

PSALMS

Chapter 44

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: ² you with your own hand drove out the nations, but them you planted; you afflicted the peoples, but them you set free; ³ 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. ⁴ You are my King, O God; ordain salvation for Jacob! ⁵ Through you we push down our foes; through your name we tread down those who rise up against us. ⁶ For not in my bow do I trust, nor can my sword save me. ⁷ But you have saved us from our foes and have put to shame those who hate us. ⁸ In God we have boasted continually, and we will give thanks to your name forever. *Selah* ⁹ But you have rejected us and disgraced us and have not gone out with our armies. ¹⁰ You have made us turn back from the foe, and those who hate us have gotten spoil. ¹¹ You have made us like sheep for slaughter and have scattered us among the nations. ¹² You have sold your people for a trifle, demanding no high price for them. ¹³ You have made us the taunt of our neighbors, the derision and scorn of those around us. ¹⁴ You have made us a byword among the nations, a laughingstock among the peoples. ¹⁵ All day long my disgrace is before me, and shame has covered my face ¹⁶ at the sound of the taunter and reviler, at the sight of the enemy and the avenger. ¹⁷ All this has come upon us, though we have not forgotten you, and we have not been false to your covenant. ¹⁸ Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way; ¹⁹ yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death. ²⁰ If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, ²¹ would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart. ²² Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered. ²³ Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! ²⁴ Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? ²⁵ For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. ²⁶ Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!

Ps 44 Israel's cry for help after suffering a devastating defeat at the hand of an enemy. In the light of vv. 17–22, it is difficult to associate this psalm with any of those defeats announced by the prophets as judgments on Israel's covenant unfaithfulness. It probably relates to an experience of the kingdom of Judah (which as a nation did not break covenant with the Lord until late in her history), perhaps during the reign of Jehoshaphat or Hezekiah. Structurally, three thematic developments rise one upon the other as the psalm advances to the prayer in the closing verses. Its structure is like the stages of a ziggurat (a stepped pyramidal structure that the Babylonians built as a mountain-like base for some of their temples; leading to the temple that crowns it. First there is praise of the Lord for past victories (vv. 1–8), second a description of the present defeat and its consequences (vv. 9–16), third a plea of innocence (vv. 17–22), then finally the prayer (vv. 23–26). Each of the themes (recalling of past mercies, description of the present distress, and claim of covenant loyalty) in its own way functions as a ground for the appeal for help (CSB)

Lament in which Israel complains to God after suffering some national calamity and/or military defeat. They are chastened and confused that God has permitted this to befall them. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–8, God has helped in the past; vv 9–16, where is God now?; vv 17–22, God's people declare their innocence; vv 23–26, bold prayer for relief. (TLSB)

44:1–8 Praise to God for past victories: (1) those by which Israel became established in the land (vv. 1–3); (2) those by which Israel has been kept secure in the land (vv. 4–8). (CSB)

44:1 *our fathers have told us* – Fathers were responsible for teaching the faith (Dt 6:7), as well as general education. (TLSB)

what deeds you performed in their days – This was the expulsion of the inhabitants of Canaan followed by the planting of Israel in their stead. (Leupold)

God’s mighty acts of deliverance for His people; deliverance of the 12 tribes from slavery in Egypt and the giving of the Promised Land when He made them a nation (Ex 10:2; Dt 6:20–25; Ps 78:3–4). (TLSB)

44:2 *drove out the nations* – Not human might, but God alone gave the land by driving out Israel’s enemies (Jsh 3:10; Ps 78:55). (TLSB)

peoples – Former inhabitants of Canaan. (TLSB)

44:3 *not by their own sword* – The Israelites further understood and confessed that all this happened to them, not because of any merit or worthiness in them, but because in His free sovereign grace He did delight in them. (Leupold)

light of your face – When he does hide his face, those who depend on him can only despair. When his face shines on a person, blessing and deliverance come. (CSB)

Biblical expression for the Lord’s gracious favor shining on us like a bright, storm-free sky (4:6; Nu 6:25–26). Psalmist describes God in human terms as having “hand,” “arm,” and “face.” In Christ, God has taken flesh fully. (TLSB)

delighted in them – “All this [giving] He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, without any merit or worthiness in me” (SC, First Article, p xxxvi). (TLSB)

44:4 *my* – Here and elsewhere in this psalm the first-person singular pronoun refers to the nation corporately. (CSB)

Even under a human king, the psalmist recognizes God personally as the true King (TLSB)

Jacob – Also known as Israel. (CSB)

The human father of Israel (Gn 32:28) for whom, and through whom, God ordains salvation in the promise of blessing, fulfilled in Christ. (TLSB)

44:5, 8 *your name* – The name of the Lord is the manifestation of his character. (CSB)

The Lord’s name (Hbr *yahweh*) is not just a label by which He is known. Every attribute of His divine, saving character stands behind this name. Cf Ex 3:14–15. (TLSB)

When Israel was attacked in the past, God won the victory and was the ground for their boasting. *thanks to Your name*. God made Himself accessible through His name in the place where He resided on earth for His people: the tabernacle and Jerusalem temple (cf Dt 12:5, 11). The psalm

switches between the singular (“my,” v 4) and plural (“we,” v 5) as the psalmist speaks for the nation but also prays as an individual within the nation. (TLSB)

boasted continually – The point is that they were always indebted to him for their successes , and so they always had reason to praise and acknowledge him. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

selah – Hebrew; untranslatable. Mainly in the first two books of Psalms. Probably refers to the accompaniment of the harps during the psalm. (TLSB p. 993)

This often occurs in the middle of a psalm and which apparently signals an interlude. “The Sela indicates that one must be still and quickly think through the words of the psalm; for they demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers” (Luther). (Psalms – The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer p. 23)

Selah may be a musical notation. It could also be a point where a pause is desirable for the singer or reader of the psalm in order that the statement last made or the thought as a whole just developed may be reflected upon before the next turn of the thought appears. (Leupold)

44:9–16 But now you have forsaken us: (1) You have caused us to suffer defeat (vv. 9–12); (2) you have shamed us before our enemies (vv. 13–16). (CSB)

The psalmist is perplexed that Israel has suffered a crushing defeat in spite of God’s promises and their faith in him. He cannot understand why this should be. Since idolatry was present at almost every point of Israel’s history, the denial of idolatry must be understood as the assertion of the faithful among Israel. It is they who cannot understand why they are suffering in spite of their faith in God’s promises. (PBC)

44:9 *not gone with our armies* – From the nation’s perspective, God’s behavior has changed: Israel’s armies now go into battle without God. His absence causes their defeat. (TLSB)

44:10 *spoil* – As Israel retreats, their abandoned camp becomes booty for the enemy. (TLSB)

44:11 *sheep for slaughter* – Have not protected us as our Shepherd-King. (CSB)

The loss of troops suffered at the time must have been alarming, for Israel is spoken of as having been like sheep for slaughter (Hebrew: “sheep for food”), and captives taken on the field of battle were sold into slavery. (Leupold)

made us a byword among the nations – Israel’s defeat makes many Israelites slaves to other nations. (TLSB)

44:12 *sold your people* – Like chattel no longer valued (see Dt 32:30; Jdg 2:14). (CSB)

Complaint that God has cheaply sold His people to their enemies. He has made a bad bargain, dishonoring His own name among the nations. (TLSB)

no high price – For nothing of value (see Isa 52:3; Jer 15:13; cf. Isa 43:3–4). (CSB)

43:13 *taunt* – They state that by not helping them in battle God has made them a reproach – he has given their enemies the occasion to taunt them. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

44:14 *a laughingstock among among the peoples* – Because their God seems powerless to help, they are held in contempt, the butt of jokes. (TLSB)

By heaping up the descriptions of the enemies' onslaught of triumphant mockery the people underscore their deep humiliation. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

44:15 *disgrace...shame* – Each person is expression personal shame. Dishonor is always before them. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

44:16 *avenger* – One who strikes back in malicious revenge. (CSB)

Vengeful enemy holding up defeated Israel to scorn. (TLSB)

44:17–22 And we have not been disloyal to you: (1) We have not been untrue to your covenant (vv. 17–19); (2) you are our witness that we have not turned to another god (vv. 20–22). (CSB)

44:17 *your covenant* – See Ex 19–24. (CSB)

Without explicitly accusing God of being unfaithful, Israel maintains their faithfulness to the covenant given in Ex 19–24. (TLSB)

44:18 *your way* – The way marked out in God's covenant – May the way down which you lead me be straight, level and smooth, free from obstacles and temptations.). (CSB)

44:19 *you broken us* – But that cannot be used as evidence that we have been disloyal. (CSB)

place of jackals – A desolate place, uninhabited by man (see Isa 13:22; Jer 9:11). (CSB)

Desolate place, suitable only for scavenging animals, which eat the bodies of the fallen. (TLSB)

shadow of death – The absence of all that was associated with the metaphor “light.” (CSB)

It indicates that death was covering them; it is a term of fear and despair. If God did not intervene soon, they would die. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

44:20 *spread out our hands* – Prayed (see Ex 9:29). (CSB)

Posture of prayer. (TLSB)

stretch out hands. (1) Gesture of prayer that turns into reaching, a sign of longing for God's help (Ex 17:12; 1Ki 8:38; Ps 143:6). (TLSB p. 1277)

44:21 *he knows* – Psalmist calls God as witness to their faithfulness. (TLSB)

44:22 *Yet* – Or “As a matter of fact” or “As you, O God, know.” From the time of her stay in Egypt (see Ex 1), Israel has suffered the hostility of the nations because of her relationship with the Lord (see Mt 10:34). For Paul's application of this verse to the Christian community in the light of Christ's death and resurrection see Ro 8:36. (CSB)

for your sake we are killed – Cry of God’s people, who charge that God is hostile and indifferent. Although God allows suffering for reasons known to Him alone, we can yet be certain of His steadfast love (v 26; Rm 8:36). A great reversal: for *our* sake, *He* is killed! The innocent One who suffered all things, even death for us, then rose as Conqueror (Rm 8:31–39). (TLSB)

44:23–26 The appeal for help: (1) Awake to our need (vv. 23–24); (2) arise to our help (vv. 25–26). (CSB)

44:23 *Awake* – The Lord does not sleep while evil triumphs and the oppressed cry to him in vain (as they do to Baal; see 1Ki 18:27). But the psalmists’ language of urgent prayer vividly expresses their anguished impatience with God’s inaction in the face of their great need. (CSB)

Charge against God for His slowness to help the pious, while the godless escape. The Lord rests (Gn 2:2), but He does not sleep as we do. (TLSB)

Why – It expresses the anguish of relief not (yet) granted and exhibits the boldness with which the psalmists wrestled with God on the basis of their relationship with him and their conviction concerning his righteousness. (CSB)

44:24 *hide your face* – God is accused of withholding mercy and refusing to answer prayer (13:1). (TLSB)

affliction and oppression – Mentioning these here adds a motivation for God to respond – they were suffering apparently for no known reason. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

44:25 *bowed down to dust* – About to sink into death– The depths are often linked, as here, with Sheol (“the grave,”) and “the pit” , together with a cluster of related associations: silence, darkness, destruction, dust, mire, slime and mud.). (CSB)

44:26 *Rise up* – Hebrew idiom frequently prefaces an imperative calling for immediate action with the call to arise. (CSB)

Final appeal that their Redeemer God deliver them. (TLSB)

redeem – Here, as often, a synonym for “deliver.” (CSB)

steadfast love – The Hebrew for this phrase denotes befriending. Appeal to God’s “(unfailing) love, kindness, mercy” is frequent in the OT since it summarizes all that the Lord covenanted to show to Israel as well as to David and his dynasty.). (CSB)

Ps 44 The psalmist recounts God’s past faithfulness but complains that God is now against His people, letting them suffer defeat despite their faithfulness to Him. They petition Him to help them once more. As we undergo affliction, we are tempted to believe that God has deserted us or is unfairly punishing us. God is always “for you” despite everything you see, feel, or think to the contrary. God is not sleeping but helps, redeems, and loves—indeed, “He ... did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all” (Rm 8:32). • Awake, O Lord, and come to our side. Amen. (TLSB)