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RETRIBUTIVE JUSTICE

in the

BOOK of PSALMS.

by

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GRADUATION THESIS.

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE.

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Rec
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To

My Father and Mother

Whose love and inspiration have never failed me.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y .

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Chapter 1.

Historical Sketch of Idea of Retributive Justice.

A discussion of the idea of retributive justice as found in the book of Psalms must include a resume' of the previous development of this doctrine. It is, therefore, the purpose of this chapter to present a historical sketch of this idea whose various aspects found in the book of Psalms, will be treated in greater details in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

"Justice is an attribute of God in the sphere of His relation to His sentient and rational creatures, by virtue of which He as legislator wills equal laws, and as judge-mak~~ers~~ awards that are equal to and proportionate to merit or demerit." (1) The above definition of justice represents a stage in the development of religion when an ethical relation has been established between the deity and his worshippers. It presupposes a God who is supreme and who according to ethical principles punishes the wicked and rewards the good. Thus it is supposed that the good man finds himself happy (in the early development, happiness is secured by visible, tangible, material rewards), and the wicked man finds himself unhappy. It implies a God who in His absolute goodness seeks by all His acts, the ultimate good and welfare of His creatures.

A history, however, of the very beginnings of the idea of retributive justice must carry us back to a stage in the early development of religion, when the ethical motif was lacking and when the deity

(1) Baldwin, Dict. of Philosophy and Psychology- Vol. 1. pp. 586

possessed an amoral and capricious character; a deity, who exercised his punitive powers not according to recognized ethical laws but according to his capricious and whimsical desires. While Hebrew literature opens at a stage when the ethical basis of religion has been established, yet we can find in these writings traces of the earlier period which might well be called the "pre-ethical stage." In this period we can see a deity who while akin to his creatures, yet is jealous of his handiwork and constantly endeavors to maintain the chasm and distance which separates the human from the divine. In Hebrew thought this idea of divine jealousy is often hidden beneath later glosses which tended to modify the earlier and cruder thought, and which clothed this with the later ideas of justice.

We have, however, instances of the former. In the Paradise story found in the book of Genesis (ch. 3), the deity shows himself jealous of man's ambition to reach the rank of the divine, and hence he is punished by being driven from the garden, whilst the garden itself is carefully guarded from any further encroachments. A similar motif is to be found in the story of the Tower of Babel. (Gen. 11) Here the deity in his jealousy feels that extraordinary measures must be taken to restrain man's lofty ambitions. (1) and (2)

.....
 (1) An analogy in Greek thought which depicts jealousy on the part of the deity is found in Odyssey 23: 210:12

"Penelope recognizing her lord after she had made trial of him, declares as she casts her hands about his neck:

"It is the gods that gave us trouble, the gods who were jealous that we should abide together."

(X) ^{from} Montefiore—"Hebrew and Greek Ideas of Retribution.

(2) It might be remarked concerning these Biblical illustrations

Other illustrations of how the deity inflicts punishment on his creatures with no particular ethical motif may be found scattered through the Bible. Thus in 2 Samuel 24, which treats of the Davidic census, we see that Jaweh incites David to commit sin in order that He might have an excuse to punish the people. Similarly in Exodus 10:1 no distinction is made between an offence against a moral code or a personal affront against the deity. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart represents a means whereby Jaweh's power might be exhibited.

As primitive religious thought evolved and developed, the conception of God took on a higher moral and ethical character. God is now beheld as one who is absolute goodness and whose actions towards His creatures are all motivated by their welfare. Punishment for amoral and capricious motives ceases and is administered for a definite purpose. The deity as the promulgator and guardian of the laws, must according to recognized ethical principles punish all those who disobey and violate them.

The ethicising of the God conception affected thought to the extent that all physical evil which could not be explained by natural causes was traced back to moral evil, to an infraction of the divine laws. (At first these divine laws may have been of a ritualistic character, but regarded as divine, their infraction was held to be a moral evil and was bound to result in a corresponding physical evil.)
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 aiming to show divine jealousy, that same authorities while agreeing that in early religion there was such a thing, yet do not believe that the Garden of Eden and the Tower of Babel stories are examples of this tendency.

Under this influence, the Paradise story was given an ethical motif in which the author sees a just punishment for an act of disobedience on the part of man. Similarly the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah is told to convey the lesson of moral corruption and its just punishment.

The thesis of a just retribution of sins by a moral God is found in the book of Deuteronomy. Here we find a definite legal code which is left to man to obey or disobey (Deut. 30), and which promises specific, material rewards and punishments. Here a causal relation is expressed between physical evil and moral evil, between moral good and physical good which might almost be called mechanical. Deut. 11:13-26: represents a statement characteristic of this point of view:

"And it shall come to pass if ye shall hearken diligently unto my commandments which I command you this day to love the Lord your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, that I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn and thy wine and thy oil, and I will give grass in thy fields for thy cattle and thou shalt eat and be satisfied."

.....

(1) How this view was held in later times may be seen in Passages from Talmud:

(a) Talmud Sabbath 55 A-

אמר רב אסי אין סילתא בלא חטא
יין יסורין בלא עון

(b) Talmud Nedarim 41 A:

אין התולה עשר סחולין
עד מטחולין זו על כל עונותיו

A full statement of the workings of retributive justice is found in Deut. 27:28, in which the people are told and warned of definite blessings and curses which inevitably follow from obedience or disobedience of the Law.

The book of Judges written in the Deuteronomic spirit, represents the doctrine of retributive justice as applied to a philosophy of history. The rhythmic succession of victory and disaster so characteristic of this piece of writing means to hold forth the lesson that evil and calamity are the inevitable results of disobedience and apostasy, while a change of heart is always succeeded by a period of victory and prosperity. Judges Ch. 2, states clearly this thesis viz; the causal relation between moral obedience and external prosperity.

Any discussion of the idea of retributive justice must include not only the idea of God and its bearings upon this doctrine, but also the persons who were subject to the justice dispensed by the deity. An outstanding feature of this phase of the problem is the question of "tribal solidarity" which shall now engage our attention.

A study of primitive society reveals to us the fact that the outstanding unit of such a society is the clan or tribe. A few quotations from works dealing with this stage of society will show us what a prominent place the clan, tribe, and family occupied. Thus in Simmons and Wignmore Transactions- Asiatic Society of Japan 19, 177 F (quoted in Dewey and Tuft's "Ethics"), we read of the Kumi, a Japanese local institution comprising five or more households.

"As members of a Kumi we will cultivate friendly feelings even more than with our relatives, and will promote each others happiness and will share each others grief. If there is an unprincipled or

lawless person in a Kumi, we shall all share the responsibility for him."

How this tribal or group solidarity worked out in the economic life is to be seen in Caesar's description of landholding among the Germans:

"No one possesses privately a definite extant of land; no one has limited fields of his own, but every year the magistrates and chiefs distribute the land to the clans and kindred groups and to those who live together. (De. Bell. Gall. 6:23)

Similarly Dudley Kidd in "Savage Childhood" (pp.74) (quoted in Dewey and Tuft's "Ethics" pp.20) in describing Kafir clanship gives us a clear statement regarding this feature of primitive life when he says:

"The sense of solidarity of the family in Europe is thin and feeble compared to the full blooded sense of corporate ~~union~~ of the Kafir clan. The claims of the clan entirely swamp the rights of individual. ***** If one member of the clan suffered, all the members suffered not in sentimental phraseology but in real fact."

For a statement of how this organization of primitive life affected religion, Robt. Smith in his "Religion of Semites" (1894-pp.258) tells us:

"It was not the business of the gods of heathendom to watch by a series of special providences over the welfare of each individual. The benefits which were expected from the gods were of a public character affecting the whole community. Fruitful seasons, increase of flocks and success in war, all so essential to ancient life, were wholly the business of the community."

There citations are sufficient to show us that the individual occupied little or no place in ancient society. Any individual, especially be he of humble origin, as an individual was not inclined to murmur at his individual misfortune, nor did he expect that retribution would especially overtake him for his sins as an individual. Retributive justice was felt jointly and in common, and when it fell, it took no special consideration of the individual's part in the sin or crime which provoked the punishment. It is told of early Chinese life, that a man aided by his wife flogged his mother. For this it was ordered that the head of each clan be put to death; the immediate neighbors each receive eighty blows and be sent into exile, and even went so far as to decree that the head or representative of the first degree (A.B.) to which the offender belonged, should be flogged and exiled. (1)

In our Bible the classic example of joint punishment is seen in the case of Achan (Joshua 7-24:35). "Achan had taken for his own possession certain articles from the spoil of Jericho which had been set apart as "devoted to Jaweh." Israel then suffered a defeat in battle.

When Achan's act had become known Joshua and all Israel with him took Achan the son of Zerah, and the mantle and the wedge of gold, and his sons and daughters and his oxen and asses, and his sheep and his tent and all that he had. And all Israel stoned him with stones, and they burned them with fire and stoned them."

.....

(1) J. H. Gray, China, vol.1, pp.237 ff. (quoted Dewey and Tuft's "Ethics" pp. 17-18)

In 2 Samuel 21, 1-2: we see the subjects suffering for the sins of their king, "And there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year, and David sought the face of the Lord and the Lord said, 'It is for Saul' and for his bloody house, because he put to death the Gibeonite's."

The idea of joint responsibility not only applied to the living contemporaries, but this doctrine also held that the children were visited for the sins of the fathers. This point of view is found in Ex. 20:5; 34:7; Deut. 5:9. Thus in 2 Kings 23:26, the good King Josiah is said to be punished for the sins of Manasseh. According to this view, the children are not held guilty of the fathers acts, but the father is considered the unit and the children dependents as they are ^{are} embraced in him, so that when punishment pursues the posterity, it is really reaching out after the father.

We have now reached a point in our discussion where we must treat the view of the literary prophets concerning retributive justice. It was these bold and fearless men who came before the people with an advanced and highly ethical God conception. They proclaimed the knowledge of God and His inexorable moral law, the violation of which was inevitably to bring doom and disaster. Thus Amos sees Jaweh as the God of strict justice who if He is true to Himself, must mete out due punishment for wrong doing. Such is the key note, characteristic of his prophecies. Similarly Hosea pictures Jaweh as the God of love, and because that love was spurned and rejected, Jaweh is forced to punish Israel. To Isaiah, Jaweh is the God of Holiness ("holiness" to him has dropped all physical characteristic's), and the evil ways and injustice of the wicked defile God's presence and hence must be punished.

It must be remembered, however, that the appeals and rebukes of the literary prophets were directed to the nation as a whole and the punishment was to be meted out to the collective group. Individual retribution occupied no place in their point of view, and the righteous judgment knew no distinction between the individual wicked or righteous. When certain classes are denounced, it is done with the idea that these classes are bringing the whole nation to ruin. As to the idea of the "remnant" which some might contend represents a type of individual retribution, Professor Humbart says:

"And let nobody object that the earlier prophets made use of the term "remnant." They did not mean by using that word to satisfy the demands of individual retribution and secure to the righteous the propitious career they deserve. The doctrine of the "remnant" contains an especially strong menace--- It is a figure of speech meant to bring home to the sinner's minds the extent of the divine punishment and national catastrophe." (1)

It can readily be seen why this simple doctrine of retributive justice and its corollary, tribal solidarity, worked so effectively in ancient Israel. The society was simple, the elements were detached, and they drew their subsistence direct from the soil. The classes and the complex, interweaving of relations so characteristic of our modern society, did not exist then. When calamity came, it fell upon those directly concerned, and did not spread its evil to innocent sections. (except those within in the clan itself, where the innocent suffered with the unit). In general, then, it was axiomatic that the righteous should be blessed with external happiness while the wicked

(1) Biblical World-- Sept. 1916. "O.T. and The Problem of Suffering."

should suffer an opposite lot.

As Israelitish history advanced, however, and as Israel came into contact with foreign nations, the conditions of life and the state of society took on a more complex character. The new commercial and agricultural environment no longer made possible the old nomadic standards of justice, and in time the old doctrine of retributive justice began to be questioned. This was especially so when the nation began to feel the iron heel of invading foreign nations and when the people of Jaweh suffered reverses. Still according to the old doctrine of tribal solidarity, such reverses might well be explained by the fact that the nation was suffering for its collective sins. But by this time, a new factor enters the situation, and that is, the rising importance of the individual and his place in the religious life.

It was inevitable that prophetic teachings should gradually evolve the idea of the individual and his relation to God, and thus we find Jeremiah, who in his preachings established the position of the individual as an entity in the religious life. He who experienced such individual communion with God, gave expression to this doctrine as applying to all individuals.

The seeds of individualism thus sown were stimulated in their growth by the course of external events viz; the calamities suffered as a result of the Babylonian invasion and the later sad experiences. A conflict now arose between the two doctrines-- on the one hand, tribal solidarity declaring that children suffer for the sins of the fathers, and the doctrine of individualism as promulgated by Jeremiah. We see the evidences of such a conflict when the author of the book of Lamentations puts into the mouth of the people the words:

"Our fathers have sinned and are not,
And we have borne their iniquities. (Lam. 5:7)

Due to the old doctrine of tribal solidarity, a deep despondency fell upon the people which threatened to immerse them in the depths of gloom and despair.

By this time the exiled nation had begun to take on characteristics of a religious community and the demands grew for a God who could not only save the nation but also the individual. Jeremiah comes to meet this situation and carries out his idea of individualism, by setting forth the doctrine of individual retribution. Thus Jeremiah 31, 29:30;

"In those days they shall say no more,
The fathers have eaten sour grapes
And the children's teeth are set on edge,
But every one shall die for his own unquity.

Every man that eateth sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge." In these words Jeremiah sets forth the doctrine of individual freedom and moral responsibility. Other traces of this feeling are to be found in the story of Abraham and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. (Gen. 18, 23:25):

"Wilt Thou indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked etc."

It remained, however, for Ezekiel to carry out to its logical extremes, the doctrine of individual freedom as laid down by Jeremiah. This, no doubt, he felt necessary in order to make the people realize that they were not forever doomed because of their fathers' sins. In Ezekiel 18, 1:3, the prophet states the new view:

"Behold all souls are mine, as the soul of the father so also the soul of the son is mine---The soul that sinneth it shall die."

In this chapter, he expatiates further on this doctrine, setting forth all its implications to show that under no condition does the father bear the son's sins or vice versa.

"The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him. (Ez. 18:20) In chapters 14:14, he expresses his opposition to any such solution as offered by Genesis 18, by stating that even three righteous men as Noah, Daniel, and Job can deliver their own souls but not those of the wicked.

Ezekiel's theory is a mechanical one. The right consists in the performance of a number of individual acts, and the righteous or wicked man will be punished according to the nature of the act at which he is engaged at the time. (Ez. 33,12:17) This point of view encouraged the people who constantly felt that they were suffering for their fathers sins, by showing them that it was within the power of each one to determine his fate and destiny.

To sum up Ezekiel's teachings, we have:

- (1) God is just and exercises retributive justice in this world, prosperity indicating favor and calamity indicating punishment.
- (2) Instead of this retribution being meted out to a collective group, the individual was the responsible unit. If he acted wickedly, he was punished, and if he did well he was rewarded.

Ezekiel's mechanical theory was destined to bring up many problems. Under the strict collectivistic system, the individual need not have doubted the whole working of retributive justice. Here, however, in Ezekiel's scheme, the individual is the prominent factor. Whereas before under collective retribution both the

individual righteous and wicked suffered, now arose the problem of theodicy--i.e. how to reconcile the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. Even Ezekiel was confronted with this problem, when after the fall of Jerusalem he saw that it was not necessarily the righteous who escaped, and in Ch. 14, 21:23, he attempts a solution by saying that those who escaped serve as object lessons of God's judgment. Thus the problem of individual and moral responsibility combined with an idea of strict retributive justice, coming in clash with contradictory external conditions which did anything but justify the theory, gave rise to the problems of justice with which the late exilic and post-exilic writers dealt.

As it shall be our task in treating this problem as found in Psalms to deal with many of the solutions or rather answers which these writers propounded, we can only offer here a brief outline of some of the characteristic answers in order to make this historical sketch of the idea of retributive justice complete.

One of these answers is to be found in the writings of Deutero-Isaiah. He makes no attempt to condone the punishment which has been inflicted upon Israel, but rather claims that it has been deserved. (ch. 43, 26:28). The affliction, however, has a purging effect and represents a purifying process. The suffering experienced represents the way in which a missionary should go to fulfill his mission. Ch. 52, 14, gives us a picture of the suffering the servant (Israel) has endured, but Israel, punished, disciplined, and finally redeemed will be the means of bringing the world to the acknowledgment of God's sovereignty.

The Messianic hopes held forth to the people by many of the prophets did not reach fruition as soon as they expected, and at each recurring misfortune the same old doubts and questionings arose.

A characteristic instance of this is seen in the writings of the prophet Habakbuk. A conquering army was invading the land, and in its course of plunder and blood (1:15), it did not seem to be carrying out the designed purposes of Jaweh. In ch. 1:13, we find a pious protest against such an unjust trend of affairs.

"Thou that are of eyes too pure to behold evil
And that canst not look on mischief,
Wherefore lookest thou when they deal treacherously,
And holdest thy peace when the wicked swalloweth up,
The man that is more righteous than he."

And the answer is given in chapter 2:20.

"But the Lord is in His holy Temple,
Let all the earth keep silence before Him."

Despite all contradictory appearances, God is just and His providence remains-- it is the answer offered by faith.

While all such explanations offered for the plight of the nation might have seemed rational, the demands for a solution of the individual's problem became pressing. Thus the hope (so often found in Psalms) is held forth, that the prosperity of the wicked man is temporary and even as stubble, burneth for a while only to be reduced to ashes. Malachi 3:19, sets forth this hope to the people.

"For behold a day cometh,
It burneth as a furnace
And all the proud and all that work wickedness
Shall be stubble
And the day that cometh shall set them ablaze,
Saith the Lord of Hosts."

The chastening effect of affliction as applied to the individual viz. that suffering tends to bring out those finer feelings of humility

and religiosity is given as a comforting answer to the sufferer.

Thus the Psalmist sings:

"It is good that I have been afflicted," etc.

"Happy is the man whom the Lord chasteneth," etc.

Finally come those solutions which mark the approach to the sublime solution offered by the book of Job. These mark the growing tendency to take physical evil out of the realm and causal relation of moral evil. Here we see a deeper analysis into those values which go to make up true life and prosperity.

In the 37th Psalm; where the prosperity of the wicked is questioned, the Psalmist comforts himself with the thought that he has the blessedness of God's favour.

37:4 "Delight Thyself in the Lord

And He shall give thee the petition of thy heart."

But this is not altogether satisfying to the Psalmist and in other verses he expresses the desire that ultimately visible, retributive justice will be seen, when the righteous man shall be rewarded and the wicked man shall meet with disaster.

In Psalm 73, we have an epitome of the book of Job. In these two sublime writings we are introduced to what is known as "disinterested piety." Here the writers tell us that external prosperity can have no relation to moral worth. Why the righteous man should suffer, they hold to be a metaphysical problem through which the human mind can not penetrate. But after all, what really matters is true communion and fellowship with God, and these the authors feel that they possess. In pious and exultant faith, the Psalmist sings:

"Whom have I in heaven but Thee?

And besides Thee I desire none upon earth. (73:25)

The last solution which lies outside of the sphere of this writing, is that offered by the later doctrines of eschatology and immorality with their various phases and aspects. Here the scene of retribution is transferred from this earth to another world to come, wherein present injustices will be corrected and where the righteous and wicked will receive their true deserts.

Chapter 2.

The God conception of the Psalmist and its
Relation to the Problem of Retributive Justice.

In our historical sketch of the idea of justice, we saw what a prominent part the God conception played in determining the attitude which the people held towards this doctrine. A study of the book of Psalms will reveal the truth of the statement (1) that the majority of the Psalms concern themselves with this problem of justice. The faith expressed therein, that retributive justice will ultimately be meted out, the faith that sees in the triumph of the wicked a temporary interruption in the flow of God's Providence is based on the idea of God which the Psalmist's held. The purpose, then, of this chapter is to discuss this God conception and its relation to the problem of retributive justice.

First of all, Jaweh to the Psalmist is the sole creator of the world and the sole possessor thereof. Thus Ps. 89:12:

"Thine are the heavens, yea, Thine is the earth,
 The world and its fullness, Thou didst found them
 North and South, Thou didst create them."

Similarly 24, 1:2:

"The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof,
 The world and those that dwell therein,
 For He (Note the emphatic "He" implying "He" and no other)
 founded it upon the seas,

.....

(1) D. Newmark "Philosophy of the Bible"-----pp. 230.

And established it upon the floods." (cf. 115:15; 124:8; 134:3, 146:6)

As an appropriate corollary to the idea of God as the sole creator, we find the Psalmist giving expression to the absolute Monotheistic character of God. Thus Ps. 86, 10 (cf. 18:32; 97:9)

"For Thou art great and doest wondrous things,
Thou art God alone."

As to the effect that this conception of the deity might have on the problem of our discussion, Montgomery in his lecture on Judaism ("Religions, Past and Present" pp.95) states:

"This Monism affected as well the moral sphere of the conflict of good and evil, what was elsewhere attributed to demons and ghosts and fates higher than the gods was logically assigned to one divine power. The physical evil of the world was assigned to Him and always in explanation of it, man's sin being given. Similarly Davidson in his "Theology of the Old Testament" remarks that this powerful Theism which saw God as the all in all, conceived of all events and all the changes of the earth and in life but the effects of an unseen Power operating within all things.

How effective this theistic doctrine was, may be seen from the Psalmist's view of nature. Natural law as an independent power and force was not known, but the physical and natural were but the media through which God worked and the arena in which His power was manifested.

Ps. 18:8 Then the earth did shake and quake,
The foundations of the earth did tremble,
They were shaken because He was wroth.

In Ps. 107, 33/34, we see Jaweh as the Sovereign Master of Nature who controls and adjusts natural forces as the moral conditions of man require:

"He turneth rivers into a wilderness.

And the water springs into dry ground,

A fruitful land into barrenness

For the wickedness of them that dwell therein."

In this and other passages God as the creator of the world, is looked upon as the dispenser of all natural blessings. (Vide Ps. 85:13; 104, 27-30; 147, 14-18)

Physical evil on good according to this view of God could never be ascribed to blind fate or fortuitous chance, but all must be traced back to a supreme Force which is guiding the destinies of peoples and nature. How this affected the Psalmist's idea of retributive justice may be seen from the fact, that all blessings and curses were ascribed to God who sent forth good and evil with a distinct purpose and design.

Jaweh, however, is not only depicted as the independent Power governing the cosmos, but as a Force with an ethical character which will tolerate no evil and whose moral order requires the punishment of all wickedness. Thus Ps. 115 declares that "the wicked and him that loveth violence, His soul hateth" and in 117 "The Lord is righteous and loveth righteousness."

Ps. 5, 5:6: "For Thou art not a God taking delight in wickedness,

Evil^{on} can not be Thy guest,
 Boasters can not take their stand before Thy eyes,
 Thou dost hate all workers of iniquity, Speakers of a lie.
 Jaweh abhoreth men of blood and deceit."

These expressions vocalizing the Psalmist's view of God as an ethical power in whose presence evil can not endure, gave rise to and stimulated their constant faith during times when evil was triumphant, that ultimately justice and righteousness would be seen. They are convinced of the moral order which God as the founder and guardian thereof, will vindicate by the processes of retributive justice. In Ps. 75, 3:4, we read that though all may dissolve into chaos and confusion, the moral order of God stands.

"I judge uprightly
 Tho' the earth and all its inhabitants are dissolved,
 I (emphatic) have set up the pillars of it."

The conception of Jaweh which proved to be a prominent factor in the Psalmist's view of retributive justice was his picture of Jaweh as the righteous Judge. Thus in Ps. 7:12, we see Jaweh as the righteous Judge whose judicial wrath is aroused by evil, and who is well able to distinguish between the righteous and the wicked.

"God is a righteous judge,

Yea, a God that hath indignation every day." (cf. 75:8)

Not only does Jaweh exercise His judicial activities in Israel, but performs His duties as judge over all the earth and all nations. The Psalmist's who depict in so many instances, their nation assaulted unjustly by foreign peoples, take hope in the thought that they ,

too, fall under Jaweh's rule of justice and in due time, they will meet with His righteous judgment.

Ps. 11:4: "Jaweh is in His holy Temple,

Jaweh whose throne is in heaven,

His eyes behold the world,

His eyelids try the sons of mankind."

96:10: "Say among the nations that Jaweh reigneth,

The world is established that it can not be moved,

He will judge the peoples with equity."

In Ps. 49, 243, it is stated that the problem of justice is of a universal character and the call goes forth to all peoples to hearken to the enigma about to be propounded. (cf. 67,5: 82:1; 94:2)

God can be relied upon to render a just judgment for in His omniscience, He can take into account all the facts of the case, Ps. 94:1 states that God not only knows the deeds of mankind, but also their inward thoughts, and 138:6, "He knoweth the haughty from afar" implying that no distance can hide them from His eyes, thus causing them to escape judgment. Similarly Ps. 139, 1-6, expresses in an emphatic way, "Thou knowest", nothing being hid from God's omniscient scrutiny. The emphatic "Thou" means to portray that it is God alone who possesses this absolute knowledge.

Not only is God the omniscient judge but He is also the omnipresent. Ps. 139, 7-12, states that there is no place where one might go to escape the control and authority of God. And when human strength fails, God the omnipotent, is called upon to bring about the desired justice, (142:7). Moreover, God's eternal rule is a guarantee that the moral order will be vindicated and that the evil and wicked will yet meet their doom. (92:9, 102:13, 9:8)

Finally, Jaweh is given the primitive conception of the "avenger" who exercises vengeance to vindicate the righteousness and integrity of His servants. Ps. 9:13:

"For He that avengeth blood hath remembered them,

He hath not forgotten the cry of the humble."

(cf. 18:48, 94:1 where it is stated that vengeance is the prerogative of God which He exercises in judging the people and in dealing out retributive justice). (1)

While God is constantly seen by the Psalmist's as the God of strict justice who punishes all evil, yet the punishment is not the stern, arbitrary one of an angry deity. He is the "Lord who is good to all and whose tender mercies are over all His works (145:9). He is constantly appealed to as a "Rock of refuge and a High Tower". (9:10; 18:3; 48:4; 59:10; 17, 18; 62:3, 7; 144:2; 46:8, 12;) The intense communion between the individual and his God, characterizes the majority of the Psalms, whether the Psalmist's speaks for himself or his people. It finds its best expression in Psalm 139. How this intense individualistic feeling reflected itself in the idea of retributive justice will be seen later, where it will be shown that the individual expected to be rewarded or punished according to his individual merits or demerits and not as a member of a group.

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(1) cf. phrase 'גָּדַל 'הָאֱלֹהִים (41). Here גָּדַל is used in the sense of vindication i.e. God who vindicates the Psalmist's cause against his adversaries and establishes his righteousness. For גָּדַל used in similar sense vide 5:9; 9:5; 31:2; 35:24, 28; 119:40; et. Isaiah 41:10.

Complementing this God conception, we find the Norm or standard of righteousness to be^{of} the same ethical character. Dr. M. Battenweiser (Prophets of Israel pp. 315) in comparing the Hebrew Psalms with the Babylonian Penitential Psalms remarks that while in the latter, "it is some ritualistic offense, that burdens the sinner, in the former, it is the consciousness of human imperfection and moral instability." The standard of righteousness upon which retribution was based, represents to a very great degree, prophetic ideals and teachings. In the ethical program laid down in Ps. 24, not only is external conformity to laws required but internal innocence and purity. In Ps. 50:8;15, it is not sacrifice or ritual^{that is emphasized} but rather pious disposition (V. 14), and when the Psalmist continues by cataloging the crimes of the wicked, it will be noticed that these are similar in tone and thought to those which provoked the rebukes of the prophets. (cf. Ps. 15, 51:8, 101).

To summarize the God conception as held by the Psalmist's, we have:

(a) God, as the sole creator of the world, the supreme Power who controls all natural forces and who uses these as media for His workings.

(b) God, as the ethical ideal who will tolerate no evil and whose wrath is aroused by wickedness.

(c) God as the righteous judge not only in Israel, but over all nations; the judge who meteth out justice according to moral merit or demerit; whose omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence enables Him to render the just judgment.

(d) God, as the avenger of all wrongs in vindication of the integrity of His righteous servants.

(e) God, with whom the individual enjoys personal communion and whose Providence extends also to the individual as such. (As to the special relation of God to Israel and its bearing upon our problem, this will be taken up in a subsequent chapter.)

(f) The norm or standard of righteousness like the God conception is based on ethical standards and principles.

Chapter 3.

The Thesis of Retribution Stated.

The idea of God as held by the Psalmists engendered a faith in the moral constitution of the world, a conviction that by visible signs God shows His favor of righteous conduct and disfavor of wickedness. This faith is constantly vocalized by contrasting the respective fate of the good and wicked man. Thus in Psalm 1:6, "God takes care of the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked leadeth to ruin". Similarly 145:20: "The Lord preserveth all that love Him, but all the wicked will He destroy." (cf. 75:7)

A direct causal relation is seen between external happiness and moral merit. In so far as one is righteous, he is rewarded, and in the exact proportion of one's wickedness, punishment is meted out.

Ps. 18:21 declares:

"Jaweh rewarded me according to my righteousness,

According to the cleanness of my hands hath He recompensed me.
(cf. Job. 22:30) (Ps. 18:25; 62:13)

Ps. 28:4: O give them according to their deeds,

And according to the badness of their doings

Give them after the works of their hands

Render to them their desert."

Not only does the Psalmist's appeal contain the desire that his enemies who persecute him unjustly be rewarded according to their deeds, but he also prays that they may meet their doom in the same manner and by the same devices which they had planned against him. Thus in Ps. 5:11, he prays that they may fall by their own counsels and the net which they laid for him may be the means of their own ruin (35:8)--cf. 137:8;9. This desire for exact and proportionate retribution may be well compared with the later Rabbinic

doctrine of Measure for Measure. (כרת כנגד כרת) which declared, for instance, that because the Egyptians wanted to destroy Israel by water (Ex. 1:22) they were themselves destroyed by the waters of the Red Sea. (Vide Shechter--"Studies in Judaism--"Doctrine of Divine Retribution" p. 215)

That the rewards of retribution were expected to be visible and of a tangible, material character resulted from the Psalmist's view of life. The scene of retribution was placed in this world, "Whatever principles are involved in the relation of God to man exhibited themselves completely here." (Davidson, Theology of O.T.). The problem of reward and punishment was not to be shifted to a future world. If salvation was to come, it must manifest itself here and now.

The idea of Sheol which is frequently mentioned in these writings offers no suggestion to any form of future retribution. It is the same view as held by other Biblical writers viz;

"A place where the small and great are alike." (Job. 3:19)

And as Ecclesiastes states it:

"The dead know not anything,

Neither have they any more reward. (Ecc. 9:5)

In death, then, there is to be no distinction between the good and evil. The Psalmist's express themselves in similar terms. In Sheol fellowship with God ceases. e.g. Ps. 6:6:

"For in death there is no remembrance of Thee,

Who confesses Thee in Sheol."

88:5,6: " I am become as a man that hath no help

Cast off apart among the dead.

Like the slain that lie in the grave

Whom Thou rememberest no more--"

And they who are cut off from Thy Hand.

2 | Ps. 39:14: States the view that death is almost a non-existence in which no moral element enters. (cf. Ps. 30:10; 88:12; 115:17)

It is urged by some scholars that in such Psalms as 16, 17, 49, 73, the reward of the righteous is expressed as consisting of an unending fellowship with God after death. It is not within the sphere of this writing to present the arguments pro and con. A perusal of the different views advanced will show what a mooted question this is. But if these few Psalms do express a type of after-death retribution matters little in our discussion, for they must be counted as the exceptions. The general spirit of the Psalms reflects the view that all retribution is expected in this life and no other.

This world-view of the Psalmists is evidenced in a positive way by two tendencies: (1) The tendency to call upon God, often in an intemperate way, that He may interpose immediately and speedily bring about the desired justice. (2) The desire, mentioned before, to have the rewards of retribution partake of a tangible, material character. We shall discuss these two points in their order.

It was the hope of the Psalmists to see the vindication of the righteous and the condemnation of the wicked take place immediately and without delay. Thus in Ps. 89:48, the argument advanced for the speedy restoration of God's favor is the shortness and uncertainty of life. The idea^{is} that if retribution is to come let it come now, for after death none is to be expected, is expressed clearly in 119:84:

"How many are the days of Thy servant,
When wilt Thou execute judgment for me."

The implication is that life's days are few at the most, and therefore speedy help is greatly desired. (cf. 79:10)

The same doctrine of this-world retribution is the compelling force in such exclamations as these:

"Awake, why sleepest Thou, O Lord,

Arouse Thyself, cast not off forever. (44:24,25)

"Be pleased, O Lord, to deliver me

O Lord, make haste to help me. (40:14) (cf. 35:23; 83:2)

All these exclamations, some of which might be called intemperate, are prompted by the feeling to see justice executed promptly and visibly, for in the Psalmist's view of things there was no future state in which evil and good were to receive their final condemnation or approval.

The second point mentioned above, was the desire of the Psalmist's to experience the rewards of merit or demerit in some tangible, material form. This does not mean to imply that they adhered to a strict, legal quid pro quo system in which the inner feelings of spirituality played no part. The intense spirit of communion and faith which pervades these writings would hardly allow us to make any such statement, Eduard Caird "Evolution of Religion" p.48. seems to state the psychology of this attitude when he says:

"The idea that happiness will follow goodness and that punishment will follow sin is not to be repudiated as if it were merely the vindication of a slavish spirit that needs to be bribed to virtue and that will not make any sacrifice without asking: "What shall we have then?" It is in the simplest and most naive form, the consciousness that "right is might", that the law of the world corresponds to the highest law

of our being." A discussion, however, of the motif of retribution will be taken up later. It is now our task to point out the characteristic passages depicting the types of tangible rewards.

First of all, life itself is looked upon as a precious gift, and longevity is considered a sign of God's favor. This can only be secured by living the life of godliness.

Ps. 91:15,16: He shall call upon me and I will answer him

With him I will be in trouble,

With length of days will I satisfy him,

And show him my salvation. (cf. Deut. 30:20, Prov.3:2,16)

Ps. 34:12 "Who is the man that desireth life

And loveth days that he may see good therein,

Keep thy tongue from evil

And thy lips from speaking guile

Depart from evil and do good

Seek peace and pursue it."

Not only is long life the reward of the righteous, but this life is to be filled with an unbroken prosperity. Ps. 112:2,3 states:

"The generation of the righteous shall be blessed,

Wealth and riches shall be his house

And his merit endureth forever."

As has been stated before, God controls all natural blessings and supplies them in an abundant measure to His righteous servants. (cf. 65:10; 85:13; 144:12,15). Psalm 128 gives us a picture of domestic happiness which is the lot of him "that feareth the Lord."

It will be remembered that it was the contention of Job's friends that material prosperity is a symptom of righteousness, and

that experience has shown that calamity has never overtaken the innocent. (Job. 4:7,11) Eliphaz's statement is paralleled in Ps. 37:25,26, where the author states unequivocally that material prosperity always accompanies the righteous.

Even as Job's friends (Job 33:19,26) saw in his physical suffering the sign of God's disapproval of some sin which Job had committed, so in the Psalmist's view all physical suffering and sickness finds its source and origin in transgression. Thus Ps. 6:1,4 states that suffering is a direct divine visitation. Ps. 31:11:

"For my life is spent in sorrow

And my years in sighing

My strength faileth because of my iniquity

And my bones are wasted away."

The passages which state this point of view are numerous and we shall content ourselves here by pointing out characteristic statements.

These are 25:17,18; 32:3,4; 38:1,6; 102:11; 107:17. (1)

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(cf) Statement in "Sünde und Erlösung nach Biblischer und Babylonischer Anschauung" von D. Dr. Johs Hehn: pp 12.

"Die Busse besteht für den Babylonier wesentlich aus Jammern und Klagen, ihre Motive sind die Leiden, die eine Folge der Sünde sind. Die Sünde ist Störung der rechten Ordnung, ebenso ist die Krankheit Störung des Normalen Zustandes." R 54, 1,13-28 (Zimmern, B.P. S 88) findet sich eine ergreifende Klage, die der Büsser oder der Priester in dessen Namen erhebt, wobei die Unzertrennlichkeit von Sünde und Krankheit, wie so oft, klar hervortritt:

"Krankheit, Siechtum, Ungemach (?) Drangsal, haben sich auf

A summary of the thesis of retribution which we have discussed shows us:

- (a) A statement of retributive justice expressed by contrasting the respective fate of righteous and wicked.
- (b) The scene of retribution as being this world.
- (c) Two tendencies evidencing such a view:

(1) The desire to have God execute judgment immediately and visibly.

(2) The desire to have rewards expressed in tangible, material forms e.g. long life, wealth and riches, domestic happiness, natural blessings. Physical suffering is interpreted as being a divine punishment, and the converse of the doctrine of retribution is implied viz; that material prosperity is a symptom of righteousness and godly living.

.....
ihn gelegt, schwach geworden ist sein Seufzen.

Umschliessung, Ungemach, Shraecken, Druck (?) haben ihn niedergebeugt, haben ausgetrocknet seine Tränen,
ja gesündigt hat er, leidvoll weint er jetzt von dir
Sein Gemüt ist umnachtet, er brennt (?) (zittert?) vor dir "etc."

Chapter 4.

Persons Subject to Retribution.

The subject matter of this chapter must deal with the ideas found in Psalms, as to who was the recipient of the reward or punishment given forth by God. Is it, the individual, or is it the old doctrine of solidarity that is propounded?

It might be well before discussing these points to state this fact viz; that all retribution was conceived as falling on persons because all sin was identified with them. There was not the abstract sense of sin which might lead one to pray that sin might be banished. Sin to the Psalmist was concrete and became so because it was identified with the sinner and the two were not thought of separately. (1) Hence in the imprecatory Psalms we need not be surprised to find the imprecation delivered against persons rather than against their crimes. Thus it is the plea of the author in Ps. 104:35:

"Let sinners be exterminated from the earth

And let not the wicked be any more."

Ps. 139:19: "Verily, Thou wilt slay the wicked, O God,

Depart from we, therefore, bloody men."

The idea of individual retribution finds strong expression in the Psalms. Written at a time (according to the critical view) when the people had become imbued with the individualism of the later prophets, and expressing as they do an intense individual communion between the worshipper and God, the Psalms reflect a similar attitude towards the doctrine of retribution.

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(1) Vide W.O.E. Oesterly "Life, Death and Immortality" p.83.

(Cont. on next page)

This attitude shows itself in many instances. We constantly see the conflict being waged between the pious and impious within Israel. This conflict shows us that it is the individual that is being judged according to his merits and not Israel as a whole. In Ps. 1:5, the conviction is expressed that the wicked Israelite will be separated from the pious. Ps. 10 reflects the same thought, when the Psalmist prays that the wicked within Israel who deny God's power may receive their due punishment. In Ps. 7:9, the plea is found:

"Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness,

And according to my integrity that is in me."

The implication is that God should vindicate his integrity by discriminating between him and the wicked. (cf. 55:24, 43:1).

The religious program outlined in Ps. 24:3;6 is one for the individual, and his reward for fulfilling it, is expected to come to him as such.

Ps. 26:9:

"Gather not my soul with sinners

Nor my life with men of blood,"

contains a similar plea that God's punishment may discriminate between the individual wicked and pious.

.....

"There is no differentiation between sin and sinners. Sin does not exist apart from its exhibition in the sinner; there is no principle of evil; what constitutes Sin are sinful acts, individual acts of rebellion against God and against those who love Him etc."

The view (contested in the book of Job) that the wicked and righteous are carefully discriminated in plagues and other evil is found in Ps. 91:8.

The prayer (Ps. 79:8) "Remember not against us the iniquity of our fore-fathers" is a protest against the idea of the sins of the fathers being visited upon the children. Strong evidence of this individualistic feeling is to be noted in those Psalms (e.g. Ps. 37, 49, 73) where the writers are filled with questioning when they see the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper. There would be no occasion for these doubts to arise if the view of ~~collective~~ retribution prevailed. But here the underlying feeling is that the righteous individual should receive reward for his merit, whilst the individual wicked should receive his due punishment.

While the prevailing idea in the Psalms is that of individual retribution, yet we find in a few instances, remnants of the older thought reflecting the idea of solidarity. In Ps. 106:6 we read:

"We have sinned with our fathers,
We have done iniquitously,
We have dealt wickedly."

Regarding this passage, the Cambridge Bible on Psalms (pp. 626) quotes Maclaren as saying:

"This remarkable expression is not to be weakened to mean merely that the present generation has sinned like their ancestors, but gives expression to the propound sense of national solidarity which speaks in many other places of Scripture etc."

Another instance which appears to oppose the idea of individual retribution is found in Ps. 109:9,10:

"Let his children be fatherless

And his wife a widow."

Here the man's family is regarded as a part of himself and the punishment is not complete unless they share in his ruin.

The historical Psalms e.g. Ps. 78:2 ff; 81, 95: contain expressions of national responsibility. In these Psalms which portray the past history of ^{Israel,} the entire nation is represented as suffering (Israel) because of national sins.

A summary of this chapter gives us:

- (a) Sin and Sinners are identified with each other, hence all retribution is directed against persons.
- (b) Expressions showing doctrine of individual retribution and protest against forms of collecture retribution.
- (c) Remnants of older thought expressing ideas of solidarity.

Chapter 5.

Israel and Jaweh.

The Psalmist's outlook on the whole problem of retribution was colored by his view of the special relations which he felt existed between Jaweh and the pious amongst the people of Israel. Despite the fact that the Psalms in ever so many instances depict a universalistic Weltanschauung, along side of this we find the pronounced conscious feeling that Israel is Jaweh's people, and that the causes of both are inseparably bound up with each other.

That Israel is the special inheritance of Jaweh is the thesis emphasized in such a passages as Ps. 33:12:

"Happy the nation whose God is Jaweh

The people He has chosen for His inheritance."

Ps. 28:9: Save Thy people and bless Thine inheritance

And tend them, and carry them forever.

(cf. 68:10; 74:2; 94:5,14; 106:5,40)

If Israel is the special inheritance of God, then, He in turn, is represented as its shepherd who "leadest Joseph like a flock" (Ps. 80:2)-- Yea, Israel is the beloved of Jaweh notwithstanding the disasters He has brought upon them. (60:7) He is their help and shield in time of trouble. In Ps. 20:2:

"May the Lord answer thee in the day of distress,

May the name of the God of Jacob protect thee,

the reference is made to the name of the national and ancestral God, as it was considered a pledge and security of the national existence.

(Vide Briggs, Int. Comm. on "Psalms" on this verse.") The faith is constantly expressed e.g. in Ps. 46:1-8, that in all crises and perils even though the earth shake and the mountains totter, Jaweh will never entirely forsake His people.

These passages cited are sufficient to show us the close and intimate relations which the Psalmists' felt existed between Jaweh and Israel. This feeling reveals itself in the great desire for retribution expressed so vehemently in the so-called Imprecatory Psalms. The theme emphasized here is not that Israel has sinned against God and is, therefore, being punished by having foreign nations and impious Israelitish elements harass it, but rather that these ungodly individuals are waging a war against Jaweh by persecuting His servants, the pious ones of Israel. Thus in Ps. 21:9:

"Thy hand will find all Thy enemies,

Thy right hand will reach all that hate Thee,

and in Ps. 83:3-4:

For lo, Thine enemies make a tumult

And they that hate Thee lift up the head

Against Thy people they take crafty counsel

And they conspire together against Thy treasured ones,"

the Psalmist does not hesitate to stamp the enemies of Israel as the foes of Jaweh. Ps. 79:12-13, tells us that the enemy in persecuting Israel has really reproached God, and it is on the claim that Israel is Jaweh's people and that their cause is identical that the plea for retributive justice is made. Thus:

"Render to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom

Their reproach where with they have reproached Thee, O Lord."

So we Thy people and the flock of Thy pasture will give thanks into Thee,

Will tell Thy praise to all generations." (1)

It is God's cause in which His people are engaged, and it behooves God to arise and plead it e.g. Ps. 74:22:

"Arise, O Lord, plead Thine own cause

Remember how the impudent reproach Thee daily."

It is not my task nor intention to offer any apologies for the vindicative spirit that finds expression in the Psalms of Imprecation. It is at this point in our discussion, however, that we must state the motive which prompted the Psalmist's to give utterance to such bitter imprecations. The Cambridge Bible in commenting upon the hatred expressed in Ps. 139:22, quotes Stanley (Lect. on Jewish Church p.216 (Lect. 11) as saying: it to be "the duty of keeping alive in the human breast the sense of burning indignation against moral evil." This hatred to the Psalmist could only express itself in a tangible form, hence the desire to see the cancers of society cut out so that the moral order need not suffer. The imprecation expressed is not merely a desire for personal revenge, but rather express^d the feeling that God's honor is at stake, and that retribution on Israel's enemies is the

(1) Vide Mechilta, Weis 1865 p.39 (quoted in Guttmacher-Optimism and Pessimism in Old and New Testament)

"He who rises up against Israel rises up against God, and hence the cause of Israel is the cause of God, their ally is His too."

means whereby it might be vindicated. In Ps. 79:9, the Psalmist pleads:

"Help us, O God of our Salvation, for the glory of Thy Name".

He feels that if God is not moved by His people's sufferings, He, at least, ought to take steps to vindicate the glory and honour of His name which is at stake, in the prevailing conflict.

It is the common taunt of the impious to ask "Where is Thy God" (42:4, 79:10), implying that the national God of Israel is unable to save them from their enemies. (1) It is not to be wondered then, that when these foes are defeated and put to shame, the Psalmist sees therein a triumph for God and a vindication of the moral order. It is this point of view which prompts him to say:

Ps. 40:16,17. "Let them be desolate by reason of their shame, those who say to me "aha, aha!"

Let such as love Thy salvation say continually,

"The Lord be magnified."

Retribution dealt out to the wicked only tends to confirm the conviction that there is "A God that judgeth in the earth" (58:11) and lets all know "that God ruleth in Jacob, unto the ends of the earth" (59:14)

.....

(1) cf. Ps. 115:142:

"Not to us Jaweh, not to us,

But to Thine own name give glory

For Thy love and Thy truth's sake,

Wherefore should the nation's say:

"Where now is their God."

(cf. Ps. 92:15,16: " They (the righteous) shall still bring forth fruit in old age,

They shall be fat and flourishing,

To show that the Lord is upright

My rock in whom there is no unrighteousness." (1))

The treatment which Jaweh meted out to Israel would determine what standing and influence Jaweh would have amongst the nations. If Israel, Jaweh's people, suffered, then it could hardly be expected that the heathen nations should recognize His potency. The blessings, on the other hand, which Jaweh would bestow upon His people would lead the nations to recognize His power and influence. Thus Ps.98:2:

"Jaweh hath made known His salvation

In the sight of the nations hath He revealed His righteousness-

He hath remembered His love and truth to the House of Israel-

All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God."

Ps. 67:3 gives us a direct statement as to what motive should prompt God to be gracious unto Israel:

"God be gracious and bless us,

May He cause His face to shine toward us,

That Thy way may be known in the earth

Thy salvation among all nations."

...../.....

(1) The conflict which raged between Israel and foreign nations was paralleled by the struggle between the righteous and the ungodly within Israel itself--a struggle in which it was likewise held that God's honour was at stake.

Ps. 102:15,18: states that Gods favor to Zion will be a means of His securing universal homage and recognition.

Our discussion in this chapter has shown us :

- (a) that the Psalmists' view of retribution was influenced by the feeling that God and Israel have special relations ~~toward~~ each other;
- (b) This intimate relation made Israel's cause and Jaweh's cause identical. When one suffered, the other was likewise affected.
- (c) The retribution of the wicked is not merely a personal triumph for Israel, but a vindication of God's honour and the moral order.
- (d) It behooves God to interpose by punishing the evil doers and favoring His pious servants in Israel, since this is to be the means of bringing about a universal recognition of His power and majesty.

Chapter 6.

Questionings of the Workings of Retributive Justice.

The "reign of righteousness" to which the Psalmist looked forward was not to be the result of a long ethical development in human society, to which each age was to add its contribution. This was rather to be accomplished by an interposition or series of interpositions by God as a result of which all malefactors would suddenly be destroyed and the Kingdom of God be established. Thus when the evidence of this interposition seemed lacking or unnecessarily protracted, questionings arose as to the workings of retributive justice. These questionings may be divided into three classes:

- (1) The Psalmist presents a justification of his conduct, showing his sufferings to be unjustified on the basis that he has sinned--and he therefore makes an urgent plea that retribution be dealt out to the proper parties.
- (2) The Psalmist in pious faith, expostulates with God as to why His help is not forthcoming since he can find no reason why it should be withheld.
- (3) The claims of the impious that God does not mete out retributive justice.

The first tendency mentioned above is significant because of its similarity to that found in the Book of Job. It refuses to accept the thesis of Job's friends, that suffering is symptomatic of some sin committed. Like Job, it rebels against this view and presents

a plea of self-justification, demonstrating that the conduct in question has not been such as to warrant the suffering which is being inflicted. The Psalms in which this tendency shows itself, mark an advance over that found in such Psalms as Ps.6, where the sufferer attributes his pains to some sin, although he can^{not} point out any specific one. Blindly he accepts the current theory of retribution, that all suffering has necessarily as its antecedent some wrong doing. In Ps. 17:3,5, however, the Psalmist does not hesitate to declare that God Himself has searched his heart and has found him innocent, thus giving him the assurance that his suffering is not a result of guilt.

"Thou hast proved my heart,

Thou hast visited me by night

Thou hast tested me and thou findest no evil purpose in me.

(read *לֹא אָמַר בִּי רָעָה*)

My mouth transgresseth not

As to deeds of man (I intend) according to word of Thy lips-

I on my part have kept from the ways of the violent--."

In Ps. 7:4,6, he protests that his conduct towards his fellowman has not warranted their cruel treatment. It is with confidence that he can say:

"If there be iniquity in my hands,

If I have rewarded evil unto him that was at peace with me--

(Nay, I used to rescue them that were my adversaries to no purpose.)

Let the enemy pursue my soul and overtake it

Let him tread to the earth my life

And lay my honour in the dust----Selah."

That love has been met with hatred, is the Psalmist's contention in Ps. 109:3,5:

The Psalmist even goes one step further. He not only declares that the people's suffering can not be accounted for on the current theory of retribution, but claims that it is because of their devotion and loyalty to God that he and his companions are being persecuted. Thus Ps. 44:21,23:

"Have we forgotten the name of our God,
Or spread forth our palms to a foreign god?
Will not God search this out?
For He knoweth the secret of the heart.
Yea, for Thy sake we were killed all the day
We were counted as sheep for the slaughter."

The same thought is found in Ps. 69:8:

"Becase for Thy sake I have borne reproach,
Confusion hath covered my face." (cf. 119:109,110)

The second tendency (mentioned above) is the pious questioning, the inability to understand why it is that God does not step in and deal out just retribution to the wicked. This feeling is given vent to in these exclamations eg:

"Why standest Thou afar off, O Lord?
Why hidest Thou in times of trouble (Ps.10:1)
How long, O Lord, wilt Thou forget me forever?
How long wilt Thou hide Thy face from me? (Ps. 13:2,3)

At other times, the Psalmist feels that if some punishment has been deserving, the discipline has already exceeded its measure and God's

anger should cease:

"O Lord, God of Hosts,

How long wilt Thou be angry against the prayer of Thy people?

Thou feedest them with the bread of tears,

And givest them tears to drink in great measure. (80:5,6)

How long, O Lord, wilt Thou be angry forever,

How long will Thy jealousy burn like fire? (Ps. 79:5)

The expostulation in Ps. 89:31,46, in which the author claims that punishment has been dealt out not in accordance with God's promise of mercy, was considered so bold that Iben-Ezra of Toledo (d.1167) relates that there was a certain wise and pious man in Spain who would neither read nor listen to this Psalm.

The faith of the pious was further tested and tried by the common taunts of the foreign nations and the impious Israelitish elements who claimed that they could persist in their rebelliousness without fearing that God would requite them according to their deeds. The plaint is, "How numerous are those who say to me, "There is no salvation for him in God." (Ps.3:3)

The statement made by the wicked in Ps. 10:4,6:

"There is no God" (cf. Jer. 5:12) is not a profession of atheism, but rather the belief that God will not interpose to make the necessary adjustments. He whose mouth is "full of cursing, deceit and oppression," finds himself able to say, "I shall not be moved, I who to all generations shall not be in adversity." (10:7) It is the boast of these men that God does not even see them as they proceed in their

evil practices (64:6), and they can therefore taunt the godly:

"Let him commit himself unto Jaweh,

Let Him rescue him

Let Him deliver him seeing He delighteth in him." (Ps. 22:8,9 cf.123:4)

What all these statements amount to is a denial of the fact that God deals out retributive justice. These are answered by the Psalmists despite their questionings, with the statement that the brutish man does not understand God's workings, and although he may flourish for a time, yet his ultimate fate will be destruction. (92:7,8)

Our discussion in this chapter has shown us (1) the Psalmist's view that God by direct interposition will establish the reign of righteousness; (2) the seeming delay of this interposition results in certain questionings as to the workings of retributive justice; (3) In many instances the Psalmist refuses to accept the view that his suffering is a result of guilt, and justifies his conduct, even going so far as to state that his loyalty to God has engendered his persecutions. (4) Pious questionings and expostulations with God due to the Psalmist's inability to understand his sufferings which seem to come to him unmerited. (5) The denial of the wicked that God metes out retributive justice.

Questionings of Retributive Justice Answered.

In the preceding chapter, we had occasion to note that the Psalmist often questioned the current theory of retribution because of the fact that he considered himself righteous and hence need not have been punished, and secondly, he often noted that those whom misfortune should have overtaken were counted amongst the prosperous and the fortunate. It shall be the purpose of this chapter to go into a detailed analysis of those Psalms in which this problem forms the principle theme. There are Ps. 37, 39, 49, and 73.

To supply a background for the understanding of these Psalms, we shall devote some space in considering other Psalms whose themes by contrast, throw light on our present problem. In Psalms 6, 32, 38 we have the so-called Penitential Psalms. The authors describe their sufferings, but what is of interest to us, is to note the interpretation given to these. In each case the Psalmist's interpret their afflictions as direct divine visitations provoked by some sin or transgression. What is especially to be noted is the fact that these Psalms reflect no consciousness of any specific violation, but seem to fall back on the orthodox position that all suffering as an effect implies sin as a cause. In such a situation, the only course which suggested itself was that which the "friends" advised Job to take viz; to make a general confession showing a contrite heart, by which God's favor might be regained. Thus in Ps. 32:3,4, after the writer has told us of his sufferings, he immediately follows this by a confession of sin:

Ps. 32:3, 5:

"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old

Through my roaring all the day long.

For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me.

I was changed into misery as when thorns smite me.)

(LXX read v. 46.

(נהפך נפשי למר כחרבני קין)

I acknowledged my sin unto Thee,

And mine iniquity have I not hid

I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord

And Thou forgavest the guilt of my sin. Selah."

It must seem that the Psalmist knows of no specific sin, but his sufferings lead him to believe that they are a direct result of transgression, and hence he does not hesitate to make a general confession.

Regarding Ps. 38, Cheyney in his commentary on Psalms, makes a similar observation. "We can hardly say that a deep sense of sin is expressed in it. The speaker does indeed admit himself to be guilty (7&8) but he only infers his guilt from the magnitude of his affliction. He can only sigh and groan but he cannot truly confess his sins, and before uttering his last almost despairing cry, he refers quite simply and naturally to his good deeds."

These Psalms, then, show us the orthodox theory of retribution i.e. all suffering implies previous sin, and prosperity is symptomatic of a righteous character. We shall now see how this view is modified and even rejected in Psalms 37, 39, 49, 73.

Psalm 37 in reality makes little change or advancement upon the current theory of retribution. In verses 1 & 2, the Psalmist depicts the general tendency of the pious to question when they see the prosperity of the wicked. (cf. Proverbs 3:31; 23:17; 24:1; 24:19). In verse 2, he states his theme which he is to develop throughout the Psalm viz; that the prosperity of the wicked is short-lived and ultimately just

retribution will overtake them.

"For they will wither as quickly as the grass and will decay as the herbs." (cf. 92:7)

The practical answer and solace which he gives to the questionings of the pious takes the form of a message of resignation and faith, to wait hopefully for surely the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked punished. This note is struck forcefully in verses 7-11:

"Resign yourself to the Lord and wait for Him

Do not fret over him who prospers in his pursuits, that is, one who practices intrigues.

Leave off anger and forsake wrath,

Do not fret, it can but have evil effect.

For evil doers shall be cut off.

But those that wait on Jaweh will inherit the land.

Shortly the wicked will be no more.

If you search for his place he is not there,

But the meek will inherit the land

And enjoy an abundance of peace." (cf. Bildad's statement Job 8:18)

That material prosperity is a sign of righteousness and that experience shows this to be true, is the contention of verses 25:26:

"I was young, I have grown old,

Yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken

Nor his seed begging bread."

We see, therefore, that the orthodox position is not at all changed by Ps. 37. It agrees with the views urged by Job's Friends. The only justification for placing this Psalm in any relation with Ps. 49, 73, is that it first shows the tendency of the times to call into question the

current theory of retribution and the necessity of reenforcing it by a message of faith and resignation, and secondly, that it differs from such Psalms as 32 & 38, in that self-righteousness is insisted upon, making the Psalmist refuse to take the position that his present sufferings are a result of sin. We shall find this same feeling in Ps. 49 & 73. The authors here do not even begin to consider that their conduct has caused their suffering, but grapple with the problem from an altogether different angle.

In Ps. 39, the opening verses again show us the problem which troubles the Psalmist. When he sees the prosperity of the wicked he feels inclined to protest, but to do this he regards as indulging in sinful and blasphemous speech. (cf. Job 1:22; 2:10) It is plainly evident that the Psalmist entertains in his mind a subconscious feeling that he is righteous, especially when he compares himself to the prosperous wicked. Yet unlike Job, he dare not proclaim his innocence and declare that on the basis of his conduct, his sufferings are unjustifiable. He rather falls back on the traditional view that his affliction is due to transgression. Thus 39:10,-12:

"I am dumb, I open not my mouth,
Because Thou hast done it
Remove Thy stroke from off me
I am consumed by the blow of Thine hand-
When Thou with rebukes dost correct a man for iniquity,
Thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth."

While Ps. 39 maintains the orthodox position in this regard, it evidences a deviating tendency which is beginning to develop viz; to place

a depreciatory value upon material possessions, hence the wicked need not feel so secure in the possession of them. Thus Ps. 39: 6, 7:

"Thou hast made my days but as a span

My life time is as nothing before Thee,

All men stand on a parity with breath

Man walks but as an apparition

Only for vanity do they turmoil

He heaps up and knows not who will gather it." (cf. Job 27:16)

With this view as regards the value of material goods, the Psalmist does not pray that his may be a material prosperity such as Ps. 37 might deem was appropriate for the righteous man. As has been pointed out previously, the author in Ps. 39, looks upon his sufferings as a disciplinary measure (cf. Job 5:17, Prov. 3:11, 12) and he, therefore, states that his only hope is in God who can deliver him from his transgression. (8-9). He is willing to concede the necessity of punishment for disciplines sake, but in his case, he feels that it has gone too far for "loving correction" as it has almost approached destruction and annihilation. (verse 11). Destruction would mean that he become a reproach for the base (verse 9 cf. Ps. 22:9,14), those who would interpret his sufferings as God's impotency to help His servants. He, therefore prays in verse 13 & 14, that he be relieved from his sufferings and thus secure the satisfaction of knowing that he is once more in God's favor, and that he and his God stand vindicated in the eyes of the wicked.

Our discussion, then, of this Psalm reflects two trends of thought, first, the old orthodox tendency to interpret ~~ones~~ sufferings in a causal relation to sin, and second, the advanced thought of the ephemeral character of wordly goods.

This last mentioned tendency marks a step in the advancement of thought which has its culmination in the book of Job and Psalm 73. In these Psalms we shall see the thought emphasized that spiritual bliss per se is the summum bonum which can not be affected by any material considerations.

What Ps. 39 suggests in a verse, Ps. 49 develops as its principle theme. The text of this Psalm as it has come down to us, is in several cases hopelessly corrupt, and while certain verses seem to suggest various interpretations, yet none of these are fully developed or substantiated by the context. The one theme, however, which is developed and which stands out prominently in our present text, is the thought that wealth is not as some think it to be "the master-force of the world", but in reality, it is nothing. The wealth of the wicked need not be feared by the righteous as it is ineffective in any real crises. It can not redeem its possessor from death. Life itself partakes of this same ephemeral character, for death is the destined goal of all; "the fool and the wise together perish." In all likelihood, verse 13 & 21:

"Man abideth not in honour,

He is like the beasts that perish,"

served as a refrain to the Psalm. In this respect it would resemble Job 14 and would reflect the idea of death as an evil. This, however, can not be stated with certainty.

The one certain theme viz; the ephemeral and transitory character of material possessions is stated in verse 5-13; 17 & 18.
Verses 5-12:

"Why should I fear in days of misfortune

When the iniquity of my over-reachers surrounds me-

Who put their trust in their wealth
 And boast of the extent of their riches
 But no one can by any means redeem himself

(Read לֹא for אֵין , לְעַד for לְעוֹלָם)

None make payment to God for himself

(verse 10 to be connected with verse 8)

That he should live on perpetually

(And) should not see the pit.

Verse 9:

The ransom of his soul (read נַפְשׁוֹ) is (too) dear

And there is forever an end of him.

Verse 11:

For he seeth that wise men die-

(Briggs and Wellhausen regard כִּי יָרָא as a gloss)

The fool and the dolt alike perish

And leave their riches to others

Graves are their houses forever. (read בְּקִרְיָם)

Their dwelling place for all times.

Even should they have called whole countries their own (according to Wellhausen)

Man does not continue in lordiness

He is like the beasts that are slaughtered. (read)

Verse 17 & 18:

Fear not when one groweth rich

When the splendor of his house increases

For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away

And naught of his splendor shall follow him (thither).

Attempts have been made to so interpret and amend the corrupt text of certain verses as to offer an ultimate solution to the enigma raised by the Psalmist. While we may state here the different suggestions offered, it is to be understood that these can not rest on any positive proofs. The corrupt text of verse 15 and the verses omitted which (it is evident) must have followed verse 15, make it impossible to offer any definite statement. Thus Cheyney and Baethgen would interpret ~~the~~ in verse 16, as the "community of the pious," interpreting the Psalmist to say, that whilst the individual pious dies like the wicked, the pious community enjoys an immortal life. This interpretation encounters a difficulty because of the fact that the whole spirit of the Psalm seems to represent the individual point of view. If personal immortality is expressed in this verse as some claim, it is surely not developed in the text as we now have it. Kirkpatrick in Cambridge Bible opposes such an interpretation stating:

"The truth is that the antithesis in the Psalmist's mind is not between life here and life hereafter but between life with and life without God, and for the moment, in the consciousness of fellowship with God, death fades from his view."

Dr. Battenweiser holds that while some of these interpretations may be correct, yet our present text offers no positive proof to any particular one, and hence we must content ourselves with the one certain theme which the Psalm offers and that is, its view of wealth and material possessions.

This view is important in the consideration of the idea of retribution. The theme emphasized in Ps. 49, marks a stepping-stone as it were, to the thought of Ps. 73, which is an epitome of the book of Job.

Ps. 49 tells us that in the real economy of the world, material possessions are ineffective, and hence clears the ground for the positive message offered in Ps. 73 which informs us that the only reality is the consciousness of fellowship and communion with God.

This thought completely departs from the traditional theory of retributive justice and as it was such a complete departure, it brought forth those severe remonstrances from Job's friends. They would have it that material condition is an index of character, and Job in no uncertain tones, denies this. He states that the question of the distribution of material rewards is beyond man's ken and as far as he is concerned, unsolvable. That, however, matters not to him. The Psalmist feels himself righteous and at one with God, and that is sufficient. He possesses the only true reality and hence all other external conditions need not be considered.

Ps. 73 maintains the same point of view defended by Job. The author begins by stating how he too was troubled when he saw the wicked, prosperous and sound in body. In their wickedness, they scoff and mock, denying even that God has knowledge of their doings (2:13). The Psalmist was tempted to believe that his righteousness and innocence were all in vain. While the impious enjoyed health and wealth, plagues and chastisements were daily occurrences to him. (verse 13)

It is in the sanctuary of God that he sees a new light, and he realizes how foolish his former thoughts were. He now sees that those who by their conduct stand in no relation with God, are, despite their prosperity, in slippery places and ultimately must come to ruin.

But he, the righteous, is constantly in fellowship with God who will guide him correctly and in honour. (1) The Psalmist in verse 25, then rises to that sublime height of spirituality where he can look upon physical strength and material wealth, and where he sees that the only reality is his communion and fellowship with God.

"Whom have I in heaven but Thee (add גאון) ?

And there is none upon earth that I desire besides Thee
My heart and my flesh faileth

But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

.....
(1) verse 24 "Thou shalt guide me with counsel,
And afterward receive me to glory."

This verse has often been interpreted as a reference to future life after death. Against such a view, Kirkpatrick in Cambridge Bible offers the following considerations:

"If the Psalmist possessed this definite hope, we might have expected that he would lay more stress upon it as affording a solution of his perplexities. Such a hope, moreover, would rise far above the general level of the Old Testament view of a future life, at any rate till the latest period. And no parallel can be quoted for the absolute use of "glory" in the sense of 'heavenly or "eternal glory"! Elsewhere in the Psalter גאון is used in the sense of honour. cf. 62:7; 84:12; 112:9; 149:5; and in Job and Proverbs it bears the same sense. It may be noted that the Lxx followed of course by the Vulg. sees no reference here to a future life but renders:

'In Thy counsel didst Thou guide me

And with glory wilt Thou receive me.'

If this view is correct the Psalmist's faith is even grander than if

No matter in what ways people may be deluded by their apparent prosperity, the Psalmist knows that only those who stand in relation with God rest on sure ground, whilst those who go far from him, must perish (verse 27 & 28). Communion with God is the all in all, and those who stand outside of this relation stand outside of the bounds of real life.

This chapter, then, has taken us from the traditional view of retribution upheld by the author of Ps. 37 to the rejection of that view in Ps. 73--the former maintaining that external happiness and rewards represent effective criteria by which character may be judged, whilst the latter holds that inward bliss rather than external conditions constitutes the only reality. Ps 39 and 49 with their depreciation of material values mark, as it were, midway points between these two opposite views.

.....

he looked forward to glorification in a future life. He rises victorious over the world of sense and appearance in the inward certainty of the reality of his communion with God, and the absolute conviction that this is the highest good and the truest happiness of which man is capable."

CONCLUSION.

Our study of the doctrine of retributive justice in the book of Psalms has shown us:

- (1) That this doctrine was based on the Psalmists' idea of God as an ethical Being who metes out rewards for obedience to moral laws and punishments for their violation.
- (2) Retribution takes the form of material blessings and curses to be experienced in this world.
- (3) Retribution is meted out for the most part, according to individual merit and not collectively.
- (4) Jehovah as God and Israel as His people, are vindicated by means of retributive justice.
- (5) The facts of life often contradict the theory of retribution and questionings arise as to why the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer.

These are answered thus:

- (a) The prosperity of the wicked is temporary and retributive justice will be meted out at some future time. The temporary suffering of the righteous is a disciplinary measure.
- (b) The material prosperity of the wicked which provokes the questionings, is ephemeral in character and ineffective in life's crises.
- (c) The only reality and good are communion and fellowship with God.