

# QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

## PSALMS 51—100

The following questions and answers have been selected from the files of the British and Foreign Bible Society and of the Netherlands Bible Society. In the former case the answers have mostly been provided by Rev. H. K. Moulton of the Translations Department, and in the latter case by the Translators' Advice Committee which consists of Old Testament scholars. In order to present this material in the most useful form we have freely adapted the wording, and refer to versions not mentioned in the original questions if these illustrate the point better for English-speaking readers. Where the verse numbering in the English Bible differs from that in the Hebrew, the latter follows in brackets. The following abbreviations have been used:

Am Tr: An American Translation (Psalms by J. M. Powis Smith)  
AV: Authorized (King James) Version  
comm: the Dutch version in the *Korte Verklaring* commentary  
LXX: The Septuagint (Greek) version of the Old Testament  
Malay: Bode's version of the Psalms, 1947  
Mft: Translation by James Moffatt  
OTTP: *Old Testament Translation Problems*, ed A. R. Hulst  
PBV: Prayer Book Version  
RSV: Revised Standard Version  
RV: Revised Version; mg: RV margin

### Psalm 51:8 (10)

Q. "That the bones which thou hast broken . . ." Is 'broken' to be rendered in the sense of sorrow, or literally?

A. 'Bones' means the whole body, cf. 42:10. The psalmist feels as if he is completely crushed by the sense of God's displeasure. Hence your figurative 'broken' seems justified.

### Psalm 51:10 (12)

Q. "A right spirit". Is it permissible to use the word for soul? What is the difference between 'soul' and 'spirit' in Hebrew?

A. The lexicon regards spirit here as referring to the mind. The word is *ruach* (Gk. *pneuma*), while the word for 'soul' is *nephesh* (Gk. *psuchê*). H. W. Robinson states: "'Soul' and 'spirit' eventually denote the same thing, viz. the conscious life of man, associated with the breath as the vital principle. But because 'spirit' originally denoted an energy acting on man from without, a divine energy, it naturally suggests a higher conception of the life of man as drawn from God." 'Right' here means 'steadfast'.

### Psalm 51:12 (14)

Q. "Uphold me with a free spirit" (RV). Does this refer to man's spirit, or the spirit coming from God?

A. 'free' = 'willing' (cf. RSV). This suggests that the meaning is a voluntary disposition in man to serve God.

### Psalm 58:1 (2)

Q. AV: "O congregation"; RV: "in silence", mg: "O ye Gods" or "O ye mighty ones". May we follow the AV?

A. For a discussion of the textual problem here, see OTTP. Probably the best reading is *'elim*, 'gods', but in this context it refers to the judges of the land, so that the rendering "mighty ones" is defensible. It is better not to follow the AV.

### Psalm 58:2 (3)

Q. RV: "Ye weigh out the violence of your hands in the earth"; RSV: "your hands deal out violence on the earth". What is the precise meaning of the Hebrew?

A. The meaning of the Heb. verb is uncertain: it can mean 'to prepare the

way' or it may be connected with the word for weighing scales. The RSV gives the general meaning.

**Psalm 60:4 (6)**

**Q.** RV: "... a banner... that it may be displayed because of the truth." RSV: "... to rally to it from the bow." Which reading should I follow? Here the RSV is rather difficult to translate; we would have to render '... flee from the power...'

**A.** Most authorities support the RSV. I take it that the picture is of god-fearing men escaping for refuge to God's banner from the attacks of their enemies. Your word for 'power' might be all right, or better some word for attack or shooting.

**Psalm 63:1 (2)**

**Q.** "Early will I seek thee", should this be 'early' or 'earnestly'?

**A.** The Heb. word can mean either to rise early or to seek earnestly, and the latter is obviously the meaning here. However, the RSV and most modern versions drop the intensive force of the word.

**Psalm 63:7 (8)**

**Q.** "The shadow of thy wings". Is it the shade of an outstretched wing that is meant, or the inner refuge of the chick in the safety of the mother's wings?

**A.** The LXX translation is "protection", and others support this. Of course there are many cases of a more literal use of the word shadow (e.g. "the shadow of a great rock"), but I think the primary idea is always of protection, even when it is in the form of shadow from heat. In any case a bird would more often protect its young than shade them.

**Psalm 64:8 (9)**

**Q.** Second has "Their tongues will cause them to stumble." May I follow this?

**A.** This is an obscure passage (see OTTP). It seems better that God should be the subject of the sentence: "He (God) shall make them stumble because of their tongue" (Peake).

**Psalm 65:2-3 (3-4)**

**Q.** The RSV runs these two verses together. Should we do so?

**A.** The RSV is based on an emendation. It is safer to keep to the standard division and translation.

**Psalm 65:5 (6)**

**Q.** "God of our salvation". Is "God our Saviour" a satisfactory alternative?

**A.** You can say "O God who savest us", but "God our Saviour" is almost equally good. Certainly you need not use an abstract noun.

**Psalm 65:6 (7)**

**Q.** RV: "his strength"; RSV: "Thy strength", which is much clearer. May we follow the latter?

**A.** The Heb. is "his", but the RSV rendering is perfectly good.

**Psalm 65:8 (9)**

**Q.** "The outgoings of the morning and the evening..." I have said sunrise and sunset; would east and west be better?

**A.** The matter is quite open; both are good, but there may be some reference to the morning and evening worship in the temple.

**Psalm 65:10 (11)**

**Q.** "Furrows and ridges". Here cultivation is carried on with the hoe, and we have used words for the hollows and heaps of soil resulting from hoeing.

**A.** You have found a good solution here. What have you done for 'ploughing' in the N.T., Lk. 9:62, 17:7; 1 Cor. 9:10? It also occurs a dozen or more times in the O.T.

**Psalm 65:12 (13)**

**Q.** "Pastures of the wilderness". Should this phrase be subject (as RSV) or object (as RV)?

**A.** Many modern translations and commentators make it the subject.

**Psalm 66:12**

**Q.** We have no word for 'to ride'. We just say 'to go by lorry, horse, etc'. So it is necessary to say what means of transport is used. Can you give any advice?

**A.** It has been argued quite cogently that "riding" in the O.T. normally means riding in a chariot and not on horseback.

**Psalm 68:13 (14)**

**Q.** May we use the word for speckled pigeon instead of dove, as it fits the description better?

The RSV seems to give more coherence in this verse by rendering 'they stay' instead of 'you stay'. May I follow this?

**A.** In this context your word for pigeon would seem to be very apt, although you lose an element of conformity for a concordance.

This is another obscure verse, and I think you would be justified in following the RSV here, although no other versions make the change.

**Psalm 68:26 (27)**

**Q.** "Bless God... the Lord". We have repeated the word 'bless' before 'the Lord'. "Fountain of Israel". We have no word for fountain, and have rendered 'descendants of Israel'.

**A.** It is quite right to repeat 'bless', and your rendering 'descendants' gives the sense, although losing the metaphor. What have you done in Ps. 36:9?

**Psalm 68:34 (35)**

**Q.** It is rather difficult to render "ascribe strength to God". May I translate "Give glory to God"?

**A.** Perhaps you can render: "Honour the strength of God".

**Psalm 69:13 (14)**

**Q.** RV: "Answer me in the truth of thy salvation." We have rendered: "Answer me for your salvation is a fact."

**A.** Yes, I think your word 'fact' is what the writer means in effect, cf. Moffatt "thy loyal aid".

**Psalm 69:21 (22)**

**Q.** In the gospels a transliteration of 'vinegar' is used. Kirkpatrick suggests that vinegar was wine that had gone bad and was unfit to drink. There is a word here for beer that has gone sour. May I use that instead?

**A.** Although Kirkpatrick's interpretation makes excellent sense in the psalms, this is a case where you want consistency with the gospels. If the transliterated word is already well known, it would be an advantage to use it here.

**Psalm 72:10**

**Q.** "Sheba... Seba". We are in difficulty as there is no *sh* in Bari, so that both names will appear the same. The PBV and LXX use Arabia for Sheba. Is this permissible?

**A.** The absence of *sh* is awkward! (What will you do in Judges 12:6?) Here the psalmist was mainly emphasizing the tribute of kings from afar rather than precise locations (cf. article in Hastings Dictionary). Sheba is probably Arabia, and Seba was probably in Africa (cf. Is. 43:3).

**Psalm 73:13**

**Q.** It seems necessary to repeat 'in vain' in the second line. Is this all right?

**A.** Certainly repeat 'in vain' if it is necessary to make the sense clear. You may always do this kind of thing if it makes no change in the sense.

**Psalm 73:24**

**Q.** "to glory": is this 'to the place of glory', or 'with glory'?

**A.** I take the noun to be in the accusative (there is no preposition) and translate 'with'.

**Psalm 75:3 (4)**

**Q.** RV: "The earth . . . dissolved". The usual word for dissolve does not seem right here as it is used of melting honey, wax, butter etc., so that to use it in connection with the earth would be unnatural. We have a word which is used idiomatically meaning 'to have a sudden start or jump caused by fright'; will this do?

**A.** The Heb. and the LXX both use a word which is used for melting wax or metal. What have you done in Ps. 46:6, which is an exact parallel? It may be you cannot be literal here, not because of the earth but because of the inhabitants. RSV has "totter", and Segond "tremble". Your word may be suitable, but think it over again.

**Psalm 75:4 (5)**

**Q.** Sometimes it is not possible to put a singular as the Heb. does (e.g. Ps. 76:3, 'shield, sword' must be rendered in the plural). So here, must not 'horn' become 'horns', since a cow has two?

**A.** Certainly collective singulars may generally be translated in the plural. But the case of 'horn' is a little different, as the horn is the emblem of strength—Hastings thinks it was originally the rhinoceros horn, only one! What have you got in Lk. 1:69? If you have to paraphrase to make it meaningful, try to find some fairly striking rendering.

**Psalm 76:5 (6)**

**Q.** "sank into sleep". I presume this means death, and have translated it 'last sleep'.

**A.** Yes, your rendering is justifiable.

**Psalm 78:46**

**Q.** "caterpillar". Does this mean the ordinary sort or locusts in the hopper stage?

**A.** Hastings is sure that it is a form of locust. By derivation the word means 'finisher'!

**Psalm 80:4 (5)**

**Q.** "anger". I see that the literal meaning is 'to smoke'. May I attempt to render it in this direction?

**A.** Ronald Knox once used this verse as an illustration of the perils of literal translation, for the I.C.C. renders, "Oh Lord of Hosts, how long dost thou smoke during the prayers of they people?"! But if you can safely preserve the idiom, do so, (cf. Mft: "how long will thine anger fume?").

**Psalm 80:5 (6)**

**Q.** Bread is not the food of the people here, so is it adequate to translate 'food'?

**A.** Yes, 'bread' normally means simply food, though there are places where it is literal.

**Psalm 80:10 (11)**

**Q.** RV: "cedars of God"; RSV: "mighty cedars". Which should it be?

**A.** The literal translation is "cedars of God", but it really means "mighty cedars", cedars so great that their supernatural origin is obvious.

**Psalm 81:5 (6)**

**Q.** "He went up over the land of Egypt." Bari does not use prepositions like this; there is no word for 'against'.

**A.** It is not really clear whether the reference is to God and the plagues, or to the Exodus; the context seems to favour the latter, so you could render "when he went out of the land of Egypt."

**Psalm 81:6 (7)**

**Q.** Can I render this verse as the direct speech of God? And may I render "thy" instead of "his" shoulder?

**A.** This verse is rather obscure; the RSV makes rather good sense of it, and you may do what you suggest.

**Psalm 81:15**

**Q.** RV: "their time"; RSV: "their fate". Does this refer to the prosperity of Israel, as some commentaries say, or to the fate of the enemies of Israel as the RSV renders?

**A.** Most modern versions take the latter view, but "fate" does not seem to be the usual meaning of the Heb. Thus the meaning is either "the time of Israel" or "the time (of subjection) of their enemies".

**Psalm 83:13 (14)**

**Q.** RV: "stubble"; RSV: "chaff". In Timor the rice-stubble is left standing in the fields, so it could not blow away! But is chaff the right word?

**A.** The meaning seems to be loose bits of straw rather than standing stubble or chaff. The word often translated "dust" in the first part of the parallel may be something like thistledown.

**Psalm 84:6 (7)**

**Q.** "valley of Weeping, balsam trees, or Baca". I wonder which to adopt. May I translate the second half of the verse "The first rain covers that place of hollows with blessings"?

**A.** "Weeping" is rather doubtful; it is safest to transliterate, "Baca". Your rendering of the second part of the verse gets the sense well.

**Psalm 85:1 (2)**

**Q.** RV: "captivity"; RSV: "fortunes". Which should it be?

**A.** RSV is rather paraphrasing here. It seems to mean that God restored the captives.

**Psalm 85:8 (9)**

**Q.** RV: "turn again to folly"; RSV: "turn to him in their hearts". What should I choose?

**A.** The reading "folly" is a little uncertain, but a number of authorities support it. The RSV follows the LXX, but this is not really necessary.

**Psalm 86:2**

**Q.** "I am godly". In Bari we must say, 'I am of God', and as this occurs in speech to God, it seems much more natural to say, 'I am Thine'.

**A.** The Heb. adjective rendered "godly" comes from the noun translated in the RV "loving kindness" and in the RSV "steadfast love". What are you using for that? It really means "having God's quality of kindness and love", the steadfast love God shows in His covenant relationship; hence Mft: "true to thee", Jerusalem Bible: "je suis ton ami". Your suggestion does not seem quite adequate; some phrase like "loyal to the Lord" would probably be best.

**Psalm 87:4**

**Q.** I see that Segond has 'Egypt' instead of Rahab, both here and in Ps. 89:10. May I do the same?

**A.** Yes, Rahab certainly means Egypt here. If you use footnotes you could explain this; otherwise you may put 'Egypt' in the text if you feel it necessary.

**Psalm 88:18 (19)**

**Q.** RSV: "my companions are in darkness"; Segond: "...have disappeared". Which is better?

**A.** The Heb. says "My acquaintance darkness", leaving us to fill in the grammar. Mft. has: "darkness is my one companion", and several other versions take it this way. It can also mean "my companions have disappeared in the darkness". It is difficult to choose between the two.

**Psalm 89:19**

**Q.** "our shield... our king". Should this be inclusive or exclusive use of the pronoun?

A. We advise the exclusive meaning here.

**Psalm 89:44**

Q. "thou hast turned back the edge of his sword". May I translate this "blunted his sword"?

A. The meaning is that the sword aimed at the foe is stopped from doing its destructive work, but 'blunted' is not quite accurate.

**Psalm 90:9**

Q. "as a sigh". Our word for 'breath', *yukan*, is also used to mean 'rest, holiday', and if used here would give the wrong idea. May we use *yama* 'yawn' which seems the only other suitable word?

A. I suppose *yukan* is something like the English 'a breather'! Your word for yawn would seem perfectly good.

**Psalm 91:16**

Q. Can you give us the root meaning of "satisfy", in order to help us find an adequate word?

A. The root meaning is the satisfying of hunger, but it here means 'to make content, happy'.

**Psalm 92:3 (4)**

Q. RV: "instrument of ten strings... psaltery... harp". We have two words for stringed instruments, and translate: 'By playing on the ten strings, and the *rababa*; By the thoughtful playing of the *tom*.'

A. Your rendering seems good. The Heb. names are as follows:

*Asor*, the ten-stringed instrument, is rare, only occurring here, in Ps. 33:2, and 144:9.

*Nebel*, RV "psaltery", RSV "harp", is more frequent, Ps. 33:2, 57:8, 81:2, 92:3, 108:2, 144:9, 150:3.

*Kinnor*, RV "harp", RSV "lyre", occurs in Ps. 33:2, 43:4, 49:4, 57:8, 71:22, 81:2, 92:3, 98:5, 108:2, 137:2, 147:7, 150:3.

**Psalm 94:20**

Q. RV: "throne of wickedness". We found this difficult to render exactly, and have made it: "The seat of crooked or perverted justice".

A. Your rendering is supported by Delitzsch 'The judgement seat of corruption'; thus your rendering is good. Others, e.g. RSV, personalize it: 'wicked rulers'.

**Psalm 95:10**

Q. For "grieved" (RV) we would like to use *dara* which suggests having borne with someone till patience is exhausted. In the N.T. quotation of this verse the word for anger is used.

A. The root meaning of the Heb. is 'loathe' as in the RSV. Your word may come fairly near it. There is no idea of anger, though the Greek word in the N.T. has the sense of 'provoked'.

**Psalm 96:8**

Q. "His courts": the word we have at the moment means 'homestead'. May we add the word *vekaly* to suggest the Temple?

A. Yes, your addition is justified. Other references to the Temple where this might be useful are: Psalms 65:4, 84:2, 84:10, 92:13, 100:4, 116:19 and 135:2.

**Psalm 96:13**

Q. "Earth... world". Should we try to differentiate?

A. For stylistic reasons it is desirable, but in many cases there is no real distinction of meaning between them.

**Psalm 97:10**

Q. RV: "O ye that love the Lord, hate evil"; RSV: "The Lord loves those who hate evil". Which is better?

A. The RV is an exact rendering of the Heb., and is therefore safer.