

The Psalms: Their History, Teachings, and Use

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Book II "The Theology of the Psalms"

Chapter II "A Classification of the Messianic Psalms"

The Epistle to the Hebrews opens with the statement that God's speaking to the fathers by the prophets took place "in diverse manners;" and to no part of the Old Testament does the remark apply more than to the Messianic Psalms. They all celebrate the Hope of Israel, but not after one and the same manner. There are some which, as we have seen, are in the strictest sense predictions regarding our Lord; but there are others which cannot be so described, inasmuch as, although they speak of Him, He is neither their exclusive nor primary subject.

The **Eighteenth psalm**, for instance, is undoubtedly Messianic. Apostolical authority concurs with internal evidence in shewing that the person who speaks in it is Christ. Yet nothing can be more certain than that it is not predictive of Christ in the same high and exclusive sense as the Hundred and tenth. It was written by David in thankful commemoration of the kindness of the Lord, in delivering him "from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul." Not only is there a superscription to that effect, but the whole poem is inserted in the history of David's reign,¹ as a document relative to the period. Such having been the origin and primary intention of the poem, the question will be asked, On what principle do you refer to Christ a song in which, as you admit, David speaks of himself, his dangers, his marvellous escapes, the eventual establishment of his throne and wide extension of his sway? This is a perfectly fair question. Since it is a question, moreover, which crosses the path of every careful student of the Bible, and is apt to cause serious perplexity, the discussion of it cannot be declined, even although it brings up some points which are amongst the most difficult in the whole domain of biblical theology.

When we classify the Messianic psalms, according to the "diverse manners" in which they severally speak of Christ, they arrange themselves into three principal groups. First, there is a large group, consisting of those in which Christ is present in the person of David or some other type; then there is a smaller one, consisting of psalms which relate to Him directly and exclusively; lastly, there is a group of undefined extent, consisting of psalms in which the person who speaks is "Christ mystical," the whole Church, the Head and the members together.

I. It will be convenient to begin with the psalms in which Christ is spoken of in the person of David or some other type : **THE TYPICALLY-MESSIANIC PSALMS.**

¹ 2 Sam. 22.

It has often been observed that God's most perfect works are never accomplished by a sudden stroke of power. He delights to unfold his purpose in successive parts. This is seen in Nature. The geologist traces a constant progress, from the rudimentary forms of animal and vegetable life which have left their traces on the early sedimentary rocks, to the perfect forms which are the contemporaries of man. The human body, so fearfully and wonderfully made, in respect of which man is "the paragon of animals," was not altogether a novelty in creation, on the day that the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground. We can imagine that the only thing which an angelic observer would take notice of as altogether new, was the lodgment of a soul--a personal intelligence--in a material tenement. Of the tenement itself all the leading features had been seen before, in one or other of the pre-existing animals. Those animals were therefore the types or figures of the race which was predestined to exercise lordship over them.

This principle of progressive development pervades God's administration in the work of Redemption, not less extensively than in the material universe. Long before He sent his Son into the world, to offer up the great Sacrifice and establish his kingdom, He had familiarised men's minds with the leading features of his Person and Work. During the centuries from the creation of Adam to the incarnation of Christ, the events which form the subject of the sacred history were so ordered as to be a gradual unfolding of the divine purpose respecting the predestined Redeemer.

This unfolding was accomplished by the twofold machinery of facts and oracles,--the latter with the occasional accompaniment of symbolical institutions. On the one hand, there were divine Oracles, direct and formal revelations of the mind and purpose of God. Such was the promise of the seed of the woman who should bruise the serpent's head. Such was also the promise of the seed of Abraham, in whom all nations should be blessed; the Shiloh out of Judah; the Prophet like unto Moses. This succession of great oracles culminated at length in the promise made to David, that the Hope of Israel was to be his son and the inheritor of his throne.

Running parallel to these oracles and their accompanying institutions, we can trace a long succession of Providential Events, which were a kind of real predictions concurring with the verbal predictions in the disclosure of the divine counsels. Thus the redemption from Egypt was designed to familiarise men's minds (and did familiarise them) with the idea of God's Israel as a community of emancipated bondmen,--bondmen who are emancipated, not by their own prowess, but by the favour of God, that they may be a holy people to the Lord. To this day, when the Christian attempts to describe what he was by nature and what grace has made him, he insensibly makes use of the forms of speech that originated with the exodus. The Old Testament is full of prefigurations of this kind,--precurative representations of the truth respecting Christ by means of analogous personages and dispensations. The types, then, were events, institutions, persons, so ordered by the providence of God as to bring out, clearly and impressively, the leading features of the eternal purpose which was one day to be realised in the person and work of the incarnate Son. It was by means of these types, quite as much as by the more direct and explicit medium of verbal revelations, that the mind of God was made known to the ancient church, and presentiments of good things to come were awakened within its bosom.

All this bears directly on the problem before us in the Messianic psalms. For David, who

was, by way of eminence, the Psalmist of Israel, was also, in his personal history and in his kingdom, the most distinguished of the types of Christ. In him men beheld the image of a just and wise prince, who having grown up in an obscure town was afterwards filled, in an incomparable measure, with the Spirit of kingly wisdom, and counsel, and might; a captain who, although he had been anointed by a prophet to be king over God's Israel, was detained for long years in the school of bitter humiliation; but who, when he was at length brought to the throne, achieved for his people deliverance from their enemies on every side, and subjugated the nations from the Euphrates to the border of Egypt. How distinctly, in these and a hundred other features, David and his kingdom prefigured Christ and his kingdom, and awoke presentiments regarding them in the hearts of God's people, no reader of the Bible needs to be told. His history from first to last, was a kind of acted parable of the sufferings and glory of Christ. When it is remembered that every step in David's chequered career finds its lyrical expression in the Psalter, it will be at once apparent that the Psalter must be full of Christ.

One who gives a faithful description of the shadow, must needs describe the substance that casts the shadow. The Paschal lamb having been a divinely ordered prefiguration of the Lamb of God, the law which ordained that a bone of him should not be broken is cited in the gospel as a prophecy, which spoke of Christ, and which was fulfilled in the manner of his death.² The Psalms are full of similar prophecies regarding Christ;--passages which, although, in the first instance, they speak of David and his kingdom, carry forward the mind to the person and kingdom of David's son. Nor do these typically-Messianic passages speak of Christ, only by way of such unconscious pre-figuration as took place in the offering of the Paschal lamb.

There is no reason to suppose that Moses, when he wrote the law of the Passover, thought of anything but the literal ordinance. At least, there is no reason to attribute to him a distinct foresight of the manner of Christ's death which he so exactly described. But it was otherwise with David. He knew that Christ was to be born of his seed, and that He was to be a king after the manner of David, as well as a priest after the manner of Melchizedek. Accordingly, we find that in the psalms which unfold his own experience, he is sometimes lifted above himself, and speaks in terms which, although they may perhaps admit of being applied to himself, are much more easily and naturally applicable to our Lord. Thus the Eighteenth Psalm, the great song of thanksgiving for the mercies of his life, rises at the close into this strain:--

49. Therefore "will I give thanks unto thee, Jehovah, among the nations;
And to thy name will I sing praises.
50. Who worketh great deliverances for his king;
And sheweth lovingkindness to his Anointed,
To David and to his seed for ever.

When these verses are quoted in the Epistle to the Romans,³ as a declaration on the part of Christ, of his purpose to publish God's name among the Gentiles, the apostle is not to be understood as applying the words to Christ, by way of arbitrary accommodation. No doubt the words are David's, and express his purpose to indite songs in which all nations might one day sing praise to the God of Abraham. But, in the character in which he speaks

² Exod. 12:46; John 19:36.

³ Chap. 15:9.

throughout the psalm, he so exactly pre-figured Christ that the whole is applicable to Christ as truly as to himself; and in these concluding verses, he is moved by the Holy Spirit to utter words which, although true of himself, were much more perfectly fulfilled in Christ. And this is what we mean when we entitle his song of thanksgiving a typically Messianic psalm.

To the same class belong such **Psalms as the 35th, the 41st, the 55th, the 69th, the 109th**; a cycle which will come before us again in connection with the subject of the Imprecations which impart to them such a terrible character. They are all from David's pen, and were written with reference to the implacable enemies of his kingdom and of the cause of God in Israel. They are so distinctly typical as to partake a good deal of the prophetic character. Christ and Judas are present in them as truly as David and Ahithophel. There are other psalms of David that might be ranked in this typical group, but I shall not attempt to enumerate them: for, indeed, it is hardly possible to draw a line of separation between the psalms which look no farther than David, and those which have an ulterior reference to Christ. When the psalmist writes in his kingly character he is ever ready to look beyond himself and his own age to the future glories of his house, and to its promised inheritor. The **Twenty-first and Sixty-first psalms**, for example, although they might seem to relate entirely to the temporal kingdom, utter hopes with respect to it which are distinctly Messianic. "Thou wilt prolong the king's life, and his years as many generations: he shall abide before God for ever. He asked life of thee and thou gavest it him, even length of days for ever and ever."⁴

When Solomon came to the throne, it was his honourable ambition to govern so that his reign might be remarkable for righteousness, benignity, and peace. Hence his prayer at Gibeah. Hence also the tenor of the **Seventy-second psalm**, in which he has put on record the hopes and aspirations of his golden prime. It was the people's interest, as well as his own, that he might be enabled to reign justly, and might be blessed with peace. He associates them, therefore, with himself in the prayer.

1. God, give thy Judgments unto the king,
And thy righteousness unto the king's son.
2. May he judge thy people with righteousness,
And thine afflicted ones with judgment.
3. May the mountains bring forth peace unto the people,
And the hills with righteousness.
4. May he judge the afflicted of the people.
May he save the children of the needy;
And break in pieces the oppressor.

Solomon is certainly here. The psalm is the joint prayer of prince and people, entreating that the new reign may be wise and just, long and happy. But we cannot read it to the end without feeling that, even when it was first sung, the thought of every reflective Israelite must have been carried beyond the young king, who had just entered upon the government, with such honourable aspirations and such a rich dower of wisdom and diversified accomplishment. In Hebrew, the optative and future run so much into each other that it is hard to say whether the psalm ought to be translated throughout as a prayer, or ought not rather to be thrown, in the latter part, into the form of a prediction as it is in the English version. Some, like Hupfeld, make it a prayer throughout, and read it thus:

⁴ Psalm 51:6,7; 21:4.

10. Let the kings of Tarshish and the isles render gifts,
Let the kings of Sheba and Saba offer presents.
11. Yea, let all kings bow themselves down before him,
Let all nations serve him.
12. For he delivereth the poor when he crieth,
And the afflicted who hath no helper.*⁵

But even thus rendered, the terms would have been too fulsome for a Bible psalm, if the scope of it had been limited to the person and reign of Solomon. He could not modestly have asked his people to unite with him in offering to God requests of such far-reaching and glorious import, unless he had intended them to be offered in behalf of the king in the most comprehensive sense of the term, as including the seed of David for ever, and especially the greater Son of David who was promised to succeed upon the throne. The reference to Christ is, of course, still more pointed and obvious, if (as seems preferable)⁶ the latter part of the psalm be rendered as a prediction. And if those who first made use of the psalm may be presumed to have looked beyond Solomon, what shall we say regarding those who lived to see the kingdom divided and the house of David represented by men like Rehoboam? The psalm, let it be remembered, was not a mere Coronation Anthem, sung once and then forgotten. It was a new Song added to the Church's Psalter, and continued to be sung in divine worship.

We may be sure, therefore, that even if it could be supposed that the people, in the bright morning of Solomon's reign fixed their hopes on him as they sang the psalm, they would cease to do so when their hopes from him and his were so cruelly disappointed. The type would more and more recede from their view, as the temporal glory of David's house waned; and they would come to sing the psalm, very much as we do, with an entire concentration of the thoughts on the Prince of Peace.⁷

The **Hundred and thirty-second Psalm**, written, apparently, with reference to the dedication of the Temple, and the **Eighty-ninth**, which seems to be a wail on account of the disruption of the kingdom, are two other well-defined examples of the typically Messianic class. The promise of perpetuity given to David's house is celebrated in both; and in both the terms are carefully framed, so as to admit and invite the thought of Him in whom the promise has received its complete and ultimate accomplishment. The **Hundred and eighteenth** is another example, from a later age. It is a song of the Second Temple, and, under the type of the advancement of a despised stone to be the head stone of the Corner,-- the advancement of the feeble remnant of God's Israel to be the honoured depositaries of his ordinances,--it celebrates the advancement of the Man of Sorrows to be the glorified Head of the Church.⁸

The **Eighth psalm**, although it is mentioned last, has a certain title to the foremost place amongst those which hold forth Christ under the veil of some type. For, in this instance,

⁵ Mr. Perowne's Translation.

⁶ The predictive rendering is given in the Septuagint, the Vulgate, and Jerome; in the Genevan and Authorised English Versions; by Venema, by Hengstenberg, and (as regards the second half of the psalm) by Delitzsch.

⁷ Compare Delitzsch, vol. i. 537, 538.

⁸ Fairbairn's *Typology of Scripture*, Fourth Edition, vol. i. 436-440. A work of acknowledged authority on this whole subject of the Bible types.

the type under which he is presented is the oldest of all the types, being no other than the common progenitor of the race, Adam, we know,⁹ was "the figure of Him that was to come." He prefigured Christ in this very notable respect, that as he was the Head and Surety of the entire race, insomuch that in his fall they fell; so Christ is the Head and Surety of the entire Church, insomuch that by his obedience they are constituted righteous." For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead: for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive."¹⁰ The primary scope of the Psalm is to celebrate the condescending bounty of God displayed in endowing our nature in the person of Adam with such a rich heritage of privilege; crowning it with glory and honour, making it to have dominion over the works of his hands, and subjecting all things to its rule. "Excellent endowments (some one may say); but is it not mockery of our fallen condition to ask us to celebrate them now, after they have been forfeited by our apostacy from God?" The answer is, that they were forfeited, but are now restored. And the restoration is made in a way exactly corresponding to the manner of the original endowment. It is made to God's people in the person of their common Head and Surety, by whose blood the lost heritage has been redeemed. The grant first made to the race in Adam, is made a second time to the Church in Christ, the second Adam. Hence the remarkable way in which the epistle to the Hebrews¹¹ cites the psalm, as if it had been a prediction regarding Christ. It celebrates the Second Adam and his dominion, under the type of the First Adam and his.

II. It was Calvin who first applied the principle of types, with distinguished success, to the interpretation of the Messianic psalms. Before his time, indeed, devout men, as they listened to David's harp, were sensible of the presence of a greater than David, and their devotional use of the psalms was, from the first, animated and governed by the conviction that Christ was in them of a truth. But when the problem arose, how to reconcile this conviction with the plain rule that, in interpreting an author, particular expressions must be read in the light of the context and must have no meaning imposed on them which the context refuses to share, they found themselves at a loss. Here were psalms of which some parts evidently related to David and not to Christ; was it allowable to interpret other parts as if they were prophetic of Christ?

Being unable to work out a satisfactory answer, and being at the same time perfectly confident that the sentiment of their hearts which testified to Christ's presence in the psalms was well founded, they fell upon the way of handling them which is so familiar to all who have dipped into the patristic writings. It is well exemplified in Augustine. That great divine was certainly neither ignorant of the rules of exact interpretation, nor unaware of the importance of applying them to the Messianic Psalms.¹² But not having a clear conception of the nature of a type,--as distinguished from a prediction, on the one hand, and from a mere emblem or allegory, on the other,--his expositions drift perpetually into a style of allegorising by which any sense that may happen to be desired can be extracted from any passage. It was not the least of the many services rendered to the cause of truth by the Reformers, and especially by Calvin, that they, for the first time, reconciled the sentiment of devout readers as to the ultimate reference of the Messianic psalms, with the principles of exact interpretation.

9 Rom. 5:14.

10 1 Cor. 15:21,22.

11 Chap. 2:6-8.

12 See *De Civ. Dei*. lib. xvii. c. 15.

But, as often happens, the great Reformer, having got hold of a valuable principle, went to an extreme in the application of it. In no psalm except the Hundred and tenth did he find Christ set forth without some intervening type. In the Second psalm he thinks there is an immediate reference to David, and in the Forty-fifth to the nuptials of Solomon; and in this he has been followed by many commentators of the highest standing. But the interpretation in both instances is, I venture to think, destitute of solid foundation. It is difficult, no doubt, to draw a line between the psalms which relate exclusively to Christ, and those in which he is seen through the veil of some type. The **Seventy-second**, although typical, approaches to the character of a direct prediction; the **Second and Forty-fifth**, on the other hand, so largely borrow from the reigns of David and Solomon the poetical imagery in which they celebrate Christ, that they have a good deal of the look of typical psalms. But this borrowing of imagery is by no means inconsistent with the strictly prophetic character. There are passages in Isaiah (chapters ix. and xi. for example) in which Christ and his reign are celebrated in imagery wholly taken from David's reign, yet no one regards them as anything but direct predictions. There is no reason to deny the same character to the Second and Forty-fifth psalms. To expound them as having a primary reference to David or Solomon, is simply to introduce confusion and embarrassment.

There is yet another psalm for which I would claim a place amongst those that are directly prophetic of Christ. I mean the **Twenty-second**. The majority of the best commentators, no doubt, regard it as referring throughout to David, and so rank it in the typical class. But the objections to that view are many, and, I think, unanswerable. For one thing, David's biography contains nothing corresponding to the account the Sufferer here gives of his tribulations.¹³ His enemies never "parted his garments among them or cast lots upon his vesture." Indeed, so inapplicable is the description to any Bible saint, that some who reject the direct reference to Christ, are fain to attribute the psalm--in the teeth of all existing evidence--to "some afflicted person, otherwise unknown to us, during the captivity." Besides, even if it had been possible to find in the life of David or of some other saint a time of such sufferings as the psalm describes, those who see a primary reference to him would still have had to explain the remarkable hopes expressed in the latter part of it. The Sufferer, rising above the sense of his present sorrow, rejoices in the confident persuasion that, as the fruit of what he is now enduring, all the families of the earth shall one day be moved to return to the Lord, and to bow themselves down before him.

This is a feature which so evidently points to the Man of Sorrows, that the great Jewish critics have betaken themselves to the same explanation by which they seek to get quit of the testimony of the Fifty-third of Isaiah to the Cross of Christ. In both cases, they labour to make out that the Sufferer described is the nation of Israel during the Babylonish captivity, and that the blessing so confidently anticipated to spring out of the sorrows of the chosen people, was no other than that diffusion of the true religion which resulted from the dispersion of the exiles among the nations. The theory is ingenious, and it has been eagerly appropriated by the rationalists.

But there are things both in the prophecy and in the psalm that conclusively refute it. Thus, in the former, the Lord's righteous Servant whose sufferings are pourtrayed, instead of being identified with the people of Israel, is expressly contrasted with them.¹⁴ In the Psalm,

¹³ Ver. 14-18.

¹⁴ Isaiah 53:4-6.

there is not only the same contrast,¹⁵ but, from beginning to end, the terms in which the Sufferer's condition is described, are too strongly individual to admit the hypothesis of personification. The only adequate and natural interpretation of the psalm is that which sees in it a lyrical prediction of the Sufferings of Messiah and the Glory that was to follow. No Sufferer but One could, without presumption, have expected his griefs to result in the conversion of nations to God.

Moreover, it is not a vague description of a good man's sufferings that this great psalm sets forth. It goes into many details, and these so exactly corresponding to the sufferings of Christ, that the whole reads like a poetical version of the gospel history.

(1.) The scene portrayed is a Crucifixion, and just such a crucifixion as was witnessed at Calvary. The Sufferer cannot obtain the solace of retirement. He is encompassed by scornful men, who load him with reproaches. They deride the profession of his hope in God, and do so in terms which startle us by their identity with those actually employed by the crowds who encompassed the Lord's cross. All the dreadful accompaniments of crucifixion are seen;-- the strength dried up like a potsherd--the bones out of joint--the burning thirst, making the tongue cleave to the jaws--the piercing of the hands and the feet¹⁶--the bones projecting so that one might count them--the parting of the garments by lot amongst the executioners. Surely the cross of Christ is here, and without the intervention of any type.

(2.) Not only is the psalm cited by the evangelists as having been fulfilled in the crucifixion, but the Lord employed it himself¹⁷ in expressing the anguish of his soul. "About the ninth hour he cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Taking all the circumstances into account, it is a fair construction of this exclamation, to understand it with Augustine,¹⁸ as equivalent to saying, The psalm was written concerning me.

(3.) There is in the psalm a singular alternation of deep dejection under present sorrow, and of solemn joy in the prospect of the blessings that are to accrue to all the nations. And this very alternation of conflicting sorrow and joy was seen in Christ, both on the cross and during the preceding week.¹⁹

(4.) In one respect, the psalm stands alone in the Scriptures, and indeed in all religious literature. It is a cry out of the depths,--the sorrowful prayer of One who is not only persecuted by man, but seems to himself, for the time, to be utterly forsaken of his God. Yet there is no confession of sin, no penitent sorrow, no trace of compunction or remorse. This distinguishes the psalm, quite unequivocally, not only from ordinary psalms of complaint, but from those in which Christ speaks in the person of David his type. The complaints found in them are never unaccompanied with confessions of sin. If David, or any other ancient saint, had written the Twenty-second Psalm, as the expression of his own griefs and

15 Ver. 22,23.

16 This remarkable expression in ver. 16, is rendered by many of the modern critics, according to the Masoretic punctuation and the Jewish interpreters, "like a lion my hands and my feet;" but the usual translation is supported by all the ancient versions, and yields the better sense. Indeed, the other yields no tolerable sense at all. Compare Mr. Perowne's note.

17 Matt. 27:46.

18 *Enarratio* II. in Ps. xxi. (xxii.) sec. 3.

19 John 12:20-33.

hopes, there would certainly have been audible in it some note of penitence.

On the whole, then, we hold ourselves entitled to set down as Psalms *directly* Messianic, not only the Hundred and tenth (in regard to which there is no difference of opinion among those who heartily accept the Scriptures as supernaturally inspired), but also the Second, the Forty-fifth, and the Twenty-second. If any think the Seventy-second ought to be added, I shall not object.

To the same class belong also the psalms which--like the **87th, the 96th, the 98th, the 100th, the 117th**--although they make no mention of the person of Christ, celebrate the glorious advancement which awaits the church in the latter days. I merely name these at present; for they will afterwards claim careful notice in another connection.²⁰

III. There are psalms demonstrably Messianic which cannot well be assigned to either of the two classes we have surveyed. They are neither directly predictive of Christ, nor yet do they speak of him through some type. The two most prominent examples of this class are the **Sixteenth and the Fortieth**. Its characteristic features will be best illustrated by examining one of these For various reasons I select the Fortieth.

5. Thou hast greatly multiplied, even thou, Jehovah my God,
Thy wonderful works and thy thoughts which are to us-ward;
They cannot be set forth in order unto thee:
If I would declare them, and speak of them,
They are more than can be numbered.
6. Sacrifice and meat-offering thou didst not desire;
Mine ears hast thou opened;
Burnt-offering and sin-offering has thou not required.
7. Then said I, "Lo, I come;
In the roll of the book it is written of me;
8. To do thy pleasure, my God, I have desired,
Yea, thy law is within my reins.
9. I have published [the glad tidings of] righteousness in the great congregation:
Lo, my lips I would not restrain,
Jehovah, thou dost know."

This is applied to Christ, in the most unqualified way, in the epistle to the Hebrews. "It is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me. . . . Then said he, Lo I come (in the volume of the Book it is written of me) to do thy will, O God. . . . He taketh away the first that he may establish the second. By the which Will we are sanctified, through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all."²¹ There is no mistaking the view here taken of David's words. So plainly is the Messianic interpretation laid down, and so strongly is the argument of the epistle built upon it, that many eminent divines²² conclude that Christ must be the direct and exclusive subject of the psalm. The fatal objection to that view is, that the psalm contains one of those sorrowful confessions of sin, the absence of which has just been commented upon in the case of the

²⁰ See Chap. ix. of this Book.

²¹ Heb. 10:4-10.

²² Calovius in *Pool's Synopsis*; Owen on the Hebrews, at chap. x. 5; J. Pye Smith, *Scripture Testimony to the Messiah*, i. 205.

Twenty-second.

12. For evils have compassed me about, till there is no number;
Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, that I cannot look up:
They are more than the hairs of mine head,
And my heart hath failed me.

In explanation of this, we are reminded, no doubt, that Christ, though he knew no sin, was made sin for us: so that he was, in a very true sense, a sinner before God. This explanation is an old one. It is thus put by Augustine:-- "He made our offences his offences, that he might make his righteousness our righteousness. Why should not he who took upon him the likeness of the sinner's flesh, take upon him also the likeness of the sinner's voice?"²³ There is force in these suggestions, and they go far to explain the fact (to which we shall revert immediately), that in one and the same psalm we hear the voice both of the sinless Saviour and his sinning people. But it is pressing them too far to urge them as a reason why we should attribute to Christ words which, in their natural and obvious sense, are a sorrowful and shame-stricken confession of sin before God. The psalm is certainly not of the directly Messianic order.

Shall we set it down therefore among the typically Messianic class? This is a very common interpretation. According to it David is the person who speaks, but he speaks as a type of Christ, and therefore his words are attributed to Christ by the epistle to the Hebrews. But neither is this view satisfactory. David was not a type of Christ in his priesthood and sacrifice; and it is of these only, and not at all of the kingdom, that this psalm speaks. The person who here comes forward and declares his purpose to do the will of God, puts such a value on his obedience, as neither David nor any mere man could, without presumption, have claimed for theirs. The true key to the psalm is to be found, not in the doctrine of the types, but rather in that of the Mystical Union between Christ and the Church. It is a **MYSTICALLY MESSIANIC** psalm.

This is the view taken by the ancient fathers, and especially Augustine. That great divine was penetrated with a sense of the unity which, through the grace of God, subsists between Christ and all his people, even the humblest and feeblest in the company of the saints. He is never weary of telling how, when the obscure disciples of Christ in Damascus were persecuted, the Lord resented it as a wrong done to himself, and thundered in the ear of the oppressor, "I am Jesus whom thou persecutest;" and how, when any poor saint is visited or fed, Christ takes the kindness as done to himself.²⁴ And he makes perpetual use of the principle in endeavouring to open up the Messianic element in the Psalter. The pages of his *Enarrationes* are thus made fragrant with the savour of the Bridegroom's name. Few will deny, indeed, that he presses the principle too far. He applies it to many places that can only be successfully explained on the typical principle. Nevertheless, the principle is a sound one, and is of great value in the interpretation of Scripture.

The difficulty to be explained in the class of psalms under consideration, is the seeming

²³ *Enarratio* II. in Ps. xxi. (xxii.) sec. 3; in Ps. xlix. (1.) sec. 5. It is plain that, however hazy or defective may have been the views of the early fathers with regard to the doctrine of justification by faith alone, they knew and prized the doctrine of the imputation of our sins to Christ and of Christ's righteousness to us, which underlies and sustains that great article of the Reformed Theology.

²⁴ Acts 11:5; Matt. 25:40.

incongruity involved in the attributing of different parts of one and the same song to different persons,--one part to Christ, another part to his people,--while there is nothing in the context to indicate a change of subject. The mystical hypothesis explains it by pointing out, that there is such a union between Christ and his people as warrants their being thus conjoined in the same song. That He and they are conjoined in a real fellowship of life is most certain. "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free."²⁵ The Christ here named is not the individual person of our Lord, but He and the Church together,--Christ Mystical, *totus Christus caput et corpus*. This mystical union has left its effects on many parts of Scripture. Thus, throughout the prophecies of Isaiah, one and the same title, "The Servant of the Lord," is used to denote, sometimes the Lord Jesus himself;²⁶ sometimes his people;²⁷ sometimes the whole mystical body, including Him and them together.²⁸ This no doubt wears an appearance of incongruity. But something of the kind is always found when diverse elements are conjoined in an intimate union. I sometimes speak of myself as an immortal creature, sometimes as a dying man. Why? Because my nature is not simple but composite. By my soul, I am immortal; it is a "deathless principle": by my body I am subject to corruption.

Just so is it with the Church. The Lord has taken his people into a union with himself, more intimate than that even of body and soul. He and they constitute one Christ. And of that one Christ the Psalter is the Voice. If in some psalms it is the members who speak and in others the Head, there are others again in which we can distinguish the speech of both. This furnishes the only satisfactory explanation of the remarkable conjoining of Christ and the Church in the Sixteenth and Fortieth Psalms. In the case of the latter, the explanation is frankly accepted by Calvin, although he was as little tolerant of subtleties in the interpretation of Scripture, as can well be imagined. "David (he observes) is not speaking here in his own name only, but is pointing out generally what is common to all God's children: but when he thus bringeth in the community of the Church, we must ascend to Him who is the Head."

It is related in the gospel that the Lord Jesus joined with the disciples in singing the paschal Hallel;²⁹ and there is no reason to suppose that his voice was ever mute when the psalms were sung in the Synagogues of Nazareth or Capernaum on the Sabbath days. He lifted up his soul to God along with "the praises of Israel;"³⁰ and he did not deem it necessary to refrain his voice when the melody descended to notes of contrite confession. There was no impropriety nor untruthfulness in his thus making use of words which, in their letter, were inapplicable to his case. There is hardly a psalm but contains things which are applicable only to some in the congregation; yet all who are present take part in the song. We do not enjoin the little children to be silent when the Seventy-first Psalm is sung, although it is the song of old age; nor the aged men to be silent when the Twenty-seventh is sung, although it is the prayer of a youth.

The psalms are Church songs, and all who belong to the Church are to sing them. "Both

25 1 Cor. 12:12,13; comp. Gal. 3:16.

26 Chap. 42:1; 50:11.

27 Chap. 42:19.

28 Chap. 49:1-6.

29 Comp. Book iii. chap. i.

30 Psalm 22:3.

young men and maidens, old men and children, let them praise the name of the Lord."³¹
The ripe believer, who can triumph in the steadfast hope of God's glory, is to lend his voice to swell the song of the church when she cries to God out of the depths; and the penitent, who is still sitting in darkness, is not to refrain his voice when the Church pours out in song her sense of God's love. The whole Church has fellowship in the psalms. And from this fellowship the divine Head does not turn away. There are sentiments, here and there, in which He cannot perfectly participate. Nevertheless, the psalms are the voice of the body of which he is the Head, and therefore he joins in them. This simple fact, that the Lord Jesus sang the psalms,--how vividly does it represent the Mystical Union! When we sing the psalms, especially those in which the voice of Christ makes itself so distinctly audible as it is in the Sixteenth and Fortieth, it ought to affect our hearts to think, that we are, in effect, sitting beside Christ, as the disciples did in the Guest-Chamber, and are singing along with Him out of the same book.

"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.

31 Psalm 148:12,13.