

- <sup>2</sup> \* V. 4b reads in RSV, 'mocked and derided by those round about us'.  
<sup>3</sup> See BH.  
<sup>4</sup> \* RSV has 'brought very low' instead of 'very weak'.  
<sup>5</sup> \* RSV has 'the nations' instead of 'the Gentiles'.  
<sup>6</sup> \* RSV opens v. 13 with 'then' instead of 'but' and reads in v. 13b 'we will recount thy praise' instead of 'we will speak of thy glory'.

This passionate lament about the desecration of the Temple and the terrible disaster that had befallen Jerusalem and the Yahweh community was, in late Judaism, used as a prayer, together with Psalm 137; this was done on the anniversaries of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians (587 BC) and by the Romans (AD 70). In default of concrete allusions it is as little possible as in the kindred psalms, 44 and 74, to ascertain for certain whether the psalm was composed on the occasion of the calamity of the year 587 BC or on the occasion of a catastrophe unknown to us that occurred in the time after Ezra or during the religious persecution under the Seleucids (I Macc. 1.30 ff.; 3.45; II Macc. 8.2 ff.); at any rate, the psalm seems to have served as a prayer of the persecuted cult community in the times of the Maccabees (cf. I Macc. 7.17). In its structure and style the psalm follows entirely the style of the community lament as this was moulded by tradition. This accounts not only for the parallels already mentioned, but also for the fact that various passages are reminiscent of Lam. 5, Psalm 89, and the Book of Jeremiah (e.g. vv. 6 f. = Jer. 10.25).

*The lament* (vv. 1-4)

[1-4] The lament describes the disaster: the enemy has invaded the country; the Temple is defiled; Jerusalem is laid in ruins; a horrible massacre has been perpetrated amongst the cult community; the ghastly spectacle of corpses lying around unburied meets the eye everywhere; and to this is added the unbearable taunt of neighbours gloating over the misfortunes of the people, and further the distress and anxiety of those who languish in prison and are doomed to die unless help is forthcoming speedily (v. 11). Only he who in a similar affliction has experienced the breakdown of the last safeguards of a secure existence will be able to understand the psalm and so be able to draw comfort from it.

*The supplication* (vv. 5-12)

[5-12] It is certainly not a small thing that at the very moment when the waves of disaster pitilessly engulf the cult community the way

to God is still open to them at all and that they desperately cling to him who alone can still support them in such circumstances; that they can come to him just as they are and confess to him their impatient anxiety, their bitter indignation and their helpless powerlessness, trusting that he will understand them and will have mercy upon them and help them. They do not conceal from themselves that they have to do penance for their own iniquities and for those of their fathers and are lost without the forgiveness of their sins (vv. 8 f.); but they are troubled by the question why God in that case did not first punish also the Gentiles, who offer no prayers to him, before the people of God fell a victim to their atrocious cruelty (vv. 6 f.). Out of such pressing affliction, which brooks no delay, the cult community bids God, as even a Jeremiah has done in the extreme anguish of his mind, to avenge them and grant restitution. For it is, after all, his sanctuary that has been defiled, and his people that have been destroyed; it is, after all, his glory that is mocked by the Gentiles. And it is indeed this thought which is ultimately at stake also in the eager prayer that God's glory be restored and his righteousness made clearly manifest over against all doubts (v. 10). Then those who have been saved will be able to lift up their eyes to God, the Good Shepherd of his people, trusting him and praising him with an eternal song of praise that will never end (see Intr. 54 f.), and able to take new comfort from his glory.

### 80. LET THY FACE SHINE

*To the Conductor. According to 'Lilies'.<sup>1</sup> A testimony. To Asaph.<sup>2</sup>*  
*A Psalm*

- 1 Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel,  
 thou who hast led Joseph like a flock!  
 Thou who art enthroned upon the cherubim, appear!<sup>13</sup>
- 2 Before Ephraim and Benjamin and Manasseh  
 stir up thy might and come to save us!<sup>13</sup>
- 3 Restore us, O God;  
 let thy face shine, that we may be saved!
- 4 O Lord ' '4 Sabaath, how long wilt thou  
 be angry with thy people's prayers? *check this*
- 5 Thou hast fed them with the bread of tears,  
 and given them tears to drink in full measure.<sup>5</sup>
- 6 Thou didst make us a strife to our neighbours,  
 and our enemies mock at us.<sup>6</sup>
- 7 Restore us, O God Sabaath;  
 let thy face shine, that we may be saved!

- 8 Thou didst bring a vine out of Egypt;  
thou didst drive out the nations and plant it.  
9 Thou didst clear the ground for it;  
it took deep root and filled the land.  
10 The mountains were covered with its shade,  
the cedars of God<sup>7</sup> with its branches;  
11 it sent out its tendrils to the sea,  
and its branches to the river.<sup>8</sup>  
12 Why hast thou broken down its walls,  
so that all who pass along the way  
pluck its fruit?  
13 The boar from the forest ravages it,  
and the beasts of the field feed on it.  
14 Return to us, O God Sabaoth!  
Look down from heaven, and see,  
and visit this vine,<sup>9</sup>  
15 the sapling which thy right hand planted,  
and the son whom thou hast reared for thyself!<sup>10</sup>  
16 It is burned with fire and hacked to pieces;  
they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance.<sup>11</sup>  
17 Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand,  
the son of man whom thou hast reared for thyself!<sup>12</sup>  
18 We will not part from thee;  
thou givest us life that we may call on thy name;<sup>13</sup>  
19 Restore us, O Lord,<sup>14</sup> Sabaoth!  
Let thy face shine, that we may be saved.

<sup>1</sup> See Ps. 45.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 97. (Tr. N.: RSV has 'of Asaph'.)

<sup>3</sup> \* In RSV the first line of v. 2 continues the sentence begun in v. 1b, and the remainder of v. 2 forms a new sentence.

<sup>4</sup> See BH.

<sup>5</sup> Lit.: the third part of the measure.

<sup>6</sup> See BH. (Tr. N.: V. 6 reads in RSV:

Thou dost make us the scorn of our neighbours;  
and our enemies laugh among themselves.)

<sup>7</sup> \* RSV has 'the mighty cedars' instead of 'the cedars of God'.

<sup>8</sup> = Euphrates.

<sup>9</sup> \* RSV reads 'have regard for this vine' instead of 'and visit this vine'.

<sup>10</sup> \* RSV has 'the stock' instead of 'the sapling' and omits the second line of v. 15.

<sup>11</sup> \* In RSV v. 16, differently worded, conveys a different meaning in that 'they' in v. 16b refers to the enemies and not to the people of Israel:

(16) they have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;  
may they perish at the rebuke of thy countenance!

<sup>12</sup> \* RSV renders v. 17b: 'the son of man whom thou hast made strong for thyself!'

<sup>13</sup> \* V. 18 reads in RSV:

Then we will never turn back from thee;  
give us life, and we will call on thy name!

The psalm is a community lament which presumably was recited at the joint celebration of the cult at the central shrine of the confederacy of the tribes. Since the tribes of Rachel, that is to say, the tribes of Joseph (Ephraim, Manasseh) and of Benjamin are mentioned, probably only the period preceding the downfall of the Northern Kingdom comes into the question of the psalm's dating, and in this connection the superscription given to the psalm in the LXX deserves to be noted, which relates it to the invasion of the Assyrians (cf. II Kings 15.19). Possibly it is a matter of the truncated state of Ephraim at the time of Hoshea, the last king of northern Israel. The territories of the tribes named seem to have been especially afflicted by the enemy invasion. Cities were destroyed and plundered (vv. 12 f., 16); enemies and neighbours quarrel over who should take possession of them (v. 6); the inhabitants fear their threatened ruin (v. 16). In this critical situation the tribes have assembled in the sanctuary to bring before God their lament, their supplications and their intercessions (note the change in the petition from the first to the third person and vice versa). The refrain (vv. 3, 7, 14, 19), which probably was recited as a response by the whole congregation, divides the psalm into several strophes, the construction of which is not entirely symmetrical.

*Invocation and petition (vv. 1-3)*

[1-2] The fact itself is already noteworthy that the disaster which had befallen some of the tribes is felt to be a common affliction of all which causes all earlier differences to sink into oblivion and unites the covenant people before God. It presupposes that the tribes are conscious of a common responsibility, and this consciousness has its roots in the divine acts of guidance in their history, and in their commonly practised tradition, a tradition which the Old Testament people of God never gave up completely. These facts account for the hymnic predicates ascribed to God in the invocation with which the prayer opens. Their origin lies in the tradition of the *Heilsgeschichte*, which was obviously still practised in joint celebrations of the cult even after the severing of the kingdoms, and they mean for the covenantal cult community the graphic representation and actual confirmation of their salvation. In the light of these facts it is also understandable that the congregation, once more using phrases

<sup>1</sup> Cf. in this connection Eissfeldt, *Festschrift für A. Alt.*, 1953, pp. 65 ff.

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borrowed from the ancient cultic tradition, calls upon the God of the sacred Ark, who is enthroned upon the cherubim (I Sam. 4.4; II Sam. 6.2), to appear in the glory of his radiant light (Ex. 24.10; Deut. 33.2; Pss. 50.2; 94.1) in the midst of the tribes who are in need of his guidance and help. It is a strong faith, based on the firm foundation of tradition, which is here expressed in a manner still reflecting the majesty and power of the Lord of hosts who directs battles. [3] He only needs to 'stir up' his 'might' (cf. Isa. 9.6) and the people will be saved. The refrain, too, is based on the same faith which knows man's whole existence to be in the hand of the mighty God. The Hebrew text of the first petition (*h<sup>a</sup> šibēnū*) has a larger meaning than the translation is able to express. The term comprises simultaneously man's external welfare and what takes place in the human soul, *metabasis* and *metanoia*: restoration of external circumstances and the turning of man's soul to God. Both these happenings represent the 'renewal of the covenant', and both of them are possible only if God on his part—this is the meaning which the words taken from the liturgical benediction wish to express—turns again to his people and brings about that encounter in the theophany from which all the divine blessings flow. This encounter between God and his people is the focal point and real theme of the whole psalm.

#### Lamentation (vv. 4-7)

[4] The affliction of the people of God is fundamentally a trial of their faith. They suffer from being separated from God, from being subject to his anger, though they are probably not without a sense of their own guilt. The prolonged calamity has become a crisis in their life of prayer. It is not the first time that such prayers ascend to God, but he keeps silent so that the cult community imagine the anger of God to be actually directed against their prayers. They face the incomprehensible problem, which calls into question the meaning of their whole piety, that the way in which they seek contact with God leads to their estrangement from him, that they have to realize that God, upon whom they call as their helper, is their adversary, and that they have to experience his anger at the very point where they expected comfort. [5-6] The faithful who have lost confidence in their God give vent to their bitter disappointment in the suppressed irony of the statement that the food and drink for which they are indebted to their God consisted in a full measure of, yes, *tears*, and that the people of God, to whom the expulsion of their adversaries

and the possession of the land had been promised (cf. vv. 8 f.), have now themselves become a bone of contention and a mockery to their neighbours and enemies. But the greatest trial of their faith lies not in the fact that the guarantees of the *Heilsgeschichte* are called in question, but in that it is God himself who has withdrawn his own promise and plunged his people into misery. [7] But in spite of this, nay, precisely for this reason, the cult community in faith dare to pray even to the angry God, because they trust God to do what could not be hoped for on the strength of human analogies. In this bold venture lies the paradox of faith which alone accords with the majesty and incomprehensibility of God. God has chastised; therefore he will also heal.

#### The parable of the vine (vv. 8-14a)

[8] The psalm gives an account of the *Heilsgeschichte* in the traditional form of the allegory of the vine (cf. Gen. 49.22 f.; Hos. 10.1; Jer. 2.21), in which imagery and interpretation intermingle. The vine as a symbol has its origin in Canaan and typifies the Dionysian world of fecundity and growth in the whole realm of nature. The fact that it is used in the Old Testament to symbolize the shaping of the *Heilsgeschichte* according to a definite plan is proof of the blending of the two realms of nature and history, so that from the biblical viewpoint they are regarded as a unity, a unity which has its basis and goal in God's will to save. In the context of the psalm this account of the *Heilsgeschichte* is by no means meant as a sad recollection of the 'good old days' in order that present affliction may become the more impressive against that background; it is, on the contrary, the point where God and his people meet, an encounter, which has not come to pass only once in bygone days, but takes place afresh during the representation of the *Heilsgeschichte* in the cult, and is experienced by those taking part as a present event in which they themselves participate. The past and the present are here inextricably interwoven, because it is God's presence, then and now, which is at stake. This significant fact is indicated by the strange change of tense (hardly possible to copy in the German language) that expresses the simultaneity of events already completed (perfect) and yet still efficacious in the present (imperfect). [9-11] During the recapitulation of the saving deeds of God the people know themselves to be near their God, who steadily accomplishes his saving purpose until he has reached his goal; in that recapitulation the Exodus from Egypt, the conquest and

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settlement of the land of Canaan and the spreading from the Mediterranean to the River Euphrates are thrown into relief by the metaphor of the purposeful activity of the vine-dresser whose work is crowned with planned success (cf. Isa. 5.1 ff.). [12-13] The calamity of which the two subsequent verses speak, sounding the note of a lament, contrasts most strongly with that knowledge. Should God want to destroy his redemptive work with his own hand? From this the tormenting question 'Why?' is only too easy to understand and makes clear once more that ultimately it is the problem that God himself presents which troubles the cult community. [14a] Having reached this point, they experience their separation from God so intensely that they are only able to offer God, who seems to have turned away from his people, the short fervent prayer 'return to us' in place of the more extensive petitions of the refrain.

*The supplication* (vv. 14b-19)

[14b-15] At this point the inner reason for the modification of the refrain and for its resumption as transition to the supplication is the same. The petition 'look down from heaven' is resonant, at least to a certain degree, with the feeling of the distance that separates the people from God, a distance which makes them grievously aware of the calamity they have to face and which can be bridged over only by God's intervention. The petition for a visitation from God points in the same direction. The word 'visit' (*heimsuchen*) has a twofold meaning: encounter with God as an affliction and as a deliverance. Forming the content of the petition, this phrase, it is true, is here intended to convey the meaning of a visitation for the people's deliverance, but the petition is addressed to the God whom the people face as the author of their affliction. In the last resort it is meaningful only if both adversity and deliverance are not understood as exclusive antitheses, but as having their ultimate unity in God's character; only if the people have an inkling of the hidden connection of their momentary affliction with the educational purpose of the divine economy of salvation—which they do not dare to doubt even in the face of their misery. The mystery of their present affliction, too, somehow forms a part of the divine redemptive work, though this truth is not yet discernible, and serves that work's purpose with the people of God. It is this belief that underlies the people's description of themselves as the son whom God has reared for himself. [16] The supplication once more reverts to the note of lament. The

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cult community envisages once more the utter seriousness of their position. They do not shun the bitter truth that their very existence is imperilled, not only their material position but their innermost being; for he who threatens them is God himself. [17] In this situation the faithful thus threatened make one more effort, a last bold venture (cf. v. 7), and in supplication throw themselves into the arms of this God. It is precisely because it is God who threatens them that he is their only help and that their affliction cannot be his final word (if the phrase 'man of thy right hand' is to be interpreted as an allusion to Benjamin, then v. 17 is to be understood as an intercession for that tribe, which was particularly threatened).<sup>1</sup> [18] At the point of supreme peril the cult community, because of this faith, do not give themselves up for lost, but reach out the more determinedly for the saving hand of God which despite all appearances to the contrary stretches out towards them from the darkness.

So doth the shipwrecked mariner at last  
Cling to the rock whereon his vessel struck.

The mystery of the problem which God himself presents with its tormenting question 'Why?' is here not solved by a kind of meditation, but is overcome by a daring *act* of faith, an affirmation of faithfulness, 'We will not part from thee', that is, the peoples resolve to live in communion with God; it is their turning back to the God who has visited his people (see above, pp. 59, 68). In this way a fruitful encounter comes about between God and the cult community, whereby the people of God receive their life from the hand of God in order to consecrate it anew to his service. [19] The affliction of their life of prayer, movingly expressed in the lament of v. 4, is thus overcome. Only now, too, the radiant light of the divine presence appears in all its fullness in the refrain's petition, in which the people of God, assured of their salvation, find the way back to God and to themselves.

<sup>1</sup> Eissfeldt (op. cit., pp. 76 ff.) wants to interpret v. 17 as referring to King Hoshea, who is said to have turned to the ancestral cult when he broke with Assyria.

## 81. GOD DESIRES TO SAVE

*To the Conductor. According to the Gittith [tune].<sup>1</sup> To Asaph<sup>2</sup>*

1 Sing aloud to God our strength;  
shout for joy to the God of Jacob!