

# THE PSALMS IN HUMAN LIFE

## Introduction

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It is quite sometime now since some consideration was given to certain poems in the Book of Psalms. My reason for giving a series of Bible studies on these is because they are reflective of the events, occurrences, and situations that arise in human life.

If we have the impression that we are exempt from the problems that occur in every day life because we are Christians, we are living with a false concept of Christian life. The old proverb says, 'The sun shines on the righteous as well as the ungodly'. From my understanding of life and what I have observed about it, this proverb is true.

As we have a close look at some of the *Psalms* out of the 150 we shall often be able to relate to what has been written. It is out of this interest in the parallel experiences of those who have written the *Psalms* that I want to speak.

It is however important for us to have an understanding of the Book of Psalms before we actually begin analysing them and putting them in a contemporary context. We are aware I am sure that the *Psalms* are a collection of poems written by many different people. We know the authorship of most, but there are certain ones that cannot be attributed to any particular author.

Most if not all of the famous theologians and preachers have at some time given a lot of time to studying the *Psalms*. During this series I shall give to you some quotes from the men who in the past have been great expositors of the word of God, they being dead still have something to contribute to our spiritual

life; this also shows to us the real value of the written word, which can still be effective centuries after someone had died.

This book is termed in Hebrew, which some learned men derive from to move briskly, irradiate, shine; and translate, 'Sepher Tehillim'. The Book of the Shinings forth, Manifestations, or Displays, namely, of Divine wisdom and love exhibited in God's dealing with his chosen people. But signifies also to praise, and praise arises from a sense of gratitude, and is the expression of inward joy, and was often exhibited by brisk notes, and sprightly music, etc., it may be well denominated '*The Book of Praises*', as the major part of the *Psalms* have for their subject the praises of the Lord.

A Psalm is called in Hebrew, 'Halal', a piece of music, a song with instrumental accompaniment because in singing, each word was separated into its component syllables, each syllable answering to a note in the music.

The Hebrews divide the *Psalms* into *five books*, and this division is noticed by several of the primitive fathers. The origin of this division is not easily ascertained; but as it was considered a book of great excellence, and compared for its importance to the Pentateuch itself, it was probably divided into five books, as the law was contained in so many volumes. But where the divisions should take place the ancients are not agreed; and some of them divide into *three fifties* rather than into *five parts*; and for all these divisions they assign certain allegorical reasons which merit little attention.

The division of the Hebrews is as follows:—

- **Book I. From Psalm 1 to Psalm 41 inclusive.**
- **Book II. From Psalm 42 to Psalm 72 inclusive.**
- **Book III. From Psalm 73 to Psalm 89 inclusive.**
- **Book IV. From Psalm 90 to Psalm 106 inclusive.**
- **Book V. From Psalm 107 to Psalm 150 inclusive.**

The *First, Second, and Third Books* end with *Amen and Amen*; the *Fourth*, with *Amen and Hallelujah*, the *Fifth*, with *Hallelujah*.

After having said so much on the *name* and ancient *divisions* of this important book, it is necessary to say who it is thought was the author of the Book of *Psalms*. If we were to follow the popular opinion, we immediately answer, DAVID, king of Israel because many of them were composed by *him*, there is no doubt; that several *Psalms* were written long after his time, there is internal evidence to prove; and that many of them were written even by his contemporaries.

The collection of *Psalms* as it now stands, was made long after David's death, is a general opinion among learned men; and that Ezra the priest and scribe was the collector and compiler. Ezra is given the honour of collecting the different writings of Moses and the prophets, and reducing them into that form in which they are now found in the Holy Bible, and consequently among them the *Psalms*.

It is believed that David wrote 70 of the *Psalms*, which is almost half of them. The others were written by different people, although some unknown.

On occasions we shall discover how many times the Psalmists are caught up in some particular event, which causes both a personal and a national experience to be expressed. It would be true to say that almost every type of situation in which we could find ourselves, a parallel can be found in one *Psalm* or another.

There are *Psalms* of Jubilation, Acclamation, Exaltation, Exhortation, and Instruction. There are some songs, which express the Infinity, Infallibility, and Immutability of the Lord. There are Messianic *Psalms*, those that only have a direct fulfilment in the life of The Lord Jesus. There are *Psalms* for if you are distressed, perplexed, and despondent.

A.F. Kirkpatrick in his Book of Psalm says. "The Psalter has been through all the centuries and will continue to be one unique and inexhaustible treasury of devotion for the individual and for the church. It supplies the most fitting language for common worship.

Perowne in his Book on the Psalms says, "No single Book of Scripture, not even in the N.T. has, perhaps ever taken such hold on the heart of Christendom. None, if we may dare judge, unless it is the Gospels, has had so large an influence in moulding the affections, sustaining the hopes, purifying the faith of believers. With its words, rather than their own have they have come before God. In these they have uttered their desires, their fears, their confessions, their aspirations, their sorrows, their joys, and their thanksgiving. By these their devotion has been kindled, and their hearts comforted. The Psalter has been in the truest sense, the Prayer book both of Jews and Christians".

I think Perowne has picked up on something, which we can all relate to, for very often we are unable to express the way we feel during or as a result of some experience, so our tendency is to use the words of someone else that expresses our feelings adequately. In the Book of Psalms there are so many real true to life expressions made, so we use them.

Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria in the fourth century says, "No one he goes on to observe, can take the words of the Patriarchs, Moses, or Elijah, to himself and use them as his own; but he who uses the *Psalms* is as one who speaks his own words, and each one sings as if they had been written for his own case, and not as if they had been spoken by someone else, or meant to apply to someone else. Again to me, it seems that the *Psalms* are to him who sings them as a mirror wherein he may see himself and the motions of his soul, and with like feelings utter them".

The N.T. writers were familiar with the *Psalms*; they are quoted no less than seventeen times in the N.T.

Bishop Horne, who contends for the spiritual sense of this book, gives an interesting view of the principal passages that have been *quoted* in the New Testament, and from his *preface* I shall select a few paragraphs on this part of the subject: “No sooner,” says he, “have we opened the book, than the *second Psalm* presents itself, to all appearance, as an inauguration hymn composed by David, the anointed of Jehovah; when by him crowned with victory, and placed triumphant on the sacred hill of Zion. But let us turn to Acts 4:25, and there we find the apostles declaring the Psalm to be descriptive of the exaltation of Jesus Christ, and of the opposition raised against his Gospel, both by Jew and Gentile”.

Let us note just a few of them.

Psalm 8 v 6, Heb 2 v 6.

Palm 22 v 1, Matt. 27v43.

Psalm 40 v7, Heb. 10:5.

In the *forty-first Psalm*: ‘Mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me,’ undoubtedly might be, and probably was, originally uttered by David upon the revolt of his old friend and counsellor Ahithophel, to the party of his rebellious son Absalom. But we are certain, from John 13:18, that this scripture was fulfilled when Christ was betrayed by his apostate disciple: ‘I speak not of you all; I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.’

Psalm 91 & Matt. 4 v 6, 7.

The Psalm 118 v 22, ‘The stone which the builders refused,’ is quoted six different times in relation to Jesus of our Saviour. See Matt. 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11.

We can see that the *Psalms* do have an important place in the life of every Christian, somewhere in one, or another of them will be found some parallel experience we go through, this is why it is vital to look at the *Psalms* in human life, because they can be such a help to us.

As we consider some of the *Psalms* I will at the end pose a few questions, which it is trusted will be a help as we apply the *Psalms* to our experiences and situations.

**Psalm 8 v 6** Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet:

**Heb2 v 6 to 8** But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?

7 Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hand

8 Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.

**Psalm 22 v 1** My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

**Matt 27 43 to 46** He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God.

44 The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth.

45 Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land unto the ninth hour.

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

**Psalm 22 v 7 & 8** Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me,

8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.

**Heb 10 vs 5 to 9** Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me:

6 In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure.

7 ¶ Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

8 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law;

9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God.

**Psalm 91 v 11 & 12** For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.

12 They shall bear thee up in their hands, lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.

**Matt 4 v 6 & 7** And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone.

7 Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.