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

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

PSALM XVI

A MEDITATION

Spurgeon named this 'The Psalm of the Precious Secret'. In doing so he followed Dr Alexander in deriving the title '*Miktam*', which heads the Psalm, from a word meaning 'to hide', as of some precious truth hidden, but to be sought out in meditation. It is found also in Pss. 66-69. Other Hebrew scholars, however, translate *Miktam*='golden', as in Prov. 25:12, 'fine gold'; (a kindred word is found in Ps. 45:9, etc.). There is a depth of doctrinal and spiritual teaching in the Psalm which is not always recognized. It is evident that the apostles Peter and Paul found 'hidden gold' in it for the former applies it to the risen Christ in Acts 2:25, 29-31, and the latter treats it similarly in his address in Acts 13:33-35.

The Psalm is a veiled reflection of the Incarnate Christ in the days of His life on earth. Considered from this standpoint it gives us a foreview of the perfect life of the beloved Son of God who, in His path of humiliation was not only subject to the Father's will but identified Himself with His people: 'Since the children are sharers in flesh and blood, He himself in like manner partook of the same': 'It behoved Him in all things to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God' (Heb. 2:14, 17. R.V.).

The whole Psalm may be divided quite simply into five sections, which form a little pentateuch, reflecting something of the spiritual and typical teaching of the Mosaic Pentateuch. Just as the larger Pentateuch illustrates the spiritual passage of the believer from the world's bondage to the life of liberty in Christ—a true Pilgrim's Progress indeed—so in this Psalm we see the Son of God, the perfect Pilgrim, acting as our Forerunner and Representative, passing through this earthly course—the 'Leader and Perfecter of our faith' (Heb. 12:2, R.V.)¹ Let us note some of the chief points in this exquisite cameo of Jesus, the Son of God—the Son of man. Read the verses carefully and prayerfully.

¹ Of course in *His* case it was not a passing from 'Egypt to Canaan', even typically.

1. Verse 1 reveals the character of Jesus' whole life; a life of trust in God.
2. Vs. 2 and 3. He is seen taking His place as Man, 'for us men and our redemption'—'the Word became flesh and tabernacled *among us* . . . full of grace and truth' (John 1:14).
3. Vs. 4-6 correspond to Leviticus, revealing the true Levite separated to the service of God.
4. Vs. 7-8. Here the Pilgrim on earth is content to be *led* in the Way of God and instructed (as Himself states in John 8:28, 29, 38). To this lowly Servant, Jehovah is the one supreme Object of His devotion.
5. Vs. 9-11. The path He trod is traced to its consummation in the presence of God in glory. But it has to include suffering and death itself, with resurrection glory beyond, a path opened up for all who would follow Him (Cf. Eph. 1:20-21).

As we look a little more closely into each of these sections we shall see how completely 'the Word became flesh and dwelt among us'. It is the O.T. foreshadowing of the apostle's inspired delineation of the same blessed One given in Philippians 2:6-11.

(1) The theme of the book of Genesis is life, divinely bestowed and ruined by sin, but again renewed and made available to all who respond to the workings of the divine grace and mercy. This is illustrated in the various biographies recorded for our instruction; biographies of men and women like ourselves, full of promise to begin with, but constantly prone to failure and sinning. But each in his or her own way and all together reveal, the foundation purpose of God to send His beloved Son, the Redeemer, who 'through death should deliver them who all their lifetime were subject to death' because of sin. And the new life bestowed by this Suffering Saviour would manifest itself in a day by day fellowship with God, in any environment however sinful and degrading.

The first verse of the Psalm introduces us to this Redeemer: 'God manifest in the flesh'. Here is seen the perfect Man, in Whom there never was taint of sin or principle of evil.

Yet His humanity was so real that it necessitated a constant dependence upon the Father (cf. Heb. 2:9-18; 4:15-16). The strength of His love is revealed in the great depths of His humiliation. The appeal, 'Preserve me, O God; for in thee do I put my trust' is the heart's cry of One who is in absolute need. Also such passages as Isa. 53:3 and Ps. 22:6, 7, as well as many others, are evidences of very real experiences in His sufferings. And what of the last solemn cry on the cross, 'My God, why hast thou forsaken me?'

(2) In vs. 2 and 3 the Speaker declares Jehovah to be His Lord. Man failed in Eden through self-trust; the Second Adam now walks where the first one failed in order to manifest His ability to live a life of perfect and complete obedience to God, thus giving the promise of such a life to all who would follow in His steps.

Vs. 3 is best explained by giving proper emphasis to the second clause, 'My goodness . . . is *for the saints* . . . the excellent, in whom is all My delight'. Whilst from the heart He could say, 'I come to do Thy will, O my God', His whole objective in 'partaking in flesh and blood' was the redemption of His people, who should in turn become His perfect delight. Such was the Love that 'seeketh not its own' but the blessing of others, even to the point of dying that they might live. Refer again to Heb. 2:11-17, for it is the true commentary on this verse. Through Calvary His 'goodness' is made available to 'the saints . . . and the excellent, in whom is His delight'. Here is seen the fulfilment of the types in the book of Exodus.

(3) The Leviticus section follows (vs. 4-6): here we are shown what God was to this Perfect Man. As a background, verse 4 reveals His attitude towards those who 'exchange Jehovah for another god' (see R.V.). God's greatest controversy with Israel was their oft declension into idolatry; what Hosea stigmatizes as 'playing the harlot' spiritually (Hosea 2:4, 5; 4:12, 13, and see Jer. 2:13, etc.). Jehovah's perfect Servant declares His abhorrence of all that men call 'gods', He will not even mention their names because of their defiling character. One has only to see some of

these objects of so-called worship in heathen lands to realize the meaning of the prophet's denunciations of them.

On the other hand, vs. 5 and 6 indicate His devotedness 'Jehovah is the measure of my portion and my cup; thou maintainest my lot . . . fair is (my) inheritance to me' (so F. W. Grant renders these verses). Here is found the true Levite, of which tribe in Israel it was decreed they should have no lands like the other tribes, for their continuous service in the sanctuary would be rewarded by Jehovah Himself, who was their true inheritance (see e.g. Deut. 18:1, 2 and similar references). To this Levite, His 'portion' and His 'cup' were one; Jehovah was the measure of both: He *had* nothing, He *wanted* nothing beyond this.

Those who follow this great Exemplar in the path of devotion become the 'true worshippers who shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth, for such doth the Father seek to be worshippers' (read the whole passage in John 4:20-26). We must be careful to note, however, that in Christ's own experience worship is never mentioned, that is, not in the same sense as we worship God—and the Son Himself, as on an equality with God. It is the redeemed soul that worships: the true object of worship being the triune God—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. For us His people, worship takes precedence before every other expression of devotion to God. Our Levite service 'within the sanctuary', as it were, does not take the place of but *precedes* all other kinds of service on behalf of the multitudes outside. This is not easy in a day of incessant calls to 'get busy and do something' in other types of ministry, including the Gospel.

4. The book of *Numbers* follows, describing the journeyings of the people of Israel. But the pilgrim nation failed in the wilderness through disobedience and suffered the consequences through forty years of futile wanderings.

In contrast, Israel's Redeemer, God's own perfect Pilgrim, walked the wilderness of this world with no hint of failure in thought, word or deed—His entire confidence centred in God. What was His secret? It is stated in verses 7 and 8 of our Psalm. First, 'I will bless Jehovah, who giveth me counsel; my reins (or "my heart", the whole inner thought-life) also instruct me'. To

Isaiah was given a similar view of the heart-exercise of this Pilgrim—read carefully Isa. 50:4 and 5; and note also His lowly submission and confidence in verses 6 and 7.

In verse 8 we see yet another profound heart experience of this blessed One: 'I have set Jehovah before me continually, because He is at my right hand I shall not be moved'. In the light of this we may now read with clearer understanding the record of the terrible Agony in the Garden (Luke 22:41-45), which ends on the triumphant note, 'Nevertheless *not my will, but thine*, be done!' Here is the secret of His whole path on earth, and His triumph through every humiliation and suffering, even in the death of the cross. Spend time in meditation on this revelation of the Perfect Life; here indeed is the 'precious Secret', the 'hidden Gold' suggested in the title.

(5) The final (or *Deuteronomy*) Section of this Psalm brings us to the subject of the salvation Christ has procured for all who accept the new life in Christ. But first what is the primary message of the book of Deuteronomy itself? In that book Moses reviews the journeyings of the nation from Egyptian bondage, to Canaan, the land of liberty. In doing so he seeks to prepare the people for their future course. The supreme message of Moses' record is 1st, *God's Love* triumphant over all their sad failure (see e.g., 4:37; 10:15; 23:5). The second theme in the book is the need of *obedience* grounded on a known and recognized *relationship* to God in Redemption from Egypt (e.g., ch. 11:26-28). In Moses' message certain words recur again and again: 'hear'; 'remember'; 'obey'; 'observe', etc.

In a similar manner, the last section of our Psalm deals with the salvation Christ has procured for us all, and verses 9-11 (as already noted) contain the prophetic announcement of Christ's glorious Resurrection. He has 'tasted death for every man' (Heb. 2:9); He is now seated at the right hand of the majesty on high (Heb. 1:3), and 'ever liveth to make intercession' for His saints (Heb. 7:25). 'Death is the consequence of sin. HE had none. His death was self-imposed. He laid down His own life, bearing sins not His own, but ours. His death was unique (a) in that it marked the close of a sinless life on earth; (b) in that He

voluntarily yielded to it, enduring it by way of vicarious sacrifice. Consequently resurrection was His divine prerogative, and not a matter of Divine favour, as in the case of others. Since He was His holy One, God did not suffer Him to see corruption' (W. E. Vine).

The new highway He trod is now thrown open to all His people. 'As Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so *we also* may walk in newness of life' (Rom. 6:4; also vs. 5:11). He walked amid the world's evil, He lived apart from all sin, He conquered in order that all the mighty dynamic of His experience should be made available for the weakest saint: 'Because I live ye shall live also' (John 14:19).

As we follow Him through this Psalm, and meditate on each phase of His perfect life, His sacrificial death, His resurrection and ascension, may we now take what He offers, namely the hidden Dynamic of His power for ourselves, and learn the truth of Paul's great word: '*I have been crucified with Christ; yet I live; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me: and that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me*' (Gal. 2:20 R.V.).—A.McD.R.