

THE PSALMS OF DAVID

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter On January 5, 1964 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

In our troubled world with all its stresses and tensions there is an ever increasing need for something that will bring the peace and quiet that man's nature must have. Many approaches to this problem have been made. Periods of rest and vacation are of great help, when one is tired and distraught. The medical profession, or perhaps I should say the drug industry, has produced a whole range of tranquilizers that serve a commendable purpose when properly used. Still another approach to the problem is to call upon the services of a trained counselor when there is some problem that causes tension or stress. Sometimes this counselor is merely a trusted friend, sometimes one's family doctor, sometimes a minister, sometimes an elder of the church, and sometimes a specialist in psychotherapy. Such counselors can be of great value.

There is another area, however, which I consider to be of great value, which is hardly known and little used by millions of people. Even those who do know and use this method do not use it to its full potential. I refer to the great body of meditative, devotional literature, which we find in the Bible. I particularly, though not exclusively, refer to the Psalms. The reading of these great passages of scripture can be of incalculable value in removing the stress and strain of modern living, by lifting one's view from the world about us and bringing us close to God.

Dr. H. C. Leupold, in his classic book, *Exposition of the Psalms*, pp. 27-28, puts it this way, "There does not seem to be any situation in life for which the Psalms do not provide light and guidance. They were born out of real-life situations. They were often wet with the tears and the blood of the writer ... They have a peculiarly enduring quality. Frequent use does not wear them thin. The more familiar they become, the more they are loved ... The Psalms continually carry the reader into the immediate presence of God ... They have the happy faculty of stimulating our own private prayers and of helping to make them more fruitful ... Oftentimes the Psalms become the superlative utterance of our deepest needs."

In still another passage, the noted commentator, Albert Barnes, says, "The book of Psalms is the guide of young believers; and it becomes more and more the companion, the comforter, and the counselor of the believer as he moves along through the varied scenes of life ... A religious man is rarely, if ever, placed in circumstances where he will not find something in the Psalms appropriate to his circumstances ... Hence, in sickness, in bereavement, in persecution, in old age, on the bed of death, the Book of Psalms becomes so invariable and so valuable a companion ... To the end of the world they will impart comfort to the troubled, and peace to the dying, as they have done in the ages that have passed." (*Psalms*, Vol. I, p. xlii). Who is to doubt that this final prediction is true, in view of the fact that the Psalms have meant so much to millions of people over a span of three thousand years already?

What Are The Psalms?

First of all, the Psalms constitute one of the books of the Bible. Together they make up the longest book among the sixty-six books of the Bible. Within the 150 Psalms, or chapters, there are both the shortest and the longest chapters of the entire Bible. The 117th Psalm, with its two verses, and the 119th Psalm, with its 176 verses, are to be found almost side by side.

In the second place, the Psalms are mostly lyric poetry. This means that they are primarily poetry adapted to the harp or lyre. However, the phrase, lyric poetry, now is also frequently applied to that species of poetry which "directly expresses the individual emotions of the poet." In this vein it is interesting to note that the Psalms contain the varied feelings of uncertainty, anguish, fear, hope, joy, thankfulness, devotion to God, penitence for sin, and the exaltation of forgiveness. It is in this connection that Barnes says, "It is intended to raise the heart and the affections toward God; to lift the thoughts of men from the earth; to inspire confidence in God; to produce consolation as derived from God in times of trouble; to cheer and comfort man in his pilgrimage along the path of sorrow and trouble to a better abode." (*Psalms*, Vol. I, p. xx).

In the Hebrew Bible this body of material appears under the heading Sepher Tehillim, which means Book of Praise--Psalms. In other words, it means poems or songs of praise. When the Hebrew text was translated into the Septuagint, a Greek translation, the heading Psalmoi was used. Strictly speaking, this designates poems that are sung to the accompaniment of music played on strings. Under the Mosaic dispensation of the Old Testament, the poems contained in this collection were often set to music and used in public worship. This was consistent with the means of worship employed in the Old Testament, though not consistent with the practices of the Christian era.

The Author

When we speak of the "Psalms of David" we are both correct and incorrect at the same time. We are correct when we think of many of the Psalms being from the pen of David; we are incorrect when we think of all of them being from his pen. According to the specific notations which we find at the head of many of the Psalms, David is the author of sixty-eight of the collection. When we

remember that a number of the Psalms have no designation as to author, it is quite likely that David also was the author of some of these, meaning that probably half or more of the entire collection were written by David. One of the Psalms is attributed to Moses; twelve are attributed to Asaph; eleven are attributed to the sons of Korah; two are attributed to the Ezrahite; at least two are attributed to Solomon; and the remainder do not have a designation as to author.

In addition, there are headings which give directions for the musical instruments to be employed, or the manner in which the Psalms are to be sung, or other such matters. The headings attributing the Psalms to certain authors and the other headings of direction are not a part of the text itself and therefore are only suggestive. While not absolutely authoritative, these headings are quite ancient and are worthy of respect. While uninspired, they are helpful to the student of the Psalms.

Divisions

The 150 Psalms have been divided traditionally into five separate books, each of which is closed with a doxology. For example, Book I begins with Psalm 1 and continues through 41, with the final verse of this last Psalm reading, "Blessed be Jehovah, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting, Amen and Amen." A similar benediction is found at the end of each of the other five books.

The five books are: Book I, Psalms 1-41, all of which are from the pen of David, with the possible exception of the first. Book II, Psalms 42-72, about half of which are from David. Book III, Psalms 73-89, which center in the time of Hezekiah. Book IV, Psalms 90-106, which continue down to the period of the exile. And finally, Book V, Psalms 107-150, a mixed group from David and others many of which relate to the restoration of Israel after the captivity.

Classification

A different and possibly even more meaningful division of the Psalms is that made according to the type of material contained in each. The following listing of the Psalms in eight different main categories is intended as a guide for the student who would develop a deeper appreciation of the material contained in this great book.

I. Prayers.

- A. Penitential Psalms: Ps. 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143.
- B. Under Affliction: Ps. 6, 7, 101, 13, 17, 22, 31, 35, 39, 41-43, 54-57, 59, 64, 69-71, 77, 86, 88, 94, 102, 109, 120, 140-143.
- C. A Persecuted Church: Ps. 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 89, 94, 102, 123, 137.
- D. Prayers of Trust and Assurance: Ps. 3-5, 11, 12, 16, 20, 23, 27, 28, 31, 42, 43, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 61-64, 71, 77, 86, 108, 115, 118, 121, 125, 131.

II. Didactic-Instruction.

- A. Dealings with the righteous and unrighteous: Ps. 1, 3-5, 7, 9-15, 17, 24, 25, 32, 34, 36, 37, 41, 50, 52, 58, 62, 73, 75, 82-84, 91, 94, 101, 112, 119, 121, 125, 127-129, 133, 149.
- B. Magnifying the Law of God: Ps. 19, 119.
- C. Views of Life: Ps. 14, 39, 49, 53, 73, 90.

III. Psalms of Thanksgiving.

- A. God's Goodness to Israel: Ps. 21, 46, 48, 66, 68, 76, 81, 85, 98, 105, 124, 126, 129, 135, 136, 149.
- B. God's Mercies to the Psalmist and to Others: Ps. 9, 18, 30, 32, 34, 40, 61, 63, 75, 103, 108, 116, 118, 138, 144.

IV. Psalms of Praise.

- A. Extolling the Goodness of God: Ps. 3, 4, 9, 16, 18, 30, 32, 36, 40, 46, 65, 66, 68, 84, 85, 91, 99, 100, 103, 107, 111, 113, 116, 117, 121, 126, 145, 146.
- B. Praising God's Glory, Omnipotence and Majesty: Ps. 2, 3, 8, 18, 19, 24, 29, 33, 45, 46, 48, 50, 65-68, 76, 77, 89, 91-100, 104-108, 110, 111, 113-118, 135, 136, 139, 145-150.

V. Songs of the Sanctuary and Public Worship: Ps. 15, 24, 26, 27, 30, 42, 43, 63, 65, 84, 92, 95-100, 118, 122, 132, 133, 144-150.

VI. Songs of Nature: Ps. 8, 19, 29, 65.

VII. Historical Psalms.

- A. The Davidic: Ps. 3, 7, 11, 18, 24, 30, 32, 34, 51, 55, 60.
- B. Solomon: Ps. 72.
- C. Time of Moses and the Judges: Ps. 106.
- D. The Exilic and Post Exilic: Ps. 74, 79, 80, 85, 106, 126, 137.

VIII. Messianic Psalms: Ps. 2, 16, 22, 40, 41, 68, 72, 109, 110, 118, 132.

It will be noted that some Psalms are listed under several different headings, which fact simply means that parts of the Psalm are of one kind of material and parts of another. It should also be noted that not the entire Psalm in every case fits under the heading which has been listed. Sometimes only one or two or three verses out of a lengthy Psalm deal with the theme under which it has been listed.

Conclusion

As we face the new year, may it be that each one of us resolves to read the Bible more than in previous years. May it also be that each of us resolves to read the Psalms more extensively than ever before in order that through these great passages which God has provided for his people we may draw closer to the Lord. The fact that God has reserved more space in the Bible for the presentation of the Psalms than for any other single book is an indication that he feels that this material has a great value for mankind down through the ages. The testimony of careful Bible readers through nearly three thousand years of time is further evidence that these Psalms are of inestimable value. Let us draw on this great store house of spiritual blessing in order that our lives may be lifted up and that we may grow in the quality of worshipfulness so necessary in the life of a Christian.

Finally, let us suggest that this is an ideal time for one to become a Christian. While the reading of devotional literature, especially the Psalms, is important, it is of little importance unless one accepts the Lord's invitation to come to Christ and be saved. Believe in Christ with all of you heart, confess his name before men, repent of your sins, and be buried with your Lord in baptism. Then, for whatever lifetime remains, whether it be for a few days or scores of years, let the great devotional literature which God has provided be a great undergirding force to lift your life to the heights which God intends.