread and awe of Him. Who is as revered as He by those surrounding Him?

8 O Jehovah, commander of the heavenly armies, where is there any other Mighty One like You? Faithfulness is Your very character.

9 You rule the oceans when their waves arise in fearful storms; You speak, and they lie still.

10 You have cut haughty Egypt⁴ to pieces. Your enemies are scattered by Your awesome power.

11 The heavens are Yours, the world, everything—for You created them all.

12 You created north and south! Mount Tabor and Mount Hermon rejoice to be signed by Your name as their maker!

13 Strong is Your arm! Strong is Your hand! Your right hand is lifted high in glorious strength.

14, 15 Your throne is founded on two strong pillars—the one is Justice and the other Righteousness. Mercy and Truth walk before You as Your attendants. Blessed are those who

23. Ml.: "to concealed duration."

1. Implied.

2. Literally, "the assembly of the holy ones."

3. Literally, "the sons of the mighty."

4. Literally, "Rahab."

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hear the joyful blast of the trumpet, for they shall walk in the light of Your presence.

16 They rejoice all day long in Your wonderful reputation and in Your perfect righteousness.

17 You are their strength! What glory! Our power is based on Your favor!

18 Yes, our protection is from the Lord Himself and He, the Holy One of Israel has given us our king.

19 In a vision You spoke to Your prophet⁵ and said, "I have chosen a splendid young man from the common people to be the king—

20 He is My servant David! I have anointed him with My holy oil.

21 I will steady him and make him strong.

22 His enemies shall not outwit him, nor shall the wicked overpower him.

23 I will beat down his adversaries before him, and destroy those who hate him.

24 I will protect and bless him constantly and surround him with my love; he will be great because of Me.

25 He will hold sway from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea.

26 And he will cry to Me, 'You are my Father, my God, and my Rock of Salvation.'

27 I will treat him as My firstborn son, and make him the mightiest king in all the earth.

28 I will love him forever, and be kind to him always; My covenant with him will never end.

29 He will always have an heir; his throne will be as endless as the days of heaven.

30, 31, 32 If his children forsake My laws and don't obey them, then I will punish them.

33 But I will never completely take away My lovingkindness from them, nor let My promise fail.

34 No, I will not break My covenant; I will not take back one word of what I said.

35, 36 For I have sworn to David, (and a holy God can never lie), that his dynasty will go on forever, and his throne will continue to the end of time.⁶

5. Literally, "Your saint;" apparently a reference to Samuel, who was sent to anoint David as king.

6. Literally, "his throne as the sun before me."

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37 It shall be eternal as the moon, My faithful witness in the sky!"

* * * * *

38 Then why cast me off, rejected? Why be so angry with the one You chose as king?

39 Have You renounced Your covenant with him? For You have thrown his crown in the dust.

40 You have broken down the walls protecting him and laid to ruins every fort defending him.

41 Everyone who comes along has robbed him while his neighbors mock.

42 You have strengthened his enemies against him and made them rejoice.

43 You have struck down his sword and refused to help him in battle.

44 You have ended his splendor and overturned his throne.

45 You have made him old before his time and publicly disgraced him.

* * * * *

46 O Jehovah, how long will this go on? Will You hide Yourself from me forever? How long will Your wrath burn like fire?

47 Oh, remember how short You have made man's lifespan. Is it an empty, futile life You give the sons of men?

48 No man can live forever. All will die. Who can rescue his life from the power of the grave?

49 Lord, where is the love You used to have for me? Where is Your kindness that You promised to David with a faithful pledge?

50 Lord, see how all the people are despising me.

51 Your enemies joke about me, the one You anointed as their king.

52 And yet—blessed be the Lord forever! Amen and Amen!

EXPOSITION

It is not difficult for the patient and thorough reader to grasp the scope of this psalm; but very easy for anyone perusing it in haste to miss its great argument, owing to the length of the psalm, and to the extraordinary development given to the Covenant made with David—a development so enthusiastic and long sustained as scarcely to suggest that a companion picture is to follow towards the close of the psalm, one of deep gloom,

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to which all the previous dazzling brightness is intended to serve as a mere foil. At the lowest estimate, this long delay to reveal the true object of the poem, springs from the consummate art of the poet: at the higher estimate of Divine intention, it suggests that there is more of the Plan of Redemption wrapped up in the Davidic Covenant than Gentile Christians are apt to suppose. Be that as it may, under patient observation this psalm discloses not only its high poetic merit, but the power of its pleading viewed as an Intercession, in behalf of the now Dishonored Heir of David's Throne.

After striking the Keynotes of the psalm—Jehovah's Kindness and Faithfulness (vers. 1, 2)—around which all the psalmist's pleadings revolve, and to the express mention of which a return is made as far on as ver. 49; and after, in vers. 3, 4, briefly summing up the Davidic covenant as made known through Nathan the prophet (2 Sam. 7),—the psalmist then (vers. 5-14) eloquently enlarges on the incomparable excellences of the Covenant God, as known in heaven and on earth, as shewn in Israel's history and displayed in Palestine, bringing this description to a climax by presenting as a bright constellation the four fundamental Divine attributes of *righteousness, justice, kindness and faithfulness*. He then (vers. 15-18) by a natural transition passes to the enviable *happiness* of a people having such a God as their God; inferring their joy in worship, the strength of their national movements, and their sense of security under their *king*, who is to them Jehovah's *shield*. From this second climax, the poet moves forward into an elaborate amplification of the Davidic Covenant (vers. 19-37), taking especial care to emphasise its perpetual and unalterable character, by detailing the Divine provision made for punishing unworthy heirs to the Davidic Throne without abrogating the Covenant which secures it to David's seed in perpetuity. From the past and the normal, the psalmist now (vers. 38-45) passes to the abnormal and perplexing present. It is true he does not charge God with folly, nor at any point assert that Jehovah was shewing himself unfaithful to his covenant; but he goes as far in this direction as reverence permitted leaving no feature of the pitiable condition of David's present son unnamed. Indeed the picture given of the existing heir is very pathetic: especially if, with many, we think of him as being the young king Jehoiakim, who, after reigning only three months in Jerusalem, was carried away to Babylon. And if, in addition to his youth, he was apparently

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virtuous and promising, and had already drawn forth the affections of his people, the pathos of this description becomes unspeakably touching.

It is natural enough that such a description of present calamity should issue in expostulation and entreaty that such an anomalous state of things should be ended; but we are scarcely prepared to find the shortness and vanity of life and the inevitableness of death brought into the pleading. In truth, there seems something flickering and uncertain in many O.T. references to this subject, as we realised when studying Pss. 39, 49, and others; and we can never be thankful enough for the clearer light which we now enjoy. We have forgotten, or have never realised, what it is to be shut up, as these ancient saints seem to have been, to the apprehension that *now or never* must the great promises of God be fulfilled.

A final word as to the extraordinary importance which this psalm attaches to the Covenant made with David. How best can we bring ourselves into sympathy with the undeniable fact, that such importance is attached to it? Is it enough to say that Jesus of Nazareth, whom we recognize as Son and Heir of David, has redeemed these lapsed promises? Or must we not go a step further, and discover in the Davidic Covenant provisions which, though now in abeyance, are awaiting a plenary fulfilment in the very region to which they appear to belong;—in a kingdom not of this world but nevertheless *in it and for it*, in which the Messiah shall in undeniable fact be *Most High to the kings of the earth?*

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is the predominate purpose of this psalm?
2. What is meant by Rotherham's statement: ". . . there is more of the Plan of Redemption wrapped up in the Davidic Covenant than Gentile Christians are apt to suppose". Discuss.
3. We have a great deal in this psalm of the following attributes of God: (1) Kindness; (2) Faithfulness; (3) Righteousness; (4) Justice;—To what purpose?
4. God's agreement with David is here plainly said to be eternal—what shall we say to its present fulfillment?
5. The psalmist goes as near to "charging God with folly" as he can go—why? Was it true?

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6. To whom does this psalm specifically apply?
7. The brevity of life and the certainty of death are here used. The psalmist would make good present-day humanists. Discuss.