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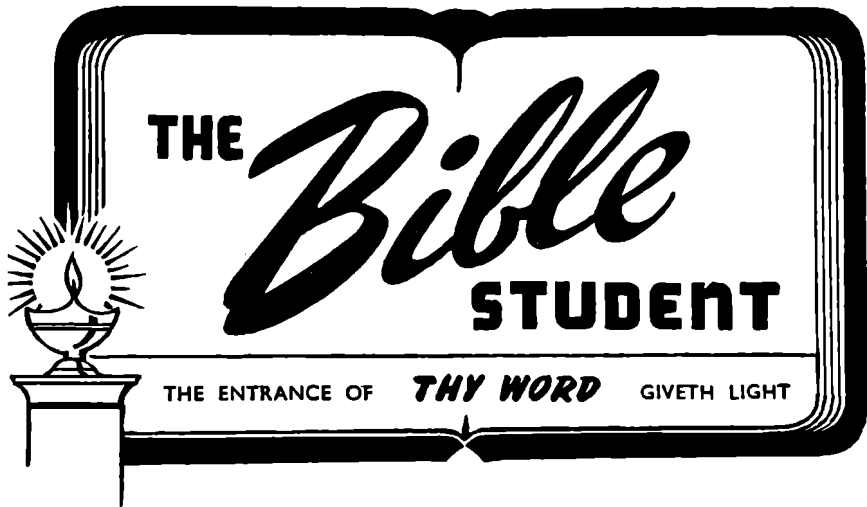
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Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

in Rev. 21:7 and 8. And all are in either the one or the other of these last two verses: if we are not in verse 7, then we are in verse 8; there is no neutral ground.

Those who believe that all God's children are not overcomers will have insuperable difficulties to encounter in interpreting the promises of these seven letters. Will not all saints be immune from the 'second death'? Will they not all 'eat of the tree of life'? Overcoming implies life; dead fish cannot swim against the stream: it is *life* that ensures victory.

In these letters there are, however, some differences which should be noted. 'He that hath an ear . . .' is placed *after the promise* in the last four letters, whereas it comes *before* it in the first three. This would appear to be because of increasing degeneracy and the Lord's recognition of the 'remnant' in the midst (see 2:24; 3:4; 3:20).

In the letters to Smyrna and Philadelphia no complaint is made: this would seem to be accounted for by the fact that it is unlikely that the professing mass would willingly submit to Smyrna's persecutions, or would enthusiastically enter a Philadelphia's 'door' of evangelistic opportunity. Mere professors are not likely to suffer for Christ, or at personal cost to seek to win souls for Him.

Lord, open our ear to Thy voice in these letters!

## THE COMPENSATING GRACE OF GOD

A Study of Psalm 49

HAROLD ST. JOHN

Two Psalms commence by propounding a 'dark saying' or enigma for solution; in 78:2 Asaph offers the riddle of a saint's failures, and in the Ode before us we are called to consider life's apparent injustice in the light of the inevitable adjustment which lies on the other side of the grave.

The Sons of Korah boldly face the question as to whether wealth is really a master force or not; whether the poor ought to cringe in the presence of the rich or even envy them at all; and

they decide that the limitations of riches are so evident that, to a thoughtful mind they cease to be desirable at all.

These limitations are described from three points of view:

(a) Riches cannot buy the redemption of their owner, either for himself and far less for his fellows, *v.* 7.

(b) They cannot postpone death for an instant, *v.* 11.

(c) They have no purchasing power in the markets of Eternity; they are worse than post-war German paper money, they are not even allowed inside the gates of Heaven, *v.* 17.

The only Divine Name used is Elohim (twice) because the range of the Psalm is universal, and has no special reference to the people of the Covenant.

The historical period probably falls within the reigns of Jotham and Uzziah when great wealth and deep poverty existed side by side, as always, provoking widespread unrest; the policy of the landowners was to add field to field until there was scarcely standing room for the poor. (See *Isa.* 5:8; *Mic.* 2:2; *Amos* 5:11; 8:4-6.)

The structure is an exquisitely complex piece of writing and merits more than a little attention:

*vv.* 1-4. An introductory appeal to the Universe.

*vv.* 5-12. The limits of wealth in this life, both as to power and permanence.

*vv.* 13-20. Its utter worthlessness when its owner has passed through the gates of the grave.

The correspondence between the two main sections ought not to escape the reader's notice. Thus:

The following verses answer to each other:

*vv.* 5 and 16. 'Wherefore should I fear: . . . be not thou afraid.'

*vv.* 6 and 14. 'They trust in wealth: . . . like sheep they are laid.'

*vv.* 7 and 15. 'None of them can redeem: . . . but God will redeem.'

*vv.* 10 and 17. 'He seeth that wise men die: . . . but when he dieth.'

*vv.* 11 and 19. 'To all generations: . . . the generation of his fathers.'

## TEXT NOTES

*vv.* 12 and 20. Refrain: identical except that *v.* 12 has 'man *abides not*', and in *v.* 20 '*man understands not.*'

*vv.* 1-4. The opening address contains four distinct calls addressed to all nations, 1:2.

Four classes appealed to in *v.* 2.

Four channels of revelation (mouth, heart, ear, harp) *vv.* 3, 4.

Four forms which revelation may assume (wisdom, understanding, parable or dark saying).

*v.* 1. 'Peoples' is plural because the call is to earth's short-lived races, in contrast to Israel who is the true citizen of eternity. The word translated 'world' means earth's life, with special reference to its brevity (see its use in Job. 11:17; Ps. 17:14; 39:5; 89:47). Like the Image that Nebuchadnezzar saw

In outline dim and vast

Their fearful shadows cast—

The giant forms of Empire on their way

To ruin, one by one: they tower

And they are gone.

*v.* 2. 'Both sons of Adam, sons of Ish' (Heb.), that is, all men alike and especially all distinguished men. The rich must recognize their vanity, the poor must learn true contentment (as in James 1:9, 10).

*v.* 3. 'Wisdoms'—plural as expressing profound insight; 'meditation' is the same word as 'device' in Lam. 3:62 and Ps. 39:3 (in a slightly different form).

*v.* 4. 'Dark saying'—(*gheedah*) occurs eight times in Judges 14 as 'riddle'; and also in Num. 12:8. The harp is the instrument of the heart's gladness and the writer knows he can open out what till then had been mysterious.

*v.* 5. 'Wherefore should I fear . . . the perversity of those who would trip me up.' He feels that his rich and powerful neighbours are a poor lot after all (*cp.* Jer. 9:4).

'Heels'—(*gahkekēv*) occurs Jos. 8:13; Ps. 41:9 in the sense of those who lie in wait.

*v.* 7. From such powerless people their friends have little to hope and their foes have nothing to fear. The reference is to

Exod. 21:30 where the same phrase, 'ransom of life', occurs again and nowhere else. The Psalmist may also have in mind Num. 35:31, where money was powerless to bluff off an offender. In the East the brother is the nearest and dearest (Jer. 22:18).

v. 8. Law cases could be assessed but no money will compensate God, as in Matt. 5:26.

v. 9. Revert to v. 7, 'not see the pit'. The word *shahghath* probably means 'pit' in every case (see 9:15; 30:9; 94:13).

v. 10. 'Leave,' not as legacies, but merely 'abandon' it—the word *azab* is translated 'gone from me' in Ps. 38:10; and 'forsake' in 22:1.

v. 11. There is a difficulty about the word 'inward thought' (*kehrev*). In Ps. 5:9 and Jer. 31:33 it occurs as here; but it seems that the *lxx* had a text which gave 'sepulchres are their houses'. The difference in the words in Hebrew is slight, the consonants being *QBRM* instead of *QRBM*; the vowels were added much later. They call their lands as conquerors do (2 Sam. 12:28); but the word for 'lands' (*adamoth*) may mean 'heaps of dust'!

v. 13. 'Folly' (*kehsel*) is used in the ritual of the sacrifices for the flanks of the animal as the seat of its fat or energy (Deut. 32:15), but in Prov. 3:26 it is 'confidence', as here.

v. 15. 'Receive' translated 'took' in Gen. 5:24; there is probably an underlying reference to Enoch's experience.

v. 17. cf. Job. 21:1; Eccles. 5:15.

v. 18. 'Blessed' means self-congratulations (Deut. 39:19).

v. 19. The ranks of those whose lot is fixed.

v. 20. Those amongst the rich who are destitute of discernment.

From the standpoint of the preacher this Psalm is especially fruitful. The awful picture of v. 14, 'Death shall be their Shepherd,' shows us the ghostly Pastor driving his terror-stricken flock along the undesired path which leads to the Land of Darkness, out of the world they have loved, *leaving behind them the books, the music, the money for which they have bartered their souls*; they go, knowing that the only thing that they can carry with them is their sin, and then, like 'sheep they are laid in the grave'.

Well has Shakespeare said: 'Death is a fearful thing; the weariest and most loathed earthly life that age, ache, penury and

imprisonment can lay on nature, is paradise to what men fear of death.'

In striking contrast with the Psalm, the Book of Revelation reveals to us that the Lamb in the midst of the Throne shall be the Shepherd of His own, and will lead them beside living Fountains of waters (Rev. 7:17, lit.).

The contrast may be set forth by a scribe instructed in the Kingdom as follows:

The two Shepherds—Death and the Lamb.

The two Folds—The Grave and the Green Pastures.

The two Flocks—The sons of Time and the citizens of Eternity.

It will be noted that no word is said as to any special wickedness on the part of the wealthy landowners; it is simply that they are absorbed by the present, that they have forgotten God, and that they have not realized that shrouds have no pockets.

As to the Flock of the Lamb, white robed and waving their palms of Victory, their only title is that they have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb; each one for himself has done it and not for another.

From David's lips the word did roll  
'Tis true and living yet,  
No man can save his brother's soul  
Nor pay his brother's debt.

Thus do the Two Shepherds pass on their way, each with his flock, and every man is claimed by one of the two worlds which they represent.

Dear reader, have you put your soul in the balances of eternity? You may sell yourself for some thirty pieces of silver, some honour or favour which this world may offer; you may risk eternity for the sake of an occasional hour of sensual pleasure, the effects of which may already be reacting on the dust of your material life, revealing itself in your dimmed eye, slackened step, and soiled manhood; but to you the pealing, pleading voice of Christ the Beautiful Shepherd is calling.

Out from the deep impenetrable silences of eternity His voice is sounding: 'Come unto Me . . . and I will refresh you'. Will you answer to Him?