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CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

IN FIVE PSALMS

by

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Summary
to
"Conceptions of God
in Five Psalms"

In this study we have taken five psalms, 22, 44, 74, 77, and 79, translated them and prepared a critical apparatus explaining and defending the translation. In preparing the text of these psalms, the following commentaries were used: Battenwieser, The Psalms; Phillips, The Psalms with Critical Commentary; Kirkpatrick, The Cambridge Bible -- The Psalms; A. Cohen, The Psalms (Soncino), and The Septuagint. So much for the lower criticism.

The above mentioned psalms were chosen because in all of them but one the psalmists stated that God had either rejected or forsaken them. The one exception, Psalm 79, was chosen because it is closely associated by most commentators with Psalm 74. Since it was written out of the same dire conditions that prompted the other utterances considered, it was thought to be worth including in this study for the sake of comparison.

The commentary that follows each psalm has three major purposes -- to evaluate the psalm as an artistic creation, to investigate the logic or dialectic that resulted from the psalmist's conversation with God, and finally to see what conception of God resulted from all this.

In terms of aesthetic evaluation the theories of poetry suggested by Cleanth Brooks in The Well Wrought Urn were used as a kind of working hypothesis. In considering the arguments of the psalmist, the categories set up by Sheldon Blank in his article Men Against God -- The Promethean Element in Biblical Prayer were used as a basic frame of reference. When considering the concepts

of God held by the various psalmists we refrained from setting up such categories as God as Judge, God as Creator, God as King, etc. Such a methodology would have resulted in the haphazard ripping out of context of verses that have only full meaning when examined within the poetic and dramatic position in which they have been placed. This was clearly manifested in the psalms considered. For example, the idea of God as King is very basic to Psalm 44; it explains the actions of a somewhat capricious God whose commands are immediately obeyed. But in Psalm 77 where God is spoken of as King, this concept is but a minor strain in the Psalmist's view of God, serving to introduce a long and eloquent section lauding the God of nature. A concept of God held by a given psalmist comes forth not so much from individual verses, but rather from the configuration of the whole psalm.

It must be said that the aesthetic criticism, for what it is worth, was almost entirely original with the writer. The critical commentators are abysmally brief when it comes to evaluating the artistic worth of this material as literature. There only interest seems to be textual criticism and the historical pigeon-holing of the given utterances, caring not at all to discover what it is that gives this literature its peculiar power.

Over the course of the study a real appreciation has been gained for the genius of the psalmists -- their poetic ability to use words, and their dramatic ability that enables them to build up tension within the artistic work and then resolve successfully the already created stresses and strains.

Most noteworthy of all is the psalmist's use of paradox, which is according to Cleanth Brooks, the very language of poetry. The verbs

of the Hebrew language are well suited for the expression of paradox, for a form such as the imperfect can at one and the same time express a pious wish in the subjunctive and a sense of certainty about the future.

Psaln 79 is the only Psalm that does not state explicitly that God has rejected His people. This may well be due to the Psalmist's sense of guilt. He is the only Psalmist among those considered that views the sufferings of destruction as caused by the "first transgressions," and even this is tendentious. But his view of God is a paradoxical one, for he thinks of Him as being simultaneously angry and compassionate in nature.

The other psalmists, having no sense of their suffering coming as God's punishment to them, are at a loss for an explanation for God's behavior. He has rejected them and removed Himself from the human situation. But here is the very crux of the paradox, for though they state that God is remote they talk to him in the most intimate of terms. All the time that they uphold God for being dormant and inactive, it is assumed not only that He is listening to them, but moreover, that He cares enough to rouse Himself to action. In every case the psalmist finds himself in the dilemma caused by the contradiction between God's behavior aforesaid as known through tradition and His present attitude as deduced by the psalmist from the human situation. It is this paradox and contradiction that the psalmists work through in the psalms considered in this study.

Den B. Isaac

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Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to study intensively five psalms where (in each case) the Psalmist feels himself to be rejected or forsaken by God. The five Psalms are 22, 44, 74, 77, and 79. The ultimate question to be asked is what kind of a concept of God the Psalmist comes to in such a situation.

But this is not our only consideration. First we are interested in establishing the text and presenting a translation. To aid us in this task we have used four English commentaries as our main source of reference: The Psalms by Moses Bittenwieser, The Psalms by A. Cohen, The Book of Psalms by A. F. Kirkpatrick, and The Psalms in Hebrew With a Commentary by George Phillips. In some instances when confronted by a difficult verse we have consulted the Septuagint.

It might be mentioned exactly what reasons prompted the selection of these five psalms. Psalm 22 was chosen because of the Psalmist's forthright expression of his feeling of having been forsaken by God. In Psalms 44, 74, and 77 the verb נָסָה is used in reference to God's action toward man.¹ Brown, Driver, and Briggs gives the meaning of this verb as "to reject" or "to spurn." It is also noted that the Arabic cognate has the meaning of "repelled," while an Assyrian cognate means "to be angry." We are satisfied to take this verb to mean "to reject," and have chosen these three psalms mentioned above that use this particular

verb. But one may well ask why these three and not others. Psalms 43, 60, 88, 89, and 108 also use the verb $\Pi\text{J}\text{L}$ in reference to God's action toward man.² But we feel that the psalms chosen each presents a slightly different problem of the psalmist, which then is solved by him in a particular way, and because they are all different, these four are enough. Psalm 79 was chosen for several reasons. It is frequently likened by commentators to Psalm 74. But a more important reason for its inclusion in this study is its very lack of any direct use of a verb as strong as $\Pi\text{J}\text{L}$, though all the conditions are present that would warrant both the feeling and its utterance. This Psalm was chosen then precisely because the Psalmist does not feel rejected by God, or at least does not dare to say it. It is as a contrast, as an aid to our understanding what the elements are that cause a sense of rejection.

Preceding the discussion of each psalm is a translation of the psalm as we have rendered it, and a critical apparatus explaining any difficulties in the Hebrew text and how they were handled.

A difficulty present throughout this study will be the translation of the Hebrew into English. This is due in good part to the multiple functions a Hebrew verb may have in expressing "kinds of time" rather than "order of time."³ As an example, a verb in the imperfect might express the movement of "progressive continuance," "reiteration of action in the future," "permission to do that which can or may come to pass, or the uncertainty and indeterminateness that is the contingency of the subjunctive."⁴

In most cases the action is not of necessity either past, present, or future, which "is order of time." Driver, too, finds it a problem to render the Hebrew verbs into a precise English:

Yet, however we translate, it must not be forgotten that a difference still exists in the words of the original, and that each tense possesses a propriety the force of which is still perceptible, even where it cannot be reproduced; it is simply the imperfection, in this respect of our own language, its deficiency in delicacy that necessitates our obliterating the lights and shades which an otherwise constructed instrument is capable of expressing.⁵

It must be emphasized, in view of these considerations, that the translation must at times be but paraphrase and is in no way an adequate substitute for the original.

But it is exactly that aspect of the Hebrew verb that causes difficulty to the translator that makes it a perfect tool for the psalmist. He can express with one and the same verb two divergent and contradicting ideas -- the certainty of "God will do this," and the prayerful hope of "would that God would do this." Cleanth Brooks says: "It is the scientist whose truth requires a language purged of every trace of paradox; apparently the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox."⁶ Poetry is the language of paradox, and to the extent that the psalmist is a poet, he uses the Hebrew verb to suggest multiple meanings simultaneously.

Throughout this study we have assumed that the psalmist is a poet before he is a theologian explaining the ways of God, or a lawyer for the defense trying the case of man

before the Divine Judge. This is not to deny that these elements are also in the psalms, for they obviously are a very important and constituent part. "The dimension (of poetry) includes ideas to be sure; we can always abstract an 'idea' from a poem ... but the idea which we abstract ... will always be abstracted."⁷ We will keep in mind the particular manner the psalmist chose to give expression to his thoughts -- poetic rather than logical exposition. It is for this reason that we consider each psalm as an independent and integral unit, rather than setting up such categories as God as Judge, God as Warrior, God as Comforter, etc. Again we reiterate, when we deduce arguments and theology from each psalm and present them as abstractions of the Psalmist's thoughts, they are but abstractions and must not be confused with what a psalm itself says qua psalm. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that we are interested in the Psalm as an integral and independent literary unit. How is the psalm unfolded? In what manner does the psalmist work out his particular problems? Wherein lies any dramatic power that the psalm might have? What are the characteristics of the psalmist's style? These and other questions will be asked of the psalms as the occasions arise in an effort to evaluate in some small way the literary worth of each unit.

We are also much concerned with the arguments that the psalmist employs when speaking to God. In this respect we have found invaluable Sheldon Blank's article "Men Against God -- The Promethean Element in Biblical Prayer." Three

not
stated

categories of efficacious argument are formulated therein; the appeal to God's self interest, God's freely chosen future commitments, and God's moral nature.⁸ These categories have been kept in mind and frequently used throughout this study. An analysis of the arguments that form a kind of dialectic that runs through a psalm, and is indeed at times the main business of a psalm, will be another major matter of consideration for this study.

Last of all we will want to know what kind of image or conception of God a psalmist has. This knowledge can be gained either by outright declarative statements made by a psalmist, or deduced from his argument. In view of the psalms we have chosen for consideration, this is a particularly knotty problem, for in all of them the psalmist senses that he has been rejected by God.

In our conclusion we shall be concerned with these psalms as a group. We will be interested to see how these psalmists work through a common problem -- both in terms of style and logic. We shall be anxious to discover how similar or dissimilar are their concepts of God.

Footnotes to Introduction

1. Psalm 44:10, 24.
Psalm 74:1
Psalm 77:8
2. Psalm 43:2
Psalm 60:12
Psalm 88:15
Psalm 89:39
Psalm 108:12
3. S. R. Driver, Hebrew Tenses, p. 3
4. Driver, pp. 32-57
5. Driver, p. 47
6. Cleanth Brooks, The Well Wrought Urn, p. 3
7. Brooks, p. 207, his italics
8. Sheldon Blank, "Men Against God -- The Promethean Element in Biblical Prayer", pp. 6-8

Text of Psalm 22

- 1 For the leader, (to the melody of) a hind of the morning. A Davidic Psalm
- 2 My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?
Far from salvation are the words I roar out.
- 3 O my God, I cry out daily but thou dost not answer;
And (I cry) at night and I am unable to remain silent.
4. But Thou art Holy,
Dwelling (in the place of) the praises of Israel.
- 5 In Thee our fathers trusted;
They trusted and Thou didst rescue them.
- 6 Unto Thee they cried out and they were rescued;
In Thee they trusted and were not ashamed.
- 7 But I am a worm and not a man;
The scorn of mankind and despised by the people.
- 8 All those who see me scorn me;
They shoot out the lip, they nod the head.
- 9 "Be committed unto God, for he will rescue him;
He will deliver him because He delights in Him."
- 10 Indeed, Thou art the one who forced me forth from the womb,
The one causing me to trust (from the time when I was)
upon my mothers breast.
- 11 Upon Thee was I cast from the womb;
(From the time of my coming forth) from the belly of
my mother,
Thou wast my God.

- 12 Do not be distant from me because trouble is near,
For there is no helper.
- 13 Many bulls have surrounded me;
Fierce bulls of Bashan have encircled me.
- 14 They open their mouths for me, ?
(Like) a lion ravenous and roaring.
- 15 I was poured out like water,
And all my bones were disjointed;
My heart was like wax,
And melted in the midst of my insides.
- 16 My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
My tongue sticks to my jaws.
Thou hast brought me to the dust of death.
- 17 For dogs have surrounded me;
A mob of evil doers have encircled me;
They cripple my hands and feet.
- 18 I count all my bones;
They look -- they stare angrily at me.
- 19 They divide my clothes among themselves;
They cast lots for my tunic.
- 20 But Thou, O Lord -- be not distant!
O my strength -- hasten to my aid!
- 21 Save my soul from the sword,
My uniqueness from the grasp of the dog.
- 22 Save me from the mouth of the lion;
From the horns of wild oxen deliver me!
- 23 Let me tell Thy name to my bretheren,
In the midst of the congregation would I praise Thy name:

- 24 Those who fear God, praise Him!
 All the seed of Jacob, honor Him!
 And be in dread because of Him, all the seed of Israel!
- 25 For He has not despised,
 Nor has He loathed the poverty of the poor;
 And He has not hidden His face from it.
 Whenever one cries out to him he listens.
- 26 Because of Thee my praise would be in the grand
 congregation;
 I would pay my vows before those who fear Him.
- 27 Let the poor eat and be sated;
 Let those praise God who seek Him.
 May your hearts live forever!
- 28 Let them remember and return
 All the ends of the earth;
 And let bow down before Thee
 All the families of nations.
- 29 Because to God belongs the kingdom,
 And he rules over nations.
- 30 All (the people of) the fat places of the earth,
 after they have eaten then they bow down before him;
 All those who are about to die prostrate themselves;
 But he whose soul is not living --
- 31 A seed would serve Him,
 It would be told of God for a generation (that which
 He did).
- 32 They would come and declare His (acts of) righteousness;
 To a people yet to be born (it would be told) that which
 He did.

Apparatus to Psalm 22

1 The phrase $\text{הַשֶּׁחֶרֶץ הַלֵּילִי}$ is somewhat puzzling, both in its meaning and function in this superscription. Literally translated it means "hind of the morning." But in the Jerusalem Talmud it is used as a designation for the earliest part of the morning before the sun has risen.

Kimchi says in the name of the rabbis that הַלֵּילִי is the name of the morning star.¹ It seems likely that $\text{הַשֶּׁחֶרֶץ הַלֵּילִי}$ in its literal sense became a metaphoric designation for the morning star during the rabbinic period, but here it still retains its original meaning. It is possible that the author of this psalm intended this phrase as a symbol with which he identifies himself -- the sensitive and innocent hind who is stalked down with the first rays of the sun by a brutish hunter.² But as appealing as this possibility is, we have assumed that it refers to a musical mode which was familiar to the guilds that performed the psalms.

3 The verb אָרַן of the A stich is to be understood in the B stich which is parallel in construction. The words $\text{לֹא יִהְיֶה דְמָוִם אֵלַי}$ literally mean, "I have no silence." We have rendered it more freely in the text as "I am unable to remain silent."

4 The Vav which marks a transition is translated "but." The B part of this verse is extremely difficult. The LXX gives a plausible rendering:

$\epsilon\upsilon\ \delta\epsilon\ \epsilon\nu\ \alpha\gamma\acute{\iota}\omicron\iota\varsigma\ \kappa\alpha\tau\omicron\iota\kappa\epsilon\iota\varsigma,\ \delta\ \epsilon\pi\alpha\iota\nu\omicron\varsigma\ \text{Ισραήλ}$

Thou art dwelling in holiness (plural),
The praise of Israel.

Unfortunately the Greek nouns are not faithful in number to their corresponding Hebrew nouns; also the versification does not agree with the Massoretic text. If בשׁוׁל is taken to belong to the B part of the verse as the Massoretes have arranged it and the words $\text{מִשְׁכָּן יִשְׂרָאֵל}$ recognized as an elaborate expression for the sanctuary, one is left only with the difficulty presented by the elliptical nature of this stich.³

7 The expression בְּזִיזָה עַם is identical in construction and meaning to בְּרִוּךְ יְהוָה of Genesis 24:31 and יְלֻד אִשָּׁה of Job 14:1; it is to be translated "despised by the people."

8 The expression יִפְּטֹר לִפְתּוֹ refers to the shooting out of the lip, but it suggests much more than a pout. It was probably a common expression of utter contempt that may have had vulgar overtones. Even today the most vulgar remarks of contemptuousness can be communicated by certain gestures that are recognized the world over, and are capable of arousing the recipient to a greater anger than any words. The phrase יִנְיֹן וְנִנְיֹן refers to the nodding of the head, which was probably done as an expression of mock pity.

9 The word לָגַל is an imperative from לָגַל whose usual meaning is "to roll;" here it has a metaphoric meaning and is to be rendered "be committed."⁴ This whole verse

What if change in person, 2p to 3p?

is thought of as a remark coming from the mouths of those mocking the Psalmist. It is couched in the language of moral maxims,⁵ but is sarcastic in intent.

10 The word אֶרְאֶה is a participle with a first person singular suffix from רָאָה ; here like in Micha 4:10 it has the force of a transitive verb. The LXX reads it as such -- ὁ ἐκὼν ἄρας με "The one who drew me forth." We understand it to mean "the One who forced me forth."

The B part of the verse is very idiomatic and elliptical; the number of English words that must be supplied in translation testifies to the poetic skill of the Psalmist.

11 The כִּי in the B part of the verse is a preposition of time marking the terminus a quo, as does this same preposition in the A part of the verse.

13 The word בְּרִיחַ is understood as a "fierce bull."⁶

14 The metaphor of the Hebrew text that makes of the enemy "a lion ravenous and roaring," is rendered for the sake of understanding as a simile. ?

17 The word אֶרְאֶה is emended to אֶרְאֶה -- "they dug" or better yet, "they crippled," on the basis of the LXX -- ὥρυσαν -- "they dug," Battenwieser mentions that the Arabic kara denotes in the second conjugation "to throw one down in a heap" and in the fourth conjugation "to have one crippled."⁷

18 The first word אֶרְאֶה is pointed as a Piel meaning "to tell;" since its Kal form, meaning "to count,"

?
~ ellipti-
cal form
אֶרְאֶה

is much more cogent and involves but a re-pointing of the form, we understand it as such. Brown, Driver and Briggs states that the verb לִּנְקוּ can mean "feast eyes upon" or "gloat over;" he cites this verse. We would carry it one step further and say this particular phrase $\text{לִּנְקוּ בְּעֵינָיו}$ has the connotation of looking at one with evil intent.

20 The word יְהוָה is substitute for God and is in the Vocative.

21 The word נַפְשׁוֹ might at first be construed to refer to a young child belonging to the Psalmist (Genesis 22:2). But the parallel to נַפְשׁוֹ in the A stich and Kimchi's statement that "it is the soul, which is dwelling solitary in houses of clay,"⁸ prompt us to reconsider. The word refers to that element in man, beyond his physical composition, that makes him different from all other men, We render the word "uniqueness," and understand it as being a descriptive noun that is another appellation for "soul."

23 The verb in the A stich is cohortative, whereas the verb in the B stich is a subjunctive.

24 This verse as well as the next is construed to be that which the Psalmist would say in the congregation were he delivered by God.

25 Though the Psalmist is referring to what would be his own experience if God delivers him, he objectifies it and gives it the language of a general truth. This is particularly so in the last stich where we find a present general condition.

26 The Mem prefixed to the first word in the verse has the causative force. Since this statement hangs on the condition of deliverance it is placed in the subjunctive mood.

27 The verbs are cohortative inasmuch as the A and B stichs are understood as being an invitation to a banquet. The C stich is understood as a blessing that the host invokes upon his guests.⁹ But still this last stich poses problems. One would expect the plural noun as well as a plural verb in a blessing that addresses a large company of banqueters, but one finds the singular. The LXX renders it:

Ζῆσονται αἱ καρδίαι αὐτῶν εἰς αἰῶνα αἰῶνος

"Their hearts will live into eternity of eternities."

This rendering rather than indicating a corruption in the Hebrew, is an attempt to smooth out a difficult passage. The apparent irregularity in number is attributed to the flexibility any living language will tend to assume. The word $\square \supset \supset \supset \supset$ could well be a collective noun. We therefore render this stich in the plural.

28 This verse continues the Psalmist's hypothetical speech after deliverance, but turns to a new subject -- the kingship of God. Again the verbs are cohortative.

29 The Lamed is the Lamed of possession.

30 The phrase $\supset \supset \supset \supset \supset \supset \supset \supset$ is to be understood as a statement of general condition and is to be rendered "after they have eaten, then they bow down." This

verse refers to three categories of men, describing how each one relates to God depending upon his condition. ¹⁰ The first category is of those who live amidst plenty in the fat places of the earth; they prostrate themselves after they have eaten. The second category is the ⁷¹³ ⁷¹⁷ ⁷¹⁷, understood as "those about to die;" they bend the knee to God out of desperation; but the last category, and here the Psalmist switches to the singular for he is referring to himself and thinks of his situation as being unique, "one whose soul is not alive." This, unlike the other two categories is purposely left unfinished, for a man in such a state is unable even to pay obeisance to God.

31-32 These verses describe what the Psalmist envisions will be the reaction to his declarations. The word — ⁷¹³ refers to a whole race of people. The LXX translates it as such with the word ⁷¹⁷ ⁷¹⁷ -- "race." In the B stich of this verse the phrasing is terse and elliptical. What will be spoken of concerning God is left implied; obviously it would be His act of saving.

32 The word ⁷¹⁷ ⁷¹⁷ is a potential participle. ¹¹ The B stich is elliptical; it is another example of the B stich not restating the verb that has already appeared in the A stich.

but your translation

The words that begin this psalm are unquestionably the classic statement of rejection.

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יֵשׁוּעַ

They strike the ear with the same suddenness and finality that we experience when we hear the opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. The B stich turns the whole verse into a kind of paradox, for here the Psalmist laments that even his words are far removed from the place of salvation which of course is God. But the opening words suggest a painfully intimate relationship between the Psalmist and God. The Psalmist addresses God twice, and in repeating His name refers to Him both times as "my God." This ambivalent feeling that God is near enough to talk to, yet too far off to be of any assistance is an agonizing strain that underlies the entire Psalm. Indeed, much of this psalm is but development and amplification of the opening verse.

Verse 3 gives us more evidence of the Psalmist's sense of frustration. Night and day he cries out to God, but there is no answer; still he cannot contain himself and persists in his attempt to gain a response from God.

Verse 4 follows with the inevitable contrast. God is certainly near for He dwells in the sanctuary. This contrast is expanded in verses 5 and 6. Here it is God's relationship with the Psalmist's progenitors that is spoken of. They displayed a sense of trust in God, and God reciprocated by delivering them.

But the Psalmist's state is sorrowful compared to the favorable one enjoyed by those of an earlier day. So much so that in verse 7 he speaks of himself as a worm rather than a man, ^{and} who is despised by all the people. It is interesting to note that almost every word in this verse finds a parallel in Deutero-Isaiah. ¹² Verse 8 is a graphic description of the scornful and mocking treatment he was given by his oppressors. Verse 9 is a taunt hurled at the Psalmist by these same men. The fact that the suffix endings to the verbs are of the third person, singular, masculine form of the direct object suggests that this may well have been a popular saying that expressed a general truth. ¹³ But this popular maxim, undoubtedly delivered with great sarcastic intonations, forces the Psalmist to think of his own former trust in God.

In Verses 10 and 11 the Psalmist accounts for his trust in God; being the one who forced him into the world, He was also the one that the Psalmist trusted at the very time he was on his mother's breast. Moreover, it was God who taught him to trust.

מבטחי עץ שדי יאמר

These verses are tender and striking at one and the same time. Only verse 4 in the first chapter of Jeremiah may be said to surpass this as an expression of intimacy in a relation between man and God.

Verse 12 is a plea, and interestingly enough the first explicit one that we encounter in this Psalm. It uses the words קרח and קרוב in a good balance that suggests

the urgency of the situation when trouble is near and God is distant. This verse serves to introduce a long section in which the Psalmist describes both his life situation and his reaction to it. It is interesting that the Psalmist in speaking of his tormentors continually refers to them as animals of violence. In verse 13 they are spoken of as bulls and fierce bulls, in 14b as a lion, in 17a as dogs (the Massoretic Text of 17c has the word lion, but we have emended this), 21b as a dog, 22a as a lion, and 22b as wild oxen. All in all, five different varieties of animals are used metaphorically for the Psalmist's enemies. This and the detailed description of what is happening to him that is like an "on the scene report" give this section of the Psalm a terrible power. Verse 13 which starts this description tells of the oppressors encircling and surrounding the Psalmist. Verse 14 pictures them as a lion menacingly opening his mouth and roaring; one feels the enemy closing in. Verses 15 and 16 the Psalmist describes his own feelings with similes that are overwhelmingly effective. The expressions are vivid and fresh; there is nothing at all forced or contrived about them. One is certain that such expressions could result only out of such an experience as it describes. The Psalmist speaks of his strength deserting him as a result of fear; he is even unable to cry out at this moment (16b). He is so frozen with fear that in verse 18 he speaks of "counting his bones," apparently an attempt to see if his limbs will bend and his movements coordinate as he tries to work out of this paralysis.

Verse 19 tells of the chilling game his enemies play in the presence of the Psalmist; they cast lots for his clothes, regarding him as already dead. It is after this verse that the Psalmist makes his only other plea to God. This plea spans three verses (20, 21, and 22), and is marked by an urgency that is lent to it by both the language and the situation.

The remainder of the Psalm, verses 23 to 32, is a kind of extended and glorified "if" clause. The Psalmist describes in detail what he would do and what the consequences of his action would be if he were to be delivered by God. Since this section is also an implicit argumentation, we shall give it more careful consideration later.

The Psalm concludes on a rather buoyant note, perhaps more than the situation warrants. The Psalmist describes in glowing terms what will be the resultant reaction to his declaration of God's mighty saving act, referring to himself of course. According to him all the peoples will recognize God as Lord of the entire world and He shall in truth rule all the nations. A note of dread creeps into verse 30, but this is quickly eclipsed by the last two verses, especially verse 32 that concludes the Psalm gloriously -- those people who have either witnessed or been told of the Psalmist's deliverance will be the bearers of God's righteousness to a people yet unborn.

The almost happy ending to this Psalm is aesthetically unfortunate. It does not at all blend in well with the

heavier sounds of terror and doom that strongly mark the earlier sections. But because of this, one is not to regard this last section as spurious. The Psalmist was bending to the artistic conventions of his day that frowned upon any work ending unpleasantly. But this majestic ending does not spoil the integrity of the Psalm. Rather it provides a pitiable contrast with the situation of utter urgency which the Psalmist is in, making of his hopes mere illusions.

Now that we are ready to consider the theological implications of this Psalm, let us return again to the opening verse. We have already said that there is a sense of finality about this statement of rejection. Much of this is due to the verb being in the perfect rather than the imperfect. The rejection is stated as an accomplished fact that can in no way be reversed. But the Psalmist insists on asking an anguished "Why." His rejection seems in his eyes to be contrary to the moral nature of God.¹⁴ But interestingly enough this is the only place in the Psalm where this particular question is asked explicitly. Even more interesting is the fact that though the Psalmist has recognized by the very choice of his words that he has suffered total rejection, the rest of this Psalm, while appearing to describe the agony of a dire situation is an implicit argument with God that hopes for a successful conclusion. We mentioned earlier that the Psalmist's attitude in this regard is ambivalent. We cannot give this too much emphasis. This tension accounts for the throbbing energy that bursts forth in almost every verse.

The implicit argumentation begins with verses 5 and 6 where we are told of the trust of the Psalmist's forefathers and God's response to their cries in times of trouble. Two arguments are being suggested here that are very closely bound up with one another. It is believed that man's very act of trust in God should cause Him to respond in a favorable manner. Also it is felt that that mercy which was extended to one's fathers should also be extended to oneself, expecting a consistency in God's behavior. Both arguments question the nature of God, but have undertones of God's commitments as well, particularly the first mentioned.

With the very next verse the Psalmist answers his own argument by bitterly declaring that he is a worm rather than a man. God need not respond to him because he is outside and beneath the category of man; he is a specie of being to which God does not feel morally bound to care for. But in answering one argument it creates another. What kind of a God would want the adoration of a worm? Is he not responsible for having brought what was once a man in His special charge to such low estate? The first implication of this statement is directed toward God's self esteem, the second His sense of responsibility.

Verses 10 and 11 that speak of God's intimate relationship with the Psalmist during the earliest days of his life speak of Him not only as the force that brought him into the world, but also as the one who bestowed upon him the capacity to trust at a time when he was completely helpless and vulnerable. This places God in the position of a parent and

renders to Him all the responsibility that attends fatherhood.

The plea of verse 12 introduces a long section which is a powerfully descriptive amplification of the reason the Psalmist gives in this verse for invoking God to action --

כִּי צָרָה קְרוּבָה. But there are certain subtleties in this section that it would be well not to overlook. We have here such a vivid description of terror that we would think that this alone would appeal to God's nature, to His sense of justice as well as his compassion. But the Psalmist's skill is displayed in his contrast of himself with his enemies. We have earlier remarked on the Psalmist's persistent use of wild animals as a metaphoric description of his oppressors. The implication to be drawn is that since these men are not behaving as human beings they do not deserve to be considered by God as such; any treatment they receive at His hands need not be lamented by Him for He is not dealing with men but with voracious beasts. When the Psalmist speaks of himself it seems as if he assumes that God is already disposed to be sympathetic to him. Why else would he elaborate the details of his ebbing strength unless he believed that God cared. At this point he may be appealing either to God's moral nature or to God's commitment to a particular nation, though the latter is never explicitly invoked, the Psalmist certainly identifies himself in verse 5 with those who came before him and were a favored people. But in verse 21 he makes an appeal that transcends the two just mentioned:

הַצִּילָה בַּחֲרָב נַפְשִׁי בְּיַד כָּל־יָחִיד

"Save my soul from the sword, My uniqueness from the grasp of the dog!" Now he asks God to spare him on the basis of his uniqueness. His life is precious because though he is in the category of man, his soul makes him distinct from all other men. He is a particular being the like of which has not occurred before and will not occur again. Any given man is a rarity to be treasured and held dear by God. And the Psalmist is careful to show that he is very much in the category of man, while those opposing him are fiendish beasts.

The final section of this Psalm which begins with verse 23 and carries to the conclusion appeals entirely to God's self esteem. If the Psalmist is delivered he promises to praise God in the congregation (verse 23), which we may well construe as a promise to tell of God's saving act at a religious gathering (verse 25). The consequences of this testimonial act as he envisages it are fantastic. Not only will all the people of Israel pay obeisance to God (verse 24), but all the nations of the world will recognize Him (verse 28), and the kingship of God will be proclaimed (verse 29). God will be served not only in this generation (verse 31), but a continuous chain will have been created that will assure devotion to Him from "a people yet to be born" (Verse 32). The most striking of these statements is found in verse 29, for it reminds us with a frightening suddenness of the immediacy of the Psalmist's situation. He sets up three categories of individuals in variant situations and describes how they pay homage to God. But the third category, which we can safely

assume to be the Psalmist in his unique situation of "one whose soul is not living," is left unfinished. The implication is that such a one is unable to worship God. The power of such an unfinished statement that allows whoever is addressed to complete it in his own mind is great. One finds a more perfect example of this kind of a literary expression that states the protasis alone in the last verse of Lamentations.

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֵין עִלָּינוּ
 תָּנִיחַ לָנוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ

"If you have surely rejected us, (and) are exceedingly angry toward us --"

The imaginings of the mind that fill in the apodosis will always be more terrible than anything that can be stated.

We have said that the above arguments are calculated to act as an appeal to God's self esteem. Familiar (to all of us) is the doctrine "for the sake of His Name." Some might think that this is directed at God's vanity, but nothing could be further from this. It refers in one sense, as Dr. Blank has pointed out, ¹⁵ to God's "altruistic jealousy" for His good name. And in another sense it reveals man's vanity that he should suppose that God really cares what he thinks of Him.

We have yet one more argument imbedded within this last section. In verse 26 the Psalmist declares that he will pray in the grand congregation and that he will make good on his vows. In the following verse he speaks of holding a banquet to which the poor will be invited. Though there is nothing at all in the Psalm that indicates that the Psalmist thought

of himself as a sinful man in the past, he certainly does intend to be more scrupulous in his religious life in the future. Apparently the Psalmist feels that God would be pleased by a man who decided to be punctillious in his religious obligations, as well as being more sensitive in the moral realm.

What does all this tell us about this Psalmist's concept of God? Since this whole psalm is placed within a situation of extreme urgency, many of his statements spring forth from his emotions and feelings and are not carefully worked out utterances that are meant to embody a creed. This accounts for the marked ambivalences that the Psalmist has manifested. God has totally rejected, but may yet save. God is removed, but is pleaded with to draw near. God has been a saving God for He helped the Psalmist's ancestors. In that the Psalmist expects the same treatment, he believes that God is consistent. God is looked upon very literally as a father, in that He has played an active and vital part in the birth and survival of the Psalmist. God is expected to act as a benefactor for as a parent He has responsibility; and one would hope he would be concerned for the welfare of his child beyond the limits of responsibility. God takes pleasure in the uniqueness of each man and would not want him to be ravaged by beast-like men. God delights in worship and would be happy to have his kingship recognized by the whole world. God is concerned that those in future days will worship Him, and would want his praise and saving power talked of in a continuous chain

of tradition to unborn generations. These are the many and complex thoughts about God that are implied within the words of the Psalmist.

One might conclude that the contradictions that exist in the mind of the Psalmist particularly in the early parts of the Psalm are caused by the tension created between what he deduced about God from his immediate situation and the manner in which his trust of God was instilled within him with the very milk that he took from his mother's breast.

Footnotes

1. The Psalms in Hebrew with Commentary. Vol. 1. George Phillips, p. 157
2. The Book of Psalms. A. F. Kirkpatrick, p. 115
3. Phillips, Vol. 1, p. 160
4. Phillips, Vol. 1, p. 160
5. The Hebrew Tenses. Driver, p. 44) — ?
6. The Psalms. Moses Bittenwieser, p. 605. BDB notes that the word 7'2 has two meanings -- when referring to men it functions as an adjective and means "mighty" or "violent." Here it is used as a parallel to becoming a substantive. , ?
7. Bittenwieser, p. 605
8. Phillips, p. 169
9. Kirkpatrick, p. 122
10. Kirkpatrick, p. 133
Phillips, Vol. 1, p. 173
11. Bittenwieser, p. 606
12. ^{Isaiah} Isaiah 41:14; 49:7; 53:3
13. Gordis has an excellent chapter in his book Kohелеth -- The Man and His World where he demonstrates how widespread the use of quotations were in literature of the ancient world with particular reference to the Bible. p. 95 ff.
14. Men Against God -- The Promethean Element in Biblical Prayer, Sheldon Blank, pp. 6-8
15. Sheldon Blank, p. 7

Text of Psalm 44

- 1 For the leader, for the sons of Korah, Maschil.
- 2 O Lord, we have heard with our ears
That which our fathers have told us;
The work which Thou didst in their days
(And in days of old.
- 3 Thou with Thy hand hast disinherited nations and
planted them.
Thou hast destroyed nations and set them forth.
- 4 For not by their sword have they inherited land;
Nor did their own arm work salvation for them.
Rather was it Thy right hand and Thine arm,
And the light of Thy face when Thou didst favor them.
- 5 Thou art the one who is my king, O God;
Commanding the victories of Jacob.
- 6 With Thee we were goring our enemies;
With Thy name we were trampling down all who rose
against us.
- 7 For I was not trusting in my bow,
Nor was my sword able to save me.
- 8 For Thou hast saved us from our enemies,
And made those who hated us ashamed.
- 9 We have praised God continually,
And Thy name we have thanked eternally.

(musical interlude)

- 10 Yet Thou hast rejected and made us ashamed,
For Thou didst not go forth with our battalions.
- 11 Thou hast caused us to turn back from the enemy,
But those who hate us took spoil for themselves.
- 12 Thou makest of us like sheep, mere food (to be eaten);
And amongst the nations Thou hast strewn us.
- 13 Thou sellest Thy people for nothing of worth;
Nor hast Thou increased (Thy wealth) with their price.
- 14 Thou makest of us a reproach to our neighbors;
Scorn and derision to those round about us.
- 15 Thou makest of us a byword among the nations;
A cause for a sorrowful shaking of the head among the people.
- 16 My shame is before me continually;
And the shame of my face has covered me.
- 17 Because of the sound of him that taunts and scorns me,
Because of the revengeful enemy.
- 18 All this has happened to us, but we have not forgotten
Thee,
Nor have we been false to Thy covenant.
- 19 Our heart has not turned back,
Nor have our footsteps turned aside from Thy path.
- 20 Thou hast crushed us until we are but a habitation
for jackals;
And Thou hast covered us over with deep gloom.
- 21 If we have forgotten the Name of our God,
And if we have raised our hands in invocation to a
strange god,

- 22 Surely God will search this out;
For He knows the secrets of the heart.
- 23 But on Thine account were we perpetually slain.
We were counted as sheep for the slaughter.
- 24 Rise up! Why shouldst Thou sleep, O my Lord?
Awake! Do not reject forever!
- 25 Why shouldst Thou hide Thy face?
Wouldst Thou forget our poverty and our oppression?
- 26 For our soul is bent into the dust;
Our belly cleaves to the earth.
- 27 Arise! Help us!
And redeem us for the sake of Thy mercy.

Apparatus to Psalm 44

1 This is a superscription and has no direct bearing on the meaning of [^]psalm itself.

2 The first word $\square \text{ה'י} \text{ל} \text{א}$ is in the vocative. After $\text{ל} \text{נ} \text{ע} \text{ש}$ and $\text{ל} \text{ע} \text{ב}$ the relative pronoun $\text{ל} \text{ש} \text{א}$ is understood.¹ Psalm 9:16 clearly illustrates this kind of construction where the relative pronoun is obviously understood after the word $\text{ל} \text{ש} \text{א}$ in the A part of the verse.

3 The first two words of this verse are understood with Bittenwieser as being a good text.² The word $\text{ל} \text{ד}$ is an accusative of instrument and lends emphasis to the first word $\text{ל} \text{א}$. The suffix on the word $\square \text{ע} \text{ל} \text{ל}$ refers not to $\square \text{ל}$ but to $\text{ל} \text{ב} \text{ל} \text{ל}$. The verb $\text{ל} \text{ר} \text{ע}$ is understood as coming from the root $\text{ל} \text{ע} \text{ר}$, which is the Aramaic cognate to the Hebrew $\text{ל} \text{צ} \text{ר}$, meaning "to break" or "to crush."

5 We find $\square \text{ה'י} \text{ל} \text{א}$ again in the vocative. The word $\text{ל} \text{ל} \text{ל}$ is the Piel Infinitive Construct of $\text{ל} \text{ל}$; here it functions as a Gerund. The word $\text{ל} \text{ע} \text{ל}$ is taken here to mean "victories."

6 The Bes in both $\text{ל} \text{ב}$ and $\text{ל} \text{ש} \text{ב}$ is the Instrumental Bes. The use of the Imperfect with both verbs expresses a sense of continuous action in the past left incomplete.

7 The Imperfects in this verse carry a double meaning. They refer to incomplete action on the one hand, and future intention on the other. We have rendered it as imperfect

action. Yet it should be kept in mind that the author of the Psalm may well have intended both meanings simultaneously.

9 The phrase $\square \text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ}$ is (taken to be) an adverb and is understood as meaning "continually;" in the B part of the verse $\square \text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ}$ is likewise (taken as an) adverb. The word $\text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ}$ is understood with Kirkpatrick as indicating a musical interlude,⁴ and has no direct bearing on the meaning of the Psalm.

10 The word $\text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ}$ has the force of "but." Isaiah 41:26 preserves this same usage. As Cohen points out, "it marks the contrast between what happened previously, and what is happening in the present."⁵ We render $\text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ}$ with Cohen as "yet."

12 In the A part of the verse the Psalmist takes a familiar and favorable metaphor and gives it gruesome connotations. The metaphor is the flock of sheep symbolizing Israel. It is found in many Psalms, particularly Psalm 23 where it is fully worked out, and Psalm 100:3 where it is stated in all its ramifications of protective benevolence. Here the metaphor is used with great irony. The verb $\text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ}$ is to be understood in the sense of "to make." The first two words of the verse suggest the usual relationship that is frequently implied by this metaphor. But its concluding word $\text{וְיָ} \text{וְיָ}$, a noun meaning "food," makes the metaphor suggest that the people of Israel are like sheep, not because God will be the protecting shepherd and care for them, but because their destiny is to be eaten by others for mere food.

13 The expression $\text{לֹא הָיָה$ means literally "for nothing of worth." In the B part of the verse the direct object is implied rather than stated and is obviously something like "Thy wealth." Kirkpatrick understands it as such. ⁶

15 The verb וַיַּשְׁחֵךְ is used here with the same meaning that וַיַּחֲכֵךְ had in verse 12 -- "to make." The B part of the verse means not "Thou hast made us a shaking of the head...", but rather -- "Thou hast made us a cause for shaking of the head on the part of others." The expression וַיִּשְׁתַּחֲוֶה implies wonderment and horror that other peoples expressed at seeing the sad plight of the people of Israel.

16 The phrase לְעוֹלָם וָעוֹלָם is used adverbially and can be understood as in verse 9 to mean "continually," or as Kirkpatrick renders it -- "perpetually." ⁷

17 With the word וַיַּחֲכֵךְ the Mem prefix has a causative force and is parallel to וַיַּשְׁחֵךְ in the B part of the verse. ⁸ We understand $\text{וַיַּחֲכֵךְ וַיַּשְׁחֵךְ}$ with Battenwieser as a hendiadys that should be rendered "the revengeful enemy." ⁹

18 The word וַיִּהְיֶה should be rendered as "happening to us," as Phillips suggests. ¹⁰

20 The word וַיִּשְׁחַדְנוּ is taken to be the plural of the word שָׁחַד , meaning "jackal." The A part of the verse is understood to mean -- "Thou hast crushed us until Thou hast turned us into a place inhabited by jackals." In the B part of the verse the word וַיִּשְׁחַדְנוּ is not to be translated in the

traditional sense of "shadow of death." Concerning this word Kirkpatrick has this to say:

"The word 'tsalmaveth' is rendered thus "shadow of death" in the Ancient Versions, and the present vocalization assumes that this is the meaning. But compounds are rare in Hebrew except in proper names, and there are good grounds for supposing that the word is derived from a different root and should be read 'tsalmuth,' and rendered "deep gloom." It is however not improbable that the pronunciation of the word was altered at an early date in accordance with a popular etymology." 11

21 The phrase כף שרש is a familiar idiom that suggests the raising of hands as an act of invocation.

23 The expression בחה כצא is reminiscent of Jeremiah 12:3 בחה לך כצא and is considered identical in meaning even though the Lamed has dropped out.

27 We take the word עזרה to be an imperative as does the LXX.

This Psalm is divided into two distinct sections. The first section, verses 2 to 9 concluding with the word ¹⁷40, tells of a positive relation between God and Israel; verses 10 to 27 which comprise the second section of the Psalm considers the same relationship only under less happy circumstances.

The second verse, which properly begins the Psalm, sets the keynote for the whole first section. It speaks of the God known through oral tradition. It begins with the word ¹⁷41 which is in the vocative; thus God is addressed directly. This addressing of God directly continues throughout the Psalm and makes of it a monologue directed toward God. The first verse also speaks of the knowledge the Psalmist has of God through the oral tradition that has been communicated to him by his father. The word ¹⁷42 may be extended to mean "relatives, elders, and teachers of the community." The rest of the first section gives us a full and detailed picture of the traditional concept of God as viewed and interpreted by the Psalmist.

Verse 3 tells simply of God dispossessing the nations and "planting" in their place the people of Israel. This

image of God planting Israel, while not a common one, is not (original) with this Psalmist; it can be found also in the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:17), as well as in II Samuel 7:10. It suggests a certain permanence to the people on the soil, as one thinks of their roots reaching deep into the ground.

Verse 4 makes it quite clear that this is entirely of God's doing -- though the soldiers may have wielded swords

it was not their own arms that saved them. Clearly it was the arm of God and the light of His face that accomplished this when He chose to favor them. Commenting on this verse Fitzpatrick says: "God's free choice, not Israel's merit, was the ground of His intervention on their behalf." ¹³

Verses 3 and 4 present to us an interpretation of the historical saving God whose help in such a large matter as a people establishing itself upon a land is a necessity. His reasons for action are neither stated nor understood, but are based entirely on His favor.

In the A part of verse 5 it is stated that God is a king, and the B part of this verse verifies it by maintaining that God "commanded" the victories of Jacob. Just as it is with a human king that his words are immediately enacted and the thing commanded accomplished, so is it with the heavenly King.

Verse 6 is a very interesting one. The Bes in both **ב** and **בשם** is the Bes of instrumentality and suggests that the Psalmist actually thought of both God and His name as being used as a weapon of war. The classic statement in Psalm 20:8 plainly shows that this is not an unwarranted interpretation.

אֵלֶּה בָּרֶכֶב וְאֵלֶּה בַּסּוּסִים
וְאִנַּחְנוּ בַּשֵּׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ נִזְכִּיר

"Some use the chariot, others use horses;

But we use the name of the Lord our God by pronouncing it."

Not only is God an aid in battle, but His very name is a potent weapon.

Verses 7 and 8 restate the theme first presented in verses 3 and 4. Verse 9 which concludes this section finds the Psalmist giving testimony to his faith by his proclamation of his regular and continual worship of God.

Verse 10 which begins the second section of this Psalm presents a striking comparison to what has come before. Were it not for the word η, λ' , which is a little unusual in this usage, this verse would be altogether too abrupt. The A part of the verse makes two allegations concerning God's behavior toward the people of Israel in either the immediate present or the most recent past -- he has rejected them and made them ashamed. The B part of the verse, rather than being a third accusation, seems to mention specifically that area of life where this rejection and abashment has taken place -- it has been on the field of battle. Just as the first section of this Psalm was concerned with success in battle when accompanied by God's assistance, this second section will consider failure in battle when God has apparently withdrawn Himself.

Verse 11 begins to describe what has happened to the fighting forces of the people -- their demise and its consequences. This verse, like the entire Psalm, is in the first person. Verse 12 continues describing the consequences using metaphoric language. The A part of the verse takes the familiar metaphor of Israel being like sheep, which in the past has usually implied God's tender and loving care as the shepherd (Psalm 23), ¹³ and turns it into a simile that strikes

home with a bitterness not previously experienced in this Psalm. Now the image of the sheep no longer suggests an object of affection to be watched over, but merely a dumb animal that is destined to be slaughtered and devoured by a ravenous enemy. It is not unlikely that Ezekiel 34 served as a model for the use of this particular image. In the B part of the verse the Psalmist continues using metaphor, but this time in reference to God rather than His people. Here an image from agricultural life is used; God "winnows" His people among the nations. Verse 13 continues speaking of God in metaphoric terms. Here God is spoken of as a merchant who has sold his possession, but failed in this transaction to gain either profit or prestige. In this instance it appears that the Psalmist is indebted to Deutero-Isaiah; Isaiah 50:1 and 52:5 speak of God selling his people. The metaphor is brutally powerful. It succeeds in reducing both God and Israel to mere agent and object, cheapening both immeasurably thereby.

Having injected a tone of acid bitterness in the Psalm, the Psalmist leaves off his use of metaphor and resumes again description of the results of God's rejection of His people in terse and graphic phrases. Verses 14 to 17 carry out this description. Verse 14 has an almost perfect companion in Psalm 79:4, though it is impossible to say which is dependent upon the other; perhaps they both come from a common, earlier source. Verse 15, while original in its precise wording, has many parallels in its general thought which lead us to believe that this verse is most likely an imitation of already known literature.¹⁴ Verses 16 and 17

not
few
12.3?
53.7?

belong together; verse 16 again describes the plight of the people, while verse 17 submits the immediate causes of the shame that covers them.

Verses 18 and 19 introduce a new theme in this section -- the steadfastness of the people in their belief in God in spite of adversity. With real eloquence the Psalmist speaks out:

כָּל זֶה אֲחַד בָּאֵלֵינוּ וְלֹא שִׁכַּחְנוּךָ
וְלֹא שִׁקְרָנוּ בְּבְרִיתךָ

"All this has happened to us, but we have not forgotten Thee;
Nor have we been false to Thy covenant."

Verse 19 continues this proclamation of faith.

Verse 20 (again) reiterates the dire situation of the people; but coming immediately after the testimony of obedience to God's ways as it does, it is a doubly powerful statement implying that this is the reward of God to His people for their manifest devotion to Him. The juxtaposition of these two verses evokes a strong feeling of irony. Verses 21 and 22 provide another little unit. Here the irony continues to mount as the Psalmist says that had the people worshipped strange gods, God who knows all the secrets of the heart would have searched this out. Verse 23, the B part of which is a strong reminiscence of both Jeremiah 12:3 and Isaiah 53:7, completes the irony. Not only has God failed the people, but it is because of Him that they are like sheep made ready for the slaughter.

The next verse comes as a plea that is uttered out of the frustration of helplessness, and yet has strong tones

of sarcasm. It begins that which is the culmination and conclusion of this Psalm -- the invocation of God to action. God is commanded to awake from his sleep. The Psalmist is not necessarily saying that he really thinks that God has been sleeping, but God's inactivity leaves unknowing man with this conclusion as the only semi-logical way in which he can explain to himself what he sees around him. Verse 25 questions God with very bold language, asking why He has hidden His face, forgetting His people in their poverty and oppression. Verse 26 is the last reference that the Psalmist makes to the misery of the condition of himself and his people. It is powerful, leaving one with the image of a man groveling in the dust in abject humility. The final verse is the final plea -- simple, artless, and direct. It must be, for everything else has been said.

In this Psalm the first person is used throughout. Only with the exceptions of verses 5 and 7 where the singular is used, does the Psalmist fail to use the plural. Thus he speaks for the people, identifying himself with them. He addresses God in the second person from the very beginning to the very end. The Psalm derives its power from this direct confrontation of God on the part of the Psalmist -- in the first section reminding Him of how He had acted in the past, while the second section is a bitter comparison of how God has treated His people in more recent times.

There is within the entirety of this Psalm an almost frantic effort on the part of the Psalmist to work

out a satisfactory conception of God that will explain His treatment of His people over the years within a framework of logical consistency. He starts with the God of tradition, but interprets His actions in a particular way. Verses 3 and 4 are crucial for the understanding of his interpretation. Verse 3 seems simple enough telling of God's disinheriting the nations and "planting" the Psalmist's forefathers on this land. But in verse 4 we are told that it was entirely with God's help that this was accomplished; and why did God do this for this people? The answer, which in a sense is not an answer, is given in the last two words of verse 5 --

כי רצוּהוּ "because Thou hast favored them." But then one asks why was it that God favored this particular people? The answer is not given directly, but may be implied within what follows. In the very next verse the Psalmist recognizes and proclaims the kingship of God. With verses 6 and 7 he strains to tell how his actions recognized this relationship -- by complete reliance upon God in battle, using God and His name as his chief weapon rather than the bow and the sword. In this first section the Psalmist seems to be saying that God is the divine King, and like a king can at times be arbitrary, favoring a people for no apparent reason. But this people had early recognized His Kingship and perhaps that explains His favor towards them. The last verse of this first section contains the people's continuing praise and worship of God. One would think with the Psalmist that this would greatly please a king, be he divine or human.

But something has happened that seems to the Psalmist inexplicable. The people are despoiled, slaughtered, and sent into exile (Verses 11 and 12). Even a capricious king would not treat his subjects so without reason. Now the Psalmist must afford himself some kind of answer that will account for God being the agent and author of these events without making of Him a completely contradictory Being who has no rationale whatsoever for His actions. The capriciousness of a king was at least comprehensible, but now there does not even seem to be this left.

The Psalmist's next formulation of his conception of God sees Him as a merchant who has sold his subjects for profit.

הַמֶּכֶר עַמֶּךָ בְּלֹא הוֹן וְלֹא רַבִּיחַ בַּמַּחֲרִימָם

"You are selling Your people for nothing of worth,

And you have not increased Your wealth with their price."

But this breaks down before it can be stated, and the Psalmist himself refutes the idea by carrying it to its absurdity, stating that nothing was gained by this sale. It is a senseless sale, leaving the cause for the agent's action unexplained. Even if God be pictured as a scrupulous man of business, his actions are still inexplicable. As has been noted earlier, this is a bitterly ironic statement, which gives us an indication of the acid mood of the Psalmist rather than a valid concept of God that he is seriously entertaining.

Verse 22 gives us merely in passing some suggestion as to what the Psalmist's concept of God really is. In this

verse he is trying to prove his case that he has never worshipped strange gods by saying:

וְיָדַע ה' סְדֵר הַלֵּב
 "He knows the secrets of the heart"

Therefore the Psalmist need not make elaborate statements as to his continued faithfulness, for God who knows the very thoughts of man certainly knows this. In the eyes of the Psalmist God is clearly omniscient.

In verse 24 a final attempt is made to understand God's mysterious and devious ways. God is implored to awake and cease from his sleeping. Though it may seem gross and unsophisticated to speak of God as being in a dormant state, it does answer the "why" of God's rejection. The plight of His people can now be seen not as an act of incomprehensible hostility, but merely as God's inactivity. But the final verse, like verse 24 coming in the form of a plea, gives us the complement to the idea of God as a deity asleep. God must rise up and come to the aid of His people, because He is a God of **רַחֲמִים** "merciful⁷ kindness." The verb forms in this last verse are all in the imperative, because it is imperative that God arise and take action that will favor His people, if He really is the God that corresponds to the Psalmist's image. Only here at the very end does the Psalmist state explicitly that which shaped every thing that he had thus far formulated. Only to a God that had **רַחֲמִים** as one of His attributes would the Psalmist dare to make not only such caustic statements, but such bold pleas as well.

See
p. 46

The images presented by the Psalmist in verse 13 as a merchant and in verse 24 as one asleep are not to be understood as the Psalmist's final concept of God, but merely stages in an argument with both God and himself. With these verses he is in a sense holding a mirror up to God and saying: "This is the image we have of you based on what we see happening to ourselves daily. How do you like the picture?" Therefore these verses are considered rhetorical devices in an impassioned plea, rather than a legitimate expression of the Psalmist's concept of God.

The Psalmist's real image of God comes through in the first section as he presents the God of history. Here we see God as an all powerful king whose words are immediately realized. He happens to favor a certain people and establish them in a land formerly inhabited by others. In the second section we learn that God is all seeing and has the attribute of $\tau\omicron\upsilon\eta$, which Snaith understands as Covenant love.¹⁵ The idea of Covenant Love is a definite progression from the presentation of the capricious King who but happens to favor a people. It suggests that the King has duties and obligations to His people, and indeed, the Psalmist closes the Psalm by demanding that the King take action. The Psalmist, in spite of everything he sees happening around him to his people and himself, believes in a God who is bound to act according to the commitments of His covenant.

Footnotes to Commentary on Psalm 44

1. George Phillips, The Psalms in Hebrew with Commentary
Vol. 1, p. 331.
2. Moses Bottenwieser, The Psalms, p. 752
3. Phillips, p. 332
4. A. F. Kirkpatrick, The Book of the Psalms, p. 238
5. A. Cohen, Soncino: The Psalms, p. 136
6. Kirkpatrick, p. 239
7. Kirkpatrick, p. 239
8. Phillips, p. 335
9. Bottenwieser, p. 753
10. Phillips, p. 336
11. Kirkpatrick, p. 241
12. Fitzpatrick, p. 237
13. Chapter 34 of Ezekiel is an exception to the use of
sheep as a favorable metaphor and may be the source
for the use the Psalmist makes of it here.
14. Deuteronomy 28:37, I Kings 9:7, Jeremiah 24:9,
Joel 2:17, Psalm 22:7, and Lamentations 2:15 ff.
15. Norman Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old
Testament, p. 119

not
?

Psalm 74

1 Maschil of Asaph

Why, O God, hast Thou rejected forever?
(Why) is Thy anger smouldering against the sheep of
Thy pasturage?

2 Remember --

Thy congregation which Thou acquired aforetime;
That Thou didst redeem the tribe of Thy inheritance;
Mount Zion upon which Thou hast dwelt.

3 Bestir Thy self to the place of continual upheaval;
The enemy does everything evil in the sanctuary.4 Thine adversaries roar in the midst of Thine assembly;
They have set up their (religious) symbols as the
symbols (of the sanctuary).

5 C o r r u p t

Axes against a gnarled tree.

6 But now it is its (i.e. the sanctuary's) carved woodwork
They batter down together with hammer and axes.7 They have set fire to Thy sanctuary,
They have destroyed the tabernacle down to the very
ground.8 They said in their hearts: "Let us oppress them
altogether."

They burnt all the meeting places of God in the land.

9 We do not see our (religious) symbols;
No longer is there a prophet,

Nor is there with us a sage knowing to what extremity --

- 10 How long, O God, will the oppressor continue scorning?
Shall the enemy despise Thy name forever?
- 11 Why dost Thou return Thy hand and Thy right arm?
From the midst of Thy bosom (bring them forth) and
consume!
- 12 O God, my king from aforetime
Who works acts of salvation in the midst of the land,
- 13 Surely it was Thou who with Thy strength split the sea;
Thou brokest the head of the monster in the water.
- 14 Surely it was Thou who crushed the head of Leviathan;
Thou madest of him food for the people of the waste
places.
- 15 Surely it was Thou who split (open) the fountain and
the torrent;
Surely it was Thou who dried up the continually flowing
rivers.
- 16 Thine is the day; the night is Thine also.
Surely it was Thou who established the moon and the sun.
- 17 Surely it was Thou who established all the borders of
the earth.
Summer and winter, surely Thou hast created them.
- 18 Remember this -- there is an enemy scorning God,
And a loathsome people spurning Thy name!
- 19 Do not give to the beast of the field the soul of
Thy turtle-dove;
The group of Thine impoverished people, do not forget
forever.

- 20 Look to the covenant!
For the pastures of the land are filled with darkness
and violence.
- 21 Let not the oppressed return ashamed,
Nor the poor and impoverished who would praise Thy name.
- 22 Rise up O God, plead Thine own cause!
Remember the scorn Thou (hast received) daily from the
loathsome brute.
- 23 Do not forget the sound of Thine adversaries,
The tumult of those rising up against Thee that fills
the air constantly.,

Critical Apparatus to Psalm 74

- 1 With Phillips we understand the interrogative before $\int \psi \gamma \gamma$ in the B stich.¹ The verb $\int \psi \gamma \gamma$ is considered as the imperfect of continuous action and is best rendered in English with the present tense of general truths.
- 2 The dropping out of a relative pronoun, frequent in Hebrew poetry, occurs between $\gamma \eta \tau \gamma$ and $\eta \gamma \eta$ in the A stich. The word $\eta \gamma$ is understood as a relative pronoun in the B stich; Brown, Driver and Briggs concurs with this. Sticha B and C are also considered to be the direct objects of the imperative $\gamma \eta$, as the A stich obviously is.
- 3 The phrase $\gamma \eta \gamma \eta \eta \gamma \eta$ is idiomatic; we translate it as "Bestir Thyself."² The word $\eta \gamma \eta \gamma$ is a noun with a Lamed prefix from the root $\eta \gamma \eta$ -- "to crash into ruins." The word $\eta \gamma$ is hyperbolic and has the force of an adjective. The phrase $\eta \gamma \eta \gamma \eta \gamma$ is elliptical and is to be rendered "to a place of continual upheaval." In the B stich the word $\gamma \eta$ is not the subject of $\gamma \eta \eta$ but is an adverbial accusative.³ Though the lack of a definite article before such a word as $\gamma \eta$ adds to the poetic quality of the style in Hebrew, an English translation finds it almost a necessity to render the word as being determined, which indeed it is in the mind of the Psalmist. This occurs frequently in this Psalm.

4 The noun $\gamma\tau\upsilon\delta$ stands for the full expression $\tau\upsilon\delta \text{ } \zeta\eta\lambda$ according to Bittenwieser.⁴ But this expression is never found with a pronominal suffix attached to the second word. Therefore we prefer to take BDB's reading of this word as "Thine assembly." The word $\eta\lambda$ is understood as referring to religious symbols in the sanctuary which were removed by the enemy and replaced by the symbols of a foreign cult. The whole context in which this phrase is set is a concern for the temple.

5 This verse is extremely difficult. Bittenwieser feels that it and subsequent ones describing the destruction of the temple are hopelessly corrupt.⁵ The A stich does seem to impose insuperable difficulties, using familiar words in a disjointed fashion that lacks any recognizable syntax. The B stich can be rendered, but gives hardly more than a hint as to what the meaning of the verse might have been.

6 The feminine pronominal suffix of $\eta\lambda\eta\lambda$ refers back to the sanctuary of verses 3 and 4. The feminine (ending to this) suffix does create a problem, but the whole context suggests this interpretation.

7 The word $\gamma\tau\lambda$ is used adverbially and is idiomatic in usage expressing completeness.

9 The word $\gamma\tau\lambda$ functions both as a participle and a noun. As a nominal form it means "sage."⁶ Job 34:2 and Ecclesiastes 9:11 give us a similar usage of this participle as a noun. The phrase $\eta\lambda\text{-}\gamma\tau\lambda$ means "how long" or "to what extremity." Left implied in this brief statement is

the thought "will God allow His people to suffer?" This is the inevitable completion of this fragmented phrase that must occur in the mind of the reader.

10 The word $\square \text{ } \text{ר} \text{ } \text{ל} \text{ } \text{נ}$ is vocative.

11 The B stich is elliptical. (Most noticeably absent are subject and predicate, but both are) suggested by the preceding stich. There God's hand is spoken of as being returned to his "bosom;" but in the B stich we need the very opposite of "return," and so supply by necessary implication the verb "bring forth."

12 The word $\square \text{ } \text{ר} \text{ } \text{ל} \text{ } \text{נ}$ is vocative. The word $\text{ל} \text{ } \text{ש} \text{ } \text{ו} \text{ } \text{ל} \text{ } \text{ח}$ being in the plural is rendered "acts of salvation."

13 and 14 The phrases $\square \text{ } \text{ר} \text{ } \text{ל} \text{ } \text{נ}$ in verse 13 and $\text{ל} \text{ } \text{ש} \text{ } \text{ו} \text{ } \text{ל} \text{ } \text{ח}$ in verse 14 are emended to $\text{ל} \text{ } \text{ש} \text{ } \text{ו} \text{ } \text{ל} \text{ } \text{ח}$ and $\text{ל} \text{ } \text{ש} \text{ } \text{ו} \text{ } \text{ל} \text{ } \text{ח}$. The only justification for retaining the plurals would be to assume that they are metaphors for the Egyptian soldiers and the verse refers to the historical event at the Red Sea. Other verses in the Bible that refer to these mythological monsters as well as the verses that follow here distinctly imply that what is referred to is the God of creation and pre-history who did battle with these creatures. It is true that Frankfort has discovered a cylinder seal that shows a seven headed hydra and finds further reference to a multi-headed leviathan in the Ras Shamra texts.⁷ Nevertheless, we still emend the text since this would be the only reference to a Hebraic concept of leviathan as many headed, though we admit that the text could be left as it is and justly supported by this evidence.

16 The word לַיָּרֵךְ , usually rendered as luminary, being the first part of a pair of which שֶׁדֶשׁ is the second part, may well be a less familiar designation for the moon.

19 Bittenwieser considers this verse to be so corrupt that he does not even render it.⁸ Nevertheless, the general intent seems clear enough. Noting that the Psalmist has earlier left words implied, we understand לַחֲרִיף to stand for the complete phrase $\text{הַשָּׂדֶה לַחֲרִיף}$, though it is quite likely the word הַשָּׂדֶה stood in the text originally and dropped out, inasmuch as elliptical words are not to be found in the construct state. The second occurrence of the word לַחֲרִיף is an uncommon usage. It occurs in II Samuel 23:13 where it obviously means "group" or "troop." A. Cohen tells us that "in Arabic it means a clan consisting of persons sharing the same blood."⁹

20 With Bittenwieser we recognize the difficulty of this verse and accept his emendation.¹⁰

$\text{כִּי בָּלְאוּ כֹאֹה אֶרֶץ בַּחֲשֹׁךְ וְחָם}$

21 A relative pronoun is to be understood before יִהְיֶה , which is a subjunctive.

22 The word לַחֲרִיף refers not to a feeling of scorn originating with God, but rather scorn received by Him from the enemy. The phrase כֵּן הָיָה is adverbial, modifying the verb implied in this laconic stich. The word לַחֲרִיף is too strong to mean "fool," suggesting merely a simpleton. Modern usage thinks of someone loathesome and disgusting; we have rendered it as "loathesome brute."

23 The phrase עוֹלָה הַיָּדִים is idiomatic and its rendering is that of Bittenwieser's.¹¹

Psalm 74 may quite easily be broken down into sections.

Verse 1 is a question and states the basic theme.

למה א-ל-הים זנחך לנצח

"Why, O God, have you forsaken forever?"

In the text we translated זנחך as "continually," which we come to realize it means only when we have completed the Psalm. In truth the Psalmist would not have bothered writing the Psalm if he were completely convinced that God had rejected "forever." What the word means here in the beginning when the Psalmist purposely overstates his grievance, and what it means in retrospect is something of a paradox. It is this paradox, generating a tension, that gives rise to the Psalm and others like it.

Verses 2-4 constitute a plea in which the key words are "remember" and "bestir Thyself." God is commanded to at least consider the situation.

Verses 4-9 are a descriptive passage that detail the destruction of the temple wrought by the enemy. It has a certain completeness within itself and is worth a careful consideration. Verse 4 begins this section by telling of how the enemy has perpetrated sacrilege in the temple by howling like a beast, and by removing the proper symbols and replacing them with his own. Within this verse we see a progression from a lesser offense to a greater offense that will continue to be developed throughout this section.

Verse 5 is corrupt beyond repair as we have already noted. Verse 6 is quite clear and refers to the wanton way in which the enemy takes its foreign instruments to the

finely carved woodwork of the temple.

Verse 7 tells of a more thorough way of destroying the temple. The enemy has set fire to it and burned it to the ground. Verse 8 succeeds in the increasing of the intensity of terror by a direct quote from the mouth of the enemy, making it clear that his intentions are nothing short of complete devastation. The B part of the verse bears this out as we learn that all the meeting places for the worship of God, doubtlessly scattered throughout the countryside, have been burned. Verse 9 which concludes this section is a masterpiece of laconic statement. Here we are told the almost crushing facts, that not only are the familiar and comforting symbols of the temple gone, but there is neither prophet nor wise man to give even a thread of hope.

Verses 10 and 11 constitute another plea. It is not only a reaction to the final note of utter despair of the previous section, but it is almost a necessity. Verses 10 and 11a are agonized questions directed to God, but 11b is an insistent demand for the destruction of the oppressors.

Verses 12 to 17 constitute another section of the Psalm that has a certain completeness within itself, and is at the same time a necessary integral part. In recalling the deeds of the God of creation, pre-history, and nature the Psalmist projects a certain calm in an otherwise turbulent description of desperation in the face of destruction. It is a kind of tactical retreat after the Psalmist has uttered before God his deepest and darkest wish -- the destruction of his

enemies. But it is much more than a moment's respite before the resumption of the anxious cry. It is like the gravedigger scene in Hamlet, which provides not only the much needed comic relief in the midst of gathering tragedy, but sets the proper mood for the audience, fortifying them with a philosophy of life so that they can bear up under the horrible consequences of the final act, (not to mention the sheer mechanical genius of having Hamlet in the proper place to witness Ophelia's funeral, thus allowing the dramatic line of action to begin once again). It is important that God should be reminded of His awful deeds of destruction of the primeval beasts who once threatened the very existence of the world. He has caused the waters to break forth, but can also dry them up (verse 15). He is responsible for both day and night (verse 16). And in verse 17, before we learn that God is also responsible for both summer and winter, it is made quite clear that God establishes borders. This is extremely significant, for while it is merely mentioned in a list of aspects of nature that are under His control, it implies that any nation that would overrun his border is violating the natural order of the world. Should it not be for God to correct this?

Verses 18 to 23 conclude the Psalm with a plea. It begins by calling God's attention once again to the enemy who blasphemes Him. Verse 19 reverses field and asks God to consider His dove, an obvious image for the people of Israel; the poor should not be forgotten. Verse 20 calls

to God to look to the covenant during a dark and violent hour, and verse 21 has God consider the poor and oppressed. But it is in verse 22 that the most telling blow is delivered.

ק'צו ה' אלהים ר'בה ר'בה

The word ר'ב has at least two distinct meanings. It refers to a quarrel that may well be of a physical nature, and a dispute that is strictly verbal. In this latter usage it may even be a technical term for a legal dispute considered in a court. We believe that both meanings are intended here. The Psalmist has been arguing God's case for Him, pointing out the many reasons why He should take a particular point of view and decide in favor of the party that the Psalmist represents. The Psalmist also feels that the very defeat of his people is due to the failure of God to fight for them. In truth, for God to plead His own case would of necessity cause Him to take action in battle against the oppressing enemy. The Psalm does not end here leaving one on the very peak of emotion, but retreats to an already heard argument, certainly less forceful than the one in the previous verse. But this, too, has its effect, providing a welcome relaxation from the high-pitched intensity of the rest of the Psalm -- coming as a feminine ending to a line of strict iambic meter.

The most remarkable thing about this Psalm is the effortless way in which the Psalmist makes transitions from one section to another. The best example of this is the linkage between the description of the destruction of the temple (verses 4-9) and the plea that comes hard upon it in

verses 10 and 11. The last phrase in verse 9 is

וְלֹא יֵשֶׁת אֵלָינוּ יוֹדֵעַ עַד-כַּהֲ

"And there is not a sage among us who knows to what extremity (how long --)"

Verse 10 picks up this last expression and alters it slightly to introduce a question.

עַד מַה יֵּאֱלֹהִים יַחַרֵּף צַר

"How long, O God, will the oppressor continue scorning?"

Another interesting mark of this Psalmist's style is his method of suggesting ideas without stating them. He not only uses elliptical phrases already noted in the critical apparatus, but will sometimes force the reader to complete a phrase that he has left unfinished. This is most obvious in the C stich of verse 9. Verse 11 provides an example of how the A stich and B stich of a verse can complement each other.

לָמָּה תֵּשִׁיב יָדְךָ ויָמִינְךָ
מִקֵּרֶב חִיקְךָ כֹּלָּה

"Why dost Thou return Thy hand and Thy right arm?

From the midst of Thy bosom (bring them forth) and) consume!"

Each stich lacks a word that is given in the other stich.

In the A stich the lack of the word "bosom" is not felt until one has already proceeded to the B stich and finds it there. There is another instance of the suggestion of a word which we did not find it necessary to take note of in the critical apparatus. In the B stich of verse 3 it is not unlikely that

the Psalmist intends the reader to supply an imperative like וְרָא "and see --" at the beginning of the stich; it would complete the parallel construction of this verse perfectly. This Psalmist is a stylist of the first order and knows well how to handle words.

Let us look now at the argument. The very first verse, ^{which} that asks why God has rejected forever, sets up the problems of the Psalm. The B stich asks the same question in a different way. In the A stich God rejects and is inactive; but in the B stich we are told that God is active in a way destructive to his people. But most important of all in this stich is the phrase וְצֹאן עֵינֶיךָ -- "sheep of Thy pasturage;" In these two words we find expressed the Psalmist's view of the relationship between Israel and God. This is expanded in the next verse when past history is alluded to; God acquired Israel and like a kinsman redeemed Israel. It was God who in both instances made the first overtures that brought Him into this relationship. Therefore God has a responsibility, but it is not an onerous one -- Israel is God's inheritance. Even further, God actually dwelled in their midst at one time on Mount Zion. This relationship between God and Israel may be a legal one as the reference to the covenant in verse 20 suggests, but here in the very beginning it transcends mere obligation, for it has been initiated by One who cares so much for this people that he chooses to dwell amongst them. The contradiction in God's present anger contrasted with his former relationship to His people is well developed in these few

verses. The argument that God be consistent in his actions is a strong one.

Verses 4 to 9, while presenting an all too vivid description of the destruction of God's house of worship, also presents an implicit argument. It is believed that God will feel at least regret and perhaps anger that His dwelling place should become but a scorched frame. This is an insult to God. Verse 10 makes this quite explicit as we move from the description into another plea.

עד מתי אלהים יחרף צר
ינאץ אויב שמך לנצח

"How long, O Lord, will the oppressor continue scorning?
Shall the enemy despise Thy name forever?"

The Psalmist follows this with his boldest request -- that God destroy the enemy.

We have already pointed out that the section that follows appears to be a calm recollection of the early achievements of God, but serves a very important function in the course of the Psalmist's argument. Should God think that man is overstepping his limits in commanding Him to destroy, the Psalmist documents his argument by showing that the God of creation and nature found it necessary to destroy the Tanim and the Leviathan (verse 13 and 14). It was with force that God split open the sea (verse 13), as well as the fountains and rivers (verse 15). Many of the acts of creation would have been impossible without premeditated destruction. Therefore, it would not be inconsistent of God

to destroy the evil ones harassing His people.

We have already discussed the significance of including the establishment of borders in the midst of a list of natural processes attributed to God. Any breach of these borders would be an offense against God's natural order.

It must be emphasized again that this is one of the salient arguments in the Psalm, stating that the enemy is committing a crime against nature by attacking lands not his own.

The final plea is a series of imperatives calling God's attention to a number of things, some of them already mentioned. Verse 18 picks up the already familiar theme of the enemy scorning God. Verse 19 uses a dove to symbolize the people of Israel, asking that she not be forsaken to the beast of the field. This, too, is a restatement of the B stich of the first verse where sheep were used for the very same purpose of picturing Israel as a tender and helpless animal that needs God's protection. Verse 20, as we have earlier noted, asks God to "look to the covenant." God is called upon to make good on his commitments. Verse 21 moves away from the argument that God should do something for this people because of His unique relationship to them, but asks only that people who are poor and oppressed should receive some consideration, especially when these people are worshipers of Him. Verse 22 is the powerful call, already discussed, for God to rise up and argue his own case, fight his own battle. Verse 23 rounds off the Psalm by commanding God's attention once again to those oppressors rising up against Him.

It is curious that in this Psalm 11 imperatives directed towards God are employed. Three times God is commanded to remember (verses 2, 18, and 22), twice told not to forget (verse 19 and 23), once to move himself to a place where he might observe (verse 3), once to look (verse 20), once to consume (verse 11), once not to permit (verse 19), and once to enter into litigation and do battle (verse 22). That seven of these imperatives ask God to either remember something or carefully take note of a particular situation is significant. God is constantly being forced to confront Himself with what is happening in the present and asked "to remember" if this is consistent with His promises and His actions of the past.

Let us consider the images of God that emerge from this Psalm. God is thought of as having rejected his people (verse 1). The frequent use of the imperative suggests that the Psalmist thinks of God as being dormant and must be commanded into action. This is most apparent in verse 22 where God is told to rise up. The B part of the first verse suggests that God is actively angry, so much so that his anger burns; but God as one active in the present is not suggested elsewhere in this Psalm. Rather the main motif thinks of God as having removed himself from a consideration of the happenings of His people.

The Psalmist believes that the nature of God is such that he can be invoked to destroy the enemy. Here the Psalmist has several strong arguing points, for God has destroyed

the primeval beasts. So too, should the enemy who blasphemes God's name and defaces his Temple be consumed. He also believes that God has entered into a unique relationship of his own choosing with the people of Israel, and for this reason should come to their aid if he is to remain true to His promises and Himself.

It is also thought that God takes pride in His temple. Indeed, it is the imperative **הִנֵּנִי בְּחַרְבִּי** "bestir Thyself," that insists that God bring Himself from his position of remoteness "to the place of destruction" -- the Temple Mount. Then follows in verses 4 to 9 the description of the destruction of the temple by the wanton enemy. It is believed that God will be aggravated into action by this effrontery, for God takes pride in His holy place and out of self respect will not permit such abuse.

Most interesting of all is the Psalmist's image of the God of past action; it is not a redeeming God of history that he recalls but rather the God of creation and nature. This is a fierce God who has overcome with force monsters more terrible than any frenzied human beings the Psalmist might know. A God who destroys in order to create.

The mention of God's kingship in verse 12 serves only to introduce a new section to the Psalm and is not a dominant motif with the Psalmist. The mention of the people as poor and oppressed in verse 22 is an appeal to God's sympathetic nature and is likewise a minor strain. It is not so much out of pity for His people, but out of rage for the scornful

enemy that God is invoked -- commanded to rise up and do battle for His people.

The underlying assumption of the whole Psalm is that the God of the present will act as did the God of the past. God may be remote, but he is not capricious.

Footnotes to Psalm 74

1. George Phillips. The Psalms in Hebrew with a Commentary, Vol. 2, p. 162
2. A. F. Kirkpatrick. The Book of Psalms, p. 443
3. Moses Bittenwieser. The Psalms, p. 613
4. Bittenwieser, p. 613
5. Bittenwieser, p. 613
6. Bittenwieser, p. 613
7. Henri Frankfort. Cylinder Seals, p. 122
8. Bittenwieser, p. 614-615
9. A. Cohen. The Psalms, p. 236
10. Bittenwieser, p. 615
11. Bittenwieser, p. 615

Psalm 77

- 1 For the leader, for Jeduthun
A psalm of Asaph
- 2 I will direct my voice towards God and I will cry out;
I will direct my voice towards God for He must hear me.
- 3 In the day of my oppression I sought (Thee out) with
my hand;
(At) night (my eyes) streamed tears and would not cease;
My soul refused to be comforted.
- 4 I remember God and I groan;
I meditate and my spirit faints.
- 5 Thou hast seized the lids of my eyes;
Because I was disturbed I could not speak.
- 6 I considered former days,
The years of antiquity.
- 7 I remember my night song and I commune with my heart.
And my spirit inquired:
- 8 Will the Lord reject for all ages?
Will He never again show favor?
- 9 Shall His kindness cease forever?
Has (His) speech ended for all generations?
- 10 Has God forgotten to be gracious?
Has He angrily confined His mercies?
Selah
- 11 Then I said: it is my sickness,
Changes caused by the right hand of God.

- 12 I will remember the acts of God;
Indeed, let me recall Thy wonders of the earliest time.
- 13 I will meditate on all Thy doings,
And I will speak of all Thy deeds.
- 14 O God, Thy path is in holiness!
Who is a god as great as God?
- 15 Thou art the God who does wonders;
Thou hast made Thy strength known among the people.
- 16 Thou hast saved Thy people with a strong arm,
The descendants of Jacob and Joseph.
Selah
- 17 When the waters saw Thee O God,
When the waters saw Thee they writhed in anguish.
Even the deeps quaked!
- 18 The clouds poured forth water,
The heavens gave forth their voice.
Even Thine arrows went about.
- 19 The sound of Thy thunder was in the storm;
Lightning lit up the world,
The earth trembled and shook.
- 20 Thy path was in the sea;
Thy way in the great waters;
But Thy footsteps were not known.
- 21 Thou hast led Thy people like sheep,
With the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Critical Apparatus to Psalm 77

Verse 1 A superscription that has no relation to the Psalm itself.

Verse 2 A use of progressive parallelism. The B stich is almost an insistent demand that God listen to the Psalmist rather than an expression of calm certainty that God hears prayer.

Verse 3 There are difficulties here and it is not unlikely that some words have dropped out. Briggs maintains that

דַּרְשָׁתִּי implies the seeking out of God in order to get a response to prayer; he also suggests the use of דַּר as the hand extended "in a gesture of invocation and importunity."¹ The next phrase is more troublesome. The LXX

reads ἑναντίον αὐτοῦ, meaning "opposite him."

Buttenwieser concludes that the LXX read נגדה for נגדה of the textus receptus.² But it is not necessary to emend the Massoretic text with the LXX, for this is most likely an elliptical expression with the word עֵינַי understood.

Looking at Lamentations 2:18 we find:

הורידו כנחל דמעה יומם ולילה
אף תלגני בוגת לך אף תדום בל עינך

In view of this, our phrase לילה בגרה ולא תפוג is easily rendered as: "At night (my eyes) streamed tears and would not cease."

Verse 4 The unusual pausal form הִיאֵהָ is to be explained as a Lamed He from an original Lamed Yod verb.

Verse 5 The word חורו presents some difficulties. We take it to mean "eyelids" with Theodotion, Aquila, and Ibn Ezra,³ though it occurs nowhere else in the Bible with this pointing. It is interesting to note that the verb _____ occurs two other places in the Niphal and once in the Hitpael with the noun חור as the subject in each instance. Its root meaning is "to thrust" or "to impel," and it apparently refers to an agitation or irritation of the spirit due to a disturbing night's sleep.⁴ Since the A part of the verse refers to the total inability to sleep, the verb חורו is taken to refer to the feeling of extreme agitation after a night of sleeplessness.

Verse 6 The B part of this verse is in direct parallel to the A part, and it too refers back to the earliest of days. The basic root meaning of סתר is "to hide;" the noun סתר refers to time which is so much a part of antiquity that it is hidden and veiled. This whole verse may well suggest that the Psalmist is dwelling upon the creation story and the earliest generations.

Verse 7 Buttenwieser, in suggesting that the first two words of this verse are a marginal note indicating that verses 12 and 13 are misplaced and belong after verse 7, presents a strong case.⁵ The LXX does seem to read חורו as חורו , making the first two words of this verse practically identical with the first word of verse 12 and the first word of verse 13. Reading these verses after verse 7 would give us a smooth text and a further develop-

Verse 12 The Kere of קִיָּא is the preferred reading. We read קִיָּאִים with many MSS as קִיָּאִים, thus taking it as a plural.⁷

Verse 14 With an abstract noun such as שְׁדָּה "holiness," the prepositional prefix has the force of expressing the interior nature or condition of this quality,⁸ suggesting that God is entirely surrounded by holiness.

Verse 18 If we take יְדָּה to be a Pual form, the preposition Min must be understood before הִיבָּה. But the

general mode of rendering has been to construe it as the Piel.⁹ We have rendered it with the force of the Piel. The

word יְדָּה poses some problems. Kimchi takes this word to mean "hail stones," but "arrows" as a symbol of lightning seems to suit the sense of the context which is describing a tempest.¹⁰

Habakkuk 3:11 provides us with a phrase quite similar to ours where there can be no question of translation.

Verse 19 The word שֶׁנֶּשֶׁבֶת is taken variously. Ibn Ezra understands it as air that is moving around in the higher stratosphere and thus would render it "heaven."¹¹ Kirkpatrick sees it as a reference to God's chariot-wheels, the rolling and rumbling of which causes the sound of thunder.¹² We prefer to understand it as "whirlwind" or "storm."

This Psalm deserves careful consideration, for there is a real movement in the feeling tone and thought of the Psalmist and a consequent change of his conception of God. The Psalm well exemplifies a kind of dialectic of the soul, which finds the Psalmist's point of view and world outlook vastly different at the end of the Psalm from that with which he started, -- but due almost entirely to his inner experiences and conversation with himself and God rather than any external happening in the world of objective reality. This experience is so entirely self-motivated, that not even the impingement of the slightest sort from the outside world upon any of his sensory apparatus is (in any way) responsible for the direction taken by the Psalmist's thoughts and remarks. To this extent we can say that during the time span included in this Psalm the Psalmist's entire reaction is a "subjective" one.

Let us examine the Psalm carefully to see exactly what does happen to the Psalmist, and how and where this dialectic of the soul takes place. Ultimately, we will want to know what kind of a concept of God results, and to what extent it has been shaped by the inner experiences of the Psalmist.

The second verse, which is the proper beginning of the Psalm, is very formally structured, using progressive parallelism to tell the reader what is going to happen. In the A part of the verse the Psalmist states that he is going to speak to God directly; his use of the phrase, "and I will cry out" suggests that he is in either physical

or mental pain. The B part of the verse repeats with powerful effect the opening three words of the A stich, and then moves on to a further point. It is insistently maintained that God will listen. The Psalmist is not so much stating his assurance that God will hear him, but is rather hoping to get God's attention by stating his assurance as if it were a certain and accomplished fact. There is almost a note of desperation in the phrase $\text{וְיִשְׁמָעַל$, as if the Psalmist were saying, "He must listen to me!" The verse serves as an excellent introduction, for in a few, short, rhythmic words the Psalmist has informed us of what will happen as well as indicating his present mood. The opening verse has not only created for the reader a set of expectations so that he is properly prepared for what follows, but also succeeds in disclosing the emotional state of the Psalmist.

Verses 3 to 5 spell out in detail what is merely suggested in the introductory verse -- the extreme emotional agitation of the Psalmist. He begins his speaking with God by sharply describing all the failures he has met with in his initial attempts to communicate his feelings and troubles. In verse 3 he is in an apparent state of hysteria; he imploringly reaches his hand out to God; at night he finds himself weeping continually without cessation, and admits that his soul refuses comfort. Verse 4 gives us additional details allowing us to judge to what extremities his emotional state has reached. The very recollection of God could cause him to moan; his attempts at talking about it caused him to swoon.

Verse 5 is the culmination of this confession; the A stich is unusual for it is the only instance up to this point where the Psalmist attributes his suffering to the handiwork of God. Here it is God, addressed directly in the second person, who has seized his eyelids and afflicted him with sleepless nights. But it is important to note that in every previous statement the Psalmist has made describing the anxious agony he has endured, there is not the slightest indication that God is responsible for this condition. The B part of the verse concludes this section with a statement that is both related to the stich immediately preceding it, and serves as a summary for all that has been said prior to this point. The verb וַיִּשְׁכַּח, as has been fully explained in the critical apparatus, describes a special kind of agitation that is caused by disturbing dreams or a sleepless night; thus we have the relationship of this stich to the A part of the verse. But the B part of the verse moves forward as the Psalmist recognizes that his extreme agitation, a consequence of his sleepless nights attributed to God's doing in the A part of the verse, resulted in his inability to express his feelings in spoken words. This section brings reminiscences of two of the prophets. When we read the Psalmist's unashamed admission before God of his inner agony, we cannot but recall the confessions of Jeremiah. The Psalmist's malady, one of the principle manifestations of which is the failure of speech, immediately reminds us of Ezekiel who underwent a somewhat similar experience.¹³ Verse 3 is a tristich, though it may

well be corrupt, and verse 4 and 5 are conventional distichs with a continued use of progressive parallelism that sees sickness of the Psalmist becoming more and more aggravated as the seriousness of the symptoms mount, concluding with the failure of speech.

Verses 6 and 7 are extremely important, for they give us the only clue we are able to find in the text as to precisely how the Psalmist was able to recover his powers of speech. Verse 6 is a work of art in its own right. Within the space of five words the Psalmist gives poetic expression to a task that must have been an immense undertaking. He began to speculate upon the earliest of times and perhaps even the origin of the world. In verse 7 we are told that he remembers his night song, most likely a kind of prayer sung or recited by children before going to bed, affirming a simple faith in God. Suddenly, the Psalmist begins to become conscious of precisely what it is that is causing the tremendous tensions within him. It is the contradiction between the God he has learned about through tradition and rituals, and the experiences he has personally endured which have given him in no way any evidence that God is an active participant in the world. Sticks B and C of this same verse, like the previous verse, express with brevity his immense undertaking of speculative thought. But it is just this speculation that clarifies his thought for him, for he becomes so completely aware of his problems that he is at last to verbalize them.

Verses 8 to 11 contain the dramatic protest which the Psalmist has been struggling to express. The A stich of verse 8 asks if God will reject forever; the B part of the verse re-echoes this question, but asks negatively if God's favor is to be cut off. Stich A in verse 9 asks the same question for a third time, but it uses different terms, making special reference to the failure of God's hesed, thus making this restatement of the same thought sound as bold to the ear of the reader as the very first utterance. But it remains for the B stich of this verse to pose the most powerful question this Psalmist has yet dared to ask:

וְהִיָּה דְבַר
וְהִיָּה דְבַר
וְהִיָּה דְבַר
וְהִיָּה דְבַר

"Has speech ended for all generations?"

After having asked if God's show of His beneficence has ceased, this Psalmist wonders if God's communication with man has been completed as well. Is there not even to be an explanation for God's actions from Himself? With the failure of both God's kindness and His willingness to explain His reason for acting, the Psalmist feels it necessary to provide for himself some explanation for God's actions. This he attempts in the final verse of this protest, but so frames it that it too is a part of his questioning of God's ways. In the A stich he suggests that God has "forgotten" how to be gracious; the alternative explanation that God is "angry" is offered in the B part of the verse. Obviously, both of these suggested explanations are tentative and very unsatisfactory to the Psalmist, but he concludes his protest with

them for they heighten the dramatic effect by daring to conclude what kind of a god would act in this manner. These three verses are almost a unit by themselves. The Hebrew is perfect; each stich is clear in its meaning, and though all the words are familiar, the phrases remain fresh and suggest nothing of a heavy imitative style. The Parallelism is preserved throughout and rises to a proper pitch at the conclusion.

Verse 11 is at one and the same time the most important verse in the Psalm and the most difficult. It is in a sense a pivotal verse, for once having expressed in well-phrased words all his doubts about the beneficence of God, the Psalmist already visualizes the answers to his own questions and is somewhat ashamed of the way in which he has questioned Him. He wishes to disclaim all responsibility for what he has just said, and attempts to do so by attributing his remarks to his sickness.

חלתי היא שנות ימין עליך

"It is my sickness (that makes me speak thus),

Changes caused by the right hand of God."

We are immediately reminded of another instance in literature where an individual attempts to disclaim responsibility for his actions. Hamlet speaking to Laertes just before they are to duel says:

If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
Who does it, then? His madness.

Hamlet, like the Psalmist, attempts to be excused for his actions on the grounds that they were performed while he was in a state of disordered reason. With the Psalmist we cannot quite say that his reason was disordered, but he certainly was in a state of intense anxiety that would render his thinking capacity ineffective. The Psalmist would further lay off the responsibility for what he previously said by maintaining that even this sickness was caused by God. In this verse the Psalmist renounces his protest and stoically states that all is in the hand of God, even the sickness that caused him to question God.

Concerning the next two verses, we have already noted in the critical apparatus as possibly misplaced. But taken as they stand in the textus receptus they do not interrupt the flow of the Psalm. Rather do they seem to be almost a short prayer or a statement of intention, depending on whether one takes the verbs to be subjunctives or imperfects. At any rate it is clear that the Psalmist once again reverts to his knowledge of God through tradition. In verses 12 and 13 he again, with the aid of his memory, turns to knowledge of God preserved through tradition. But this time it is for the purpose of forging out a synthesis that will resolve the already existing tensions created by the disparity between what he has been taught and what he has observed.

Verses 13 to 21, which constitute the Psalmist's ultimate resolution of the dialectic he has established, present some problems of their own. It is well recognized that

there is a strong literary tie between verses 16-19 in our Psalm and the third chapter of Habakkuk. But Battenwieser points out that there is little justification for maintaining that Psalm 77 is dependent upon the third chapter of Habakkuk, and further suggests that they may both be dependent on an earlier source.¹⁴ It is well to note though, that the Psalmist is most likely working within the framework of an already established literary tradition. Verse 14, which is an introductory verse to his final section, proclaims God's supremacy and majesty in clear and simple language. The A part of the verse that speaks of God walking in holiness is more than a mere image -- it is almost a philosophical statement; it implies as Kirkpatrick recognizes that God is "separate from all sin and imperfection, in accord with the perfection of His Nature."¹⁵ The B part of the verse is probably a reminiscence and restatement of the famous phrase from the Song of the Sea:

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 מִי כָמוֹךָ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ

"Who is like Thee among the gods, O Yahveh"¹⁶

Verse 15 addresses God directly and constitutes perhaps the most affirmative verse in the whole Psalm. This verse makes the emphatic identification of the living God of whom the Psalmist is painfully cognizant, with the God of tradition who is spoken of in the Song of the Sea as אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ
 "One who works wonders."¹⁷ Verse 16 speaks of God saving His people with a strong arm. The author thus makes explicit in this verse that which had been subtly alluded to in the

previous verse with the use of literary reminiscences. Here it becomes quite clear that God is being spoken of as the God of redemption, suggested by the reference to His mightiest act of redemption -- the parting of the Red Sea. The word ¹⁸וַיִּפְּץ marks the end of a stanza as Kirkpatrick points out.

The second and final section that constitutes the resolution of this dialectic begins with verse 17. Using the literary device of rhetorical repetition,¹⁹ the Psalmist sets forth a verse that accounts for the parting of the Red Sea by personifying the water -- the water reacting turbulently after having seen Yahveh. But this verse, as well as 18 and 19 which follow it, are ambiguous and intentionally so. On the one hand they seem to refer to the particular event at the Red Sea, but on the other hand it seems to be nothing more than the account of a fierce storm, with a personification of some of the elements. Verse 17 recalls a similar expression in Habakkuk 3:10 in which the mountains are spoken of as "dancing" or "writhing" (¹⁷וַיִּרְדּוּ) at the sight of God. The expression, "And the depths trembled ..." seems to refer to a cataclysmic event. But it could also be construed as a hyperbolic description of a terrifying storm. That this verse in its entirety lends itself to a dual interpretation is important to note, for it is just this quality that displays the ingenuity of the author in moving from one thought to another.

Verse 18 continues the form of a tristich first found

in verse 17, and while it also continues the picture of nature in a state of violence, it loses that element found in the previous verse that suggested there was something unique about what was happening, something beyond the familiar phenomena of nature. The B and C stichs continue the personification of nature; but the image of arrows for lightening cannot be fully understood unless one is familiar with the verse in Habakkuk where it is completely developed: (Hab. 3:10)

לְאוֹר חֲצִיךְ יִהְיֶה כֹּחַ
לְנֶגְהָ בֶרֶק חֲנִיתֶיךָ

"Thine arrows go abroad to serve as light,
The flash of Thy spear for brightness."

In this passage in Habakkuk we discover the unusual combination of the warrior God with the God of nature. It is His utensils of war, His arrows and spear, that when witnessed by man are seen as light. Thus in our passage "arrows" comes to be a symbol for lightning. Verse 19 continues as a tri-stich, describing a storm; the last stich speaking of the earth shaking and trembling using the perfect form of the verb tends to suggest again a cataclysmic historical event.

Verses 17 to 19 serve two functions. They give a vivid account of the participation of the elements in God's great act of redemption at the Red Sea; but even more important is the implication that all of these elements are at God's disposal. The very sight of Him precipitates commotion and disorder. The waters become turbulent, the depths

quake, the clouds given forth water, the heavens produce thunder, and lightning, spoken of as God's arrows, goes forth. All of nature has become so excited that it is in an unnatural state. Though the redemption at the Red Sea occurred but once, these accompanying signs of nature in disruption have been seen many times in severe storms. The conclusion to be drawn is that any storm that finds nature in violent disorder is ample evidence of the presence of God. This is a partial answer to the questions raised in verses 8 to 10. Obviously, God is still active in the world; but whether or not this action is beneficent is still open to question.

Verse 20 continues as a tristich, but makes a more subtle and philosophical statement than anything we have had previously. The A and B stichs suggest that God's path is in the sea, and the final stich concludes from this that that is why his path cannot be known. Metaphorically this verse is saying that God traverses an element like water that leaves no trace of His having been there. Verses 17 to 19 and verse 20 constitute two distinct statements that affirm God's continued presence and activity in the universe.

Verse 21, which concludes the Psalm, addresses God directly as the one who led His people, with the implicit understanding of having led them to redemption and the land of Israel. It is a direct identification of God with the God of tradition and history. It is also the final affirmation needed to conclude the dialectic, for a God who leads

His people as a shepherd would his sheep is certainly a beneficent and provident God who would have all the qualities that the Psalmist seemed to find lacking according to verses 8 to 10. The last verse is not a concluding verse in the usual sense of the term; there is no summary, no final rounding off. But it is the final and necessary statement in the dialectic. Without it the dialectic is incomplete, and with it there is apparently nothing more that this Psalmist feels there is left to say. Its final conclusion is an acceptance of the God of tradition and history as the living God, believing that what happened before may well happen again. Kirkpatrick has this to say about it:

Attention has been called to the abruptness of the close of the Psalm, and it has been suggested that it is either incomplete or mutilated. But this abruptness is a mark of the poet's skill. He ends with the thought which he would leave impressed on the reader's mind for his consolation -- God's providential guidance of His people.

The most interesting aspect of this Psalm is the manner in which the Psalmist solves several artistic problems with which he is faced. He wants his audience to know something about the emotional struggle that preceded his complaint. He solves this problem by telling God at the very outset of the emotional and physical hardships he has undergone as a result of his earlier attempts at communication. Jeremiah's confessions must have served as an example, creating the possibility of a whole new genre of literature -- a kind of writing where one could talk about one's own feelings by addressing one's speech to God. Our Psalmist makes use of

this genre in disclosing his own particular inner struggle.

Another problem with which the Psalmist is faced is the presentation of the dialectic. In Platonic dialogues there are always at least two people involved and the dialectic usually moves by virtue of a question and answer process. Here there is the Psalmist and God; but God is silent throughout and does not participate in any direct way. We might well ask then what is the generating force of the dialectic; what is it that makes it move? The answer is that the Psalmist is able to turn to his memory, to a recollection of the tradition he was taught. This is obvious in verses 5 and 6 and 12 and 13, both of which constitute key transition passages in the stages of the argument. In verses 7 and 12 the verb זָכַר -- "to remember" occurs in variant forms of the first person imperfect. But for the most important movement in the whole dialectic, the one that occurs between verses 10 and 11, there is no suggestion as to what was the motivating factor; it is implied and we must supply it ourselves. I have already suggested that at this point, having expressed his complaint he immediately visualizes the answer to his own questions and seeks to disclaim the responsibility of having made such vigorous protests. Not only has his point of view changed at this instant, but his whole manner of bearing himself before God undergoes a decided alteration. Humility replaces rebelliousness.

When we assess the thoughts about God contained in this Psalm, we must always keep in mind which stage of the dialectic we happen to be at. Obviously, the importance of

the Psalmist's God concept in the synthesis is considerably greater than anything envisioned in either the thesis or antithesis. The God image of the thesis is spelled out with a number of questions in verses 8 to 10. It is the image of a rejecting God who is no longer favorable; ²⁰ it is a God who does not keep hesed with the world; it is a God who has become silent, explaining neither his action nor the lack of it; ²¹ it is, most of all, the picture of a God who is either very forgetful or very angry. ²² He is a God not perceived, but deduced by the Psalmist from what he has apparently seen and felt of the world in his own lifetime.

It is almost impossible to say whether this Psalmist is reacting to a national and political situation, or to his own experiences and inner feelings. Battenwieser, Phillips, and Kirkpatrick view this Psalm as a reaction to national calamity, ²³ and indeed the choice of words used in the protest of verses 8 to 10 tend to substantiate this point of view. But the continued use of the first person as well as the elaborate descriptions of the Psalmist's emotional and physical reactions suggests at least a highly personal reaction to these national calamities. Whether it be national calamity or personal sufferings, it is clear that the Psalmist's experiences suggest to him that God has ceased to operate in the world.

The antithesis to the Psalmist's experiences is the image of God he has been given through tradition. This he recalls in verses 6 and 7, though it is not explicitly spelled

out. It is merely alluded to, assuming that the reader or audience is sufficiently well versed in this tradition and will immediately make the same association that the Psalmist has made. A good example of this is the reference to $\square^{\prime}\Delta^{\prime}$ $\square\eta\rho\Delta$ in verse 6; this should bring to mind the creation stories and subsequent happenings, including perhaps even the tales of the patriarchs. One thinks of God as creator and supreme master of the world; one also remembers with the Psalmist the many promises God has made.

It is the dynamic tension between these two images of God that is responsible for verses 14 to 19, which (in exalted language) resolve the problem posed. God is pictured as an active force in the world as the master of nature. The eruptions of violence, such as the thunderstorm described in verses 18 and 19, that occur from time to time are reminders of God's continued presence in the world. The Psalmist has borrowed heavily from some of the language that serves to describe God's deliverance of the Hebrews at the Red Sea in the role of the God who is master of nature. Thus, with these literary allusions, two more dimensions are added to this Psalmist's conception of God -- the God of deliverance and the God who intervenes in history. This picture of God is converted in the last verse to that of the Shepherd-God. The Shepherd-God is perhaps most fully worked out in the 23rd Psalm. But here it is skillfully woven in with the God of History by the references to Moses and Aaron. Thus the last

verse is not only a conclusion, but a culmination. God is finally seen as one who will lead and tend his people as a gentle shepherd would provide for his flock. As a result of his own particular problem the Psalmist has successfully compounded several standard conceptions of God and brought them into a happy harmony.

Footnotes to Psalm 77

1. Briggs, International Critical Commentary, p. 172
2. Battenwieser, Psalms, p. 630
3. Phillips, Psalms with Commentary, Vol. II, p. 187
4. BDB, p. 821
5. Battenwieser, pp. 629-630
6. Phillips, p. 189
7. Battenwieser, p. 630
8. Kirkpatrick, The Cambridge Bible Book of Psalms, p. 461
9. Phillips, pp. 190-191
10. Phillips, p. 191
11. Phillips, p. 191
12. Kirkpatrick, p. 462
13. Ezekiel 33:22
14. Battenwieser, p. 629
15. Kirkpatrick, p. 461
16. Exodus 15:11
17. Exodus 15:11
18. Kirkpatrick, p. 456
19. Kirkpatrick, p. 457
20. Psalm 77:8
21. Psalm 77:9
22. Psalm 77:10
23. Battenwieser, p. 627
Kirkpatrick, p. 456
Phillips, p. 185

Text of Psalm 79

1 A Psalm of Asaph

O God, the nations have come against Thy inheritance.

They have defiled Thy holy temple

2 They have made the carcass of Thy servants

Food for the fowl of heaven;

The flesh of Thy pious ones

For the beast of the land.

3 They shed their blood like water

In the surrounding parts of Jerusalem;

And there is no burying!

4 We have become an abhorrence to our neighbors,

A scorn and derision to those about us.

5 How long, O Lord? Will Thy (jealousy) smoulder forever?

(How long) will Thy jealousy burn like a fire?

6 Pour out Thy wrath upon the nations who do not know Thee,

And upon the kingdoms who do not call upon Thy name!

7 For they have devoured Jacob,

And devastated his dwelling place.

8 Do not count against us the first transgressions;

Speedily bring Thy mercies before us,

For we are exceedingly low.

9 Aid us, O God of our salvation, for the sake of the

glory of Thy name,

And forgive our sins for the sake of Thy name.

10 Why should the nations say: "Where is there God?"

(Where there God is) will be known among the nations --

before our very eyes,

(By virtue of) the vengeance for the blood of thy servants which was shed.

- 11 Let the groan of the prisoner come before Thee;
According to the greatness of Thy great arm, release those destined for death!
- 12 And return to our neighbors seventy times over into their bosom,
Their scorn with which they reviled Thee, O Lord.
- 13 For we are Thy people, the sheep of Thy pasturage!
We are thanking Thee continually;
In each generation we tell of Thy praise.

Critical Apparatus to Psalm 79

- 1 The word $\square \gamma \gamma$ is from $\eta \gamma$ -- "to bend, twist," and is rendered "a heap of ruins;" Brown, Driver and Briggs understands it accordingly.
- 2 The Vav in $\eta \gamma$ is pleonastic.¹
- 3 Concerning the phrase $\square \delta \tau \gamma \psi$ -- "they have shed their blood," "they" is the enemy and "their" refers to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The word $\eta \gamma \gamma$ is a noun in construct and functions adverbially.
- 5 This verse is elliptical. It is similar to verse 11 in Psalm 74 where each stich leaves a word implied that is suggested by the other stich. In the A stich the subject of the verb $\eta \gamma \gamma$ seems to be missing, but is found in the word $\eta \gamma \gamma$ in the B stich; likewise the interrogative $\eta \gamma$ of the A stich is assumed when one reads the B stich.
- 7 The word $\eta \gamma$ is emended to $\eta \gamma$ on the basis of Jeremiah 10:25.
- 8 The expression $\eta \gamma \gamma \eta \gamma$ is idiomatic and is best rendered -- "Do not count against us ..." We need not be concerned with the apparent discrepancy in gender between the noun $\eta \gamma$ and its modifier .
Though the noun ends in η -- it is masculine plural, and is certainly treated as such in Isaiah 59:2 and Proverbs 5:22. The imperative $\eta \gamma$ is to be rendered adverbially.
- 10 The question $\eta \gamma \gamma$ is the understood subject

of the verb שׁוּב . In prose the instrumental בִּשְׁבִּי would ordinarily precede the word נִקְמָה . The clause that begins with the word נִקְמָה is a clause of instrumentality.

11 The word הוּאֵר is emended to הֵאָר ; the root of the latter is נִהַר and it is to be read as --
 "let loose!" ²

It is unfortunate that this Psalm is thought of only as a companion piece to Psalm 74. While there are similarities in style and subject matter, and both Bittenwieser and Morgenstern agree that they were occasioned by the same event,³ this Psalm certainly deserves more consideration than it is usually given.

The form of this Psalm is quite simple. The first verse describes the destruction of the temple and the city. Verses 2 to 4 tell of the plight of the people. The remainder of the Psalm is a plea.

The most apparent thing about the style of the Psalm is its imitative quality. It is always a problem when we have identical readings in two different texts to establish one of them as the original and the other as an imitation. Indeed, they both could be from a common source that is no longer extant. The difficulties multiply when we are handling two different texts where the dating of either is in any kind of doubt. But when we find a text such as ours that has parallels not merely in phraseology, but in entire verses among many different texts, we must suspect that this text has borrowed heavily from the others.

Let us look more closely at some of these parallel passages. Verse 4 of our Psalm reads:

הִי יְנוּ חֲרָבָה לְשֹׁכְנֶיהָ
לְעַג וְקֶלֶס לְסִבְיֹתֶיהָ

Psalm 44:14 reads:

חַשִּׁימֵינוּ חֲרָפָה לְשַׁכְנֵינוּ
לַעֲגֹ וּקְלָס לְסִבֵּי בֹהֲלֵינוּ

Verses 6 and 7 of our Psalm read:

שִׁפְךָ חֲמַתְךָ אֶל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדָעְךָ
אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁמְךָ לֹא קִרְאוּ
כִּי אַכֵּךְ אֶת יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת כּוֹהֵן הַשָּׁמַיִם

Jeremiah 10:25 reads:

שִׁפְךָ חֲמַתְךָ אֶל הַגּוֹיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא יָדָעְךָ
וְעַל מִשְׁפַּחֹת אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁמְךָ לֹא קִרְאוּ
כִּי אַכֵּלוּ אֶת יַעֲקֹב וְאֶת כּוֹהֵן הַשָּׁמַיִם
וְאֶת כּוֹהֵן הַשָּׁמַיִם

Also many phrases used in this Psalm are found elsewhere.

In the first verse we find:

שָׁמַיִם אֶת יְרוּשָׁלַיִם לְעַיִים

In Micah 3:12 Micah states and is quoted on this phrase in
Jeremiah 26:18:

יְרוּשָׁלַיִם עַיִים תִּהְיֶה

This passage is one over which there would be little dispute as to who has borrowed from whom. It seems quite unlikely that this Psalmist pre-dated Micah. In verse 2 the expression *עוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם* is a common one. One of its most dramatic occurrences is found in I Kings 21:24 when Elijah addresses Ahab. The phrase of verse 4 *וְאֵין קוֹבֵר* is found in II Kings 9:10 where it is used in a prophetic address to Jehu by one of Elisha's young disciples. The two phrases *בְּנֵי תַמּוּלָה* and *אֲנָקָה אֲסִיר* of verse 11 find their only other occurrence in Psalm 102:21. The phrase *צִיָּן בְּרַעֲיָתְךָ*, as we have already noted, occurs in the first verse of Psalm 74. This Psalm abounds

in apparent borrowings.

We have described this Psalmist's style as imitative, but perhaps in doing so we are unfair to him. He may be quite consciously quoting from and alluding to familiar literature in order to suggest to the reader either an event or a personality strongly associated with the particular phrase involved. Certainly modern Hebrew literature fully exploits this literary device whereby a character may be likened to a biblical figure by the mere use of a distinctive phrase that occurs only in reference to the biblical personality. In literature of our own language T. S. Eliot has managed to allude to personalities and events quite successfully by this very same use of quotations; his poem "The Wasteland" is an outstanding example of this. Our Psalmist seems to be doing this same kind of thing.

The most interesting thing about this Psalm is not the Psalmist's borrowings from other sources, but rather the manner in which he has organized them to present a forceful and coherent argument. The first verse describes the destruction of the temple and the city. This description appeals to God's sense of pride in both His house and His holy city. But verses 2 and 3 present a more terrible picture, for it is here that we learn the fate of the people. An immense slaughter has taken place. The dead bodies have become food for vultures and beasts of prey, the blood of the people has been shed like water, and worst of all burial has become impossible. This last condition is the

final disgrace. It has most probably been brought about by the inaccessability of the burial grounds which are held by the enemy, but may also be due to the profuse number of corpses that have already filled all available graves, as well as a result of the raging battle that leaves neither time nor manpower for burial. Most likely all three of these causes were responsible for the condition described as

721p [1X] -- "and there is no burying." This description is an implicit argument; it runs something like this: "It is bad enough that we must die in such a wanton manner, but death is inevitable and we are almost willing to accept this. But that we should be refused the final dignity of a proper burial, this is too much. Even God must recognize that this is a breach of everything right and proper." The argument is directed to God's moral nature that would abhor such an unnatural treatment of the dead.

Verse 4 appeals both to God's legal commitments to His people and His feeling of sympathy for them. It tells how the people have come to grief in the eyes of their neighbors. In truth, this verse can be said to appeal to God's self-esteem as well, for when a people fall into disrepute their god is scorned as well (verse 10).

Now begins the direct questioning and the unveiled plea. Verse 5 asks a basic question of God. Is it in the very nature of God to be eternally angry? If it be so, reasons the Psalmist, then God must be exhorted to direct His wrath upon someone else. Indeed this is what the Psalmist instructs

God to do in verse 6. Not only is someone else designated, but reasons are supplied in this verse and the following as to why God's anger should fall upon them. They are a people who neither know God nor pay homage to Him. Furthermore, they have destroyed God's people and devastated His dwelling place.

Verse 8 drops the argumentative attitude quite suddenly and asks for mercy. The A stich asks that the early sins of the people not be counted against them. It is difficult to say whether the Psalmist is here referring to the transgressions committed in earlier times by the people's forebears, or whether it may refer to transgressions committed by these people themselves at an earlier time in their lives, mere childhood peccadillos. It is the first instance in this Psalm of the admission of possible guilt, of granting that there may be a reason for God's anger with His people. The verse continues with a plea that relies upon God's compassionate nature and His pity.

Verse 9 begins a new argument. Here we find the appeal being made to God's self esteem and reputation. The familiar phrase *לְשׁוֹם שְׁמִי* -- "for the sake of Thy name" is used. It is interesting that three imperatives are employed in this verse, but none of them seem to have a tone of insistence about them; rather are they uttered imploringly, or so the context would suggest. The first stich of verse 10 makes more apparent the shame the people are suffering and strengthens the appeal to God's self interest by repeating the

very words of insult that the enemy has hurled at the people -- "Where is their God?" The Psalmist, having used his strongest argument, asks God to make Himself known to them by avenging the blood of His servants. This second cry for vengeance seems justified in the mind of the Psalmist on several scores. First, the enemy has mocked God by suggesting that He is not available for help; it is only fitting and proper that God respond to this challenge by making His presence strongly felt. Also, according to the law of measure for measure, the same punishment must be meted out to the enemy that they inflicted upon the people. The use of the word 7723 -- "Thy servants" further suggests that God is in some way obligated to these people. Verse 11 reverts to the plea that appeals to God's sympathetic nature. The people are described as "prisoners" who are "destined to die," and God is asked to free them according to the strength of His arm. But it is in verse 12 that the Psalmist makes his third and most bitter demand for God's vengeance. The revenge requested is no longer measure for measure, but seventy fold over that scorn which the enemies directed towards God. The Psalm ends on a comparatively placid note by restating God's relationship to His people with the familiar "sheep of Thy pasturage" image in the first stich, while the final stich informs God that He can be assured of having people around for some time that will praise His name.

The dominating image of God in this Psalm is that of an angry and vengeful God. The Psalmist's only hope seems

to be that He will turn His wrath from His people and upon the enemy. It is significant that with this view of God as destructive and wrathful the Psalmist can simultaneously hold the view that God is merciful in nature, and indeed appeals to Him on this very basis.

מִהֵר יִקְדְּמוּנוּ רַחֲמֶיךָ כִּי דָלוּנוּ אֲנִי

"Speedily bring Thy mercies before us, For we are exceedingly low." The word רַחֲמֶיךָ, which we have translated as "mercies" has even stronger meanings. Brown, Driver and Briggs renders it as "compassion" and suggests that when it is used between man and man it suggests the kind of brotherly feeling that would exist between two who were from the same womb. When referring to God's feeling for man we would suggest that it is a feeling of loving concern for one with whom God has had an intimate relationship from birth, such as described in verses 10 and 11 of Psalm 22. Certainly, there is the element of responsibility suggested in such a relationship between father and son, but it is so transcended by the element of love that naturally results, that it makes of the dutiful aspects a secondary consideration. God is thought of as loving and compassionate, it is a part of His very nature to take pity upon His people.

God is also thought of as being concerned with His own reputation among the nations. This, as has already been pointed out, is strongly emphasized in verses 9 and 10. Not only is God's reputation questioned, but His very existence is doubted. The very last verse suggests that God is one

who takes pride in hearing His praise recited, or at least finds this act desirable. God wants to be well thought of.

The most salient view of God that comes forth from this Psalm, and in truth dominates it, is the view of God's nature as being simultaneously angry-compassionate.

Footnotes

1. Phillips. The Psalms, Vol II, p. 213
2. Battenwieser, The Psalms, p. 616
3. Battenwieser, p. 612

Conclusion

As we begin to summarize we will of necessity have to make the unreal division between "form" and "content," but it is "certainly not form in the conventional sense in which we think of form as a kind of envelope which 'contains' the 'content!'"¹ For we have seen that a psalm is a carefully contrived and well worked out poetic utterance. Each psalmist has posed the problem to himself in a particular way and then set out to solve it within a framework of his own choosing.

In Psalm 22 the opening verse is a bold but agonized plea that gives us the most forthright statement of the Psalmist's paradoxical position of belief -- God is too far off to help, but near enough to call upon. The Psalmist then begins to work out this theme in detail; God's distance is further emphasized by His failure to answer the Psalmist's continual pleas, while His nearness is implied in the deliverance He gave to those of an earlier day who trusted in Him, as well as through the tender description the Psalmist gives of his own relationship to God in the earliest years. Then follows a graphically chilling description of the immediacy of the persecutions the Psalmist is experiencing. It is just when the enemy is depicted as circling the Psalmist coming in for the kill, a situation from which there is no way out, that the Psalmist removes us from this hideous scene and begins to speak of his own deliverance and the effect the retelling of it will have upon others. The Psalm ends on a glorious but unfortunately false note of unimagined happiness at the

thought of unborn generations hearing of God's merciful dealing with the Psalmist. This Psalm starts out with rejection and the bold plea, and after exploring ambivalent feelings toward God showing the urgency of the Psalmist's situation, manages to resolve these stresses and strains by imagining in detail the Psalmist's own deliverance.

The introductory verse of Psalm 44, like Psalm 22, addresses God directly. Progressive parallelism is employed as the Psalmist relates how he had heard of God's deeds through an oral tradition. The first stanza, verses 2 to 9, develops this idea only. A warrior God is depicted without whose help nothing can be accomplished. The tone of the second stanza, verse 10 to 27, is in sharp contrast to the placid tone of the first. The stanza begins by asking why God has rejected the people, refusing to go forth to war with them. Several verses mention the sad straits the people are in, but this is not dwelt on. Instead of describing the specifics of the destruction as in Psalms 22, 74, and 79, this Psalmist merely alludes to it through the "sheep for food" metaphor of verse 12, and the reaction in verses 14 to 17 of the neighboring peoples to Israel's sad plight. The predominating part of this stanza is argument, suggesting (for God's apparent rejection) one explanation after another and then discarding them as inadequate to explain the situation. The mounting tension that is generated by his persistent assay to make the hardly understood actions of the God of the present consistent with the familiar and oft-heard actions of the God

of the past pushes the Psalmist to address almost brazen statements to God. The only way to save God's consistency is to think of Him as sleeping. He is boldly invoked to wake up and take action, for only if He does so will the Psalmist be able to cast off this comic caricature of a God asleep.² Here too is a paradox, for the Psalmist pleads and argues with a God that is obviously rendered senseless to words by his somnolence.

Psalm 74 begins with a paradox -- God's final rejection of a people to whom He has placed Himself in the relation of a beneficent shepherd. Here, too, God is thought of as removed from His people, for He is invoked in verse 3 to come to the Temple Mount and view the destruction that has therein ensued. A detailed description of that destruction then follows (verses 4 to 9). This recounting raises the Psalmist to such a fever pitch that he demands God consume the enemy. Then follows the magnificent praise to the God of nature and pre-history that serves an indispensable function within the Psalm, reminding God that he has in the past destroyed in order to create. The Psalmist finds his own argument so convincing that he is able to conclude by uttering almost triumphantly *יְיָ רִבְּנוּ*, which has the double meaning of "plead Thine own case," and "fight Thine own battle." The apparent paradox of the beginning is resolved by the Psalmist with a compelling argument so successful that God is left with no alternative but to do as the Psalmist directs.

Psalm 77 handles the problem of rejection in an almost unique manner. One can see working within this Psalm a distinct dialectic which operates so satisfactorily for the Psalmist that he is not forced to invoke God to take some kind of action in order to salvage ^{the psalmist's} his conception of ^{Him} God. Yet within this Psalm are all the doubts, misgivings and contradictions involved in the discrepancy between God's behavior aforesaid and His behavior now that have plagued the other psalmists considered in this study. The Psalmist begins his conversation with God by telling Him all the mental anxieties and physical ailments he has experienced because of his failure to find Him and speak to Him at an earlier time. He recounts to God his process of recollection that made him painfully aware of God's absence. It is then that he is most aware of the disparity in God's behavior and asks a series of questions concerning God's nature that are so basic that they cannot go unanswered. But before an answer can be given, the Psalmist apologizes for having dared to ask these questions and blames this abruptness on his sickness. Then follows a series of verses exalting the God of nature, for it is here that the Psalmist finds the answer to whether or not God will continue to make his presence known in the world. The cataclysmic acts of nature are obvious responses to the very sight of God, giving ample proof of his continued participation in matters of the world. Here the paradox is partially solved. God is active, but there is nothing to assure us that he is beneficent. This, perhaps, is never questioned by this Psalmist.

Nevertheless, he does not insist God perform specific acts to demonstrate to all that He is at work in the world.

Psalm 79 begins by describing the destruction of the temple. But whereas Psalm 74 devotes considerable attention to this matter, this Psalm moves on to describe the slaughter of the people. God is spoken of as being continually angry with His people, but never of having forsaken them. God, viewed as one in anger, is implored to spend His anger upon those who do not call upon His name. Appeals are also made to His self esteem. But most important of all is the admission on the part of the Psalmist that he has committed sins. This Psalmist, then, sees not the absence of God in the raging foe, but His wrathful presence meting out punishment to a sinful people.

The admission of sin in Psalm 79 is the element missing in all the other Psalms. Indeed the author of Psalm 44 is so certain of his innocence that he calls upon an all-knowing God who searches these things out to verify his claims of purity (verse 22). It is the sense of guilt that holds the Psalmist of Psalm 79 back from the final conclusion the others have made -- that God has removed Himself from the world. It is this conviction of innocence on the part of the other psalmists that makes God's actions seem incomprehensible to them. To explain His actions they are forced to say He has rejected His people. But a motive for such action is missing.

Blank, in his article subtitled "The Promethean Element in Biblical Prayer," deals specifically with those

who "stand up to God in prayer and demand their due." ³ Certainly there is an abundance of this in the psalms we have considered. Indeed, Psalm 44 is discussed at length in this article as an outstanding example of this kind of prayer. ⁴ Other outstanding examples of the Promethean element in prayer are verses 2 and 3 in Psalm 22; verses 1, 10, 11, and 18 through 23 in Psalm 74; verses 8 through 10 in Psalm 77; and verses 5, 6, 10, 11, and 12 in Psalm 79. Considering the desperate situation of the psalmist of each psalm, we might suggest that this can be a condition that will prompt a man to stand face to face with God and command rather than beg.

But among these men we have noticed a certain Berditshevian element in their prayer. Like the 18th century hassidic rabbi of Berditshev who after having addressed God with impudent demands suddenly remembered before whom he stood and retreated cautiously by humbly praising God's name, ⁵ several psalmists climb down from the high ground of bold demand to a safer valley of humble acceptance. The most obvious is the instance in Psalm 77 where the Psalmist, after having asked some very serious questions of God (verses 8-10), almost begs forgiveness for having asked them by blaming his actions on his sickness (verse 11). He thereupon embarks on a lengthy hymn in praise of God. In Psalm 74 after commanding God to consume the enemy (verse 11), the Psalmist substitutes for his previous angry and demanding tone a certain placidness that is content to offer calculated,

but nonetheless glorious, words of praise and admiration for the God of creation and nature. In both cases these psalmists had presented before God irrefutable arguments that demanded action; but a dread of One who was still in many respects unknown -- of One whose actions could not be carefully calculated -- held them back from making even further demands.

These psalms abound with anthropomorphisms and anthropathisms. There are references to God's face (22:26, 44:4, 44:25), His arm (44:3, 77:16, 79:11), His hand (44:4, 74:11), and His bosom (74:11). God is spoken of as one who feels anger (74:1, 77:5,6), mercy (44:27), and compassion (79:8). But we cannot deduce from this that these psalmists thought of God in these terms. Personification is a legitimate device of all poets, and this may be nothing more.

We encounter some difficulties when we try to group together the conceptions of God held by these psalmists. Not only concepts, but mere words that are identical may have different meanings in various poetic contexts. "But where is the dictionary which contains the terms of a poem? It is a truism that the poet is continually forced to remake language. As Eliot has put it, his task is to 'dislocate language into meaning.'" ⁶ There is a real danger involved in the comparing and contrasting of concepts abstracted from the works of different poets, or even from different works of the same poet, for it is the dramatic position of an expression that lends to it function and meaning and ultimate

value. This is seen quite clearly in the psalms we are working with. The concept of God as king occurs both in Psalm 44:5 and Psalm 74:12. In Psalm 44 this concept could not be dispensed with. It characterizes a particular image of God that dominates the entire first stanza. It is necessary to picture God as a king, for this is a legitimate explanation for God's apparent capriciousness, favoring whomever He would. In contrast to this, the use of this same image in Psalm 74 merely marks a transition and introduces a new subject. God is king because of his mastery over nature, but it is the idea of the God of nature that is explored and developed rather than the God who is like a human king. Indeed, the idea of God as king could be omitted from this Psalm without considerable harm to its integrity, whereas it is indispensable to Psalm 44.

We have another example of the variant functions of a standardized image of God. We have two eloquent passages that describe the God of nature in Psalms 74 and 77. In Psalm 74 it is the purpose of the Psalmist to illustrate the destructiveness of God involved in the very act of creation. God's destructiveness is witnessed both in his breaking open the fountains and drying up the streams (verse 15). Whereas in Psalm 77 the violent eruption of nature in a storm testifies to God's continued presence and activity in the world.

Verse 22 of Psalm 44 speaks of God knowing the secrets of the heart. Such an image of God is brought into this Psalm for a definite reason, to serve a specific function.

The Psalmist is proving his own innocence and calls upon a God who knows all the secrets of the heart to bear witness. The innocence of the Psalmist is important, for if he cannot maintain this his argument loses much of its effectiveness.

We cannot say that this or that is the psalmist's image of God by pulling forth one verse out of the context and isolating it. The psalmists used many images of God to suit their own purposes. To evaluate these psalmists' conceptions of God we must look at the total picture they have given us.

In every instance these psalmists find themselves involved in contradictory conceptions of God. Psalm 79 views God as being angry — compassionate. In the other psalms the contradiction is occasioned by the discrepancy between the God of the past and the God of the present -- the God they know of through tradition and the God they have deduced from their observation of present conditions. They are all involved in the same paradox -- the beneficent God of the past, and the rejecting God of the present. But they all believe that He listens to them, and moreover that He cares. Why else would they speak to Him?

Footnotes to Conclusion

1. Brooks, p. 194
2. In the contest between Yahveh and the priests of Baal, Elijah berates their failure by suggesting that perhaps their God is sleeping and he will wake up. I Kings 18:27 ✓?
3. Sheldon Blank, "Men Against God", p. 1
4. Blank, pp. 10-11
5. In Time an Eternity, p. 94f.
6. Brooks, p. 210

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