

Israel's Hymnal
 Biblical Research Monthly
 December, 1945
 Dr. David L. Cooper

PSALM SIX

[Pss 6:1] O Jehovah, rebuke me not in thine anger, Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

[Pss 6:2] Have mercy upon me, O Jehovah; for I am withered away: O Jehovah, heal me; for my bones are troubled.

[Pss 6:3] My soul also is sore troubled: And thou, O Jehovah, how long?

[Pss 6:4] Return, O Jehovah, deliver my soul: Save me for thy lovingkindness' sake.

[Pss 6:5] For in death there is no remembrance of thee: In Sheol who shall give thee thanks?

[Pss 6:6] I am weary with my groaning; Every night make I my bed to swim; I water my couch with my tears.

[Pss 6:7] Mine eye wasteth away because of grief; It waxeth old because of all mine adversaries.

[Pss 6:8] Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity; For Jehovah hath heard the voice of my weeping.

[Pss 6:9] Jehovah hath heard my supplication; Jehovah will receive my prayer.

[Pss 6:10] All mine enemies shall be put to shame and sore troubled: They shall turn back, they shall be put to shame suddenly.

I. A pleading for mercy and restoration to divine favor (vss. 1-7).

II. The psalmist's enemies urged to withdraw because God had answered prayer (vss. 8-10).

A perusal of this psalm shows that the writer had an outraged conscience, because of some wrong of which he was guilty. There is nothing in the superscription nor in the poem which gives us any intimation as to the occasion of its being written. When one reads this psalm carefully and then studies Psalm 32, one is inclined to believe that both poems were occasioned by the same sin; but we know that which occasioned David's writing Psalm 32. It was his sin in taking Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah, for his own wife, (See II. Sam., chapters 11 and 12). Also read Psalm 51. In answer to David's prayer, the Lord forgave and cleansed him. Psalm 32 was written upon the occasion of the Lord's restoring the king to His favor and forgiving him of his wrongs. Psalm 6 seems to reflect the anguish of soul and distress of spirit which he experienced during the time that he endeavored to conceal the enormity of his sin in taking Uriah's wife and having this brave soldier killed in battle. Though we may see these sins of David reflected in this psalm, we must not be dogmatic on this point.

I. A pleading for mercy and restoration to divine favor

"O Jehovah, rebuke me not in thine anger,
 Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.
 Have mercy upon me, O Jehovah; for I am withered away:
 O Jehovah, heal me; for my bones are troubled.
 My soul also is sore troubled;
 And thou, O Jehovah, how long?
 Return, O Jehovah, deliver my soul:
 Save me for thy lovingkindness' sake.
 For in death there is no remembrance of thee:
 In Sheol who shall give thee thanks?
 I am weary with my groaning;
 Every night make I my bed to swim;
 I water my couch with my tears,
 Mine eye wasteth away because of grief;
 It waxeth old because of all mine adversaries." (Ps. 6:1-7)

David's guilty conscience was pricking him severely. He knew that he was guilty, and that there was justification for God's being indignant against him. He therefore prayed,

"O Jehovah, rebuke me not in thine anger,
 Neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure."

He desired that the Lord would be lenient toward him and would not in the fierceness of His hot displeasure punish him as his wrongdoing deserved. In other words, he prayed for the Lord to lighten the punishment just as much as possible.

We are told that the Lord chastens every son whom He receives--that is, when he does wrong. If any of God's children sin today the Lord cannot do otherwise than punish them. Let no one therefore pray that the Lord will not punish him for his sins. To do so would be praying against the will of God. But one may ask the Lord to make the punishment as light as possible--just as David did in this petition; however, the Lord is to be the judge in the entire matter.

In verse 2 there is reflected the effect that the guilty conscience and the disturbed, disquieted spirit had upon the physical frame of the psalmist. He declared that he was withered away and that his bones were troubled. One can have a burden pressing upon one's mind to the extent that it affects one's nervous system and upsets the entire physical being. The consciousness of wrong had this effect upon David physically. The knowledge of his having taken another man's wife and of his having plotted the death of one of his brave warriors at the front haunted the royal monarch through the long, weary months which followed his sin. Thus his physical strength was giving way under the terrific load of his sin.

Not only was David's body being affected by his distress of soul and his health giving way, but also his spirit was sore troubled. The joy of the Lord had long since departed from him. The sin that had entered his soul was permeating his very being and was embittering his spirit. These things were doubtless bringing David to the point of distraction. He therefore cried out, "And thou, O Jehovah, how long?"

He then pleaded for the Lord to return and deliver his soul; to save him for his loving-kindness' sake. Figuratively speaking the Lord had turned his back upon the sinner and had left him to his fate. The realization of his spiritual condition led David to plead for the Lord to come back to him, to deliver his soul from its wretched, miserable condition, and to save him because of His loving-kindness, His unmeritable grace. David knew the secret of how to return to God. He knew that human efforts and labors are unavailing in obtaining the favor of the Lord. He realized that the only way one can approach God is by pleading the Lord's mercy and favor. The Lord God who dwells in the high and holy place also dwells with him "... that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite" (Isa. 57:15).

In desperation the psalmist prayed for deliverance and for salvation, "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: In Sheol who shall give thee thanks?" David realized that unless the Lord forgave him and lifted the burden from his soul, He would break in health and would soon be beyond recovery. In other words, he knew that, if he continued as he was, he would actually and literally die.

Prior to the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord, all who died went to Sheol, a place which is in the heart of the earth. This place of departed spirits was divided into two sections, as we learn from our Lord's remarks concerning the rich man and Lazarus (Luke, chapter 16). One section was for the righteous, and the other was for the unrighteous. These localities were separated by a great gulf. No one could pass over from one place to another, but had to remain where he was. Since our Lord's conquest over the powers of the unseen world, those who accept the Lord Jesus Christ, upon death do not go to Sheol (or Hades, as Sheol is called in the New Testament). On the contrary, those who die in the Lord go immediately into the presence of Christ. Not so with the lost, who still go to Sheol, awaiting the judgment of the great white throne which will occur at the conclusion of the Millennium (Rev. 20:11-15). And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat upon it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead the great and the small, standing before the throne; and books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead that were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. And if any was not found written in the book of life he was cast into the lake of fire.

Our psalm says that in death, or in Sheol, there is no remembrance of God. Is this statement a proof of the modern doctrine of soul-sleeping? Positively not! In attempting to arrive at the meaning of verse 5, we must remember that we are dealing with Hebrew poetry, the fundamental principal of which is known as Hebrew parallelism. But what is Hebrew parallelism? A statement is made by the choice of certain words and is then repeated in different words. The second statement becomes therefore a comment upon the first one. In the first statement we are told that there is in death no remembrance of God.

Remembrance in what sense? "In Sheol who shall give thee thanks?" This rhetorical question means in Sheol people do not worship and praise God, giving Him thanks for what He has done. In other words, this passage simply states that there is no worship carried on in Sheol by those who have left this life and who have gone to the other world. The same question is brought out in Psalm 30:9:

"What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit?
Shall the dust praise thee?
Shall it declare thy truth?"

The rhetorical question "shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth?" is equivalent to an affirmation that those who go to Sheol do not praise God and do not declare His truth. In this connection one would do well to look at Psalm 88:10-12, which gives the same teaching. The lost are in Sheol. They are conscious, and they realize their condition. Moreover, from the statements relative to the rich man and Lazarus, we see that in Sheol those who are there not only realize their condition, but they also know some of the things about those who are still upon the earth. There is therefore no scriptural basis for the doctrine of soul-sleeping.

In Psalm 6:6,7, the psalmist reiterated what he said in verse 2 concerning his groaning and the distress of his soul as they affected his physical being. Moreover, he informs us that, while he was lying on his bed at night, he wept penitential tears because of his sins. O that God would bring us to the point that we would thus weep and mourn before Him for the wrongs for which we are guilty! In verse 7 we learn that not only was the psalmist distressed because of his own sins, but because of his adversaries. They were doing all they could against him. This the psalmist knew all too well. Moreover, he realized that he had given them an occasion to ridicule and to belittle the religion and worship of the Almighty. When Christians sin today they give an occasion to the enemies of the Lord to ridicule and to blaspheme.

II. The psalmist's enemies urged to withdraw because God answered prayer

"Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity;
For Jehovah hath heard the voice of my weeping.
Jehovah hath heard my supplications;
Jehovah will receive my prayer.
All mine enemies shall be put to shame and sore troubled:
They shall turn back, they shall be put to shame suddenly" (vss. 8-10).

David prayed through. The Lord gave him assurance of His having heard and of having forgiven him. Thus the joy of the Lord was restored to him. He therefore spoke to the workers of iniquity and urged them to depart from him because God had heard the voice of his weeping. He accepted this by faith. When he did, the Lord restored him the joy of his salvation. In verse 9 David reiterated the thought of verse 8. God does hear and answer the petitions of faith, arising from the hearts of those who know God.

By faith David also saw that all of his enemies would be put to shame and would be sore troubled. God in His providence will deal with everyone according to the merits of his case. Continuing his revelation the psalmist declared, "They shall turn back, they shall be put to shame suddenly." All enemies of God and of the servants of God will be put to shame, that is, their expectations will be disappointed. They will not be realized; but the psalmist declared that they would be put to shame suddenly. God allows wicked men to continue on seemingly unopposed; but, when the Lord has finished His work with one who is wicked and the moment arrives for Him to deal drastically with such a one He does so. This is a general principle concerning God's dealings with the wicked. But there can be little doubt that the psalmist was looking forward to the time when God deals with wicked men in general. This will be during the Tribulation Period when the Lord will send His wrath upon the earth and will purge it of all wickedness and rebellion. At that time the Messenger of the Covenant, the Lord Jesus Christ, will suddenly come to His Temple and will take the reins of government in His own omnipotent hands and reign from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth.