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## Homiletics: Outlines on the Old Testament Eisenach Series

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## HOMILETICS

### *Outlines on the Old Testament Eisenach Series*

By HERBERT E. HOHENSTEIN

#### FOURTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

#### PSALM 50

(NOTE: It would be a good idea to treat this entire psalm as a unit, since the Eisenach text itself makes far better sense when approached from this viewpoint.)

This psalm serves to remind you that  
You Are on Trial

#### *I. God announces the trial (vv. 1-6)*

A. First of all, we observe that God will break His silence. There are times when we wonder if ours is a dumb God. Have you ever heard Him speak? A dumb God? How can we ever think or say that since God not only spoke the Word but was the Word? St. John writes: "The Word became flesh and tented among us." Christ Jesus isn't only the Word that we can hear, He is the Word we can see and touch. He isn't only a word on lips or page; no, He is the Word on a cross, in a grave, and then out again, to deliver us from sin, hell, death, and devil.

God will break His silence also about our individual lives. The people of Israel lived as if the Lord were a dumb God. They kept on indulging and reveling in their sins and thought that God would continue to be still about it all. His silence, they imagined, was an indication that He didn't see their sins or that He winked His eye at them, ignored or overlooked them. They were dead wrong. God was going to break His silence and speak out in judgment against His people. We dare not make the mistake of the Israelites and confuse God's silence with a con-doning or overlooking of our sins.

B. The God who judges is a fiery and tempestuous God. We read: "Before Him is a devouring fire and round about Him

a mighty tempest." Picture language? Yes! But there's also a warning here, the warning not to tone and water down God's wrath to a mild dislike or upset, or to visualize it simply as the empty threats and fumings of an irritable old man powerless to execute his anger. Of course, God isn't like us when He's angry. He does not grind His teeth, shake His fists, shout at the top of His lungs, and in general lose control of Himself. But He does have anger. And this anger is not just a withdrawal from the sinner, it is also an active outpouring of fire and brimstone. God did not just depart from the pre-Flood world, He drowned those sinners out. He did not just leave Sodom and Gomorrah, He rained fire down upon them. And this we must remember in an age that has taken the starch out of God's wrath with all of its talk about a loving God who apparently tolerates sin with a smile and says, "After all, boys will be boys."

C. Note who the judge is. It is God Himself. There is only one supreme court whose verdict is final and irrevocable, and that is not the court of your own feelings or your own estimation of yourself. It is not the court of public opinion. It is not even the judicial courts of the land, nor is it the pronouncements of the church or those of later historians. The supreme court is the court of heaven, and God's is the only verdict that will stand eternally. The question is, of course, On whose verdict are you basing your living and dying?

#### *II. The Judge begins His indictment (vv. 7-13)*

A. The judge calls the defendants *His* people. He brings them to trial precisely



because He had blessed them and made a covenant with them. God is not like some parents who say, "I don't care what my youngsters do," and who never discipline with tongue or rod.

B. God is fed up with Israel's sacrifices. These Hebrews thought that a mere bringing of animal sacrifices to God was enough to placate and appease His anger against their sins and to assure them of His blessings. But God points out that He doesn't need their sacrifices. Every beast and bird they offer Him is already His. God is not profited or moved by our religious exercises, our prayers and worship practices. We think of our giving here, and we sometimes feel or act as if the Lord needed our funds. As little as God needed those dead animals on Hebrew altars, just so little does He need our money, our churchgoing, our praying, or any of our holy practices or our worship routines. When we present the Lord with our treasures we are simply acknowledging His ownership of our funds, and at the same time we are growing in the art and joy of unselfishness. Would we deprive ourselves of that gladness and growth?

C. This, then, is the sacrifice that God demands (vv. 14, 15).

1. God here tells His Hebrews and us that the sacrifice He demands is praise. It isn't easy to praise God. Surely it is hard to offer God our praises when we're so terribly jealous of the blessings of others which we lack and covet. It's hard to praise God when our sufferings make us feel we have little for which to be grateful. It's hard to praise God when we overlook the little and taken-for-granted daily blessings and think praise should be reserved for only the rare and spectacular good fortune.

2. A second sacrifice that God demands is the keeping of one's vows. In Baptism you vowed to love and be loyal to the Holy Trinity all your life long. At confirmation you repeated that vow. Yet each new day

makes liars out of us, for the vow is broken. Christ's body was broken on the cross and then revived again to take away the guilt of our broken vows. Would you do less breaking of your baptismal vow? Then reflect more upon Christ, broken and revived for you. Eat more of Christ, who offers you His broken and raised body in the Holy Supper.

3. Bring God the sacrifice of praise, keep your vows to Him, and then what a blessing will be yours! You'll have deliverance in the day of trouble. The Hebrew word for trouble here means literally "narrow straits." It comes from the verb which means to wrap tightly in a cloth or a bundle. It can also mean to be under a state of siege. Suffering is often like that, isn't it? You feel as though you were in narrow straits, as if the four walls were closing in upon you and leaving no escape, as though you were in a strait jacket, as if you were under siege, pelted and pounded from all sides by one affliction after another. Under these conditions you can call upon Him, and He will deliver you. The word means literally to pull off. God will tear the pinching shoe of suffering off your aching feet.

### *III. The indictment continues (vv. 16-21)*

The Lord here confronts those who use their worship as a cloak for wickedness. He indicts those who recite religious words and phrases, yet lead irreligious lives. These hypocrites hate discipline. They detest the blows and stripes God lays upon them. Do we? Then we hate to be loved, for "whom the Lord loves He disciplines," says the Scripture. These hypocrites cast God's words behind them. Do we? How can we when God has cast all our sins behind His back because of Jesus' death and resurrection? The Lord has thrown our sins behind His back that we might keep His words constantly before our eyes. As St. Paul puts it, "He died for all that those who live should not henceforth live unto themselves but unto Him who died for them and rose again."



These hypocrites keep company with thieves and adulterers. Do we? The worst robber is he who steals a man's good name and reputation by unkind gossip and slander. I fear we not only keep company with such thieves; each of us is one of them. And adulterers? The greatest unfaithfulness of all is that which we daily commit against our heavenly Husband as we leave Him to lavish our love upon the idols of things and people. These hypocrites use the same tongue to bless God and curse people. In the words of St. James, "Out of the same mouth proceed both blessing and cursing." Worst of all, this evil speaking is directed even against members of one's own family. It is a terrible sin to speak cruel and loveless words to your wife, husband, parents, or children; yet we do it, and sometimes it really doesn't bother us much or long.

St. James would tell us to remember two things here. First of all, cursing men is cursing God. For men are made in God's image, and therefore when we speak lovelessly against men, we are speaking lovelessly against the Lord. Secondly, it is impossible for the same mouth both to bless and to curse. A fountain can't gush forth both salt and sweet water simultaneously, nor can the fountain of your mouth. But it can and does, and therefore Christ Jesus had to die and rise again to obtain God's pardon for the sin of our untamed and loveless tongue.

#### *IV. God the Judge concludes His indictment (v. 22)*

The defendants still had a chance, the chance to change and reform. God the Judge was coming, coming like a lion who would rip them to shreds. But there was still time to bring the sacrifice of praise, praise which takes the form of a well-ordered life. (V. 23)

Will we be ripped to shreds? Will God pounce like a lion on us for our sins? Of course He won't, now that Christ, the Lion from the tribe of Judah, died and then rose

again to pay for all our wrongs. In the Lion, Christ, lies our only hope for deliverance from the lionlike fury of God's wrath against our wrongs. With St. Paul we too ask: "Who is there to condemn when Christ, the only One who could, has suffered the condemnation of hell's fire and agony for us to obtain our full and free pardon?" Who is there to condemn? No one. But now, my pardoned defendants, go and sin no more.

#### FIFTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

1 KINGS 17:8-16

After reading and hearing these words, about all one can say is:

What a Faith!

##### *I. On the part of Elijah*

A. He placed obedience to God above the regard for his own life (v. 1). The wicked king Ahab would have liked to do away with the meddlesome, troubling prophet. Yet when God commanded Elijah to stand before the king and predict the coming drought, he obeyed.

B. When God commanded him to depart for the desert, he did (vv. 3-5). The only guarantee the prophet had for survival in that desolate, wild place was God's promise. Yet that promise was enough, and Elijah went.

C. When God commanded Elijah to go to Zarephath (vv. 8-10), once again the divine command was enough for the prophet. Surely from reason's view this order from God was just as silly as that other one. "A drought is on the way; therefore go live in the desert." Again comes a strange, divine command: "The drought and famine are here, therefore go and get food from a poor widow" — from a widow, probably the last person in the world who would be able to supply it. Yet Elijah went. His was a faith in a God who does not lie.



*II. On the part of the widow (vv. 11-16)*

A. You have to remember her religious background. She was not an Israelite. This is evident in v. 12 where she says: "The Lord, *your* God." This was a pagan woman or at best a proselyte.

B. Yet what a faith she displayed! A strange man commanded her to share with him a portion of her last meal, yes, to let him eat of that meal first before she and her little son partook of it. And she obeyed. Put yourself in that woman's shoes. "Who does this fellow think he is, demanding a share of my last meal? Here my son and I are about to die of starvation, just one little cake between us and stalking death, and now this fellow wants to cut in? Be off, prophet, and find your own bread and water. We have troubles enough of our own without taking on yours. Besides, what guarantee can you furnish that your Israelite God will come through for us and keep the flour bin and the oil cruse full? The only proof I have is your word, and I don't even know you. Be off, prophet, and let us die in peace." None of this from the widow. With majestic, almost breath-taking simplicity she did as Elijah said. What a faith!

*III. Can this be said of us?*

A. What do we fear more, the loss of God or the loss of goods? I suppose it's because God is so very vague and distant and unreal and seemingly unlovable, and our goods and loved ones are so very concrete and near and dear, that we flirt with the loss of the divine favor of God before we will sacrifice the joys of worldly goods.

B. Are we as quick as Elijah and the widow to take God at His word?

1. In His commands to us. These are the possible and frequent reactions to those hard divine orders: (a) He's not completely serious. Of a parent who barks at his children all day, the children say, "He just

sounds stern and severe. He doesn't really mean what he says. After all, he's been saying it to us so often, yet has done so little about it." (b) "I'm the one exception. He means everyone else but me." (c) "These are idealistic, impossible orders that you issue, God. Who can obey them? Therefore, why try?" And back we settle into our comfortable, leisurely pace of half-hearted discipleship.

2. In His promise of pardon. God says: "I don't care how deep and repeated your sins are. I remember how Jesus, My Son, hung upon the cross, and I have blotted out your transgressions forever. When I lifted My Son from His tomb on Easter, I left your sins sealed in His vacated grave. They are dead, gone, and buried for good." But we say: "That's not true, Lord," every time we fret and torture ourselves over past failures or possible future mistakes. What we're really saying by such worry is: "God, you're a liar. My sins aren't dead, gone, and buried. They're still very much alive to haunt and torture my conscience and to make life a living hell."

3. In His promise of preservation, Elijah asked the widow to share with him some of her last meal. "For," said he, "God will provide." Now God isn't asking many of us to share with others our last meal. Yet we often act as if this were the case. Oh, how we hold on to what we have, whether it be our funds or our love, for fear we won't have enough left over for ourselves! No prophet of God asks us this morning to share our last meal with another hungry person. Your pastor does ask, however, that you give a lot more of the surplus. I say surplus, for what we have of food, clothes, appliances, luxuries, funds, far exceeds what we need even to live comfortably. Give a little bit more of that surplus. Begin to sacrifice a bit, to give of yourself and of your funds until it hurts, to get beyond the giving of leftover



dimes and dollars, the love you have left after you have achieved all your own precious plans and pleasures. You're afraid? Afraid that if you give and love too much you won't be able to meet your own needs and debts? Well, this story demonstrates the foolishness of such a fear. The last meal lasted until the rain came once again and food became abundant. Have you ever met a saint who was suffering because he gave too much of himself or his goods to God? By sacrificial giving and living dare God to let you down. If God gave His own dear Son to death and then raised Him again for your pardon and eternal safety, if He gave such a gift, do you think He'll ever find it hard to give you a loaf of bread?

C. It can't be said, at least not with frequency, that ours is a great faith. Yet our little wobbly faith can become more vigorous and robust as we stop looking at our own frailties and as we stop looking around at the big problems and evils that threaten and instead look up to Jesus. We think here of Simon Peter walking upon the water on the Lake of Galilee. As you look at yourself and your own frailties and the tremendous problems that surround you, you will begin to sink. But if you keep the eyes of faith riveted upon Christ, the Christ who lived, died, rose, ascended, and will return for you and your salvation, then you will have the strength to walk upon the water.

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## SIXTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

JOB 5:17-26

### It's All a Big Joke

That's what these Bible words tell us.

#### I. *What's all a big joke?*

Why suffering, of course. This is the remark of Eliphaz, Job's friend: "At destruction and famine you shall laugh." It's just one big joke, that burden of yours.

#### II. *Of course it isn't*

You don't wear a big broad grin and jump up and down with glee before the confined body of your dear one. You don't whistle a merry tune and jump for joy in the midst of your sapping troubles. You do just the opposite. You fret and you frown. You don't grin, you grit your teeth. You don't whistle, you weep. It's no joke at all. And God doesn't expect it to be. But we hear these words about laughing at destruction and famine; we hear St. Paul say that we are to glory in our infirmities. Do we think that means we must laugh in sorrow, or that depression and tensions and tears are proofs of a feeble faith or no faith at all? This is not true. The Scriptures do not say you dare not cry, but they do command you not to cry as people without hope. You do believe that Christ Jesus lost, and then found, His life to loose you from your sins and to bring you to heaven. You do believe that Christ broke death's strength with His Easter victory. Well then, you have hope, a hope as sure as Christ lives, that your present sufferings can't be compared with the joy God has in store for you. Cry, yes, but not with a hopeless wail.

#### III. *Because happy is the man whom God reproves*

A. There are three reproofs that God sends us.

1. Discipline. This is what a loving father does to his son. It is the proof of his love, and it is always for the son's good.

2. Testing. This is, of course, the putting of gold into the furnace in order to refine and purify it, and so God often tests us, using the furnace of affliction in order to refine away all the dross of our doubts.

3. The cross. This is that special suffering, that special affliction, we must bear for the sake of our Christian conscience and principles. Does our light shine even during such trouble? Perhaps we are putting it too



often beneath the basket of cowardice or compromise.

B. Eliphaz points out how God blesses the saint who suffers patiently and bravely.

1. God binds him up (v. 18). The only reason God wounds us is that He might bind us up again. The only reason He smites us is that He might heal. Now this isn't very logical, is it? For we would immediately reason, far better not to have been wounded or smitten at all. Far better to forgo the binding up and the healing, and to do without the wounds and blows entirely. No, this isn't very logical at all; rather it is theological, it is God-logical. It is the Lord's firm conviction that the best way He can prove and lavish His love upon you is by permitting your being wounded so that He might bind you up again.

2. God delivers him out of impossible straits (v. 19). The phrase "seven troubles" indicates the ultimate of distress. It signifies a blind alley of agony. Yet even from such straits God will rescue you. In fact, He won't just deliver you. Trouble won't even touch you, says Eliphaz, let alone get its ugly paws on you.

3. God redeems him in famine and war (v. 20). It's difficult to talk about famine in our fair land of plenty. We're not really worried about getting enough to eat. Our worry is eating too much. But we do get a little tense and edgy about war. Will it ever come, even here to our city and homes and families? We hear the words: "He will deliver you from the power of the sword," but what about the power of missiles and rockets and high-flying bombers? Is God's rescuing power up to date enough for that, too? Of course it is.

4. God will hide him from a mean tongue (v. 21). All of us, I am sure have felt the sting of a sharp tongue. What a blessing it is to have God hide us from such a scourge!

5. God makes even the beasts of the field

to be at peace with him (vv. 22, 23). This is a promise to a farmer that wild animals will not constantly destroy his crops.

6. God gives him a prosperous business (vv. 23, 24). Just imagine how a farmer would treasure this promise. "You shall be in league with the stones of the field." That means you and the stones have a pact. They promise never again to occupy your soil and to make tilling such a chore; no more stones in your yard or garden to cause you concern and sweat when you plant your grass and vegetables. And what a beautiful picture we have in the words "You shall know that your tent is safe"! Your home won't be made up of bricks and wood and steel. It will be made of prosperity. Think of it, no recessions or depressions. No bad months. Prosperity will cover you like a tent.

7. God will give him a big family (v. 25). (a) First of all a big family is a mark of God's favor and blessing. It is His way of showing love. (b) But, and this is just as important to remember, a small family or no family at all does not necessarily prove God's lack of love. If you have few or no children you need not look for some sin in yourself that is responsible. For God loves both fertile and barren saints with equal fervency.

8. God will grant him a ripe and mature death (v. 26). The picture here is of a perfectly mature shock of corn being lifted into the granary. So it will be with you also. There is no such thing as a premature death for a saint of God, nor is there a death that is long overdue. For the grain is harvested into the granary at precisely the right moment by the wise farmer. We are living grains of wheat, it is true, only because of that other grain of wheat, Jesus Christ, who fell into His grave on Good Friday like a grain of wheat into the soil and then was raised by the Father's power again on Easter and now lives, never again to die. Because



of this grain of wheat you and I are headed for the granary of heaven.

*IV. Is it? Is suffering something at which we can laugh?*

A. Not for some. It is a fact, God does not bestow the blessings of our text on every saint, no matter how valiantly he endures affliction. We don't always regain the happiness so cruelly snatched from us by suffering.

B. But we will one day. And Christ Jesus is the Proof of it. St. Mark tells us at the beginning of his Gospel that during His wilderness temptations Jesus was with the wild beasts of the desert. He is the first man of God's new creation. He is the second Adam. He is the first man of God's new world in which unfriendly beasts, war and famine, wounds and evil tongues, narrow straits and poor business and barrenness, yes, even death itself, will be gone for good. In Christ is the proof of this new and happy world to come. He is the Proof of it and also the Assurance that it is very near. And then, after God Himself has wiped all tears from our eyes, we'll have the last laugh, the eternal laugh, on sorrow.

#### SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY AFTER TRINITY

#### PSALM 75

(NOTE: It would be well to treat this entire psalm as a unit.)

This psalm is a command to be happy. Its directive at both beginning and end is Rejoice!

*1. Because God has a set time for everything (v. 2)*

A. The reference here is to God's judgment, His righteous balancing of the scales. He has set the time when He will pronounce the final, irrevocable verdict, the time when He will reward the righteous, redress their

wrongs and sufferings, and give the wicked their just deserts.

1. Please notice *God* has set this time and not you. God alone is the one who determines our fate and fortune, the length, the joy and sorrow of our life. Therefore we dare not reverse things and try to put God on trial, try to judge Him for His decision and guidance in our lives. Yet this we do every time we say in affliction: "God, how could You? It's not fair, it's not right, that I should have this burden."

2. Therefore don't judge prematurely. (a) In a sense you can't, for St. Paul informs us there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. How can you do the impossible? If God does not condemn, how can you? This holds true as you think of yourself and of others. (b) But we do judge. We often condemn God for His mysterious and painful dealings in our lives. We often judge ourselves either for better or for worse, and we often pronounce sentence against others. We judge their intentions toward us. We judge their abilities. We pronounce sentence against their shortcomings. Yet this is all quite premature, for the judgment won't take place until the Last Day. Therefore we should reserve judgment until God's verdict is in.

B. But God's judgment also applies to everything else, to our daily joys and sorrows, to our achievements, to the realization of our goals, to the length of our life.

If this is true, then what are we but helpless pawns, powerless to control our destiny in life? What can we do? Very much. Plenty. We can exercise constant, sanctified common sense. Please notice "sanctified"; that is, we do everything by the Spirit's direction and control. We do everything by the answer to this question: "How can I best help and love others?" What is the best course of action for me to pursue in order to achieve the temporal and eternal benefit of all concerned?



*II. Because God steadies a tottering earth  
(v. 3)*

A. Do you, Lord? This is hard to see and believe in our world, staggering, and busy, and groggy from the pounding it gets by the clenched fists of evil, pain, and death. Where, O Lord, is your steadying hand, your quieting hand?

B. We see it: (a) In Christ. This is not just a quieting hand, but a quiet hand, deathly still. In Jesus of Galilee, who died and rose again to separate us from our sins and to unite us to God forever, God was re-establishing His control over evil, pain, and death. Jesus is the Pledge and Promise of God's ultimate control over a new world forever free from the battering punches of evil and suffering. (b) By faith and not sight. It is not feeling or intuition or empty hope but faith, taking God at His word without proof or sight, that makes us sure of God's steadying hand.

*III. Because the final verdict is in God's hands and not ours (vv. 6-10)*

It is not East or West, it is not Russians or Americans, who will have the final say-so. It is the eternal God.

A. Now this is a humbling fact.

1. If God decides my ups and downs and He alone determines the degree of my lifting and lowering, my heights of delirious joy and my descents to the depths of heart-breaking anguish, then I shouldn't pat myself on the back in prosperity or chastise myself in suffering. God is at the helm, I am not.

2. Don't boast, commands God. But we do: (a) By our worry. Worry is a terrible pride on our part. It is the attempt on our part to assume a responsibility that belongs in God's hands alone, the care and the government of our future. (b) By our works. We begin to feel that it is our churchgoing which will help us to heaven rather than Christ's going alone, His going to a cross, into a grave, and then out of it again.

B. This is a wonderful fact.

1. We could be wrong in our judgments about others and about ourselves. We could be unduly severe and critical and condemnatory. If we were right, it could be horrible for both ourselves and others. But God's is the only verdict that's final and that counts.

2. This gives us the courage to die. We find ourselves guilty, doomed, and damned. God says, "This is My verdict: 'There is no condemnation to those in Christ Jesus.'"

Richmond Heights, Mo.