

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Bible Student* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bible-student_01.php



"The Entrance of THY WORDS Giveth Light"

CONTENTS

IN THE HEAVENLIES	49
THE HEBREW PSALTER	53
WORLD LEADERS IN THE FINAL CRISES	61
NOTES ON HEBREWS	65
THE THEOPHANIES OF THE OLD TESTAMENT	72
THE WISDOM LITERATURE OF THE BIBLE	76
THE PROMISED DELIVERER	78
THE PLACE OF GOOD WORKS	87
"GOODNESS"	90
URBANE	94

Editor: A. McDONALD REDWOOD

THE HEBREW PSALTER

By E. W. ROGERS*

The Hebrew Psalter has been a source of comfort to an innumerable company of men and women ever since it came into being. In it are to be found expressions that exactly suit the circumstances of human life. As we read the Psalms a sense of gratitude comes over us: gratitude to others who have lived before us for saying exactly what we feel, but to express which words have failed us. Here are to be found Praises that fit precisely our feelings of thanksgiving for mercies received. Here are to be found Prayers perfectly adapted to our own circumstances. In the midst of injustice and oppression we instinctively turn to the Psalms to find relief. It helps us as we contemplate that others have trodden a like path and poured out their hearts to the same God as is our God. Herein we can trace the outline of future events and experiences. Herein we can trace the faithfulness and holiness of Jehovah. Here we learn that His mercy endureth for ever. Here we learn that everything centres in His Anointed. Here we are permitted to ponder the sufferings of the Godly Man as He becomes the butt of the ungodly masses. And much more.

But in order to enable us to grasp more clearly the purpose and use of the Psalter we will consider the matter under the following headings:—(1) Voices in the Psalms. (2) Their Order. (3) Their Headings. (4) The Use of Selah. (5) N.T. Usage of the Psalter.

Of course, in the scope of this article it will not be possible exhaustively to deal with these things, but mere suggestions may be given which the student may pursue in more detail in private.

Voices in the Psalms

Psalms 1 and 2 are introductory to the whole of the Psalter. In them are shown two parties and such parties at conflict; and the grand final issue is given. They constitute a key to the understanding of the whole volume.

* Mr. Rogers has been engaged for many years in ministering and teaching the Word of God amongst God's people in the British Isles. His fresh treatment of the subject of the Hebrew Psalter will prove most helpful to all, and stimulate a deeper study among those who are anxious to get a better understanding of this wonderful section of the Writings—so often mishandled by superficial and critical "authorities" who get no deeper than questions of authorship and dates!

Psalm 1 speaks of "the godly man" in contrast with the "ungodly men". Care should be taken to note this difference: The godly man stands alone and in the minority: the ungodly are found together and appear to be in the majority. It is the *voice of the godly man* which is heard throughout the Psalms. Of course, primarily the Godly Man is our Lord Jesus Christ but we may, in measure, follow His steps and live as He lived. 'They that will live godly will suffer persecution' 2 Tim. 3:12. Great care must ever be exercised in interpreting those Psalms which relate to the Lord Jesus Christ lest we fall into the serious mistake of attributing to Him expressions which are clearly not suitable to His lips. It is a safe rule not to go beyond the N.T. application of the Psalms in His case. It is HIS VOICE which may be heard in such Psalms as 16, 22, 40, 69, 109 and others.

But another *voice* may be heard, that of *godly souls in any age*. Some of the Psalms are above dispensational limits, they speak of things which obtain at all times, whilst God in patience waits with a wicked world in order to fulfil His purposes of grace and judgment. Such Psalms as 23 and 37 are of this order, not that they will fail also to have a special application in future days. Undoubtedly 'the wicked' one referred to in Ps. 37:12 adumbrates the great Lawless Man of Sin Who will yet be seen in power on earth. Notwithstanding that, no-one can but feel that here is a Psalm which deals with things as they are in an unjust world today. We must be careful not to lose present benefit by our prophetic interpretations.

There is, of course, in the Psalter the *voice of the godly remnant of Israel* who will yet be found on earth during that time which immediately precedes the advent to earth of the Lord Jesus. Let the reader peruse such Psalms as 74 and 79 in the light of those days and that remnant and they will take on a new meaning. Indeed, in order properly to appreciate the Psalter from the prophetic vantage point it is requisite to have a fair outline of God's prophetic programme. Clearly in this paper it is not possible to give such. But with such a clue much may be seen in the Psalms which, without it, is hidden from view.

Then there is the *voice of the individual writer* of the Psalm. It is better not to guess at the time of the composition of any Psalm if it is not definitely known. Such guesses are sandy foundations on which to build any truth or, indeed, exhortation. But

•

where there is a clear indication of the author and the time of its composition, they should be carefully considered in interpreting the Psalm. We must remember that history is prophecy enacted beforehand: history repeats itself because human nature remains unchanged as also do Divine principles. There must, therefore, of necessity be a repetition of things in main outline, though the details may vary as time goes on. It is, therefore, important to listen to the voice of the individual writer when known. As a case in point, Psalm 51 may be cited. Clearly we may gather from the heading its historical occasion, but verse 18 shows us that it has also a prophetic meaning. Like David, Israel were guilty of the twin sins of adultery (idolatry) and murder (the crucifixion). Therefore Israel will have to tread in full measure the path which David trod, be brought through the same exercises with the same blessed result.

Care must be used in reading the Psalms that we do not put upon our lips expressions which are not suitable for our position or destiny. From Pentecost till the Rapture God is doing an unique work, namely He is calling out of the nations a people "for His name." (Acts 15:14). He is not now dealing with an earthly people but forming a heavenly people. He is not now calling to an earthly land but 'bringing many sons to glory' (Heb. 2:10). This is the dispensation of the Spirit when God is dealing with men in grace, "not imputing their trespasses to them". (2 Cor. 5:19). It follows, therefore, that the Psalter which was written long long before the secret of the Church was disclosed, which was written in days when that secret was entirely unknown, contains things which, though perfectly suitable for days prior to and subsequent to the church, are unsuitable for the time while it is here. Spiritual discernment will show to the reader what he may suitably use. For example, some Psalms have been called 'imprecatory' because they contain wishes for the defeat of the enemy. Now in a day of grace, when God is longsuffering "not willing that any should perish" (2 Pet. 3:9), when He waits long for the sinner to turn from his evil ways and to trust His Son, it is clearly inappropriate that we should utter such imprecations even against those that "persecute" us. We should rather "bless and curse not" (Rom. 12:14). But in days yet to come, when God will be acting on earth in judgment preparatory to "bringing again the First-begotten into the world" (Heb. 1:6), it will be

in accordance with His mind that the remnant should desire and long for the crushing of the enemy and the establishment of the rights of His Messiah on earth. For, be it noted, these imprecatory phrases are not merely the expressions of wishes: they are the assertions of the inevitable issues of certain courses of actions. They are in the future tense and denote the unavoidable outcome of certain attitudes.

Thus the believer needs to "handle rightly the word of God". He must 'discern the times' in which he lives. He should know the mind of God as to the church, and the heart of God as to the sinner, and the characteristics of this present age. In the light thereof he will not become a loser when he takes up his Psalter, but he will be able to read it with greater intelligence and see its beauties in brighter light.

Their Order

Although we have one hundred and fifty Psalms they are not thrown together haphazardly but each is in its right order. Who arranged the Psalms may be a matter of conjecture but the superintending control of the Spirit of God in their individual composition and in their general compilation is everywhere evident.

There are five books which make up the one Psalter. Book I terminates with Psalm 41: Book II terminates with Psalm 72: Book III terminates with Psalm 89: and Book IV terminates with Psalm 106. Let the reader turn up and read the last few verses of each finishing Psalm and he will observe on what a grand note each ends. In these may be traced, in order, Israel's history: their moral failure; accentuated by the murder of God's Son; their consequent ejection from the land; their present Lo-Ammi condition, and their future recovery. In Book I predominantly is shown the godly man in the midst of the ungodly, but with God's faithfulness as his stand-by. Book II deals with Israel's guilt in murdering the Christ of God and the evil results that follow for the nation (see Ps. 51). Book III has to do with the great question "O God, why hast thou cast us off for ever?" (Ps. 74:1). Book IV recounts the confidences of the godly in Israel as time and again they rejoice in the fact that "The Lord reigneth", withal pleading that God would answer their cry as thus uttered: "Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations. . . ." (Ps. 106:47).

All this the student should carefully seek to trace out. "God

is not the author of confusion" (1 Cor. 14:33) no more in the Psalter than anywhere else. All is set out in perfect order furnishing to the godly material for use both in sorrow and in the prospect of deliverance.

But we may pursue this line a little further. Psalms 22, 23 and 24 have been tersely described as the Cross, the Crook and the Crown respectively. This is good. Ps. 22 relates to what is now past; 23 to what is present; and 24 to the future. (Psalm 24 has not to do with the Ascension, strictly speaking, but with the Lord's future return to earth.)

Psalm 108 is man's request for "help from trouble" (see v. 12) having regard to the uselessness of the "help of man". Psalm 109 is God's response in sending His Son, although man murdered Him. Clearly Psalm 110 properly follows with the exaltation of Christ at God's right hand, and a forecast of His future triumphant exploits. What more appropriate then that Psalms 111, 112, 113 should follow with their 'Hallelujahs'; and Psalm 114 speaking of Israel's deliverance from Egypt having been re-acted on a much larger scale by the Lord's intervention at His second advent. Moreover Psalm 115 rightly follows all these, being a disclaimer of glory to man but the attributing of all honour, to God.

Again, Psalm 90 is a plea, "Oh *satisfy* us early with thy mercy" (v. 14). Psalm 91 is a promise, "With long life will I *satisfy* him"; and Psalm 92 is a "Psalm or Song for the sabbath day" when *satisfaction* will undisturbedly be enjoyed.

It is not a little significant that Psalms 8, 16, 24, 32, 40 and 48 can only be understood in the light of the resurrection of Christ. And we know that eight is the resurrection number of the Bible, the number that tells of the commencement of a new era. Let the reader put Psalm 8 beside Hebrews 2; or Psalm 16 beside Acts 2; or Psalm 24 with 1 Cor. 2; or Psalm 32 with Romans 4; or Psalm 40 with Hebrews 10; and he will readily discern that without the key of resurrection the treasures of these Psalms could never be unlocked. They, therefore, are clearly rightly placed.

And this leads me to remark that historically Psalm 32 comes after Psalm 51, although in the Psalter the latter is found in book II and the former in book I. Why this reversion of order? Is it not that Psalm 32 relates the joys of justification because of

a risen Christ, a just basis on which God can pardon the guilty having been laid. But Psalm 51 deals with a dual matter: David's sin and Israel's sin. Therefore each is allotted its proper position.

This section could easily be unduly lengthened but I do not want to fall into the snare of prolixity. However, let the student carefully read each Psalm bearing in mind, as he reads, the contents of the preceding Psalm and enquire what the one has to do with the other; how they are bound together, if at all; and how many are thus bound together in a sequence of thought; it is thus that he will be able to reach the firm conclusion that the Spirit of God has arranged the Psalter, through the agency of man of course, in order that He might set forth moral and dispensational truths in their true light.

Consider the Songs of Degrees: They trace the recovery of a nation which finds itself in a wrong place, and therein may be read the steps of recovery of a soul which is seeking after God. How many of God's dear children today find themselves ecclesiastically in positions that are contradictory of their faith. What are they to do? Let them peruse these songs of Degrees. Ps. 120:5 finds the writer in a wrong place longing for deliverance. 121:8 is a promise of preservation should he determine to make a move. Ps. 122:1 reveals that there are others of like mind, and certainly 'two are better than one' and fellow-pilgrims are to be desired. Ps. 123:3 is a prayer for "mercy" in view of the contempt of those who have no sympathy with their exercises and aspirations after better things. But 124:7 shows them to be on their way, having escaped out of the snare in which for so long they have been held. Ps. 125:2 is an assurance that, like as the Angel of the Lord accompanied Israel through the waste and howling desert, so they can now count on the Lord's protecting care as the mountains surround Jerusalem and make for its safety from attack. Going forth as they do weeping (for how much sorrow will returning Israel experience as they wend their way to Zion) they are assured that the end will be all right: A safe arrival is certain; sheaves will follow the precious seed (126:5 and 6). In view of their future aims of building a house for the Lord, in view of their future occupation of the city they soliloquize one with the other as to the necessity of the Lord being both Builder and Defender or else all will be vain (127:1). 128:2 assures them of success, prosperity and joy. And if the

student will examine 129:8; 130:5 and 6; 131:2, 132:8, he will see how step by step they are literally "going upward" not merely to Mount Zion but rising in their spiritual attainments, until in 133:1 we find them arrived at their destination, and "dwelling together in unity" finding occupation in the "house of the Lord" (134:1). The goal is reached: the exercise has been salutary: the honour of the Lord has been secured. Each of these Psalms is rightly placed and each is an advance on the former.

The Headings

The headings of the Psalms should never be ignored. They are part and parcel of the inspired volume and in many cases form an additional verse to the Psalm in Hebrew. Unlike in the case of Habakkuk ch. 3 where the phrase is put at the end of the Prayer, the present writer is of the opinion that, as in the A.V. and R.V., these phrases are rightly regarded as 'headings' and properly stand at the beginning. Psalms without headings are of wider application than those with a heading. But the headings are as keys; they let one into the secret beauties of the Psalm to which they are appended.

Whoever historically the "Chief Musician" or Precentor may have been, we may see in that an indication of the Lord Jesus, who "in the midst of the congregation" leads the praises of God's people (Ps. 22:22). David who is the author of many of the Psalms is a type of the Lord Jesus first in Divine appointment; secondly in rejection as the Lord is now; and thirdly as reigning on his throne. This should be borne in mind in all Psalms which are inscribed "A Psalm of David". "Gittith" of Psalm 8 reminds one of the winepress, telling us that only by the Lord Jesus having gone through the winepress of God's wrath against sin at Calvary can man be restored to a better state than that in which he originally was and which he lost. The heading of Psalm 22 is very illuminating. "Aijelesh Shahar" is a Hebraism denoting the dawn of a new day. The hind which during the night has passed the time in the depths of the rough valley, mounts to the highest crag at the first ray of the morning sun, telling of Him Who went into the roughest of all valleys in the darkest of all nights, rising from the dead early in the morning on the first day of the week. It is this that divides the Psalm into two—vv. 1 to 21 telling of the dark and rough valley: and the remainder of the Psalm

showing the day's dawning resulting in the full splendour of the noon-day sun.

The "Maschil" Psalms are full of interest. The first such Psalm is 32. That touches the matter of the forgiveness of sins which is the first thing that a sinner needs to know. Hence although, as we have observed already, that Psalm 51 precedes historically Psalm 32, yet seeing that forgiveness is the first requisite for a sinner it is the first Maschil Psalm: that is, it is the first Psalm "giving instruction". But all others with this caption are of an instructive nature. "Michtam" Psalms are also very interesting. Psalm 16 is the first such: Pss. 57 to 60 inclusive are the others. They are what the LXX calls "Pillar writings", and who that has read them will not discern that they are outstanding, prominent, "golden" treasures in this Hebrew book of Praise!

To write fully on the headings of the Psalms would demand a volume. Others have attempted it. But we may say, in general, that all historical headings should carefully be studied. The histories concerned should be perused with the view of discovering both their moral and dispensational and prophetic import. We have seen that David's sin was prophetic of Israel's. So, too, Solomon's glory is typical of Messiah's future glory. "The Sons of Korah" represent a spared remnant, that hitherto belonged to a rebellious stock. This enables us to read in the rebellion of Korah, Dathan and Abiram that great amalgamation which will rebel against the Man Whom God has Anointed to be both Priest and King. In the light of such prophetic history the Psalms that are dedicated to Korah's sons become full of significance.

Absolom is the usurper of the throne of the true King, foreshadowing another usurper who will be on Judah's throne only to come to a terrible end as did that rebellious son. Psalm 3 should be read in the light of the prophetic significance of David's rejection at the hand of his own people. "Another" has "come in his own name" and him they have received (see John 5:43).

As this paper is only intended to put keys into the hand of the Bible Student nothing more need be said about these headings. The student will, for himself, examine closely each one, and ascertain where possible the true meaning of the words therein contained or the histories therein referred to. Such a research will well repay him.

(To be concluded in next issue)