

The Psalms: *Their History, Teachings, and Use*

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Book II "The Theology of the Psalms"

Chapter I "That There are Predictions Respecting Our Lord in the Psalms"

Some of the older divines used to describe the Psalter as a Little Bible, and the title aptly denotes one of its most remarkable qualities. It possesses a certain internal completeness not found in any other single book in the sacred volume; being, indeed, a kind of lyrical and devotional reflection of the entire Bible. One consequence is, that it offers a singularly inviting field to the student who, employing the methods of the modern Biblical Theology, makes it his business to collect the views of truth presented in the several portions of the Divine Word, and to marshal them in orderly array, according to the topics of the theological system. What is of more importance, the application of the methods of Biblical Theology may be confidently expected, in this instance, to yield results of the utmost practical value. This is evident from the very nature and design of the Psalter. It is the Book of Church Song,--the voice of the daughter of Zion, in which she utters all her heart. The diligent study of the views of truth and life that pervade such a book must needs shed a flood of light on almost every subject of vital importance in regard to true godliness.

What are the genuine characteristics of Scriptural piety? What influence ought it to exert on men in the various relations of life? What are the truths that constitute its proper aliment? These certainly are questions that come home to the business and bosom of every fearer of God; and where shall the materials for a satisfactory solution of them be found, if not in the authentic lyrics of the regenerate heart collected in the Psalter?

I am not sure that it would serve any valuable purpose to collect the teaching of the Psalms in regard to all the doctrines of the theological system.¹ At all events, the limits of the present work forbid the attempt. As the theme on which the harp of the psalmist descants most copiously is the Life of God in the soul,--not the truth respecting God, so much as the new life in man, which is kindled and nourished by that truth,--I shall devote the greater part of the space at my command to the elucidation of the more salient features of Personal and Social Religion, as these are here reflected,--the religion of the Individual Soul, the religion of the Church, of the Family, of the State.

No doubt the Psalms are full of truth respecting God--His being and attributes. His counsels, His works in nature, providence, and grace: and there are veins of instruction on

¹ The only work, known to me, in which this is attempted, is Koenig's *Theologie der Psalmen*, Freilburg, 1857 (pp. 528); but the success is not such as to invite imitation.

these subjects which would richly reward a fresh exploration. The Natural Theology of the Psalms, for example, is a most fascinating subject, as is also the strain of covert or express allusion to the Law of Moses which pervades the sacred lyrics from first to last. On these and similar topics, however, I must limit myself to those passing notices which it may be possible to bestow while we are considering the various exercises of the divine life in the soul.

But there is one of the more objective or doctrinal topics, so important in itself and so prominent in the Psalms, as to demand a separate and most careful consideration at the threshold of these discussions. I refer to the teaching of the Psalms respecting the Lord Jesus Christ. The subject is many-sided. It will be necessary to begin with a vindication of the faith of the Church respecting the presence of Christ in the psalms. Certain important questions respecting what may be called the Theory of the Messianic psalms,--the principles, namely, according to which they are respectively to be interpreted of Christ,--will claim attention in the second place. These preliminary discussions--never more necessary than at the present time--will clear the way for our collecting into one view the whole teaching of the Psalmists regarding the Lord Jesus and His Work.

That there are Psalms which are, in the strictest sense, predictive of the Lord Jesus Christ, has been the constant belief of the Church ever since the psalms were written. Till a comparatively recent period, all commentators of note, whether Jews or Christians, accepted this belief without doubt. There might be differences of opinion as to whether this or that psalm was Messianic, differences also as to the true sense of particular passages; but that there did exist Messianic psalms, strictly and properly so called, was assumed as incontrovertible. It is plain to every reader of the New Testament that the evangelists and apostles shared in this conviction, and that it can claim the sanction of the Lord Jesus Himself.

It might seem superfluous to discuss the grounds on which a conviction so ancient, so catholic, and so well established, rests. Yet I venture to think there is a call to do so at the present time. In common with the whole doctrine of the supernatural inspiration and divine authority of the Holy Scriptures, the belief in the existence of Messianic psalms has of late years been rejected by many. No one who looks into new books can have failed to observe, that on this subject ideas are extensively current which involve the utter rejection of the divine authority of the Psalter, and indeed of the whole Bible. These ideas are everywhere making themselves heard. The air of the nineteenth century is full of them; they cannot, without dereliction of duty, be ignored by those who are set for the defence of the truth.

I believe they can be thoroughly refuted. What is more, I believe that the intelligent investigation of them will add fresh confirmation to both Testaments; that, in this instance, as in so many others, the overruling wisdom of God may be seen educating good out of the seeming evil; and that he has suffered modern Rationalism to assail his Word mainly in order that he might take occasion from its assaults to shed fresh illustration on his truth. Believing this, I have a strong conviction that the discussion of the subject ought not to be confined to the Schools of Theology, but should be conducted in the audience of the entire Christian community.

A word or two regarding the precise point in dispute. That in some sense there are Messianic elements in the Psalter we need not stay to prove; nor even that there are entire

psalms which may, in some sense, be said to have Christ for their subject. This is admitted on all hands. It is a fact indisputable and undisputed, that, for a long time before the birth at Bethlehem, the Jews were looking out for a Prince who was to arise to them from David's house. They were "waiting for the consolation of Israel."² Many a Jew besides Simeon made it his constant prayer that he might not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ, and sung his *Nunc dimittis*--"Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation." The expectation of a Redeemer and Prince had been growing in the hearts of the people ever since the captivity, and may even be traced back through the preceding centuries as far as the accession of Rehoboam, the fatal era when the hopes of perpetual unity and dominion, which had been cherished during the brilliant reigns of David and Solomon, were so lamentably frustrated by the final disruption of the kingdom. From that time till the cessation of prophecy, a long succession of predictions announced the advent of a Son of David, of the increase of whose government and peace there should be no end, upon the throne of David and upon his kingdom, to order and establish it for ever.³ The last of the prophets left a charge to the people to look out for the sudden appearance, in the temple, of the promised Prince, the Messenger of the Covenant.⁴

And the admonition so solemnly given was not neglected. When the child Jesus was brought into the temple, Anna the prophetess could speak of him to a company of Jews who were "looking for redemption in Jerusalem."⁵ It was impossible that announcements and hopes like these should have failed to make themselves heard in the divine songs of the Hebrew Church. In not a few of the psalms, accordingly, the advent of the Son of David is hailed from afar, and the people are invited to expatiate on the peace and felicity which are to accrue from it, first to Israel, and afterwards to the Gentiles.

All this, I repeat, is not only indisputable, but undisputed. It is admitted, in substance, by the Rationalists as well as the orthodox. The infidelity of last century, standing haughtily aloof from the Scriptures, may have refused to acknowledge the existence of ancient Messianic hopes in Israel--may even have kept itself in the dark regarding the existence of such hopes. But the modern rationalism moves in a different orbit. It prides itself on its scholarly acquaintance with the biblical writings; it is loud in the praises of their literary merits; it frankly recognises the vein of Messianic expectation that pervades their structure; it has its own way both of explaining the origin of this rooted and steadfast hope, and of turning it to account in explaining (or explaining away) the miraculous features of the gospel narrative. Such being the present state of opinion, it is plain that a bare acknowledgment of the existence of psalms which look forward to the advent of Christ, furnishes no decisive evidence of belief in the supernatural origin of the Old Testament Scriptures. At all events, it is unnecessary to spend time in demonstrating what no competently informed person, whether Jew or Gentile, would now call in question.

Christ, then, is in the psalms. But in what sense? Is it only in the sense conceded by Rationalists? Is Christ's presence in the Psalms to be limited to this, that they give expression to bright anticipations regarding a Prince and Redeemer, and regarding blessings to be procured by his reign for Jew and Gentile, which, in so far as they had any foundation, have

2 Luke 2:25.

3 Isaiah 9:6,7.

4 Mal. 3:1.

5 Luke 2:38.

received their accomplishment in the Lord Jesus and the Christian religion? All this may be conceded without the recognition of the divine authority of the Old Testament, and indeed without the recognition of any such thing as a direct and preternatural revelation of the divine purposes with respect to Christ and the Church. Well, it is gratifying to find that modern Rationalism has made so great an advance upon the base infidelity of last century, that it has awakened to a sense of the fine poetical feeling, the lofty ideas of personal and national duty, the high-toned and elevating hopes respecting the future destinies of the nations, with which the psalms are replete.

But we cannot consent to accept its theory of the Messianic psalms as adequate or just. We believe and are sure that these psalms make representations respecting Christ and Redemption, which were immeasurably above the reach of the natural hopes and presentiments of the Hebrew bards--representations of things which "eye had not seen, nor ear heard, which had not entered into the heart of man," and which could not have been celebrated, as we see them to have been, unless they had been preternaturally revealed by the Spirit of God--that Spirit who "searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God."⁶ The authors of the psalms were seers or prophets, and we believe, with the apostle Peter, that the "prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."⁷ With the same apostle we believe that there are things delivered regarding Christ in the psalms which, so far from having been merely the bold conjectures of sagacious men, were too high for the psalmists themselves to understand; in so much that they inquired and searched diligently into the meaning of their own writings, "searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow."⁸

This estimate of Old Testament prophecy the apostles learned from their Master; for He was accustomed to point out to the disciples predictions concerning himself in the law of Moses, and in the Prophets, and in the Psalms-- predictions in accordance with which it behoved him, as the Christ, to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day.⁹ The Lord Jesus having spoken thus, it may well be maintained that the existence of true Messianic prophecy in the Psalter deserves credit, on his testimony, from all who are not prepared openly to reject the authority of his teaching;--would have been entitled to claim credit, on his testimony, even if no more direct evidence had been available. However, since we have to do with men who refuse submission even to this pre-eminent authority, it is well to know that other evidence is available--evidence so abundant and decisive as to have amply warranted the conclusion that the Psalter contains real prophecies regarding the Lord Jesus, true preternatural revelations regarding his Person and Work, although we had not possessed the Lord's own attestation of the fact.

To collect and marshal the whole body of available evidence would require a volume. We must be content with two or three of the more material items.

I begin with the **Hundred and tenth psalm**. I select it for many reasons; for this, among others, that there is no dispute of any consequence about the translation. Thus, most providentially, the considerations adducible on either side are, in this instance, of a kind

6 1 Cor. 2:9,10.

7 2 Pet. 1:21.

8 1 Pet. 1:10,11.

9 Luke 24:44-46.

regarding which any person of good sense may form an intelligent judgment. The psalm may be thus rendered:--

Of David a Psalm.

1. Thus saith Jehovah to my Lord,
"Sit thou at my right hand,
Until I lay thy foes, as a footstool, at thy feet."
2. The rod of thy strength shall Jehovah send forth from Zion;
Rule thou in the midst of thine enemies.
3. Thy people offer themselves willingly in the day of thine army,
In holy ornaments;
From the womb of the morning
Thou hast the dew of thy young men.
4. Jehovah hath sworn and will not repent,
"Thou art a priest for ever,
After the manner of Melchizedek."
5. The Lord at thy right hand,
Hath smitten kings in the day of his wrath.
6. He shall judge among the nations;
He hath filled [them] with dead bodies:
He hath smitten the heads over a wide region.
7. Of the brook in the way shall he drink:
Therefore shall he lift up the head.

What, now, may we suppose is the drift of this poem? It celebrates the majesty and prowess of some prince. Who may the Prince be? The traditional interpretation, which can be traced at least as far back as the beginning of the Christian era, refers it (as we shall see) very decidedly to Prince Messiah. This interpretation certainly does not bear on the face of it the unequivocal tokens of error; on the contrary, it has for these eighteen hundred years and more been acquiesced in by the generality of Bible readers, and thus comes before us with a presumptive token of credibility. It is totally repudiated by our modern Rationalists. The reasons which have moved them to do so are scarcely attempted to be concealed. It is not that the current *translations* have been found to be at fault. Nothing of the kind is alleged. The Messianic interpretation is quite as much favoured by the version given by De Wette, or Ewald, or Hupfeld, as by our Authorised Translation or the one given above. Neither is it that *some other prince* has been found to whom the words of the psalm, in their natural and obvious sense, are more applicable than to the Lord Jesus.

On the contrary, the rejecters of the Messianic interpretation are unable to agree upon any other person to whom they may assign it. *The reason for rejecting the ancient interpretation is a doctrinal one entirely.* If the Lord Jesus be the person whom the psalm celebrates, the inference is inevitable that David must have known that the son whom God had promised to raise up to him, to sit upon his throne, was a person of super-human dignity,--his Lord as well as his son. On the same supposition we are, in like manner, shut up to the admission that David foresaw the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, his exaltation to the right hand of power, and the abrogation of the whole Levitical economy. Let it once be admitted that the oath of

which the Psalmist speaks, the irrevocable oath, "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," refers to the Messiah, the Son of David; and we know from the Epistle to the Hebrews what will follow. The whole fabric of modern Judaism will fall to the ground. The Old Testament must be allowed to have borne witness to the cross; the Messiah behoved to suffer before he could reign; we live under a new priesthood, diverse from the Levitical and superseding it for ever.

But these are conclusions as distasteful to the Rationalists as they have always been to the Jews: for, as Dr. Owen remarked with reference to Grotius and the other precursors of Rationalism two hundred years ago, these men "in their annotations on the Scriptures seldom depart from the sense of the Jews, unless it be where they are in the right."¹⁰ That there should have been a declaration of Christ's superhuman dignity and everlasting priesthood, in a psalm written a thousand years before the sacrifice on Calvary, is what the Rationalists know they cannot afford to admit. Such a fact would explode the whole fortress of their unbelief. If the Hundred and tenth psalm teaches what the Epistle to the Hebrews deduces from it, it is a prophecy that cannot have come by the will of man; there must have been preternatural revelations of God's mind to the Hebrews; there can be no more an absolute denial of the existence of Scriptures preternaturally inspired by the Spirit of God.

Let it be remembered, then, that the non-Messianic interpretation rests on the prior assumption that the things declared could not possibly have been known so long before the death of the Lord Jesus. They could not have been declared beforehand without a miracle; therefore some other sense must, at any cost, be found for the psalm. Should any one think this an unfair explanation, let him read attentively the long discussion of the point in Hupfeld's Commentary.

Another argument, no doubt, is urged. The learned commentator thinks that the martial and even vengeful acts attributed to the Prince of whom the psalm speaks--his smiting of kings and filling the countries with dead--are not in keeping with the character of our Lord, and betray an unchristian spirit. It is enough to say that the criticism applies to the Apocalypse quite as much as to the Hundred and tenth psalm. The argument, therefore, needs no refutation. Indeed it is only thrown in as a make-weight.

The main pillar on which the rationalistic interpretation rests is the doctrinal assumption that preternatural revelation is incredible, and that there is no such thing as an inspired Scripture. Dr. Hupfeld, who with all his faults is a thoroughly candid man, frankly admits this. His words are these: "It is certain that a prophecy of the Messias, in the *Christian* sense--that is, with the attributes which the New Testament assigns to him on the ground of this psalm-- is utterly inconceivable; it cannot be reconciled with the historical and psychological ideas and the hermeneutical principles, which are recognised [namely, by the rationalistic school of critics] in other cases. For (1.) the sitting down at the right hand of the Father spoken of in the New Testament takes place in heaven, and is always connected with the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, *events of which no presentiment could have arisen in a single human heart*; (2.) Christ's high-priestly or propitiatory office, as it is set forth in the Epistle to the Hebrews, in opposition to the Mosaic priesthood, and as involving the abrogation of the Mosaic law, is so remote from the point of view of the Old Testament, so foreign to the Old Testament conception of the Messias, that *the thought of it could not possibly have come into the mind of any Old Testament psalmist or prophet.*"

¹⁰ *Exposition of the Hebrews*, i. 202. (Dr. Goold's Edition).

I cite these remarks, partly to shew how directly the rationalistic doctrine contradicts that of the apostles regarding the possibility of the Holy Spirit's revealing to men things which never else could have come into their hearts; but principally that the reader may see how entirely the rationalistic interpretation of the Hundred and tenth psalm has originated in a dogmatical bias. It is proper to add that the interpretation has already been imported into this country. Dean Stanley has boldly adopted it in his *Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church*,¹¹--following in this, as in so many other particulars, the example of Ewald. It is important, therefore, that the real foundation on which it rests should be known.

The arguments by which the Messianic interpretation is sustained are mainly these three:--

1. *It is the only one that yields a tolerable sense.* Several alternatives have been proposed. For example, Herder and Ewald affirm that *David himself* is the prince to whom the psalm refers; that (like the Twenty-first psalm) it is a prayer for the king, in which the people speak of him as their Lord, whose throne was exalted at the right hand of the Lord's throne in Sion, and whom God had invested with such honour in connection with his house, that he might be said to be a priest like Melchizedek, the ancient King of Salem. The theory can be dressed so as to wear a plausible air. But it will not bear examination.

For (1.) the psalm is in the title attributed to David's pen, and there is not a tittle of evidence pointing to any other writer. Would he have written of himself as "My Lord"? (2) The king is invited to sit at the right hand of Jehovah: a manner of speech nowhere else in Scripture used with reference to an earthly king. The Jewish kings sat "on the throne of Jehovah,"¹² as his representatives or vicegerents; not "at his right hand," as his fellows. (3.) The people are represented as following the king in sacred attire, the beauty of holiness; that is to say, in holy sacerdotal vestments as an army of priests: a thing of which we find no trace in the history of David or any of the kings. It is Christ alone of whom we ever read that his "armies followed him, clothed in fine linen, white and clean" when he went in righteousness to make war.¹³ (4.) The king is, by the oath of God, constituted a priest, "a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek." One would think this at least cannot apply to David. But the exigencies of the rationalistic theory are great, and a bold attempt must be made. Ewald, girding up the loins of his ingenuity, sets himself to shew that in David's reign there was a remarkable conjunction of the royal and sacerdotal functions. How he goes to work may be gathered from the picture of David's administration that has been recently sketched by the elegant pencil of the Dean of Westminster. Thus it is gravely related of the King, as if it were matter of ascertained fact, that "though not himself a priest, he yet assumed almost all the functions usually ascribed to the priestly office. He wore the priestly dress, offered the sacrifices, gave the priestly benedictions, walked round about the altar in sacred processions."¹⁴

11 Vol. ii. 97,98.

12 1 Chron. 29:23.

13 Rev. 19:14.

14 Stanley, *Lect. on Jewish Church*, ii. 96. There is a great deal more to the same purpose; indeed, the straining to make out this point gives a false colouring to page after page of the author's account of the reigns of David and Solomon. Thus, narrating the dedication of Solomon's Temple, he remarks (p. 220), "The king alone prays, sacrifices, blesses, consecrates. And, as if to keep up the memory of the day, thrice a year throughout his reign, on the three great festivals, he solemnly entered, not only the temple courts with sacrifices (2 Chron. viii. 13), but penetrated into the Holy Place itself, where in later years none but the priests were allowed to enter, and offered incense on the altar of incense (1 Kings ix. 25)." It is very doubtful whether the passage referred to in 1 Kings really means that the king burnt incense (see Keil *ad. loc.*). It is certain that the law, excluding from the Holy Place all except the priest, is as old as Moses. But, not to insist on these details, it is surely too much to

But all this is asserted without a shadow of warrant from the sacred narrative. No doubt David is related to have "offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings" at the bringing up of the ark; but that he did so with his own hand is no more likely than that Solomon, on a yet more solemn occasion, offered with his own hand the twenty thousand oxen and the hundred and twenty thousand sheep which he is related to have offered at the dedication of the house. David doubtless sings in the Twenty-sixth Psalm of "compassing God's altar;" but that is no more to be taken literally, than the prayer in the Twenty-seventh, that he might "dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life." As for the allegation that he wore the priestly dress, it is enough to say that the Ephod in which he arrayed himself at the bringing up of the ark was not the priestly robe so named; this was made of *byssus* (fine linen), whereas the king's was of ordinary linen--a festal robe, no doubt, but not peculiar to the priesthood.¹⁵

This is not all. Let it be supposed, for the moment, that all these fancies about David's intrusions with the functions of the priesthood had been matters of fact; let it be supposed that this man after God's own heart was accustomed to officiate often in rites which the law of Moses had so sacredly appropriated to the sons of Aaron, that Saul, for venturing to officiate in them on one solitary and pressing occasion,¹⁶ was rejected, he and his house, from reigning over Israel; let it be supposed that he performed habitually, with high commendation, sacred offices like that for which Uzziah, when he attempted to perform it but once,¹⁷ was sharply reproved and smitten on the spot, with leprosy,--would all this have sufficed to vindicate the application to David of the oracle in the psalm? Such conduct might, perhaps, have warranted the application of the priestly *title*; certainly it could not have warranted the lofty and emphatic declaration: "Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent. Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek."

The allegations so boldly made, if they had been true, would have amounted merely to this, that David exercised such priestly functions as belonged to all princes and heads of families under the patriarchal dispensation, before the Law restricted the priesthood to Aaron and his sons--that he was a priest in the sense in which Abraham and Jacob were priests. But how far is this from answering to the grandeur of the oracle! The king here addressed is constituted a priest after the order of Melchizedek, to whom Abraham, the patriarchal priest, paid tithe in token of homage, and from whom he was content to receive a benediction; and the priesthood is confirmed by the irrevocable oath of Jehovah, and declared to be a perpetual priesthood. It shews how hard men are pressed by the exigencies of their theory when they can plead for the application to David of a declaration so far-reaching and magnificent.

After all, it is no wonder the Rationalistic interpreters fight hard for the identification of David with the priest after the order of Melchizedek--the throned priest of Zion; for

assume, as if it were a matter of course, that all the things the historian relates of Solomon must have been done by him in his own person. One would think that the king may have burnt incense in the same sense in which he slew the 20,000 oxen; and it will hardly be contended that he did that with his own hand. The truth is, that the only priest-like act he performed in person was the blessing of the people: and that, instead of being "the highest sacerdotal act" (p. 218), was not an exclusively sacerdotal function at all, but was competent to any superior in age or station.

15 Vaihinger in Herzog's *Real-Encyclopædie*, Art. EPHOD; and the corresponding article in Smith's *Bible Dictionary*.

16 1 Sam. 13:9,14.

17 2 Chron. 26:16-21.

incredible as this is, it is less so than any other of the non-Messianic interpretations;--than that of Hupfeld, who suggests (not without a misgiving) that the psalm celebrates *the dynasty* of David rather than any individual king; and than that of some others who fancy they see in it a reference to the martial exploits of the priesthood in the age of the Maccabees. Besides these, I do not know that there is any other theory worth notice, unless it be the wild notion of De Wette, that the psalm comes from the pen of some prophet who chose in this way to express his approval of King Uzziah's presumptuous invasion of the priestly functions! It is to shifts like these that learned and able men are driven when they abandon the natural and obvious sense of this great Messianic psalm.

2. *The ancient Jews unanimously understood the psalm to refer to the Messiah.* When our Lord¹⁸ appealed to it to prove that David's son was David's Lord, the Pharisees found nothing to answer, which plainly shews that, although the doctrine of the psalm may have been imperfectly apprehended, its Messianic character was universally allowed. If there had been any difference of opinion either as to David's being the writer, or as to the Messiah's being the person whom the psalmist styles his Lord, the Pharisees would certainly have taken advantage of it to escape the edge of the question propounded to them. No doubt, when we come down to the middle ages we find learned rabbis rejecting the Messianic interpretation; but Dr. Hupfeld admits that some vestiges of it are found even among them, and that their sole motive for wishing to get rid of it was the desire to deprive the Christians of a silencing argument for the divinity and priesthood of the Redeemer. He admits also that the interpretations they suggest are unusually farfetched and inadmissible.

It is always a presumption in favour of the Messianic interpretation of a passage in the Old Testament, if it can be shewn that that interpretation prevailed among the Jews, who lived prior to the birth of Christ. In the present instance, the presumption is greatly strengthened by the contents of the psalm, inasmuch as the sacerdotal character which it attributes to the Hope of Israel, is not one which the Jews have shewn any eagerness to attribute to Him. And it is worth remarking that if the Rationalists were correct in thinking that the Old Testament Jews had no presentiment either of the superhuman dignity or the priestly office of the Messiah, this would simply invest with higher significance the indubitable fact of their having applied to Him the psalm in which these are so magnificently attributed to the promised King of Israel.

3. It needs hardly be added that *the authority of our Lord and of the apostles* has sanctioned the interpretation we plead for. Not only are there quotations in the New Testament which indicate that the psalm was appealed to as a prophecy respecting the Messiah, but it so happens that this psalm is more frequently quoted and more largely reasoned from, than any other portion of the ancient Scriptures. Dr. Hupfeld himself remarks upon the fact, that the whole Messianic interpretation of the psalm may be collected from the places in which it is formally cited or tacitly alluded to in the New Testament.

Reference has already been made to our Lord's citation of the first verse.¹⁹ It may be remarked that in calling attention to the truth taught in the psalm regarding his superhuman dignity, rather by a suggestive question than a formal and explicit declaration, the Saviour was simply following his ordinary course. During his personal ministry he dealt very sparingly in declarations regarding his Person and Atoning work, especially in

18 Matt. 22:43-45.

19 Matt. 22:43, Mark 12:36, Luke 20:42.

addressing mixed audiences. He chose rather to throw out remarks which set people's minds to work in the direction of the truth. Thus, in the present instance, he pointed out the remarkable circumstance that David, speaking of One who, he knew, was to be his son, called him his Lord. He left them to follow out for themselves the train of thought which that circum-stance was fitted to suggest, and we need not doubt that some hearers would thus be prepared for the fuller declaration of the truth subsequently made. The same verse is quoted in the Pentecostal sermon of the apostle Peter: "For David is not ascended into the heavens, but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool;" and he adds, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."²⁰ The places in which allusion is made to the Father's invitation to Christ "to sit at his right hand till his enemies be made his footstool" are too numerous to quote.²¹

Still higher honour has been put upon the oracle in the fourth verse,--"Jehovah hath sworn, and will not repent. Thou art a priest for ever, after the order of Melchizedek." Not only is it quoted as unquestionably an utterance of the Holy Spirit with reference to Christ, but it is a text from which the New Testament preaches, more than from any other in all the ancient Scriptures. The central chapters of the Epistle to the Hebrews--chapters more precious than fine gold for the elucidation they give of the priesthood and sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ--what are they but an extended commentary on this one verse?

Such are the reasons which have constrained orthodox commentators, with rare unanimity, to look upon the Hundred and tenth Psalm as a Messianic psalm in the strictest sense--a song which has for its theme the throned Priest in Zion, the Son and Lord of David, our blessed Propitiation and Lord, Jesus Christ. This interpretation has, from the first, been generally received in the church; was sanctioned, in singularly express terms, by the apostles and by Christ himself; was the only one current among the Jews prior to the Incarnation; and, in fine, is not only an interpretation which the words of the psalm are fairly capable of, but is so imperatively demanded, that if it be rejected, the psalm refuses to yield any tolerable sense.

Before passing from this great Psalm, a word or two may be said regarding the *form* in which it sets forth the truth regarding Christ. It has been already remarked that as a rule it is not in the Psalter, but elsewhere, that we are to search for new revelations of truth;--that the psalms are the authentic response of faith to God's revelations, rather than the vehicle of those revelations. Such is undoubtedly the rule; but there are exceptions, and among these the Hundred and tenth Psalm is pre-eminent. *Both in form and substance it is a new revelation*, a prophecy respecting Christ, a divine oracle delivered in song.

This is precisely what the psalm declares itself to be. Alone in the Psalter, it opens with a formula which is appropriated in Scripture to the use of prophets in publishing oracles entrusted to them by God. Justice has hardly been done to this in the Authorised Version. Most recent translators make the formula very emphatic--either "Jehovah's oracle to my Lord" (De Wette and Delitzsch), or "A revelation of Jehovah to my Lord" (Hupfeld). When the Lord Jesus, in his reference to the psalm, describes David as calling him Lord "in the Spirit," there can be little doubt that he alludes to the peculiar form of this particular psalm. The contents verify the introductory formula. The psalm contains two distinct oracles--two

²⁰ Acts 2:34-39.

²¹ The reader may refer for examples to 1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 1:13, 8:1, 10:12,13; Rev. 3:21; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 3:22.

declarations which, at the time of their publication, were revelations of new truth to the ancient church, and not merely authentic echoes of truth elsewhere revealed. There is first, in the opening verse, the announcement of Messiah's Exaltation to the right hand of God; and then, in the fourth verse, the memorable proclamation of his Royal Priesthood.

I have devoted what may appear a disproportionate space to the Hundred and tenth Psalm, because it seemed of importance to demonstrate, in one decisive instance, the existence of true Messianic prophecy within the Psalter. There is no other psalm in which the prophetically Messianic character is so unequivocally marked. Still there are many which can be satisfactorily shewn to speak of Christ; and I know few subjects in the wide domain of Biblical interpretation which would better reward a serious study than that which is brought up by the questions, Which are the Messianic psalms? and, In what sense are the respective psalms to be regarded as having Christ for their subject? These questions will come up for careful consideration in the next chapter. Meanwhile, it may be possible, in a few sentences, to shew that there are good grounds for accepting other psalms besides the Hundred and tenth as truly Messianic.

I shall name three--the Twenty-second, the Second, the Forty-fifth. These have been constantly sung in Christian congregations for these eighteen centuries; and it may be affirmed without hesitation that if one could interrogate the souls who have delighted to use their help in soaring heavenwards, regarding the practical interpretation put by them upon the sacred words, they would answer with one accord that they have been accustomed to interpret them of Christ and the Church. The sophistications of rationalising critics have never been able to persuade Christian congregations that, in singing these psalms, they ought to look somewhere else rather than to Christ. Through all the centuries devout souls have manifested a surprisingly harmonious feeling in this practical interpretation.

The Twenty-second Psalm, as we learn from Augustine, was sung in the North African congregations at the Easter celebration of the Lord's Supper. More than fourteen centuries have passed since the Vandals drowned those songs in blood; but a stranger who happens to look in upon a Scottish congregation on a communion Sabbath will be likely enough to find the psalm turned to the same holy and solemn use.

In these days of criticism, the query will be put, When the psalms are thus sung in Christian assemblies--sung by people who see in them Christ and no other--is their genuine sense preserved? Will the Christian thoughts that twine themselves around the words bear the scrutiny of a strict interpretation? The query will be put; and, for my part, I welcome it. There may, doubtless, be found many subordinate points in which the views of particular psalms current at particular times and in particular Churches will not bear rigid scrutiny; but one may, without arrogance, offer to demonstrate that the Christian sense of such psalms as the three which have been named, is also the genuine sense, and that no interpretation which excludes that sense will stand. We cheerfully admit that they may have had some other immediate referenc ; as, for instance, a reference to David himself, his wars, and tribulations, and conquests--or to Solomon in his glory. It is well known that some commentators of excellent judgment have thought so. I am not satisfied that, in the instances before us, any such reference can be made out. But what I wish to remark is, that the point is not a vital one, if, along with the immediate reference to David and Solomon, there be admitted a further, and principal, and conscious reference to Christ; if, in other words, the inferior sense contended for is not held to exclude the higher Messianic one.

The **Twenty-second Psalm**, our venerable translators, following Calvin's example, mark as one in which "David complaineth in great discouragement." But neither Calvin nor they would have thought of referring the psalm, ultimately or principally, to David. It may well be doubted whether there is any special reference to David at all. It is certain that there is a reference to Christ; that the proper design of the psalm is to set forth "the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." Even rationalists like Dr. Hupfeld have expressed astonishment at the coincidence, in minute detail, between its delineations and the histories of the crucifixion.

The **Second Psalm** is not only applicable to Christ throughout and actually applied to him in several New Testament texts, but was so commonly understood beforehand as having a prophetic reference to the Hope of Israel, that two of the names by which that Coming One was commonly known among the Jews were drawn from it. The title by which both the Jews and the Samaritans usually designated the expected Son of David was the Messiah, that is, the Christ--or Anointed One,--and it was taken from this psalm. The King here celebrated is called, in the second verse, the Anointed of Jehovah--that is to say, "the Lord's Christ."²² In the subsequent words, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee," we see in like manner the Scripture which taught Nathanael to say, when he first recognised in Jesus the long-expected Christ, "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God, thou art the King of Israel."²³

The **Forty-fifth psalm** is a Nuptial Song--the Epithalamium of some great King of Israel, who has fixed his love on a Gentile maiden, the daughter of a princely house, and is being united in marriage to her in his own palace. The glories of the King are first described, his superhuman beauty and gracious words, the everlasting stability of his throne, his martial achievements; and the mild equity of his administration. Then follows a description of the marriage. The Queen-Consort is at the King's right hand, in gold of Ophir; she is conducted--she and her maidens--into the King's palace; and the daughter of opulent Tyre, who has come to grace the day with her presence, brings in her hand a wedding gift. It is a song resplendent with the richest ornaments of Oriental Poetry. Respecting its ultimate and proper intention, there has been from the first an unfaltering consent among all devout readers. The opening verse,

My heart poureth forth a goodly matter:
I speak the things which I have made touching the King:
My tongue is the pen of a ready writer:

--this verse, I say, in their judgment, is strictly parallel to that of the apostle, "This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the Church."²⁴

There are, no doubt, differences of opinion in regard to what may be called the theory of the psalm; some understanding it to refer to Christ and the Church directly and exclusively, while others think there is an immediate reference to Solomon (or some other Hebrew king), and his Gentile wife. But this difference is quite immaterial, so far as our present purpose is concerned; for those who think there is an immediate reference to an earthly

²² Luke 2:26.

²³ John 1:50.

²⁴ Eph. 5:32.

marriage agree with the others in holding that there are many things in the psalm which, in their full and proper sense, apply only to Christ, and that it was designed from the first to lead men's thoughts to Him.

Is this received interpretation just? Certainly, if external authority is to be accepted as decisive in the matter, it cannot be called in question; for, besides the general consent of the Christian Churches, the mystical interpretation is known to have been the one that prevailed among the Jews before the Christian era, and it is unequivocally sanctioned by the New Testament.²⁵ But the same reasons which oblige the rationalistic critics to impose some other than the Messianic construction on the Hundred and tenth psalm find place here also; and they endeavour, with one consent, to make out that this glorious Nuptial Song is nothing more than an earthly Epithalamium, the memorial of the marriage of a Jewish king with a Gentile princess.

How baseless this theory is, might be shewn by many arguments. In the first place, there is much in the psalm that cannot, without violence, be applied to any one but Christ. Take the sixth verse, for instance :

Thy throne, God, is for ever and ever:
A sceptre of equity is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

Surely the Epistle to the Hebrews puts the most natural construction on these words when it cites them as having been spoken "unto the Son." In answer to this, it used to be alleged that "God" (Elohim) is a title communicable to creatures, that it is repeatedly applied to magistrates, and might well be given to Solomon as a king. But it is to be observed that the title is never applied to any creature, whether man or angel, except in such a connection as excludes the possibility of mistake; certainly never in the unqualified way in which it is used here.

That device, accordingly, is now laid aside, and the Messianic sense is attempted to be evaded by altering the translation thus, "Thy throne of God (or, thy God's-throne) is for ever and ever;" according to which the meaning would be, "Thy throne, which is the throne of the Lord, on which thou sittest as his Vicegerent, is for ever." So far as grammar is concerned, the translation is possible; but it is violently unnatural, and all the old translations, from the Septuagint downwards, are against it. It is too obviously a device to get rid of a translation which, though the only natural one, would be fatal to a favourite theory. Dean Stanley--who, as usual, favours the non-Messianic interpretation--alludes to the verse as if it said of the king that "his throne is like the throne of God;"²⁶ but that is a sense which none of the translations will yield.

Another consideration is of great weight. There is no example in the Psalter of a purely secular song; it is only Church songs that are here collected. Not even David's name could procure for his Lament for Saul and Jonathan admission into the sacred collection. If the Forty-fifth Psalm celebrates the wedding of a Jewish king, and nothing else, it is the solitary exception to the rule--the only one of all the hundred and fifty psalms that is not a devotional composition. This is frankly acknowledged by Ewald, and involves him in great perplexity. Again and again, in the course of his learned disquisitions, the glaringly excep-

²⁵ Heb. 1:8.9.

²⁶ *Lect. on Jewish Church*, ii. 199.

tional song comes in his way, and he does not know what to make of it. In one place he throws out the desperate conjecture that it may have got into the Psalm Book by some oversight of an editor or transcriber; but, finding no rest in this, he comes back to the supposition that the allegorical interpretation may be as old as Ezra's time, and that this may have led to the insertion.

Why not take one short step more, and acknowledge that the allegorical interpretation is the true one? Does not this, besides its other high recommendations, best accord with the lofty terms in which the Psalmist announces that his theme is to be "a good matter," and declares that it has so taken possession of his heart that his tongue is like the pen of a ready writer? No other psalm is introduced after the same fashion. Is it credible that the one secular song in the Psalter should be adorned above all the rest with such a preface of eulogy?

"The Imprecations" in William Binnie, *The Psalms: Their History, Teachings, and Use* (T. Nelson and Sons, 1870). Note: The text has not been modified, except that long paragraphs have been divided.