

Psalm 44

Introduction

The whole nation is suffering, presumably as a punishment for its sins. However, the Psalmist, who feels innocent, is perplexed by his personal suffering. This particular psalm is unique because it seeks a reason for the nation's disaster that goes beyond their own guilt. The Psalmist finds an answer, declaring: "We are being killed for your sake," which suggests their distress is part of a larger, worldwide battle against God and his chosen King. The New Testament later uses this concept to explain why the Church is persecuted, asserting that it ultimately will be victorious. Some details—like the people being scattered and their claim that they haven't worshiped idols—might suggest the psalm was written after the Exile. Nevertheless, because similar defeats happened even before the Exile and the psalm is included in the Second Book of the Psalter, it was likely written pre-Exile.

Exposition

Activities of God (44:1-3)

**44:1 We have heard with our ears, O God,
Our fathers have told us,
The deeds You did in their days,
In days of old:**

It is the responsibility of every father to tell their children of the faithfulness of God and His redemptive plans. It is the responsibility of every children to receive this and pass on to the next generation. Specific event the psalmist referring may the Exodus story which sums up the core of this plan. As a NT believer, we need to pass on the great work of Christ on the cross to those around us.

**44:2 You drove out the nations with Your hand,
But them You planted;
You afflicted the peoples, and cast them out.**

Lord also drove out various nations or tribes from the land of Canaan and gave that to Israel. They were expelled because of their sins (Genesis 15:12-21). If Israel sins she will be also be expelled likewise. There is no partiality with God. The afflictions are the consequence of their sins.

**44:3 For they did not gain possession
of the land by their own sword,
Nor did their own arm save them;
But it was Your right hand, Your arm,
and the light of Your countenance,
Because You favored them.**

The victory they got in the land of Canaan is to be credited to the God and not their military power. This is emphasized by three phrases such as *Your right hand*, *Your arm*, and *the light of Your countenance*. The last one refer to the Shekinah Cloud of Glory during the wilderness wandering period.

**44:4 You are my King, O God;
Command victories for Jacob.**

A citizen of kingdom will look to his king for victories against enemies. A noble king will protect his citizen from enemies. Here, the Psalmist is looking to the God who is his king. Lord God is the commander-in-chief of Jacob. Jacob is referring to the 12 tribes of Israel originated from the patriarch Jacob. He is the one that commands brings victories for the army of the nation of Israel. This prayer is true today, not primarily in physical sense, by in a spiritual sense, our enemies are the forces of darkness and the sinful nature that is in us.

**44:5 Through You we will push down our enemies;
Through Your name we will
trample those who rise up against us.**

The Psalmist's unwavering confidence stems from his belief that God is his strength. Although many enemies may rise against him, his total dependence on God remains his virtue and his assurance.

**44:6 For I will not trust in my bow,
Nor shall my sword save me.**

The Psalmist is not saying that he would not use a bow or a sword, but his confidence is not placed in them. It is important that one has a bow and sword while going to battle. However, the effective use of these weapons depends on the inner guidance coming from the Lord when one trusts God.

**44:7 But You have saved us from our enemies,
And have put to shame those who hated us.**

The Psalmist is acknowledging God for the victory gained over his enemies. Not only did he achieve victory, but it was so decisive that his enemies were ashamed. This is the result for one who trusts in the Lord.

**44:8 In God we boast all day long,
And praise Your name forever. Selah**

Therefore, the Psalmist can boast, not in his own ability, but in the power of God. This is not a momentary truth; rather, it is a truth for all future generations to follow.

**44:9 But You have cast us off and put us to shame,
And You do not go out with our armies.**

The Psalmist does not hide the defeat and shame. He also realizes that the Lord is not going with their army. Shame is a result of defeat, especially before Gentile enemies. Furthermore, he acknowledges the sovereignty of God in this defeat.

**44:10 You make us turn back from the enemy,
And those who hate us have taken spoil for themselves.**

The defeat is augmented by escape from the battlefield and the subsequent plunder by the enemies of God. This resulted in a great loss of life and property. In those days, the spoils included women and children. The pain and shame must have been unbearable. However, the Psalmist does not abandon God. Instead, he is pouring out his heart to God.

**44:11 You have given us up like sheep intended for food,
And have scattered us among the nations.**

The sheep is a common domestic animal used for food and, therefore, does not have much value. The people of God seem to have no value, like sheep slaughtered for food. The suffering is intensified by deportation to different parts of the world: they were uprooted from their homeland.

**44:12 You sell Your people for next to nothing,
And are not enriched by selling them.**

Slavery was common in those days, and the victorious army would often sell the defeated people. As the huge number of Israelite's were sold into slavery, their value was diminished, meaning those who sold them did not make much profit. This situation inflicted great shame and demonstrated the low worth the Jewish people held in the eyes of their enemies.

**44:13 You make us a reproach to our neighbors,
A scorn and a derision to those all around us.**

The Jewish people felt abandoned by God, leaving them exposed to reproach from their enemies. They were scorned and derided by their neighbors, becoming objects of public contempt. This complete lack of respect highlights their utter shame and humiliation, particularly following their defeat and the profound sense that God had forsaken them.

**44:14 You make us a byword among the nations,
A shaking of the head among the peoples.**

The plight of the Jewish people is amplified by their standing among the surrounding nations. At one time, during the reigns of David and Solomon, they were respected; however, they are now thoroughly defeated and humiliated. They are not even respected by the people around them, who shake their heads in a gesture of contempt and look down upon them with hatred. This total lack of regard represented a sober and painful humiliation for the Israelite's.

**44:15 My dishonor is continually before me,
And the shame of my face has covered me,**

The Psalmist clearly acknowledges his continual shame and dishonor. As a slave likely living in a pagan land, he is constantly reminded of his shameful state by the people around him.

**44:16 Because of the voice of him who reproaches and reviles,
Because of the enemy and the avenger.**

The humiliation inflicted by the enemy is sustained through their ongoing reproaches and reviling. The author is transparent about this reality, acknowledging the existence of an enemy.

**44:17 All this has come upon us;
But we have not forgotten You,
Nor have we dealt falsely with Your covenant.**

The basic cause of this calamity is more than mere sin. The Psalmist boldly proclaims that they have neither forgotten God nor abandoned His covenant. This reminds us that we need to be constantly aware of our relationship with God and remain true to the covenant we made with him. Essentially, this means we must fulfill the responsibilities as a child of God.

**44:18 Our heart has not turned back,
Nor have our steps departed from Your way;**

The heart indicates a person's inner emotions. The Psalmist assures us that he has not turned his heart from God, thus testifying to a strong inner connection. Not only are his emotions right with God, but his external life (or "steps") is consistent with this inner relationship. It is important to remember that our unseen relationship with the Lord should be manifested in our visible, external lives. That is, our conduct should always be consistent with our relationship with God.

**44:19 But You have severely broken us in the place of jackals,
And covered us with the shadow of death.**

In spite of this bold affirmation of their relationship with God, God dealt very strongly against them. A "place of jackals" is a proverbial expression for a scene of ruin and desolation, suggesting that God had reduced their land to a desert. Furthermore, God covered them with "the shadow of death," meaning the deep gloom surrounding the time of death.

**44:20 If we had forgotten the name of our God,
Or stretched out our hands to a foreign god,**

The Psalmist asserts that they have not forgotten God and have not worshiped any deity other than Jehovah. The phrase "stretched out our hand" is used figuratively to mean worship or prayer.

**44:21 Would not God search this out?
For He knows the secrets of the heart.**

God is omniscience and nothing can be hidden from him. Psalmist is asserting his innocence. By the way, only God can read our minds. No human being, no angels, or evil spirits can read our mind. Hence, don't be afraid of any such being will read our mind. At the same time, we should fear God who knows the secrets of my heart and absolutely honest before him.

**44:22 Yet for Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.**

The theological crux of this Psalm—the ultimate reason for God's people's suffering—is revealed in the phrase, "For your sake." This means the Psalmist and his people suffer because the world hates their King, the Lord. While this is the ultimate cause, we can't deny that sin often serves as the immediate cause of suffering. The intense, persistent nature of their suffering is emphasized by the phrase "killed all day long." Furthermore, the image of being like "sheep for the slaughter" suggests that the world views them as having no rights; the common standards of 'human rights' simply do not apply to God's people.

**44:23 Awake! Why do You sleep, O Lord?
Arise! Do not cast us off forever.**

Awake and 'Why do you sleep?' are idioms using human languages. Theologically we know God does not sleep, however, the experience of the Psalmist is that God seems not responding. Such an experience is possible when sin separates us from the active fellowship with God. Such as state is unbearable to one who had experience the warmth of fellowship with God. In such a situation, the Psalmist all the more calling God to restore the broken fellowship.

**44:24 Why do You hide Your face,
And forget our affliction and our oppression?**

His prayer continues in the form of a question asking God why He is hiding his face. Hiding face is symbolic of no favor and displeasure. Those days when the king turn his face convey his intense displeasure. He also ask why God is forgetting his suffering and oppression by then enemy. This also points to a broken fellowship and the Psalmist longing to restore that fellowship. One may wonder why God seems hiding his face and forgetting our plight. Scripture asserts that it is not a absolute rejection by God. But it helps to appreciate the value of His fellowship when it is restored.

**44:25 For our soul is bowed down to the dust;
Our body clings to the ground.**

This is the imagery of a prayer. There are many postures in prayer: standing and kneeling are very common postures in the scripture. However, falling prostrate on the ground shows the humility of the person praying and the intensity of prayer. This posture reminds us of the prayer of Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane where it says that he fell on his face and prayed (Mat 26:39). It is a good model for us to pray especially when things seem gloomy.

**44:26 Arise for our help,
And redeem us for Your mercies' sake.**

Arise: It is invoking God to help his people by redeeming from the state of humiliation. Mercies' sake: The reason for God to act is not in the goodness of his people. Our actions will attract only the wrath of God. Hence, one should always be reminded of his unworthiness while approaching God in prayer. Such a prayer honors God and will be answered.

Additional Notes

How to Pray for One's Country

I. Israel's Previous History (:1-8)

A. The Facts of That History (:1-3)

B. The Force of That History (:4-8)

II. Israel's Present Helplessness (:9-22)

A. The Military Disaster Confronting the Nation (:9-16)

They were being:

1. Defeated (:9-10)

2. Deported (:11-12)

3. Derided (:13-16)

B. The Moral Dilemma Confronting the Nation (:17-22)

1. The Religious Revival It Had Experienced (:17-19)

2. The Remarkable Resolve It Had Expressed (:20-21)

a. Challenging God on All Counts (:20-21)

b. Choosing God at All Costs (:22)

III. Israel's Positive Hope (:23-26)

A Call Upon God to:

A. Regard His People (:23-25)

B. Rescue His People (:26)

Application