

Psalm 44

To the chief Musician for the sons of Korah, Maschil.

A psalm of national lament, this psalm expresses the sorrows of a godly people who are undergoing suffering. It is naturally divided into four parts. First, God's care for Israel in the past is described (verses 1-8). The acquisition of the land of Canaan is especially emphasized because God's mighty acts on behalf of His people were never more evident than at that time. Second, their present condition contrasts gravely with their glorious past (verses 9-16). It appears that God has cast them away and repudiated them, leaving them humiliated in the face of the enemy. Third, they sense no just deserts for the current defeats (verses 17-22). Why God has apparently forsaken them is a mystery to them. Finally, they offer their earnest petition that "God would intervene (verses 23-26). Their interest is more than in saving their own skins; they plead that God would do it for the sake of His mercy.

Verses 1-26: Psalm 44 is a national lament following some great but historically unidentifiable defeat in battle. Throughout this psalm there are subtle shifts between speakers of the first person plural (i.e., "We" and "us"; compare verses 1-3, 5, 7-8, 9-14, 17:22), and the first person singular (i.e., "I" or "my"; compare verses 4, 6, 15-16). This may indicate that the psalm was originally sung antiphonally with alterations coming from both the beaten king-general and his defeated nation. The prayers of verses 23-26 may have been offered in unison as a climax. By employing 3 historical centers in Psalm 44, the psalmist tries to understand and deal with a national tragedy.

- I. Focus on Past History: The Shock of This National Tragedy (44:1-8).
- II. Focus on Current History: The Inscrutability of This National Tragedy (44:9-22).
- III. Focus on Future History; A Prayer for an End to This National Tragedy (44:23-26).

"Title": The words of this title are the same as those (in the title of Psalm 42); however, in the Hebrew text their order is slightly different.

Psalm 44:1 "We have heard with our ears, O God, our fathers have told us, [what] work thou didst in their days, in the times of old."

"We have heard": There was rich tradition about God's great acts which the nation's fathers had passed on. Indeed, the rehearsal of holy history was commanded (compare Exodus 10:1-2; 12:26; 13:14; Deut. 6:20; Joshua 4:6; Psalm 78:3).

The church being in distress calls to mind the past favors of God to his people, in order to encourage her faith and hope. And this expression, delivered in such a form, shows the clearness, evidence, and certainty of what was heard. And which was heard not only as a tradition from father to son; but being recorded in the writings of Moses and the prophets. And these things read both in private and in public, were heard with the ear.

"Our fathers have told us what works thou didst in their days, in the times of old": Such as the signs and wonders in Egypt, the slaying of the firstborn there, and the bringing of the people of

Israel from thence with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. Which fathers were used to tell in the ears of their sons, and sons' sons. And of which there were memorials continued in future ages. Which led children to ask their parents the meaning of them. When they informed them of the wondrous works of Providence done in former times, and by which means they were handed down from age to age (see Exodus 10:2).

We see that the mighty works of God had been handed down from generation to generation. The fathers told the sons to preserve the works of God. The Hebrew had books earlier than most people as well. The first 5 books of the Bible were written by Moses, so it is of very early origin. The feasts were to remind them of the greatness of God from generation to generation. We know that by hearing the Word of God, many people are saved. Hearing about the miracles then, is very important to believing.

1 Corinthians 1:21 "For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe."

Psalm 44:2 "[How] thou didst drive out the heathen with thy hand, and plantedst them; [how] thou didst afflict the people, and cast them out."

Of power; that is, the Canaanites. As the Targum; the seven nations which inhabited the land of Canaan before the children of Israel came into it (Deut. 7:1).

"And plantedst them": Not the Canaanites elsewhere. But, as the same Targum explains it the house of Israel in their land. Which, like a vine, was removed from one place, and planted in another. And the settlement of the children of Israel in the land of Canaan is frequently expressed by this metaphor (Exodus 15:17, Jer. 2:21).

"How thou didst afflict the people": The Egyptians, according to Arama; rather the Canaanitish nations by wars and desolating judgments.

"And cast them out": That is, the same nations out of their land. Though some render this clause, "and didst send them out"; the captive Israelites, as Arama; or "didst propagate them". Meaning the people of Israel; who being like a vine planted, sent out its boughs and branches, and became very flourishing and fruitful (see Psalm 80:9).

On the imagery of God's planting His people, compare (2 Sam. 7:10; Isa. 5:1; Jer. 12:2); also compare their being planted and taking root in (Psalm 80:8-11).

This is relating some of the things that had been passed down from generation to generation. We know that God not only brought the Israelites out of Egypt with the mighty hand of God, but this same mighty hand drowned the Egyptians at the Red sea. This mighty hand had defeated their enemies in Canaan, when they moved into the Promised Land. God had sent the family of Israel into Egypt, and they came out a mighty nation. When the Ark of the Covenant was with them, the enemy was no match for them. The only time they felt defeat, was when God did not send them to the battle.

Psalm 44:3 "For they got not the land in possession by their own sword, neither did their own arm save them: but thy right hand, and thine arm, and the light of thy countenance, because thou hadst a favor unto them."

“They got not ... but thy right hand”: This is a brief historical summary of the theology of divine grace, intervention, and enablement (compare Joshua 24:17-18).

The right hand spoken of here, is the mighty power of God. Jesus is the Right Hand of God. He is the doer part of the Godhead. Jesus is also the Light. This is just saying that these Israelites were successful, because God was leading them. It was not because they were mighty fighters that they won, but because God went before them.

Psalm 44:4 "Thou art my King, O God: command deliverances for Jacob."

“Command deliverances for Jacob”: If the division of the Hebrew consonants is taken at a different point (as it is in some early versions), this line would better fit into the immediate context, reading: “You are my King, my God, who commands (or, orders), victories for Jacob”. “Jacob”, the original name of the ancient patriarch, is often used to designate the nation of Israel, especially in poetry.

The penman here, is just saying that it is right to proclaim God as his King. Jacob of course, is the same as Israel. He was called Jacob when spoken of as the leader of his family. When he became the leader of the nation, he was called Israel.

Verses 5-8: Through thee ... For I will not trust in my bow ... thou hast saved us”: The defeated king-general picks up the theology (of verse 3), and adds his personal commitment to it.

Psalm 44:5 "Through thee will we push down our enemies: through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us."

The Chaldee paraphrase renders it, "through the Word". The essential Word of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the church's King and God, and has wrought out complete deliverance and salvation for his people. And he is the horn of salvation, by which, though weak in themselves, they push down their enemies, which are many and mighty, and they are more than conquerors over them. The metaphor is taken from creatures pushing with their horns those that oppose them, and in defense of themselves. And there seems to be an allusion to (Deut. 33:17).

"Through thy name will we tread them under that rise up against us": In the name of the Lord the saints set up their banners, and in his name they come forth and fight with their spiritual enemies. Those that rise up against them, as sin, Satan, and wicked men. And in the name, and through the power of the Lord, they tread them down as mire in the streets. And before long Satan will be wholly bruised under them. And the antichristian party shall be trodden down by them, and be as ashes under the soles of their feet (see Rom. 16:20).

The Israelites became known as a people whose God fought for them. The enemies they encountered were not afraid of the children of Israel, but they were afraid of Israel's God. It became so evident that God was fighting for the Israelites, that their enemies ceased to even resist them.

Psalm 44:6 "For I will not trust in my bow, neither shall my sword save me."

In any carnal weapon, in any creature help and assistance, or in an arm of flesh, but in the word of the Lord, and in his name (see Psalm 20:7).

"Neither shall my sword save me": That is, I will not ascribe salvation to it. The church's weapons are not carnal, but spiritual. Not the sword of the civil magistrate, but the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Christ's kingdom, being not of this world, is not supported and defended by worldly means, or carnal weapons.

The enemy of the Israelite has just as powerful a bow and sword as Israel has. Their trust must be in the Lord, who brought them out with a mighty hand.

Psalm 44:7 "But thou hast saved us from our enemies, and hast put them to shame that hated us."

Spiritual ones, and not we ourselves. And therefore, will not trust in ourselves, nor in anything of ours, but in the Lord, and give him the glory of salvation.

"And hast put them to shame that hated us": The men of the world, the seed of the serpent, and the serpent himself. When his works were destroyed, and his principalities and powers spoiled by Christ upon the cross. Hence the following boasting of the Lord, and glorying in him.

The countries that the Israelites came through coming to the Promised Land, hated these Israelites. They feared their God more than they hated them however.

Psalm 44:8 In God we boast all the day long, and praise thy name for ever. Selah.

Or, as the Targum, "in the word of the Lord". In Christ, who is God over all, and who of God is made to his church and people wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. So that there is always the matter of glorying and boasting in him. We boast of God as our God, who saves us, and puts to shame our enemies (see verse 7).

"And praise thy name for ever and ever": In this world, as long as life continues. And in the other world to all eternity. Both for the works of providence and of grace. For deliverances commanded, and for salvation from all enemies wrought out.

Notice that their boasting is not in their own ability, but in the power of God. Selah here, means, pause and think on this. There is a pause here, and a new train of thought begins in the next verse.

Psalm 44:9 "But thou hast cast off, and put us to shame; and goest not forth with our armies.

But now thy countenance and course is quite changed to us.

And put us to shame": Made us ashamed of our boasting, and trust in thee, which we have oft professed to the face of our enemies.

Goest not forth with our armies": To lead them, and fight for them, as this phrase signifies (Judges 4:14; 1 Sam. 8:20). He seems to allude to God's marching with and before the Israelites in the wilderness, and afterwards, as occasion was offered (compare Psalm 68:7). The Lord God is viewed here as having resigned His commission as the nation's Divine warrior.

Psalm 44:10 Thou makest us to turn back from the enemy: and they which hate us spoil for themselves."

In the times of Eli, according to Arama. But may be understood of some of the visible members of the church, and professors of religion. Not being valiant for the truth, and deserting the cause of God and Christ, by reason of tribulation and persecution arising because of the word.

"And they which hate us spoil for themselves": By seizing on the goods and substance of those they persecuted. Enriching themselves by confiscating their estates and possessions to their own use. Or by spoiling others of them, they deceived with their corrupt doctrines and soul destroying principles, whereby they became slaves to the antichristian party. This may respect the same wars as before.

It seems that in their recent encounters with the enemy, God had not been with them. What they are forgetting is that God went with them into battle, when He sent them, not when they took it upon themselves to fight someone.

Verses 11-16: "Thou hast given ... thou sellest": These are graphic descriptions of God superintending the defeat and utter humiliation of the nation.

Psalm 44:11 "Thou hast given us like sheep [appointed] for meat; and hast scattered us among the heathen."

To be butchered, and then eaten as sheep are. And therefore, are called "the flock of slaughter" (Zech. 11:4), as the church was. Not only under the ten persecutions of Rome Pagan, but through the butcheries and massacres of Rome Papal. Who have worried many of Christ's sheep, have eaten their flesh and drank their blood, and have become drunken with it. It has been their meat and drink to persecute the saints of the Most High.

"And hast scattered us among the Heathen": The Pagan world, as the first Christians were, who were scattered up and down in the Gentile world everywhere (see 1 Peter 1:1). Or the Papacy,

who are sometimes called Gentiles (Rev. 11:2); because much of the Gentile idolatry is introduced into the Popish religion. And among these many of the true members of Christ and of his church have been carried captive and scattered. And such will be found there a little before the destruction of Babylon, and will be called out from thence (see Rev. 13:10).

God had warned them what would happen, if they went after false Gods. God is not with them when they are not in His will. This is in punishment for their disobedience to God.

Psalm 44:12 "Thou sellest thy people for nought, and dost not increase [thy wealth] by their price."

So God, when he is said to deliver up his people into the hands of their enemies, is said to sell them to them (see Judges 2:14). And selling them for nought suggests, that in their apprehensions he had no esteem of them and value for them. Just as men, when they have any person or thing to dispose of they have no regard unto. But choose to be rid of, will part with it for nothing: and as it follows.

"And dost not increase thy wealth by their price": Get nothing by the bargain. This must be understood after the manner of men, and in the opinion of the church, and not as in reality. No, otherwise than as it has been true, that God has suffered some of his people to be in the bondage and slavery of mystical Babylon, called Egypt. One part of whose wares and merchandises are slaves and souls of men (Rev. 11:8).

Psalm 44:13 "Thou makest us a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and a derision to them that are round about us."

Which is the common lot of Christians. Christ and his apostles have given reason for the saints in all ages to expect it, and have fortified their minds to bear it patiently. Yea, to esteem it an honor, and greater riches than the treasures of the antichristian Egypt;

"A scorn and a derision to them that are round about us": Being always represented as mean and despicable, and reckoned ignorant and accursed. And as the faith of the world, and those rejected of all things.

Psalm 44:14 "Thou makest us a byword among the heathen, a shaking of the head among the people."

Among the Papists, as the Jews were among the Gentiles (Deut. 28:37). Calling them schismatics, heretics, fanatics, and what not?

"A shaking of the head among the people": By way of indignation, scorn, and contempt (see Psalm 22:7).

All of this is happening to them, but it is not God's fault that it is happening. They were unfaithful to God's will, this is why all of this is happening. They brought it upon themselves.

Psalm 44:15 "My confusion [is] continually before me, and the shame of my face hath covered me,"

Meaning that which is the occasion of it.

"And the shame of my face hath covered me": Not by reason of sin, which is often the cause of confusion and shame in God's people (see Jer. 3:25); but on account of what follows.

Psalm 44:16 "For the voice of him that reproacheth and blasphemeth; by reason of the enemy and avenger."

That is, antichrist, to whom a mouth speaking blasphemies has been given. And which he has opened in blasphemy against God, attributing that to himself which belongs to God. Blaspheming his name, his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven (see Rev. 13:5).

"By reason of the enemy and avenger": Which are very proper characters of antichrist, who is the enemy of Christ and of his people. And breathes out vengeance against them; as the same titles are also given to the Scribes and Pharisees. The implacable enemies of Christ (Psalm 8:2).

The penman acts as if he does not understand why this is happening. Help is just a prayer away. Every time Israel repented of their disobedience, God forgave them and gave them another chance. They need to repent, and ask for God's help.

Verses 17-21: "Yet we have not forgotten thee ... if we have forgotten the name of our God": The nation's recent defeat was painfully perplexing in view of their basic loyalty to God.

Psalm 44:17 "All this is come upon us; yet have we not forgotten thee, neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant."

All the evils before mentioned, and certainly we have deserved them all.

"Yet have we not forgotten thee": Although we cannot excuse ourselves from many other sins, for which thou hast justly punished us. Yet, through thy grace, we have kept ourselves from apostasy and idolatry, notwithstanding all examples and provocations.

"Neither have we dealt falsely in thy covenant": We have not been unfaithful to thy covenant. To the covenant which thou didst make with our fathers. To the commandments which thou hast given us. This can only mean that there was no such prevailing departure from the principles of that covenant as could account for this. The psalmist could not connect the existing state of things. The awful and unique discomfitures and calamities which had come upon the nation. With anything special in the character of the people, or in the religious condition of the nation. Remembering God and keeping the "covenant" are closely related; those who think of God's deeds want to obey Him (2 Peter 1:4; 1 John 3:6).

Psalm 44:18 "Our heart is not turned back, neither have our steps declined from thy way;"

To its original hardness, blindness, and bondage, to its former sin and folly. To cherish, gratify, and fulfil its lusts and desires. Not from God, from love to him, faith in him, and desires after him. Nor from his worship and service. Their trials had no such influence upon them as to cause them to apostatize from God, neither in heart, nor in action.

"Neither have our steps declined from thy way": From the way of his commandments, from the paths of holiness, truth, and faith. Being directed and guided therein by the counsel of the Lord, and kept and preserved by his power.

Psalm 44:19 "Though thou hast sore broken us in the place of dragons, and covered us with the shadow of death."

Where men, comparable to dragons or their poison and cruelty, dwell. Particularly in Rome, and the Roman jurisdiction, both Pagan and Papal. The seat of Satan the great red dragon, and of his wretched brood and offspring, the beast. To whom he has given his power. Here the saints and followers of Christ have been sorely afflicted and persecuted, and yet have held fast the name of Christ, and not denied his faith (see Rev. 2:13). The wilderness is the habitation of dragons. And this is the name of the place where the church is said to be in the times of the Papacy. And where she is fed and preserved for a time, and times, and half a time (Rev. 12:6).

"And covered us with the shadow of death": As the former phrase denotes the cruelty of the enemies of Christ's church and people. This their dismal afflictions and forlorn state and condition (see Psalm 23:4; Isa. 9:2). And may have some respect to the darkness of Popery, when it was at the height, and the church of Christ was covered with it. There being very little appearances and breakings forth of Gospel light anywhere. According to Arama, the "place of dragons" denotes the captivity of Egypt, which is the great dragon. And the "shadow of death", he says, was a name of Egypt in ancient times, as say the Jewish Rabbis' (and observes that Psalm 44:25 explains this; see Gen. 3:14).

This is great to say, and it may be true in David's heart, but God had not sent them into this battle. Sometimes, even though we are His children, we have problems. One thing that could have been wrong was not checking with God before they got themselves in this embarrassing situation. Sometimes God allows something like this to happen to teach us a lesson. Whatever the reason, they are humiliated by the results in front of their enemy.

Psalm 44:20 "If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god;"

As antichrist, and the antichristian party did in those times (Dan. 11:36).

"Or stretched out our hands to a strange god": As not to any of the Heathen deities under the Pagan persecutions. So not to any images of gold, silver, brass, and wood, under the Papal tyranny. Not to the Virgin Mary, nor to angels and saints departed. Nor to the breaded god (one that is made of a wafer-cake), in the mass, never heard of before (see Dan. 11:38).

Psalm 44:21 "Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart."

Undoubtedly he would, was it so, and expose it, and punish for it. As he will those of Balaam and children of Jezebel (Rev. 2:18). This seems to be an appeal to God for the truth of all that the church had said concerning her steadfastness and integrity under the most trying exercises.

"For he knoweth the secrets of the heart": Whether the heart is turned back, or there is any inclination to apostatize from God, or his name is forgotten in it. As well as whether in fact the hand has been stretched out, or prayer made to a strange god (Jer. 17:9).

David is inviting God to come and examine them and see that they have not set up a false God. Then he is saying, God would know it if we had done such a thing, because He knows everything.

Psalm 44:22 "Yea, for thy sake are we killed all the day long; we are counted as sheep for the slaughter."

Yea, for thy sake": They had no specific answers; only this inescapable conclusion that, by God's sovereign will, they were allowed to be destroyed by their enemies. Compare Paul's quote of this verse (in Rom. 8:36), and its general principle (in Matt. 5:10-12; 1 Peter 3:13-17; 4:12-16).

David is saying, that the troubles that have come upon him are because he is following God. This sounds so much like Stephen, who died because he believed in Jesus. There may come such a time, even now. It is very unpopular to be a Christian. Thank goodness, he still realizes he is a sheep. He is still on God's side even though he may be killed for his belief.

Psalm 44:23 "Awake, why sleepest thou, O Lord? arise, cast [us] not off for ever."

"Awake ... arise" (compare Psalm 35:23). God does not actually sleep. This is only in appearance to man's perception.

Not a literal effort to awaken God, this plea instead emphasizes the Israelites' need for His immediate attention to their plight (Psalms 121:3-4; Isa. 40:28).

It seems to David that God is not aware of what is happening. We do not always understand why God does not immediately come to our rescue. God has not cast him off, and he will never cast us off either.

Psalm 44:24 "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, [and] forgettest our affliction and our oppression?"

Wherefore hidest thou thy face?": Does not regard our miseries, nor afford us any pity or help?

"And forgettest our affliction": Acts as if thou did forget, or overlook it, when we have not forgotten thee? Does this become thy faithfulness and goodness?

God's timing and our timing are not the same. I am sure the Israelites wondered if and when God would ever deliver them from Egypt. He did deliver them, but it was after 400 years. God does not hide from us or forget our affliction. We just get impatient sometimes for it to happen now. Sometimes I want to call out, Lord, when will you ever come back for your people. If He wanted me to know, He would have told me. Some things are none of our business.

Psalm 44:25 "For our soul is bowed down to the dust: our belly cleaveth unto the earth."

Which may signify great condition of moral deterioration in spiritual things, much dejection of mind, and little exercise of grace (Psalm 119:25). Or a very low estate in temporals; subjection to their enemies. They, setting their feet upon their necks, and obliging them to lick the dust of them. And even it may signify nearness to death itself (see Joshua 10:24).

"Our belly cleaveth to the earth": As persons that lie prostrate, being conquered and suppliants.

This means that he is lying face down before the Lord. He is in total subjection to the Lord. He is crying out with everything in him to the Lord.

Psalm 44:26 "Arise for our help, and redeem us for thy mercies' sake."

"Arise": Or, "arise our help". God is the help of his people, and he is a present help in time of trouble. And he is the only one; and he can help and does, when none else can (compare Num. 10:35; Psalms 3:7; 7:6).

"And redeem us for thy mercies' sake": Not for the sake of her integrity and faithfulness. Nor for her sufferings for Christ's sake; but for his grace and mercy's sake. Which is the source and spring of redemption or deliverance, both temporal and spiritual. And to that the saints ascribe it, and not to any merit of theirs, or works of righteousness done by them.

The psalm therefore comes full circle from the history of God's gracious redemption (verse 1-3), to the hope for the same in the near future (verse 26).

Notice that the Psalmist is not asking in his own right. He asks for the Lord's mercy. This is almost a plea to God for His help. Why He does not always answer, I do not know. Probably He does answer, but not in our time schedule.

Psalm 44 Questions

1. In verse 1, of this lesson, we see that the miracles of God had been handed down from generation to generation, how?
2. How do we know that there were records of the Hebrews that were very early?
3. How had He driven out the heathen?

4. Name at least 3 things that this mighty hand did.
5. Who is the Right Hand of God?
6. When was the only time they felt defeat in battle?
7. Who is the Light?
8. These Israelites were successful, because of what?
9. Who is the same as Israel?
10. When is he called Israel?
11. When is he called Jacob?
12. Their enemies were not afraid of Israel, but were afraid of whom?
13. What 2 weapons were mentioned that would not save them?
14. What had they forgotten that was necessary to have God with them in battle?
15. Whose fault is it that they are suffering so much anguish, and becoming a reproach to their neighbors?
16. Help is just a _____ away.
17. Why would God know if they had worshipped another god?
18. What martyr does verse 22 bring immediately to mind?
19. Verse 22 says, we are counted as what for slaughter?
20. In verse 23, what is the Psalmist asking God to do?
21. How long were the Israelites in Egypt before God rescued them?
22. In verse 25 he says his soul is bowed down to the dust, what does it mean?
23. What is the psalmist asking for, in verse 26?