

On the Asaph-Psalms.

BY PROF. C. H. TOY, D.D., LL.D.

THE poet who is named in the titles of Pss. 50, 73-83 as their author is presumably he who is introduced in 1 Chr. 16. 5 and elsewhere as the chief sacred singer of David's time. According to Ezra 2. 41, a body of his descendants, having the same vocation as their ancestor, returned from Babylon with Zerubbabel; and we should expect here, as in the case of the Korahite group, to find our psalms attributed to the sons of Asaph. On the authority of Ezra 2. 41 (=Neh. 7. 44) we may accept the existence of this post-exilian Asaphite family or fraternity as possible or probable; but the ancestor of David's time, having no better warrant than the book of Chronicles, must be looked on as a very doubtful person. Certainly, if there then lived such a man, he did not fill the rôle given him by the chronicler. Or, let us rather say, the question of authorship of our group must be decided by the internal evidence. The statements of the titles are worthless; that is, though they may in some cases be right, they may always be wrong, and are therefore of no use as critical guides. What consideration might lead a late editor to prefix the name Asaph to a psalm, it is impossible for us to say.

For this reason, also, we cannot assume unity of authorship for our group, and it will be convenient to examine the psalms, one by one, for evidences of date. I have elsewhere¹ pointed out that the particular form of the divine name employed in a psalm is not a reliable note of time, and I shall say nothing about the Elohist character of this group. Nor are the linguistic phenomena decisive; an Aramaism here and there would point to a time during or after the Exile, but even such general indications are few, and it will be better to look for deeper-lying characteristics of thought and reflections of surroundings.²

¹ In my article on "the date of the Korah-psalms," printed in the *Journal of the Society of Biblical Literature and Exegesis* for 1884.

² My critical conclusions, reached independently, agree in the main with those of Justus Olshausen and Edward Reuss, but as their works are generally accessible, I have not thought it worth while to refer to their arguments; and throughout, for the sake of brevity and clearness, I have avoided polemics, and generally refrained from citing other writers.

I take first the group in the Third Book.

Ps. 73 is occupied with the question, so much more fully discussed in the book of Job, of the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous. One would thence be inclined to refer the two discussions to the same general period; and, further, since the solution given in the psalm is inferior in breadth and depth to that of Job, to make the Asaph production the earlier. But this mode of reasoning must be conducted cautiously. In the first place, the period during which such social-religious questions would naturally come up may have been a long one. There has been, as we know, a disposition of late to regard these discussions as suggested by, and relating primarily to, the unhappy fortunes of the Jewish nation, carried off into exile, scattered among the nations, deprived of political existence.¹ Such a starting-point for these ethical inquiries is very probable, only we must guard against supposing that they must have all fallen in the period of the Exile. The condition of Israel was sad enough for some centuries to warrant lamentations and questionings. For a long time there was just such contact with heathen magnates as would rouse the indignation of the patriotic Jew, and lead him to search for an explanation which should save both the divine justice and the national innocence. I cannot see the necessity for referring Job to the Exile, though its affinity with the Isaian servant of Yahwe points that way. But, however it may be with Job, the more general picture given in Ps. 73 might well have been produced at any time from the sixth century to the second — there were always the “wicked” who were at ease and increased in riches, and drove the pious Jew to fear that he had lived in vain an innocent life. We have to ask, however, in the second place, whether the relative dates of Job and our psalm can be fixed. Could a man acquainted with the exhaustive discussion in Job have written this psalm? Perhaps not, if he accepted the facts and reasoning of that book as correct and final. But it is evident that we cannot decide this question, since we are without information on the two main points: whether our author knew Job, and whether, if he knew it, he accepted its conclusions, or, rather, accepted Job’s polemic against the theory of the three friends. It is quite possible that he was not acquainted with the book; exist-

¹ On the character of the discussion in Job and its relation to the portraiture of the suffering servant of Yahwe in the Second Isaiah, see A. Kuenen in the *Theologisch Tijdschrift* for 1873, pp. 492 ff. (in which a history of the literature of the question is given); T. K. Cheyne, *Prophecies of Isaiah*, II. 235 ff.; and A. B. Davidson, *The Book of Job*, pp. 19–21.

ing only in a few copies, it may have been for some time confined to a small circle of readers. If he was acquainted with it, he may have dissented from it, if he lived before it had taken its place in the Canon as an inspired book. The third Canon, the Kethubim, or Hagiographa, was hardly collected in Palestine before the latter part of the second century B.C.; indeed, its extent, as is well known, was still in debate in the last decade of the first century of our era. The position of our psalmist is substantially that of Job's three friends, a position which Job himself satisfactorily combats. But it was a natural one for a Jew, and may have been held by some persons long after it had been discarded by others. For example, it may have been abandoned by the more philosophic thinkers while it was still held by the mass of the pious. The author of Job belonged to the Hokma or philosophic school; our psalmist, as appears from ver. 17,¹ was probably a priest or a Levite, and naturally retained the traditional ideas on the subject.

From the form of thought of the psalm we reach the same general conclusion as to its time. It presents a contrast between Israel, described in ver. 1 as "pure of heart," and certain other persons called "the arrogant, the wicked, those that are far from the God of Israel." These last are apparently not Jews, but Gentiles; they are contrasted with Jews in vers. 1 and 15, and appear again in Ps. 75 as foreigners. The word rendered "arrogant" or "fools" הוֹלָלִים² occurs in this sense only in these two psalms and Ps. 5. 6, and its purely ethical-religious use marks a comparatively late stage in the national life. Israel here appears as dwelling in the midst of an alien, unsympathizing community, which is prosperous and rich,³ and at the same time without special interest in the Jewish religion. This is like the situation in Isa. 53, where the wicked and the rich are similarly identified,—a confusion of thought natural in an unsuccessful and unfortunate people. We might thus put the psalm into the Exile but

¹ We seem to be warranted, from Jer. 51. 51, in rendering מִקְדָּשׁ "sanctuary," that is, the temple.

² The stem הִלֵּל means "to be bright, sparkling" (used in Arabic of the new moon, of laughter, crying, tears, rain), Kal and Hi'il; transferred to action and thought, it signifies "to be eager, excited, boastful, mad," Poel, Hiithpoel; thence the transition is easy to intellectual and ethical folly, Kal. The purely ethical sense is obviously the latest.

³ Ver. 10 is part of the description of the prosperous wicked; cf. Ps. 75. 9. This is elsewhere a symbol of wrath and punishment (Ezek. 23. 34; Isa. 51. 17). Here, unless the text is faulty, it represents abounding ease and luxury.

for certain differences of tone between it and Isa. 53, particularly the ethical use of the term "fool" above referred to, and the distinct ethical-religious individuality of the writer and his tendency to ethical reflection. The author of Isa. 53 sees his people suffering, and says, "This must be vicarious"; the author of the psalm feels himself suffering, as one of his people, and says, "This is only temporary." This seems to agree better with that later period when the Jews were encompassed by alien communities, Greek and other. There is no sign of the political existence of Israel. It is a people, but not properly a nation.

Our psalm is strikingly like Ps. 16 in its anticipation of blessedness and glory in the presence of God. In both this is connected with reflections on the condign punishment which is to overtake idolaters. The turns of thought in the two are very similar, — perpetual abode with God, the right hand, the feeling of the bodily life. In both the context shows that the writers are thinking not of the future, but of the present, not of compensation for earthly ills in the joys of immortality, but of deliverance from present sorrow by the strong hand of the God of Israel. The thought thus belongs to the period which precedes the adoption by the Jews of the hope of immortality, but probably to the later part of this period, a time marked by profound reflection, and that growing conviction of God's complete protection which led the way to the doctrine of immortality.

Psalm 74 is one of those whose date is best assured. The author writes in the midst of a hostile invasion, during which the enemy desecrates the Jerusalem sanctuary. Only two such invasions and desecrations occurred: the first, by the Chaldeans, B.C. 586; the second, by the Syrian Greeks, B.C. 170–168, and the latter is fixed for the time of the psalm by the writer's declaration, ver. 9, that there was then no prophet, no one who could say how long.¹ Such a statement would, of course, have been impossible while Jeremiah and Ezekiel were alive. Add to this the mention of synagogues, ver. 8, which points to the second century.² We may, therefore, with an

¹ See 1 Macc. 9. 27.

² Inasmuch as the institution seems here to be mentioned as a well established one. For the evidence of the fact that synagogues, though their germ may have existed during the Exile, did not assume definite form before about the second century B.C., see Vitringa, *De Synagoga Vetere*, Lib. I., Pars. II., Cap. X.; Prideaux's *Connexion*, I. 298; Jost, *Geschichte der Israeliten*, III. 138, and his *Geschichte des Judenthums*, I. 168; Herzog, *Real-Encyclopädie*, Art. *Synagogen der Juden*.

approach to certainty, accept this psalm as the utterance of a pious Jew in or near the year 168 B.C. Its resemblance to Ps. 44 is obvious.

The first half, vers. 1-11, is merely a cry of patriotic agony. Then the poet thinks of the might of Israel's God and his great deeds in the past, and appeals to him, in view of this, to remember that "foolish people" have reviled his name, ver. 18, and not to forget the voice of his adversaries, ver. 23. Here, again, we have the contrast of peoples: over against the triumphant, insolent, oppressive enemy is set Yahwe's own people, the "poor and needy," ver. 21. These terms exhibit a history similar to that of "fool, arrogant," above mentioned. In the legislative and historical books, and the prophetic writings down nearly to the fall of Jerusalem, their signification is physical; then, as in Job and the Exilian Isaiah, they come to mean "the afflicted" in general; and finally, as here, they are put simply as synonyms for Israel.¹ As the date of the psalm is otherwise fixed, we are able to say that this use of the expressions, almost as proper names, belongs to the second century. We cannot say that it belongs exclusively to this period, but we may recognize a progress in signification between the Exile and the psalm, the latter advancing the words from the domain of poetry into the vocabulary of everyday speech.²

Psalm 75 deals with the same antithesis of classes, but in a different key. For a reason unexplained, the writer is full of exultation at the reflection that God, the controller and the righteous judge of all the earth, dispenses humiliation and destruction to the wicked or arrogant, and exaltation to the righteous. The psalmist stands on the same platform with the author of Ps. 73. This might be the epilogue to that, the joyful outburst of certainty after overcoming the doubts of an earlier experience, or it may be the independent utterance of one who had had no experience of doubt.

The close similarity between this psalm and the Hannah-song, 1 Sam. 2. 1-10, cannot be passed over in an inquiry respecting date.

¹ There is a slight difference in the use of the two words. עָנִי, "needy," except in the Psalms (and sometimes there), has always the physical sense. עָנָו, "poor," is applied to suffering Israel in the Exilian Isaiah and the post-exilian Zechariah, and also in Zeph. 3. 12. It lent itself more readily to the peculiar ethical-religious sense which we find in the Psalms. For the etymologies, see Gesenius's Lexicon.

² It may be noted that the expression "return," as in ver. 21, does not always refer to a return from the Babylonian Exile.

The two have the same central thought: God alone is the creator of social conditions. The song presents this thought more fully than the psalm, detailing a number of social positions which Yahwe establishes or subverts; the psalm embraces these in one or two succinct statements, and points its polemic more sharply against that class of wicked or fools which is the object of attack in both poems. The two have this further in common, that they seem to contemplate a somewhat elaborately organized society, presenting many varieties of condition and possibilities of violent changes. The Samuel-song speaks, ver. 8, of a man's being raised from abject poverty to sit on a royal throne; and the psalm in like manner declares, vers. 7 and 8, that one's position is determined by no earthly source, North,¹ South, East, or West, but God raises one and degrades another as he pleases. Certainly, social changes occur in all forms of society, but it is noteworthy that in the most detailed and glowing prophetic descriptions of the divine power there is no allusion to such a state of society as this. From the historical books we should rather get the impression that society in both kingdoms, the Northern and the Southern, was in this respect reasonably stable. Though dynasties followed one another rapidly on the throne of Israel in the last decades of its existence, nothing is said of their founders being persons of low extraction. The picture given in our two poems very much resembles that which we find in the book of Ecclesiastes, a product of the Greek period.

Whether the Hannah-song belongs before or after the Exile must be decided by the evidence of the song itself. It now stands in a book the body of which was composed in or near the Exilian period, but it is possible that the book of Samuel may have received additions at a much later time.² The author or editor was inclined, as we see from ch. 22. and 23. 1-7, to insert poetical material into his narrative, and to connect it, whether from existing tradition or from his own ideas of probability, with the personages of his history.³ In

¹ With Ewald I insert the connective and preposition before הַרִיִם, ver. 7, so as to get the four points of the compass demanded by considerations of symmetry. Another textual change suggested by the connection is the substitution of קְרוֹשׁ for קְרוֹב, ver. 1.

² For example, the עֵת הַכֹּהֵן, "the time of assembly," 2 Sam. 24. 15, is most naturally explained as a reference to a late custom of religious worship.

³ Both these poems have a reflective tone that suggests a late origin. The paragraph 22. 21-25 (Ps. 18. 21-25) is not only incompatible with David's life, but is Pharisaic in its claim of personal righteousness. Note the curious arithmetically balanced description, vers. 26 and 27, of God's attitude towards man as

the song in 1 Sam. 2 the one distinct historical allusion is the mention of the "king" in ver. 10, which points to a royal period, either therefore to the pre-exilian period or to the second century. If it be admitted that there is nothing impossible or improbable in the last-named date, then the song will oppose no obstacle to the assignment of a late date to the psalm. In the latter, the king is not mentioned, and we are at liberty to put it in any post-exilian period that may seem to suit it best. There is nothing to decide whether it is earlier or later than the song.

Psalm 76 is usually referred to the overthrow of Sennacherib, 2 Kings 19. 35. This interpretation is not tenable if the "there" in ver. 4 means "Zion," since the disaster to the Assyrian army occurred not at Jerusalem, but at a considerable distance to the southwest, near Lâchish or Libnah. We may understand the reference, however, to be to Judah and Israel in general.¹ A more serious difficulty is presented by the picture of the times given in the psalm. The Jewish people is called, ver. 10, the "afflicted" of the earth (or, of the land), a designation which, as is pointed out above, we do not find so used till about the time of the Exile.² Or, if it is only the righteous afflicted ones that are saved, this suggests rather the second century, when the *Hasidim* or pious represented the national spirit and led the struggle against the Greeks. Add to this the late legal tone of ver. 12, "vow and pay," and compare the prophecies of Isaiah belonging to the Sennacherib period, as Isa. 10. (and also 2 Kings 19), and the difference between the two will be obvious,—in the prophecy a nation, in the psalm a church.

The name "Salem," for Jerusalem, occurs only here and in the Melchisedek story in Gen. 14. It is not probable that it is an ancient name for the city, since it does not occur in any early historical piece, and the formation of the name "Jerusalem" from a name "Salem" could not easily be explained. It is more likely that the latter is a

determined by man's attitude towards God. We have also the antithesis, ver. 28, of "afflicted" and "haughty." Ch. 23. 1-7 is obscure, but seems to be a mashalic description of a just ruler, in the manner of the late portions of the book of Proverbs.

¹ The combination "Judah and Israel," as a designation of the returned remnant, is employed by post-exilian writers, as in Zech. 8. 13; Mal. 2. 11.

² The word here used is יָדָה, to which the same remark applies as to יָדָה. In Amos 2. 7 and 8. 4 it means physical poverty, and in Zeph. 2. 3 describes the righteous portion of the people. This last may be the sense in Isa. 11. 4 (not to mention the uncertainty of the date of this passage).

poetical abbreviation of the historical name, with an allusion to the ideas of integrity and peace.¹ When it came into use, and how long it continued to be used, we have no means of determining except from the two occurrences of the word in the Old Testament. It is not improbable that the psalmist, in his description of the catastrophe of his own day, has in mind the overthrow of Sennacherib's army. A later writer might thus employ imagery suggested by an event in the earlier history.²

Ps. 77, though in the form of an individual cry of suffering, is evidently occasioned by a national misfortune. Ver. 8: "Will the Lord cut off for ever?" reflects the same situation as Pss. 44 and 74. We have here to note the disposition in these late psalms to fall back on the ancient history as a ground of hope. We do not find this in the prophets, partly, perhaps, because in their time the old traditions had not been so fully worked up into narrative as was afterwards the case, but partly also because the prophetic period was one of living national spirit and hope (this was true, though to less extent, even in the first century after the return from exile), while in the second century the people had long been under foreign domination without hope of independence.

Ps. 78 is a Judean mashalic ode, a lesson drawn from a review of the earlier history, concluding with exaltation of David, not without traces of tribal feeling against Ephraim.³ This didactic treatment of the past, and the reference, ver. 5, to a *tora* as an established and familiar thing, belong to a time later than the fifth century, and the idealization of David, with whom the historical review ends, looks the same way.⁴

The situation in Ps. 79 is like that in Pss. 44 and 74. The temple

¹ Compare the allegorization in Heb. 7. 1, 2. The Salem of Gen. 14. 18 has never been identified, but the connection ("King's dale," ver. 17) points to Jerusalem. The episode, vers. 18-20, breaking the connection between vers. 17 and 21, may be an interpolation. It may rest on some old tradition, but in its present form seems to come from a late priestly hand, probably from the same circle of thought that produced Ps. 110.

² It is perhaps worthy of note, that on the eve of the battle with Nicanor at Bethhoron (compare the "mountains of prey," ver. 5 of the psalm, if the text is not corrupt), Judas, in his prayer, mentions the Assyrian overthrow, 1 Macc. 7. 41.

³ Ver. 9, however, is to be rejected as an interpolation, which breaks the connection and has no discernible meaning.

⁴ It is to be noted that the historical knowledge is based, vers. 3, 4, on *oral* tradition, whence we infer that there was little acquaintance with books among the people.

is not destroyed, but defiled (ver. 1), and the unburied bodies of slain Jews lie around about Jerusalem. It has often been pointed out that this picture agrees, not with the capture of the city by the Chaldeans, but with the Syrian atrocities of the second century. To see the differences between the two situations it is only necessary to compare the group of psalms with the book of Lamentations. In the latter the mountain of Zion is desolate, Judah is gone into captivity and dwells among the nations, none come to the festivals, the place of assembly is destroyed, the dead lie in the streets, the prophets have visions of foolishness; in the three psalms, on the contrary, there is no question of captivity, the people remain in Jerusalem, and the lamentation is over defilement and slaughter. The comparatively calm and hopeful conclusion of Ps. 79 also is noteworthy: "The people, the sheep of God's pasture," says the poet, "will give thanks for ever." There is a deep-seated sense of belonging to God, a feeling that can only be described as churchly; and instead of the distinct mention of the various hostile peoples, as in Lamentations (Egypt, Assyria, Edom), the psalms have only the general reference to "the nations," again an ecclesiastical mode of looking at the situation, preserved in the rendering "heathen" of the English Version.

Ps. 80 describes a condition of desolation in terms less definite than the preceding, and, for the most part, general enough to suit either of the two great periods of national distress.¹ The statement in ver. 17 that the vine is "burned with fire" would apply, with obvious propriety, to the Chaldean time. On the other hand, the designation of the nation by the tribal names Joseph and Benjamin (with omission of Judah) hardly suits a Judean poet of that period. And the resemblance in general tone between this psalm and the preceding is apparent, especially in the feeling that cordial relations exist between the nation and its God. In the earlier pre-exilian and exilian time the prophetic consciousness is one of almost unmixed self-condemnation. In the book of Lamentations, also, the iniquity of the nation is had in mind; but in all the Asaph-psalms there is only one acknowledgment of present wrong-doing (79. 9). The "iniquities of the forefathers" are confessed, but the present consciousness is, in the main, one of innocence. The psalmist feels that the nation is in accord with the divine law, and has the right to expect the divine favor, and he can only ask, "how long?"² The national feeling, so

¹ Israel is compared to a vine or vineyard in Isa. 5, Ezek. 15 and 19.

² Is it an accident that in 79. 9 the purging from sin follows the deliverance? There is neither here nor anywhere else in these psalms a confession that the

far as these psalmists represent it, is that it needs only that God shall shine forth, and the nation shall be saved. We cannot suppose that there was absolutely no sense of national sin; but it is decidedly kept in the background, and the prevailing tone is conviction of righteousness. If this tone does not belong to the Chaldean period, we cannot look for it except in the second century, which produced the Hasidim.

The greater part of Ps. 81 (from ver. 6 on) is devoted to a brief review of the ancient history of the nation, a feature that has already been referred to as fitting easily into the supposition of late origin. The immediate object of the historical review here seems to be to give authority to the national religious festivals, which are represented as having been established by the God of Jacob¹ at the time of the deliverance from Egypt; the author then takes occasion to point out the folly of disobedience. The attitude of the psalm towards the festivals—in that these are given special prominence, and are treated as having statutory authority—is very different from that of the pre-exilian prophets, and is not found in Haggai and Zechariah. No trace of it appears in the history earlier than the times of Ezra. Malachi is the first of the ritual prophets, and his tone is one of struggle, visibly differing from the calmness and settledness of this psalm. We might thus with probability put the latter some time after Malachi. A preciser note of date it would be hard to find in the psalm itself.² We can only suppose that it belongs to the period that produced the other Asaph odes with which it agrees so decidedly in general tone.

Ps. 82 is directed against unjust non-Israelitish judges. That they are not Israelites (though they are judges of Israelites) appears from the fact that the poet, after describing their injustice and predicting their downfall, passes naturally to the appeal to God to judge the land or the earth, on the ground that he is to inherit or does inherit, and thus has authority over, all the nations. Such a transition

nation is brought low by reason of its sin; there is only the feeling that it has not reached the fulness of righteousness, and that it may attain perfection it is necessary that it be delivered from enemies. Here, as elsewhere, the argument is "the glory of thy name," "for thy name's sake." The appeal to the divine Being is based on the supposition that he will be anxious to vindicate himself against the mocking skepticism of the nations who cry, Where is their God?

¹ The psalm appears to be Ephraimitic, but not polemic.

² The agreement with the preceding psalm in the mention of Joseph may be merely an accident of arrangement, or the compiler may have been guided by a superficial resemblance. It remains possible, of course, that we have here a distinct group of Joseph-psalms.

and such an appeal becomes natural only when we suppose that the author had in mind judges belonging to foreign peoples. The social situation thus presented is that the Jews are under the control of foreign resident rulers, a condition of things that, so far as our information goes, seems not to have existed till the third or the second century before the beginning of our era. The exilian Jewish community in Babylonia appears, in the book of Ezekiel, as isolated from its conquerors and living under its own institutions in quiet. Certainly quite peaceful and pleasant relations between the two peoples are contemplated by Jeremiah's letter to the captives (Jer. 29). Nowhere in the second Isaiah, not in ch. 53, nor in 57 of doubtful date, is there a trace of civic or judicial wrong suffered by the exiles at the hands of their conquerors. To discover such a social condition, with foreign judges living in Jewish communities in Palestine, we must come to the Greek period, and, most naturally, to the Greek-Syrian, since under the rule of the Ptolemies the Jews seem in general to have enjoyed royal favor.

The poet's declaration that the unrighteous judges shall fall like "one of the princes," that is, "like a prince," points to a time when princeliness was the synonym of danger and uncertainty, when many men reached positions of honor and power only to be cast down by political revolutions or the fickleness of kings, a description that admirably suits the history of the third and second centuries (compare Ps. 75 and the book of Ecclesiastes).

The author, thinking of the mighty power of these men, styles them gods, that he may make the antithesis of their fall the sharper ("ye shall die like men"), and may the more effectively point to the God of Israel, who stands in the midst of his people, the congregation of God, to guard their interests, and himself is judge over these proud, unscrupulous god-judges.

Ps. 83 receives its best illustration from the first book of Maccabees. The first and last parts of the psalm are devoted to a description and denunciation of a dangerous confederation against Israel. The intensity of feeling, the eagerness and bitterness, are just such as we find in the historical literature which narrates the struggle with the Syrians. Further, the combination of hostile peoples mentioned in the psalm is actually found in the Maccabean period, and nowhere else. Edom appears in 1 Macc. ver. 3, Ammon ver. 6, Tyre and its surroundings ver. 15, the Arabians (Amalek, the Hagarenes¹)

¹ Here also we may include the Ishmaelites and Gebal. Amalek might also be included in the name Edom.

ver. 39, the Philistines ver. 66. When we then take into account the number of hostile tribes mentioned in the fifth chapter as dwelling across the Jordan, we shall have no difficulty in supposing that Moab and the children of Lot were included among them. As for the Assur of ver. 9 of the psalm, it is clear from the connection that it cannot mean Assyria.¹ In Gen. 25. 3, the Assurim are descendants of Abraham and Ketura, that is, a nomadic tribe living on the border south of Palestine. And such a tribe would naturally be mentioned in the psalm along with Ammonites, Moabites, and Idumeans. The coalition is therefore substantially that which was formed against Judas. There is no other period of the history in which we can find mention of precisely this combination of tribes. Certainly, at the time of the Chaldean siege, no Jewish poet would have thought of making such a detail as this of the enemies; nor would the picture be natural in the days of Hezekiah and Isaiah; in the period of Jehoshaphat and Asa there is no sign of hostility on the part of Tyre, not to speak of the brilliant success and prosperity which attended that period according to the accounts; and David is of course out of the question. We may, therefore, with reasonable certainty, regard this psalm as an outcry against that combination of surrounding tribes the conflict with whom is described in the fifth chapter of First Maccabees. It is merely an appeal to the God of Israel for help in a great political emergency, and has no ethical character. We see, however, in the expression "thy hidden ones," ver. 4, the same sense of intimate national relations with God which we have found in other psalms of this group. There is naturally also a very strong monotheistic feeling, which we find brought out in the last verse.

Ps. 50 stands apart from the other odes inscribed with the name of Asaph, and differs from them notably in tone and historical social setting. There is no sign of political conflict nor of social suffering. There is the contrast between the wicked and God's beloved, but while in the main group the wicked are always obviously foreigners, here their foreign character is not so evident. At the same time it is true that in vers. 4, 5, the "people" are synonyms with the "beloved" (the Hasidim, rendered "saints" in the English version), and therefore it would be quite natural to regard the wicked of the latter half of the psalm as non-Israelites. If this fact should lead us to assign the psalm to that later period during which the Jews lived in

¹ Here the King James' version has the advantage of the Revision; Assur, at least, does not commit it to any particular country.

close social relations with foreigners, still the quiet, gnomic tone would seem to take us out of the period of sharp political conflict. In this regard the author may have been in a position not unlike that of the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes, — living in full view of social inequality and corruption, but looking on the social picture with the eye rather of the philosopher than of the prophet.

The psalmist's attitude toward the sacrifices is peculiar. He is not unfriendly, at least not hostile to the ritual, for his people are described as those who have made a covenant with him by sacrifice (ver. 5), and God is represented as declaring that their burnt offerings are continually before him. Yet the poet looks on all this elaborate system of sacrifice as something secondary and subordinate, since God, the Lord of all things, has no need of the flesh of bulls and the blood of goats, and rather desires the sacrifice of thanksgiving. We here again see a tone of thought not unlike that of Ecclesiastes, the emphasizing of the ethical over against the ritual: "He that orders his way I will show him the salvation of God." This psalm may have been written in Palestine or in any other Jewish community. We cannot separate it from Ecclesiastes and the later parts of Proverbs; it could hardly be earlier than the third century and may belong to the latter half of the second. Its most interesting feature is its non-sacerdotal, non-prophetic disposition to lay stress on the weightier matters of the law and demand mercy rather than sacrifice. Its separation from the other Asaph psalms is perhaps due to the difference of tone and content, though one would be disposed to believe that it originated in a different circle and had not come under the notice of the collector of the third book.