

# Israel and Her King

*His Sheep to be Slaughtered*

**Psalm 44:1** *To the choirmaster. A Maskil of the Sons of Korah.*

*People*<sup>1</sup> O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old:  
<sup>2</sup> you with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted; you afflicted the peoples, but them you set free;  
<sup>3</sup> for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face, for you delighted in them.

*Leader* <sup>4</sup> You are my King, O God; ordain salvation for Jacob!

*People* <sup>5</sup> Through you we push down our foes; through your name we tread down those who rise up against us.

*Leader* <sup>6</sup> For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me.

*People* <sup>7</sup> But you have saved us from our foes and have put to shame those who hate us.

<sup>8</sup> In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever. Selah

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*People* <sup>9</sup> But you have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies.

<sup>10</sup> You have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoil.

<sup>11</sup> You have made us like sheep for slaughter and have scattered us among the nations.

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<sup>1</sup> “People,” “Leader,” and “Together” are my additions to help us see how the Psalm was used in the temple. On Psalm 44 being a “Call and Response” community lamentation see deClaisse-Walford and Tanner, “Book Two of the Psalter: Psalms 42–72,” in *The Book of Psalms*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, 408.

<sup>12</sup> You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them.

<sup>13</sup> You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us.

<sup>14</sup> You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples.

*Leader* <sup>15</sup> All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face

<sup>16</sup> at the sound of the taunter and reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger.

*People* <sup>17</sup> All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant.

<sup>18</sup> Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way;

<sup>19</sup> yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death.

<sup>20</sup> If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god,

<sup>21</sup> would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart.

<sup>22</sup> Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

*Together* <sup>23</sup> Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever!

<sup>24</sup> Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

<sup>25</sup> For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground.

<sup>26</sup> Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!

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## Psalm 44

# What Is Israel?

**WHAT IS ISRAEL?** Be careful. It is a trick question. Many people stumble over it. Israel was a man. His name was Jacob, but God gave him the new name Israel. This man had twelve sons who became the twelve tribes of Israel. In other words, Israel is a **national, biological, physical people** group: A race of people among the races of people in this world, a kingdom among many kingdoms with physical borders. They were easy to spot. They have no king but Yahweh who sat upon his ark-throne in the tabernacle and temple. This Israel existed long ago. This Israel exists today. Israel has never gone away or been “replaced.” Easy enough, right?

**What is Israel?** I told you to be careful. Israel was a man. His name was Jacob, but God gave him a new name Israel *in order to represent the change of person that Jacob had become*. Jacob wasn't exactly the kind of boy you'd want to bring home to momma. His name meant “deceiver.” He was kind of a scoundrel for most of his life. Then God met him and changed his life from the inside out. God had chosen Jacob before he was born, transformed Jacob, overpowered his

stubborn and sinful will, because there was another people always in mind in the name Israel. This was according to the covenantal promise God had made with Abraham, Jacob's grandfather. "You shall be the father of a multitude of nations" (Gen 17:4). Thus, Israel is an international, supernatural, spiritual people. They are a kingdom in their own right, but they have no physical borders. They exist within the kingdoms of this world, hidden and out of plain sight. They have no king but Christ. This Israel existed long ago. This Israel exists today. Israel has never gone away or been "replaced."

This is what makes the question tricky. There are and have always been two Israels. Not just one. In Romans 9:6, the Apostle says, "Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel." Yet, he calls Christians "true Jews" (2:28-29). Hence, two Israels. When people talk about "Israel" and don't define what they are talking about, it can get confusing at the least, and at the worst, theology can start to get quite muddy. This is one of the reasons why anything from baptism to eschatology can be so very different within Christian groups. We are not being clear about "Israel."

This is true also in our Psalm today. Because this is true, I want to consider the relationship of the two Israels to one another before looking at the Psalm. First, while real, **national Israel is a type of spiritual Israel**. That is, what you see with your eyes is a sign of what you can't see with your eyes. The physical people is a marker that points you to the spiritual people. It was never meant to be an end to itself.

Second, sometimes spiritual Israel **comes from inside** physical Israel. Moses or David are examples. Both were biological Jews. But both were also chosen and saved by God—true Jews. They were Israel in both senses. Sometimes spiritual Israel is **grafted** into the physical Israel. This would be true of any Gentile in the OT who became a national Jew but was also saved. Someone like Ruth would be an example of this. But sometimes—and this was very rare in the OT because it also pointed forward to something in the future, spiritual Israel merely **came into contact with** national Israel. I take it that Nebuchadnezzar was saved by the LORD. Moses' father-in-law Jethro was too. But they never converted to Judaism. Nevertheless, through Daniel and Moses, they came into contact with the nation and God saved him.

In all cases, national Israel is involved in the transformation of spiritual Israel. But again, not as an end to itself. There is something that both Israels have in common with one another that is more foundational and part of both. That something is actually a someone. That someone is **the King of both Israels**. In one, he is the king of a national group of people whose kingdom is of this world. In the other, he is the king of an international, a supernatural group of people. His kingdom is not of this world, but his people live in this world, and because of this tension, it causes some very difficult struggles for them as they learn to think about how their King is ruling over their lives. It is this kingship of the King of Israel that we are going to look at today.

## Psalm 44

Psalm 44 is the third of the “songs of Korah” (**Ps 44:1**), and the third song of Book II of the Psalter. Like the previous two, it is a “**maskil**,” or a song of instruction or wisdom (LXX). It is the first **corporate** prayer for help in all the Psalms, following immediately after two songs that make up a single fuller song of individual crisis that is

“upheld by the memory and reality of God’s presence in the communal worship of Israel” and operating “out of the same sense of bewilderment at the absence of God in a time of extreme need that characterizes the earlier two psalms.”<sup>2</sup>

It is a song of responsive reading/singing. The people sing. Then the leader. Then the people. Then the leader. Until the end, when they all sing together. It is divided into two main parts with a conclusion at the end. The first remembers God’s saving activities in the past. The second, unexpectedly, cries out about his rejection of the people in the present. The conclusion calls for God to arouse himself, to “rise up,” and redeem his people. This is very similar to the previous two songs, so that what we said about this in those songs is true in this one as well.

### *God’s Wondrous Deeds of Old to the Nation*

The song begins with the people. “O God, we have heard with our ears, our fathers have told us, what deeds you performed in their days, in the days of old” (Ps 44:1). Moses

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<sup>2</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms*, vol. 1, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 682.

was fond of this kind of language. “Remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you” (Deut 32:7). “Has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?” (Deut 4:34). The people are recounting God’s activities as far back as Moses’s day and in the days shortly thereafter.

This is vital for the people of God to do this, because what they see God doing today may not be what he has done in the past. Particularly, if he is showing a frowning face of providence, if that is all you know, what reason for hope would you have? But God *has* acted in the past. He *has* done great deeds. We learn about them as children. We sing about them as adults. And we must remember that this is no wishful-thinking religion. It is rooted in real events in space and time. If God has not acted, our faith is pointless and we are dead in our sins with the rest of mankind. Do you



recount God's deeds to yourself? Do you do it often? What should you recall?

“You with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted; you afflicted the peoples, but them you set free; for not by their own sword did they win the land, nor did their own arm save them, but your right hand and your arm, the light of your face, for you delighted in them” (Ps 44:2-3). It is tempting to think we know what is going on here, but many have missed it completely.

This passage is a classic OT example of showing us **the Triune God**. At first, it doesn't seem this way, especially if you've been brought up to read the OT believing that the Trinity isn't really in the OT, or that no one understood it until Jesus came. When you read this, it is good to see “God” here in his essence, that is as the One God. *God* did this for his (singular) people. And yes, he did. But it is also important to see God here *in his Persons*. The persons did this for the people. This is also true.

“You with your own hand” parallels “your right hand and your arm.” The “right hand” of God is not referring to a literal right hand as opposed to a left hand on a body, as if God has a body. It refers to **a seat of power**, a position of

authority held by someone. In other words, there are two persons here, not one. One is at the right hand of the other. David sings in **Psalm 110:1**, “The LORD [Yahweh] said to my Lord [Adonai], ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’” David, the king, has two Lords. One is at the right hand of the other. One is clearly **the Father**. But this passage is quoted of **Jesus Christ** many times in the NT. Jesus is the right hand of the Father.

“Right hand” is **a military term**. The right hand is the one who goes out and fights the battles. “Your right hand, O LORD, glorious in power, your right hand, O LORD, shatters the enemy... “The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is his Name” (**Ex 15:6, 3**). This “Right Hand” is a major character in the OT called the Angel of the LORD, though Isaiah calls him something a bit different. “The Angel of His presence saved them; in his love and in his pity he redeemed them” (**Isa 63:9**). “Of his Presence” is literally “Of His **Face** (*panim*).” And what is said in our Psalm? “Your right hand and your arm, and the light of your face (*panim*)” saved them.

This is very important for what we will say later. The Psalm says that God’s right hand “**drove out the nations.**”

This is talking on **the physical level** of Israel, the nation of Israel. Who is it that drives out the nations? God? Yes, when thinking about the One divine essence. But we are Christians. And when thinking about the Persons—which is exactly what the Psalm is doing—it is specifically and especially **the Angel** with the Spirit. This is what Exodus and Judges tell us. Yahweh sends an angel before the people (**Ex 23:20**). He can forgive sins (**21**). He makes the covenant with Israel (**Jdg 2:1**). His voice must be obeyed because he bears the divine Name (**Ex 20:22**) and is the “Face/Presence” of God (**Ex 23:21; 33:1**). He is the “terror” that goes before them (**23:27**) and “drives out” the inhabitants of the land (**28; Jdg 2:3**).

I want to mention that the Spirit is most likely in our Psalm passage here as well, just as he is in Exodus and Isaiah and other places. Immediately after talking about the Angel, Isaiah continues, “**He lifted them up and carried them all the days of old. But they rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit; therefore he turned to be their enemy, and himself fought against them**” (**Isa 63:9-10**). The image of the **Spirit-bird** (see also **Dt 32:10-11**) is replaced in our psalm with the image of **the light of the face of the Right Hand**. While Jesus is the

Light of the world (**John 1:9, 8:12**), the Spirit is also the Light—the pillar of fire in the wilderness and the burning bush of Sinai (**Neh 9:19-20**), the seven burning torches of Revelation (**Rev 4:5**) who illuminates our hearts with the wisdom and knowledge of Christ (**Eph 1:17-18**).

In the Psalm, it isn't the face that is the light, but the Light that illumines the Face of Christ. “Yahweh delivered Israel by means of his right hand, his outstretched arm and the light of his presence (**Ps 44:3**).”<sup>3</sup> Thus, Christians have said, “What then is the face of God the Father, whose light has been impressed on us? Surely it is none other than the only begotten Son of God, the exact image, who for this reason says, ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’ It has been pressed on us, shaping us into his form and engraving the illumination through his own Spirit as a divine image on those who believe in him ... ‘Light shines in the darkness,’ according to the truthful voice of the Spirit bearer ... [Psalm 44:3] refers to the revelation from the Son through the Spirit and the direction of all that exists as the ‘light from God the Father’s face’” (**Cyril of Jerusalem, John**

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<sup>3</sup> J. M. Hamilton, “[Divine Presence](#),” ed. Tremper Longman III and Peter Enns, *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Wisdom, Poetry & Writings* (Downers Grove, IL; Nottingham, England: IVP Academic; Inter-Varsity Press, 2008), 117.

1:9); and “The Father who by the Son and in the Spirit reveals himself to us. ‘There are many who say, ‘O that we might see some good!’ Let the light of your face shine on us, O Lord!’”<sup>4</sup>

Back to the Angel. This Angel is national Israel’s King. They understood this, for it is he who sat on the ark-throne in the tabernacle. “Sent” by the Father (Ex 23:20; cf. John 5:36-37, etc.), he is the Father’s only-begotten Son (Ps 2:7). The nations have heavenly adopted sons as their gods (Deut 32:8). Israel has the Son of God as its God (9). He is Yahweh. He is the man of war. The Commander of the Armies of the LORD. The Right hand. The Face of God, his very Presence with them. He sits upon the ark as Israel’s king ruling from within their midst. This is the one the people are singing about now, and they know it! *He* saved them. *He* drove out the nations. *He* planted Israel in the land. They

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<sup>4</sup> Herman Bavinck, John Bolt, and John Vriend, *Reformed Dogmatics: Prolegomena*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 233. Also, “The three of Them are light: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit ... The three are seen to me as in one countenance...” (Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022 AD), Hymn 12:19-20) in Hilarion Alfeyev, “The Patristic Background of St. Symeon the New Theologian’s Doctrine of the Divine Light,” in Athanasius and his opponents, Cappadocian Fathers, other Greek writers after Nicaea: Papers presented at the Twelfth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 1995, *Studia Patristica* Vol. XXXII, ed. Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters Publishers, 1997), 235 n. 59 [229-38].

didn't do it by their own swords. God did it by his Right Hand and Illuminated Face. For he delighted in them.

Thus, the worship leader now responds. “**You are my King, O God; ordain salvation for Jacob!**” (Ps 44:4). The king theme becomes explicit. The King is fighting for his people. “**Ordaining salvation**” in the immediate context probably refers to commanding victories (NAS), that is leading the people in military conquest. This is the theme of most of the song.<sup>5</sup>

But who are his people? Remember our original question. Curiously, here they are called “**Jacob.**” **The Deceiver!** He doesn't use the name “Israel,” but Jacob. They are never called “Israel” in this Psalm. Instead, it is the earlier name. The name of the man who needed to be saved and changed from the inside out. This hints that something more than military conquest is needed. The people themselves need to be changed. Salvation needs to come to Jacob, not just physically but spiritually. This is the only God who can do it.

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<sup>5</sup> This is an interesting verse to translate. One has, “**You are my king, my God, my commander, the Savior of Jacob**” (Dahood). I like this translation, but “commander” is a verb. Hence, the NAS has “**Though art my king, O God! Command victories for Jacob.**” This is probably better than “ordain” victories, because we tend to use “ordain” in the sense of predestinate, but God has already done all the predestinating that can be done (which is all of it).

Now the people chant back, “Through you **we** push down our foes; through your Name **we** tread down those who rise up against **us**” (5). The Name of God is again the Commander of the armies. It is the Son of God. He leads them into battle and victory. It is not of their own strength.

The leader responds, “For not in **my** bow do I trust, no can **my** sword save me” (6). The dance between “me” and “we” shows the change of singer. The worship leader, perhaps David originally, now the sons of Korah, help the people see that they are not to trust in themselves. “Not by might, nor by power, but *by my Spirit*, says the LORD of hosts” (Zech 4:6). “The sword *of the Spirit*” (Eph 6:17).

The people finish the first part of the song now. “But you have saved **us** from our foes and have put to shame those who hate **us**. In God **we** have boasted continually, and **we** give thanks to your name forever. Selah” (Ps 44:7-8). This concludes the whole remembrance section. God has done many mighty things for Israel. Salvation here is clearly seen as bringing the people into the land of Israel, delivering them from the wicked peoples who lived in Canaan, making them a byword on the lips of the surrounding nations. “Have you heard what Yahweh did to them? He destroyed

them.” Bringing terror upon all who hear of his mighty Name.

With this, we are to pause (*selah*) and reflect upon just what God did. And pause long and hard we should, because what comes next is quite jarring indeed.

*Declaration of Innocence. God, What are you Doing?*

The people finished the first stanza. God has given many great deliverances. The Exodus. The conquest of Joshua. Now they begin the second. “But you have rejected **us** and disgraced **us** and have not gone out with **our** armies” (9). Listen to what the Angel of the LORD told the people at the beginning of the book of Judges. “Now the angel of the LORD went up from Gilgal to Bochim. And he said, ‘I brought you up from Egypt and brought you into the land that I swore to give to your fathers. I said, ‘I will never break my covenant with you, and you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall break down their altars.’ But you have not obeyed my voice. What is this you have done? So now I say, I will not drive them out before



you, but they shall become thorns in your sides, and their gods shall be a snare to you’” (Jdg 2:1-3).

Here’s the point. What the people sing now is nothing new. But it is important. It is so important, they sing basically the same thing **a total of six times**. Six is one short of seven, the perfect number. It is a number that screams out for completion.

**One.** We’ve seen that they cry out that God has rejected them (9).

**Two.** They complain that in war, Israel is the one who is turned back, while the enemy gets the spoils (10).

**Three.** The image turns to one of sacrifice. Jacob becomes the sacrifice! “**You have made us like sheep for slaughter and have scattered us among the nations**” (11).

**Four.** This scattering becomes the image that turns into a kind of selling back into slavery. “**You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them**” (12). For God to sell his people and not care about the price is for him to completely disregard them. It is an image of total indifference. Like selling a bag of rocks that you found in your driveway to someone who passes by (Yeah, I did that as a little kid. Made a couple of bucks too. But only because

I was cute or maybe they felt sorry for me. None of us cared about the rocks).

**Five.** “You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us” (13). Not only is God indifferent to their plight. He is actually the one behind them becoming a curse word to the enemy. *He* has made them the taunt of the nations. There is a website you can go to where you can have **Shakespeare** insult thee. Thou goest to the site; thou getteth an insult. “**Get thee to a nunnery.**” Click the button, it will taunt you second time. “**What a drunken knave was the sea to cast thee in our way!**” Again. “**Go, prick thy face, and over-red thy fear, Thou lily-liver’d boy.**” That’s what the nations are doing with Israel. They are the taunt. They are the object of ridicule and scorn. They receive insult that would make Shakespeare blush.

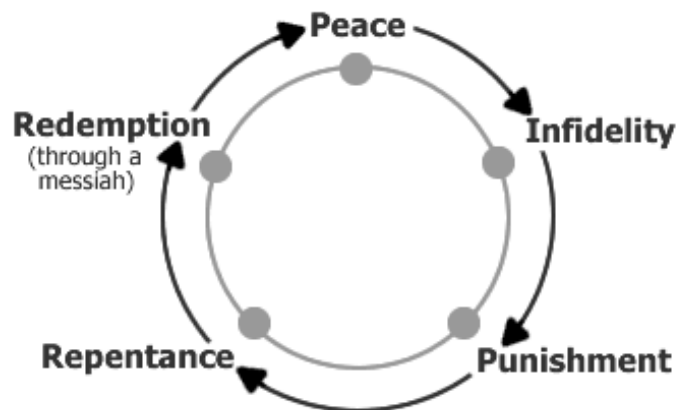
**Six.** “You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples.” (14). “**Where is the God of Israel?**” “**Who will deliver you from my hand?**” “**Obviously, no one. That’s why you are now my slaves.**” If you were ever bullied as a kid, or were always the end of kid’s jokes at school, you know a little of what Israel is

singing. They are the bullied. They are the joke. *And they are singing that God is the one who has made them this way.*

The cumulative effect of this must not be unfelt. To sing to God these six times that he has rejected them, disgraced them, scattered them, sold them, made them the joke, and laughingstock of the nations, this is not something we normally do. I've never heard a CCM song or a hymn that has a single line like this. This does something to your view of God. It reflects something of your view of God. This does something to your view of yourself. It reflects something of your view of yourself. There isn't a psychologist alive that would recommend this as therapy for bad self-esteem issues.

The worship leader tells you what it does. You could read this as the **seventh**, the final thing in the list. “**All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face at the sound of the taunter and reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger**” (15-16). It is difficult to imagine the pain someone like this is experiencing, which is multiplied from what an unbeliever would feel without God, because of its theology about God. God is the one making this happen. And yet, we know from many places in the OT that theology like this is true!

An important question to ask now is, **what is the occasion for this song?** In other words, what historical event might they be singing about? We know they aren't singing about being slaves in **Egypt**, for that predates the great events they have just sung about. Perhaps they are singing about the days of the **Judges**, when God sent Israel into captivity time and time again. Judges is illustrative of the reason the Bible says these things will come upon God's people. Over and over again, the book presents us with a cycle of *sin-servitude, supplication-salvation-shalom*. The nation goes into captivity because it has sinned. They serve a foreign nation as slaves for a time. Until they cry out to God in prayers of supplication. Then God, in his grace, sends them salvation through a Judge. Then they have peace (shalom) for a period of time until it all happens again.



The law teaches Israel that when they break his covenant, God will eventually pour out on them the curses of the covenant which include the very things they are singing about now. “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you” (Dt 28:15). But it isn’t the times of Judges either, for that was long ago. For this reason, many commentaries think that what is in mind now is the exile into [Babylon](#). The song doesn’t give us a date, so we are left to guess.

The problem is, something like the exile is frankly, a terrible guess. Why? Because at this moment, the song takes [a drastic and unexpected turn](#). The people now respond to the leader, “All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant. Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way” (Ps 44:17-18). With this confession, it is simply impossible that the Exile or anything in the Judges could be the occasion for the song. Why? Because those happened [because they sinned!](#) Not only this, but this is the only time such language of innocence is ever used in the

eleven community lament psalms.<sup>6</sup> Something very strange is going on here. It is not normal to proclaim your innocence in the face of God giving you up to your enemies like this.

Before thinking about that, let's finish with the cry of the people, just to reinforce the point. “Yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death” (19). Jackals live in the desert, the place of wild beasts and demons. The shadow of death takes on even more vivid and horrifying significance in that light. “If we have forgotten the Name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart” (20-21). Israel's God is omniscient. There is nothing you can do to hide anything from him. Even keeping it in, saying nothing won't keep him from knowing. Therefore, to proclaim your innocence in front of this God, you must really mean it!

“Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered” (22). If there is anything

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<sup>6</sup> The others are: Ps 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, and 137. On this see Nancy deClaisse-Walford and Beth Tanner, “Book Two of the Psalter: Psalms 42–72,” in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 408.

like a refrain as there was in the last two songs, this would be it. He has already brought up this metaphor (see vs. 11). Now he returns to it again. What does it signify? When sheep go off to slaughter, they do not protest. They do not whine. They do not complain. They do nothing. They just stand there until they are dead. This is the last verse the people and leader sing to each other. It is also the most important we can look at today. Why?

### *That Other Nation and a Suffering Servant King*

This is the verse that is quoted in the NT by the Apostle Paul. But he does not quote it about the physical nation. The context he sees it having is vastly different from anything we have talked about thus far in the song. One could argue that maybe someone like David or Josiah went out to battle and God did not give them victory, even though they were “good” kings. But even that doesn’t really come close to what Paul is doing. Remember, national Israel is a type of spiritual Israel. Both are real. Both are true. Both were there in the OT. Jesus is king of both.

The Apostle uses this verse to talk about things that are extremely similar to what we have just read. He lists a “catalog of troubles,”<sup>7</sup> calling them the “sufferings of the present time” (cf. Rom 8:18). Curiously, there are six of them, three pairings that end in a seventh: tribulation or distress; persecution or famine; nakedness or peril; or the sword (8:35).

How did people think about this in days gone by? Sirach says, “Such things happen to all flesh, both man and beast, and sevenfold more upon sinners. Death, and bloodshed, strife, and sword, calamities, famine, tribulation, and the scourge; these things are created for the wicked” (Sir 40:8-10). On the other hand, Job’s friend Eliphaz said, “He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no evil shall touch you ... Blessed is the one whom God reproves ... In famine he will redeem you from death, and in war from the power of the sword. You shall be hidden from the lash of the tongue ... At destruction and famine you shall laugh” (Job 5:19, 17, 20-22). In both cases, these things are obviously the punitive (discipline or punishment) work of the Creator

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<sup>7</sup> See great the discussion in Mark A. Seifrid, “Romans,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 636-37.



because of sin. But again, those singing Psalm 44 have done nothing wrong. This is like Job, the opposite of Eliphaz' point. And the opposite of Paul's too.

How does the Apostle see this part of Psalm 44? Not in the context of national Israel, but of **spiritual Israel**. This occurs just prior to **Romans 9:6** which tells us about the two Israel's because he has just raised the very point here without saying it in as many words. The start of the vital section is well-known: “**And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified**” (**Rom 8:28-30**).

To be “*foreknown*” is not to have God see what you will do in the future. He is not foreseeing actions, but people. It means to set his love upon you. These people God then *predestines* to be saved. This salvation occurs in time first when they are *called* by the Holy Spirit, second when they

are *justified* by faith. Then this, because it is a golden chain, guarantees their *glorification* in the future on the Great Day.

This shows that God is for *us* (**Rom 8:31**). For whom? For those who believe upon the Son Jesus. “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all” and thus in Christ he will graciously give us all things” (32). However, somehow Paul has Psalm 44 on his mind. Why?

Suddenly, he asks a series of three questions. First, “Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?” (33). Answer: No one, because it is God who justifies. God declares his elect “not guilty” the moment they believe in Christ by faith alone. Thus, legally speaking, they can say what the people of Psalm 44 now say. “We are innocent!”

Second, “Who is to condemn?” (34). No one, because Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, was raised—and “is at the right hand of God.” Ah, the **Right Hand** again. Jesus is the Right Hand. Here he is not fighting. He did that already at the cross. Now he is “interceding.” He is pleading our case before the throne of God. Satan cannot accuse us. No one can condemn us.

Third, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?” (35). Let’s return to the final stanza, the conclusion of our

Psalm for a moment, the part the people and the leader sing together: “Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever!” (Ps 44:23). It sounds like his love has passed them over. “Why do you hide your face?” (24). Ah, the Face again? Remember who the face is? It sounds like the Son’s love has separated itself from the people. “Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?” (24).

Now back to Romans. “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or the sword?” Affliction and oppression! This is Psalm 44. What is curious is that the Roman Christians had not yet dealt with this. What a strange thing to write to them. But the Apostle had, and he is speaking of his own experiences. He is preaching to himself. But he is also preparing the Roman Christians for some of the worst persecution that would ever come upon people in the history of the world, thanks to Nero. And what will they have done to deserve it? Nothing. Just like Paul. Just like Psalm 44. Because this psalm, through the type of the nation, is about spiritual Israel. It is about you, God’s Israel by faith. You can see it in Paul, but you can also

see it in the Psalm if you understand our point about two Israels.

The quote from the psalm comes next, and don't let its poignancy pass you by. “As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered’” (Rom 8:36). “As it is written” means that this verse in the Psalm was written because Christians would undergo these kinds of unfair things against them. Some of true Israel already had. Others would later. It is about them.

But the psalm stands in a different era of redemptive history than Paul. For when the psalm was written, Jesus had not yet come. In fact, the Face probably *was* hidden from them. But now, we see the face of God in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Angel would turn away from them, and even if they didn't do anything to deserve one particular military defeat, in the overall scheme of things, they of course did. And this psalm is therefore prophetic of you, upon whom has come the fullness of heavenly blessings in Christ.

Being considered as sheep to be slaughtered in the Psalm leads the congregation to sing together of their low-estate. “For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground” (Ps 44:25). It is like they are taking the curse of

the serpent upon themselves. That is how despised they feel themselves to be. Therefore, all they can do is cry out, “Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast (covenant) love” (26). And the Psalm ends.

Last time (Ps 42-43), we saw how the individual plea in the face of such injustice came to fulfillment in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The same is true again here in the corporate complement (Ps 44). For one who truly could sing Psalm 44 had all of these things happen to him personally. He was despised and rejected, the suffering servant of the Lord. Brought down to the dust, his belly clinging to the ground. He died. But three days later, he rose up. And through his resurrection, he redeems his people.

As I was preparing this sermon, I got an instant message from a friend asking me about why God continues to allow some particularly bad people to continue in their positions of religious authority and to be able to get away with lying about him and keeping him from seeing his children. He said, “I really have hard thoughts about God for that. Why does he do it? Why does he let the wicked prosper and hurt the innocent?” I told him, this is exactly what Psalm 44 is

asking, and that Romans 8 is answering. But its answer is not what we expect.

Though we face adversity like that of Psalm 44—unjust persecution, nations and families and friends turning against us, hostility and disaster for the sake of the gospel, any manner of tribulation, we do not cry out about the LORD rejecting us forever. Instead, they sing, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor power, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:37-39). Our King has conquered, therefore we are more than conquerors, even through ordained suffering and the continued evil in this world. We are like sheep to be slaughtered to conform us to the image of Christ. Those bad things that God won’t take away, he works them for your good so that through them you might be refined in the fires of sorrow and grief, where you come out the other side more like Jesus than you were before.

The heart-cry of the Psalm for God to rouse himself has been answered in the Beloved Son of God who died and

gave himself for us all through suffering unjustly for our sake. He loves his covenant love. He loves his Face and his Right Hand. But the time has now come for God to glorify himself through them in the face of Christ who is at the right hand of the Father in heaven.

Through him, the nation of Israel was often saved. And we remember. Through him, he was not able to ultimately keep that nation in his presence, for they were sinful and they did not have an atonement that could take this away for them. That nation pointed to those who came into contact with its King as spiritual Israel, who were innocent as they trusted in Christ. That nation pointed to a Man who would be True Israel, and through coming into vital union with this Vine, you may have life and the forgiveness of your sins.

Are you singing Psalm 44 with the nation or with the elect lady this day? Are you living prior to the Son being glorified, when his face was hidden or after when his Son is glorified through suffering, and you are conformed into his image through the same for his sake. It is for his sake that these things happen you know. **“For your sake we are killed all the day long.”** For his sake that we might know what he

did for us. For his sake that he might be glorified for his overwhelming grace in Christ. And for your sake he was killed on that Long Day, the Lamb of God slaughtered for you. So that you can be more than conquerors through him who loved you.