

PSALM 1-I

A wisdom Psalm, Psalm 1 should perhaps be seen as an introduction or gateway to the whole Psalter. It describes the way of blessing, which the rest of the Psalter elaborates. What becomes of one who studies or “meditates” upon the Psalms?

And he will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers.
(Psalm 1:3)

PSALM 1-II

Spurgeon entitles it, “*The Preface Psalm*,” seeing the rest of the Psalter as an elaboration upon its themes, contrasting the blessed way of the righteous (verses 1-3), and the destructive end of the wicked (verses 4-6), particularly underscoring the fruit that flows from meditation upon the word of God (verse 2).

PSALM 1-III

Thomas Watson entitled Psalm 1 “The Psalm of Psalms.” He called it “a Christian’s guide,” because it exposes “the quicksands where the wicked sink down in perdition” and reveals “the firm ground on which the saints trod to glory” (quoted in Spurgeon).

PSALM 1-IV

“It seems likely that this whole Psalm was specially composed as an introduction to the whole Psalter,” says Kidner.¹ It serves as “a preface to the rest,” says Matthew Henry, for “those are not fit to put up good prayers who do not walk in good paths.”

PSALM 2-I

One of the most clearly Messianic and frequently cited in the New Testament of the Psalms. We hear its echo at Jesus’ baptism (verse 7; cf. Matthew 3:17), and at the transfiguration (Matthew 17:5; 2 Peter 1:17), and it is cited as predictive of the crucifixion (verses 1-2; cf Acts 4:25-38), the resurrection (verse 7; cf Acts 13:33), and reign of Christ (verse 9; cf Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15). Though initially applied to David, Solomon, and their successors, a “greater . . . than David or Solomon,” says Kidner, “was needed to justify the full fury of these threats and the glory of these promises.”²

PSALM 2-II

Matthew Henry connects Psalm 2 with its predecessor saying, “As the foregoing Psalm was moral, and showed us our duty, and so this is evangelical, and shows us our Savior.” It predicts the opposition that Christ would face (verses 1-3), the defeat of His enemies (verses 4,5), His reign (verses 6-9), and He calls the nations to submit to His rule and offer Him worship (verses 10-12). Notice its wonderful summary of the spirit of worship:

Worship the Lord with reverence, and rejoice with trembling. (verse 11)

¹I. 47.

²Kidner, I, 50.

PSALM 2-III

Spurgeon entitles this “The Psalm of Messiah the Prince.” Its 10th verse was quoted to Henry VIII by the Protestant John Lambert as he was burned at Smithfield in 1538. Ker comments:

“Lambert’s martyrdom was one of the most cruel of that time, and the often quoted words come from him as he lifted his fingers flaming with fire, “None but Christ, none but Christ!”³

PSALM 2-IV

Psalm 2 was a favorite of Martin Luther. “The 2nd Psalm is one of the best psalms,” he said. “I love that psalm with all my heart.”⁴

PSALM 3-I

The first Psalm with a superscription, it purports to have arisen out of the occasion when David “fled from Absalom his son” (cf 2 Samuel 15:13ff). David laments what Kidner calls “the rising tide of disloyalty” (verses 1,6), and the widespread perception that he had been abandoned by God (verse 2). Yet his trust in God is strong:

I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people who have set themselves against me round about. (verse 6)

PSALM 3-II

Matthew Henry connects Psalm 3 with its predecessor, noting that in the 2nd Psalm David as a type showed us “the royal dignity of the Redeemer,” so now in his distress, David “shows us the peace and holy security of the redeemed.” The Huguenots, who adapted the Psalms for various purposes, sang this one when they posted sentinels.

PSALM 4

Spurgeon entitled the previous Psalm “The Morning Hymn” (see verse 5) and this one “The Evening Hymn” (see verse 4). Some of the concerns of Psalm 3 continue in Psalm 4, in perhaps the same setting (that of his flight from Absalom): distress (verse 1), reproach (verse 2), lies (verse 2), gloom (verse 6). Luther loved Psalm 4, particularly the 8th verse, which he asked to be sung to him in his last moments on earth:

In peace I will both lie down and sleep, for thou alone, O Lord, dost make me to dwell in safety.

PSALM 5

A morning Psalm and prayer (verse 3), it is offered as “a solemn address to God, at a time when the psalmist was brought into distress by the malice of his enemies,” says Matthew Henry. He speaks, he groans (verse 1), he cries (verse 2), and he prays (verse 3) in response to the assaults of his enemies. Yet he also finds gladness and joy in God his refuge (verses 11,12).

³Ker, p. 20

⁴Prothero, p. 123.

PSALM 6-I

The first of the seven “penitential psalms” (with 32, 38, 51, 102, 130, 143), it is the prayer of one who is deeply troubled, who is “greatly dismayed,” who cries, who sighs, who is “pining away” (verse 1). Yet he concludes with what Kidner calls “defiant faith,” confident that God hears and receives his prayer (verses 9,10). “The psalm gives words to those who scarcely have the heart to pray, and brings them within sight of victory.”⁵ The third verse, “But Thou, O Lord—how long?” was often cited by Calvin in troublesome times.

PSALM 6-II

Henry compares this Psalm to both Jeremiah the “weeping prophet” and Job. “Is any afflicted? Is any sick? Let him sing their Psalm.” Verses 1-7 express his complaint. In verse 8, the Psalmist “has changed his note,” says Spurgeon. “He leaves the minor key” and “tunes his note to the high key of confidence.”

PSALM 7

According to the superscription, written on the occasion of the false accusations of onez Cush, a Benjamite (i.d. unknown), against David, made to Saul, always eager to believe the worst about David. It has been called “the song of the slandered saint.” It opens with avows of innocence (1-5), followed by pleas that God will judge the evil one and vindicate the righteous one (verses 6-11) and warnings to the unrepentant of their self-destruction (verses 12-17). We can see in it the appeals of Messiah against the false accusations of His enemies.

PSALM 8 - I

This “short exquisite lyric is simplicity itself,” said C. S. Lewis.⁶ A Psalm of contrasts, the “excellent” name of God is proclaimed and seen in the heavens above in all their expanse and in the small infant as well. Man, in comparison with this glory, is small—“What is man, that thou art mindful of him?” Yet, in another contrast, God has made man “a little lower than the angels,” crowning him with glory, honor, and dominion. This exalted vision of man is fulfilled in *the Man*, the Lord Jesus Christ (Hebrews 2:6-8; cf 1 Corinthians 15:27), at whose triumphal entry into Jerusalem the praise of infants was fulfilled (Matthew 21:16).

PSALM 8 - II

Matthew Maury (1806–1873), author of the first textbook on modern oceanography, *The Physical Geography of the Sea and Its Meteorology* (1855) was inspired to pursue the study of the ocean floor as well as its currents and winds by the words of Psalm 8:8: “the paths of the sea.” Maury was elected to the Hall of Fame for Great Americans. A monument erected in his honour on Monument Avenue, Richmond, Virginia, reads: “Matthew Fontaine Maury, Pathfinder of the Seas, the genius who first snatched from the oceans and atmosphere the secret of their laws. His inspiration, Holy Writ, Psalm 8:8; Ecclesiastes 1:6.”

PSALM 9-I

Psalms 9 and 10 are counted as a single Psalm in the reckoning of the LXX and Latin Vulgate. Better to follow the Hebrew version, as the Protestant churches have, and see them as

⁵Kidner, p. 60,61.

⁶*Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 132.

“companion pieces,” written, says Kidner, “to complement one another.”⁷ He entitles them as follows:

Psalm 9 – God: Judge & King
Psalm 10 – Man: Predator & Prey

“We have before us most evidently a triumphal hymn,” says Spurgeon; “may it strengthen the faith of the militant believer and stimulate the courage of the timid saint.”

PSALM 9-II

Matthew Henry says of the 9th Psalm, “This is very applicable to the kingdom of the Messiah, the enemies of which have been destroyed already, and shall be yet more and more, till they all be made his footstool, which we are to assure ourselves of, that God may have the glory and we may take the comfort.”

PSALM 10-I

Closely associated with Psalm 9, the theme of “God: Judge & King” in Psalm 9 is followed by the theme “Man: Predator & Prey” in Psalm 10. Psalm 9 highlights the certain triumph of God, Psalm 10 the present though short-lived triumphing of the wicked.⁸ Spurgeon entitles it “The Cry of the Oppressed.” He comments,

“To the church of God during times of persecution, and to individual saints who are smarting under the hand of the proud sinner, this Psalm furnishes suitable language both for prayer and praise.”

PSALM 10-II

Augustine called this “The Psalm of Antichrist.” Luther notes that, “There is not, in my judgment, a Psalm which describes the mind, the manners, the works, the words, the feelings, and the fate of the ungodly with so much propriety, fulness, and light, as this Psalm.”⁹

PSALM 11-I

Written at a time of crisis, the opening affirmation of faith, “In the Lord I take refuge,” is followed by the bad advice of verses 1-3, “Flee as a bird to the mountain,” etc. Matthew Henry says that David’s temptation here was “to distrust God and betake to himself to indirect means for his own safety in time of danger.” In verses 4-7 David reaffirms his confidence that God will destroy the wicked and reward the righteous:

For the Lord is righteous; He loves righteousness; the upright will behold His face. (Psalm 11:7)

⁷Kidner, I, 68.

⁸Kidner, Vol. I, 68,69.

⁹Spurgeon, 128.

PSALM 11-II

Spurgeon calls it a “short and sweet Psalm,” and gives it the title, “The Song of the Steadfast.” When the “foundations” of righteousness and truth “are destroyed” (verse 3), the sensible recourse for the righteous is to “flee as a bird to the mountain” (verse 1), or so it would seem. This Psalmist cannot do so because he knows (1) who he is: “In the LORD I take refuge” (verse 1); and (2) who God is: “The LORD is in His holy temple” (verses 4-6).

PSALM 12-I

One of Luther’s best known hymns, *Ach Gott, vom Himmel* (O God, from heaven) is based on Psalm 12. Spurgeon entitled this Psalm, “Good Thoughts in Bad Times.” The Psalmist seeks God’s help against the wicked who now prevail, but whom God shall make to fall.

PSALM 12-II

J. A. Motyer entitles Psalm 12 “The War of Words.”¹⁰ Verses 1-4 describe the world’s “words” of flattery, falsehood, and deceit. Verses 5-8 reveal God’s pure words which deliver, keep, and preserve the people of God.

PSALM 13

Among Calvin’s last words were his lament for the suffering French Protestants, the Huguenots, “How long, O Lord?” repeated 4 times in the first two verses of this Psalm. Spurgeon says it has been called the “How Long Psalm,” even the “Howling Psalm,” for its repetition of this cry. The Psalm marks the progression often experienced by the people of God from mourning (verses 1,2), to praying (verses 3,4), to rejoicing (verses 5,6).

PSALM 14

Nowhere in the Old Testament does the doctrine of the depravity of man receive more emphasis than in Psalms 14 and, its twin, Psalm 53. The Apostle Paul quotes verses 1-3 directly in Romans 3:10-12, summing up his case for the necessity of the gospel. Psalm 53 is almost an exact replica of this Psalm.

Spurgeon suggests the title, “Concerning Practical Atheism,” the Psalm declaring, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘there is no God’” (Psalm 14:1; Psalm 53:1). Motyer characterizes the atheism of Psalm 14 as “more practical than theoretical, not so much denying God’s existence as his relevance.”¹¹

PSALM 15

The “short and excellent” Psalm, as Henry describes it, begins with the question,

“Who may dwell on Thy holy hill?”

That is, who may enter into and participate in the worship of the temple? What follows is *not* a list of ritual or ceremonial requirements but requirements that are spiritual and moral – clean

¹⁰p. 494.

¹¹p. 495.

hands and a pure heart (cf Psalm 24:3-6; Isaiah 33:14-17). The Psalm is fulfilled primarily in Jesus, says Spurgeon, “the perfect man, and in him all who through grace are conformed to his image.” But it also says to us, that “if we would be happy,” as Henry puts it, “we must be holy and honest.”

PSALM 16

“The theme of having one’s affections centered on God gives this Psalm its unity and ardour,” says Kidner.¹² The 16th Psalm is rich in devotional expression:

I said to the Lord, “Thou art my Lord; I have no good besides Thee” . . . In Thy presence is fulness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever. (Psalm 16:2, 11b)

It is also rich in Messianic prophecy. “This Psalm has something of David in it,” says Matthew Henry, “but much more of Christ.” Jesus said the Apostles regularly apply verse 10 to the resurrection of Christ, Peter, for example, preaching his Pentecost sermon, quotes verses 8-11 and says that David,

. . . looked ahead and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that He was neither abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh suffer decay. (Acts 2:31; cf Matthew 22:41-45; Acts 13:34-38)

It was from this Psalm that the young Scottish Covenanter Hugh MacKail (1640-66) drew his last comfort before he was martyred in Edinburgh.

PSALM 17-I

The likely background to this Psalm may be found in 1 Samuel 23:25ff, where David was surrounded by Saul’s men. David cries,

They have now surrounded us in our steps; they set their eyes to cast us down to the ground. (Psalm 17:11)

David’s cause is “just” (verse 1) and he is righteous (verse 15), not in an absolute sense, but in relation to Saul, to his accusers, and the injustice of their attacks. We may outline as follows:

verses 1-6	David’s plea of innocence/integrity
verses 7-12	David’s plea for protection
verses 13-17	David’s plea for divine intervention

PSALM 17-II

Spurgeon’s comments on this “Prayer of David” are particularly apt:

“David would not have been a man after God’s own heart, if he had not been a man of prayer. He was a master in the sacred art of supplication. He flies to prayer

¹²Vol 1, p. 83.

in all times of need, as a pilot speeds to the harbour in the stress of tempest. So frequent were David's prayers that they could not all be dated and entitled; and hence this simply bears the author's name, and nothing more. The smell of the furnace is upon the present psalm, but there is evidence in the last verse that he who wrote it came unharmed out of the flame. We have in the present plaintive song, AN APPEAL TO HEAVEN from the persecutions of earth. A spiritual eye may see Jesus here."

PSALM 18-I

A psalm of thanksgiving and praise, it was written on an occasion of David's deliverance "from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul," says the superscription. The Apostle Paul cites verse 49, seeing in it the promise that God made to the fathers that one day the Gentiles would "glorify God for His mercy:"

Therefore I will give praise to Thee among the Gentiles, and I will sing to Thy name. (Romans 15:8,9)

Matthew Henry says of it, "The poetry is very fine, the images bold, the expressions lofty, and every word proper and significant; but the piety far exceeds the poetry."

PSALM 18-II

David heaps up praise to God in the 18th Psalm: He is our strength, rock, fortress, deliverer, refuge, shield, horn, stronghold (verses 1-3, 30-35, 46). Spurgeon called it "The Grateful Retrospect," saying, "this Psalm is the song of a grateful heart overwhelmed with a retrospect of the manifold and marvelous mercies of God."

PSALM 19-I

The nineteenth Psalm divides neatly into two sections and a conclusion, all concerned with God's revelation of Himself.

1. *Verses 1-6*: God's self-revelation in nature:
The heavens are telling of the glory of God (verse 1)
This is a wordless revelation.
2. *Verses 7-10*: God's self-revelation in Scripture:
The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul (verse 7)
3. *Verses 11-14*: The response of the soul:
Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sin: (verse 13)

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my Redeemer. (verse 14)

It is quoted in Romans 10:18 and its thought may “underlie the argument of Romans 1:18ff,” as Kidner says. “Its theology is as peaceful as its poetry,” he notes.¹³

PSALM 19-II

The 19th Psalm provided the inspiration for Joseph Addison’s hymn, “The Spacious Firmament on High.” The Psalm speaks of the “two excellent books which the great God has published,” says Henry. “The book of the creatures,” what Spurgeon calls the “world-book,” in verses 1-6, and “the book of the Scriptures,” or “word-book,” in verses 7-11, and how to improve our knowledge of God in verses 12-14, as David prays for grace. “He who sings of the work of God in the world without, pleads for a work of grace in himself within,” says Spurgeon.

PSALM 19-III

C. S. Lewis called the 19th Psalm “the greatest poem in the Psalter and one of the greatest lyrics in the world.”¹⁴ J. A. Motyer entitles it “Three voices in counterpart:

- 1-6 The voice of creation: paradox . . .
- 7-10 The voice of the word: perfection
- 11-14 The voice of the sinner: praying”¹⁵

PSALM 20-I

This Psalm is a prayer for the king, written perhaps on the occasion of a particular military expedition of David’s. Sir James Simpson (1811-70), the discoverer of chloroform, referred to it as his “Mother’s Psalm,” frequently sung in times of anxiety and trial by his pious widowed mother. The ninth verse of Psalm 20 supplies the text for the British National Anthem: God Save the King.

PSALM 20-II

The 20th Psalm may have functioned in the liturgy of the Temple as an assurance of pardon and blessing pronounced following the prayers of confession and intercession. The worshiper has presented his “meal offerings” and “burnt offerings” (verse 3). The priest now prays for the Lord’s blessing—“May the Lord answer you . . . May He send . . . May He grant . . . May the Lord fulfill” (verses 1-5). This Psalm reminds us of the confidence that we may have that when we confess our sins in Jesus’ name, we are guaranteed the pardon of our sin and the blessing of God.

PSALM 21

Kidner hears in this Psalm “the sound of a coronation ode, or a hymn for a royal anniversary.”¹⁶ Spurgeon labels it, “The Royal Triumphal Ode.” Applied initially to David and his sons,

¹³I, 97.

¹⁴*Reflections* 63.

¹⁵*NBC*, 498.

¹⁶Kidner, I, p. 103.

ultimately it can only rightly be sung of the Lamb upon the throne in heaven (Revelation 4:1,2; 5:6-14). Verses 2-7 look back on the King's victory, verses 8-12 look forward to future victory.

PSALM 22-I

David first wrote this Psalm out of deep anguish of soul. Feeling abandoned by God, he cried "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (verse 1). Jesus made these words His own in His "cry of dereliction" upon the cross. C. S. Lewis referred to Psalm 22 as "the terrible poem which Christ quoted in His final torture."¹⁷ The whole Psalm is vividly Messianic, providing us with our clearest glimpse of the internal suffering of Christ on Calvary's hill. "In singing this Psalm," said Matthew Henry, "we must keep our thoughts fixed upon Christ, and be so affected with his sufferings, as to experience the fellowship of them, and so affected with his grace, as to experience the power and influence of it."

PSALM 22-II

A "Psalm of David" which arises out of his own suffering, but which he "multiplies . . . by infinity" (as Motyer puts it), as he speaks prophetically of the suffering of Christ.¹⁸ Motyer divides the Psalm as follows:

- | | |
|-------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-10 | Perplexity in suffering (feeling forsaken and abandoned in the midst of suffering) |
| 11-21 | Plea for divine nearness (to help, to deliver, to save the suffering) |
| 22-31 | Universal festival of praise (flowing from His suffering) |

PSALM 23-I

Spurgeon calls the 23rd David's "Heavenly Pastoral," "the pearl of Psalms," a "surpassing ode" whose "piety and poetry are equal," whose "sweetness and spirituality are unsurpassed." It is the most beloved of all the Psalms, pointing us to our Lord Jesus, the "Good Shepherd," who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:14,15). For several generations it has been associated with the tune "Crimond," to which we sing it this morning.

PSALM 23-II

J. A. Motyer divides the 23rd Psalm into three sections—

1. The sheep and the Shepherd (vv 1-3) — teaching "the providence of God, appointing life's experiences;"
2. The traveler and the Companion (v. 4) — teaching "his protection over life's pathway"
3. The guest and the Host (vv 5,6) — teaching "his provision now and always."¹⁹

The attractiveness of the 23rd is related to its setting. The 22nd Psalm is the "psalm of the cross," describing the suffering of Christ. Psalm 24 is the "psalm of the crown," recognizing that all the earth is the Lord's. Psalm 23 is the "psalm of the shepherd's crook," describing our passage

¹⁷*Reflections*, p. 127.

¹⁸p. 499.

¹⁹Motyer, 500

through life as being like that of sheep under the care of the Shepherd who bore the cross and wears the crown.

PSALM 23-IV

The living location of David in the 23rd Psalm is verse 4, the valley of the shadow of death. The Psalmist is passing through that valley, affirming there that the Lord is his shepherd; that he enjoys green pastures, still waters and paths of righteousness; that God is with him, comforting him, providing a feast, anointing his head, his cup running over; that the blessing of God will continue into eternity.

PSALM 24-I

Traditionally Psalm 24 has been used in association with the Triumphal Entry of Christ into Jerusalem, with His Advent, and with the Ascension of Christ. Its “gates” have been understood as the gates of Jerusalem, the gates of heaven, and the gates of our hearts, welcoming the King of glory (verses 7-10). Perhaps originally written to celebrate David’s conquest of Jerusalem (2 Samuel 5:6ff; 1 Chronicles 11:1-10) or the transportation of the Ark into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6; 1 Chronicles 15-16), it came to be associated with Messiah’s conquest of His kingdom. Verses 3-6 describe the holiness of those who are subjects of His kingdom.

PSALM 24-II

Spurgeon divides the Psalm as follows:

1. The true God – verses 1,2 – and His universal dominion
2. The true Israel – verses 3-6 – who are able to commune with Him
3. The true Redeemer – verses 7-10 – whose ascent opens heaven’s gates

PSALM 24-III

After identifying the LORD as the Creator and possessor of all the earth (verses 1-2), Psalm 24 asks, by what right does one enter the Lord’s presence (verses 3-5), and by what right does he come among us? Motyer answers the questions:

“We can only come by right of holiness (4); he comes by right of sovereignty, glory, power and redemption (7-9).”²⁰

PSALM 25-I

The second of seven penitential Psalms (with Psalms 6, 32, 51, etc.), and an alphabetical Psalm (each verse begins with a succeeding letter of the alphabet, with some irregularities). Motyer says about the irregularities, “This brokenness reflects the way troubles break the pattern of life itself. Yet a pattern remains.”²¹ Spurgeon speculates that it may have been written by David on the occasion of Absalom’s rebellion. “Remember not the sins of my youth,” he prays (verse 7).

²⁰Motyer, p. 501.

²¹p. 501.

PSALM 25-II

The “Wigtown Martyrs,” Margaret Wilson, 18 years of age, and the elderly Margaret Lachlan, were sentenced to die by drowning for refusing to forsake the Covenanter cause in 1684. Tied to stakes in the Blednoch channel, as the tide rose young Margaret watched the elderly Margaret drown, and sang this Psalm as the waters of the Solway overwhelmed her, refusing to renounce her faith.

“O do thou keep my soul
Do thou deliver me;
And let me never be ashamed
Because I trust in thee.”

PSALM 26

Kidner titles this Psalm “Pure Devotion,” its core (verses 6-8) describing “a personal confession that shames our ‘faint desires’” (I, 117).

O Lord, I love the habitation of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwells. (Psalm 26:8)

This devout sentiment is couched in the middle of vigorous protestations of innocence and cries for vindication.

Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity; and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. (Psalm 26:1)

Christopher Wordsworth urged that it be read in conjunction with Psalm 25, so that the affirmations of integrity in the 26th (e.g. verse 11), are read in the context of the penitential spirit of the 25th, lest the psalmist be seen as “vainglorious,” and his declarations of integrity be misunderstood as “assertions of human merit” rather than “acknowledgments of divine mercy.” Others see David speaking as a type of Christ as he asserts what Henry calls his “spotless innocence.”

PSALM 27-I

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; who shall I fear?” (Verse 1). There is no certain occasion of its writing, “but it is very expressive of the pious and devout affections with which gracious souls are carried out toward God at all times, especially in times of trouble,” says Matthew Henry.

PSALM 27-II

The “one thing” that David wants and seeks, is that “he may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of (his) life, to behold the beauty of the Lord” (verse 4). We may outline it as follows:

verses 1-3	Confidence in the Lord
verses 4-6	Seeking God for Himself
verses 7-12	Seeking God for His blessing
verses 13,14	Confidence in God

PSALM 28-I

The 28th Psalm is another cry of the afflicted and oppressed to God for help. Spurgeon calls it “another of those ‘songs of the night’ of which the pen of David was so prolific.” He sees in this Psalm the Lord Jesus “pleading as the representative of His people.”

PSALM 28-II

The troubling, even life-threatening occasion of Psalms 26 and 27 continues as David cries to the LORD, his rock, strength, and refuge, for deliverance from evildoers.

PSALM 29-I

According to Spurgeon, “this Psalm is meant to express the glory of God as heard in the pealing thunder.” It is best read, he says, “beneath the black wing of tempest, by the glare of lightening, or amid that dubious dusk which heralds the war of elements.” Its verses, he continues, “march to the tune of thunderbolts.” It was often read or sung in July, the season of thunderstorms, for this reason. “Great and high thoughts of God should fill us in singing this Psalm,” says Matthew Henry.

PSALM 29-II

Regarding this Psalm of the Storm, Motyer says, “It is best simply to let the wonder and awesomeness of this psalm sweep and swirl around us until we are so possessed in spirit by the majesty of the Lord that we too cry *Glory* (9).”²²

Further, Motyer says, “The sentimentalist says ‘One is nearer God’s heart in a garden’; more realistic, the Bible affirms we are also nearer his heart in a hurricane.”²³

PSALM 30-I

The superscription says that this song was written to be used “at the dedication of the Temple House,” but literally says “House” though which house (David’s residence? the Temple?) cannot be determined. It recalls past afflictions and deliverances, past presumption (“I said in my prosperity, I will never be moved”—verse 5) and chastened dependence, and thanksgiving. It affirms beautifully,

For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning. (verse 5)

PSALM 30-II

John Herwin, martyred in Holland during Reformation era persecutions, went to the stake to be burned singing this Psalm:

11 You now have turned my sorrow
To dancing full of joy;
You loosened all my sackcloth

²²Motyer, 503.

²³Ibid., 504.

And girded me with joy.
12 To You sing psalms, my glory,
And never silent be!
O LORD my God, I'll thank You
Through all eternity

PSALM 30-III

J. A. Motyer divides Psalm 30 into 3 parts:

verses 1-5 Deadly danger & answered cries
verses 6,7 Deadly arrogance and complacency
verses 8-12 Deadly danger & answered cries (once more)

PSALM 31-I

Psalm 31 is both a plea for help and an expression of strong confidence in God, our rock of strength, our stronghold, our fortress, our guide (verses 2-3). “My times are in Thy hand,” he affirms (verse 15). The saints have often drawn upon this Psalm amidst their trials: Jonah cited verse 6 (Jonah 2:8), Jeremiah verse 13 (Jeremiah 20:10), and Jesus found in verse 5 language for His last words upon the cross (Luke 23:46).

PSALM 31-II

Set in the contest of tribulation, this Psalm “not only instructs us to meet crises with prayer (1-18) but assures us of the effectiveness of doing so (19-24).²⁴ Luther, Knox, Huss, and many others have made verse 5 their last words as Jesus did. “No watchward of the Captain of salvation has been taken up by many sons whom he has led to glory through the valley of the shadow of death.”²⁵

PSALM 32-I

The second of the “penitential Psalms” (6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 130, and sometimes 143), it describes the blessedness of forgiveness (verses 1,2), the agony of living with unconfessed sin (verses 3,4), and urges quick and complete repentance (verses 5-11). Spurgeon sees it as a follow-up to Psalm 51, fulfilling David’s promise to teach transgressors the Lord’s ways (Psalm 51:13).

PSALM 32-II

This Psalm of repentance and restoration is described by Spurgeon as “gloriously evangelic” and classified by Luther as a “*Psalmi Paulini*,” a “*Pauline Psalm*” (along with the 51st, 130th, and 143rd). “For they all teach that the forgiveness of our sins comes, without the law and without works, to the man who believes,” said Luther.

PSALM 32-III

This penitential Psalm “Has a great deal of gospel in it,” says Matthew Henry. The Apostle Paul says that David in this Psalm

²⁴Motyer, 504.

²⁵Kerr, p. 54.

. . . speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works (Romans 4:6)

It affirms, says Motyer, that “a prayer of confession brings instantaneous forgiveness.”²⁶

PSALM 33

This “stylish poem”²⁷ is what Kidner calls a “fine example” of the “purest form” of praise—as God is praised as Creator, Sovereign, Judge, and Savior. This is the God who “loves righteousness and justice,” who made the world by His word, who “spoke, and it was done,” and whose counsel “stands forever” (verses 5, 6, 9, 11).

PSALM 34-I

“O taste and see that the Lord is good,” (verse 8) David urges, as he delights in God’s bountiful provision for His people. Written on the occasion of David’s flight from Saul to neighboring Gath, where he feigned madness before King Achish in order to escape detection (1 Samuel 21:10ff). Motyer points out that “if we only had the Samuel-account, we would say that the crisis was overcome by astuteness. But, on reflection, David saw that it was not at all so: the secret of his escape was I sought the Lord (verse 4; cf verse 6).”²⁸ David is confident that “they who seek the Lord shall not be in want of any good thing” (verse 10).

PSALM 34-II

The Church Fathers (e.g. Cyril & Jerome) mention the singing of Psalm 34 at the time of communion. It is an acrostic, all of its verses (except the last) beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Motyer says of the broken pattern, “The Psalm is a broken alphabetic acrostic: one letter is not used and another is used twice. Life’s troubles cannot be completely catalogued, we do not see the whole pattern. But in so far as the whole story can be told, here is an ABC for a crisis.”²⁹ It is quoted in 1 Peter 3:10-12 (Psalm 34:12-16). Its resounding joy and confidence in God have been an inspiration to every generation.

PSALM 35-I

“They hated without a cause,” Jesus explained to His disciples, citing Psalm 35:19 in order to explain to His disciples the world’s hatred of Him (John 15:25; cf Psalm 69:4, Psalm 109:3). “Lord, how long?” the Psalmist cries amidst afflictions suffered at the hands of his enemies (verse 17). Yet he is confident that his vindication will come (verses 27,28). While we must “take heed to applying it to any little peevish quarrels and enmities of our own,” as Matthew Henry says, yet we may comfort ourselves with its hope of vindication for the righteous, and for the whole kingdom of God.

²⁶Motyer, p. 505.

²⁷Motyer, p. 505.

²⁸p. 506.

²⁹p. 506.

PSALM 35-II

“This Psalm belongs to a time when enmity and suffering were seemingly endless,” says Motyer. David prays, but the answer is deferred. Prayer alone is the solution to the crisis, but prayer both “submits our needs to the Lord’s resources and also our timetable to His.”³⁰

PSALM 36-I

Spurgeon entitles this “the song of Happy Service.” Kidner notes its “powerful contrasts,” from human nature at its worst (verses 1-4) to God’s goodness in its fullness (verses 5-9).³¹ He both “complains of the malice of his enemies against him,” says Matthew Henry, but also “triumphs in the goodness of God to him.”

PSALM 36-II

Psalm 36 begins with the evil of the wicked in verses 1-4 and concludes with the sufficiency of God for His people in verses 5-12. Nowhere more beautifully expressed than in verses 8 and 9:

They drink their fill of the abundance of Thy house; and Thou dost give them to drink of the river of Thy delights. For with Thee is the fountain of life; in Thy light we see light.

To embrace God’s self-revelation, says Motyer, is “to enjoy life, light, provision and protection.”³²

PSALM 37-I

“The meek shall inherit the earth,” Jesus said, quoting Psalm 37 (verses 9,11). Concerned that the wicked “prosper in his way” while the righteous languish? (verse 7). “Fret not,” counsels David, “rest,” “wait patiently,” “trust” in the Lord (verses 3, 5, 7, 9). “There is no finer exposition of the third Beatitude (Matthew 5:5) than this psalm,” says Kidner.³³ Like Psalms 19 and 119, it is a wisdom, or teaching Psalm. Like Psalms 25 and 119 it is an acrostic, each double verse (e.g. 1-2, 3-4) begins with the next letter in the Hebrew alphabet. David Livingstone, the great missionary to Africa, frequently encouraged himself with the fifth verse: “Commit your way to the Lord. Trust also in Him, and He will do it.”

PSALM 37-II

Motyer wrote that this Psalm deals with “the often agonizing tension in the life of faith prompted by the contrasting fortunes on earth of the ‘righteous’ . . . and the ‘wicked.’” He defines the righteous as “those who would live out their relationship of being ‘right with God.’” And the wicked he defines as “the practical atheist for whom God may exist but only as an irrelevance.”³⁴

³⁰Motyer, p. 507.

³¹Kidner, p. 145.

³²Motyer, p. 508.

³³Kidner, Vol. 1, p. 148.

³⁴Motyer, p. 509.

PSALM 38-I

Classified as a penitential Psalm, the Psalmist is full of grief and complaint, feeling profoundly the malignant effects of sin. If we have not experienced the troubles described in the Psalm, we may one day, and so “sing of them by way of preparation,” says Matthew Henry, adding “and we know that others have them, and therefore we must sing of them by way of sympathy.” This is one of several Psalms that Bishop John Hooper, in February of 1552, soon to be martyred by Bloody Mary, recommended to his wife for her “patience and consolation” in desperate times.

PSALM 38-II

“If ever a Psalm was designed to warn us off sin by exposing its consequences, this is it,” says J. A. Motyer. He explains the teaching of the Psalm as follows:

- verses 1-8 “Sin offends the Lord and burdens the sinner, replaces wellbeing by wounds, induces lowspiritedness, with pain of body and disquiet of heart;”
- verses 9-12 “It saddens and devitalizes, isolates us from friends, and excites enmity;”
- verses 13,14 “It leaves us without excuse;”
- verses 15-18 “But it does not close the door of prayer, nor exclude us from the place or repentance.”

Finally, “Only the Lord’s favor can deliver us from the Lord’s disfavor.”³⁵

PSALM 39

Along with the 90th Psalm, the 39th has much to say about the brevity and vanity of human life. Our life is “transient” (verse 4), its length is but as “handbreadths,” our lifetime as “nothing;” we are “a mere breath” (verse 5), a “phantom” (verse 6). Our only hope is “in Thee” (verse 7). Matthew Henry refers to these sentiments as “meditations of mortality,” calling it “a funeral Psalm.” When singing it, he says, “we should get our hearts duly affected with the brevity, uncertainty, and calamitous state of human life.”

PSALM 40-I

The patient waiting of Psalms 38 and 39 (both of which conclude with the psalmist crying for a deliverance that has not yet come) now sees its “triumphal outcome.”³⁶

I waited patiently for the Lord; and He inclined to me, and heard my cry. (Psalm 40:1)

An appropriate and proportional response of thanksgiving cannot be found in sacrificial offerings, but only in the giving of oneself.

I delight to do Thy will, O my God; Thy Law is within my heart. (Psalm 40:8)

Ultimately only Christ is able to offer a sufficient self-sacrifice, as the New Testament knows well (Hebrews 10:7).

³⁵Motyer, p. 510.

³⁶Kidner, I. 158.

PSALM 40-II

The 40th Psalm may be seen as the fulfillment of the patient waiting of Psalms 38 and 39. The psalmist rejoices in answered prayer (verses 1-5), recommits himself to obedience and public testimony (verses 6-10), and prays for deliverance from continuing troubles (verses 11-17). A Psalm of David, ultimately fulfilled in Christ who alone is able to set aside ritual sacrifices and fulfill the obligations of the law of God (verses 6-8; cf. Hebrews 10:5-7).

PSALM 41-I

David writes of a righteous man upon his sickbed (verse 3), who “found his enemies very barbarous,” says Matthew Henry, yet he found his God to be “very gracious.” They attack him, and yet he is confident that God will protect and sustain him.

Verse 9,

Even my close friend, in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted up his heel against me,

was applied by Jesus to Himself at the Last Supper in anticipation of His betrayal by Judas (John 13:18; cf Matthew 26:21ff; Mark 14:18ff; Luke 22:2ff).

PSALM 41-II

The psalmist is one who cares for the poor and needy, and whose kindness has been rewarded with betrayal and scorn. Spurgeon notes that it is “too common for the best of men to be rewarded for their holy charity with cruelty and scorn.” Verse 9 gives it a Messianic reference point: it anticipates the betrayal and suffering of Christ.

Verse 13 serves as a doxology not only to the Psalm, but to the first book of the Psalter (Psalms 1-41; cf 72:19; 89:52; 150:6).

PSALM 42-I

The 42nd Psalm marks the beginning of the 2nd of five books within the Psalter. Kidner describes Psalms 42 and 43 as “two parts of a single, close-knit poem,” together “one of the most sadly beautiful in the Psalter.”³⁷ The psalmist is “cut off from the privilege of waiting upon God in public ordinances,” says Matthew Henry, and longs and thirst for God, as “the deer pants for the water brooks” (verse 1). He yearns as well for the fellowship of the saints in worship together, as he recalls “the voice of joy and thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival” (verse 4). Twice he asks,

Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me?
(verse 5ab; cf verse 11, and again in Psalm 43:5)

Each time he answers in faith,

Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him For the help of His presence. (verse 5c)

³⁷p. 165.

“If the books of Psalms be . . . a mirror, or looking-glass, of pious and devout affections,” says Matthew Henry, “this Psalm, in particular, deserves, as much as any one Psalm, to be so entitled.”

PSALM 42-II

“It is the cry of a man far removed from the outward ordinances and worship of God, sighing for the long-loved house of his God; and at the same time it is the voice of a spiritual believer, under depressions, longing for the renewal of the divine presence, struggling with doubts and fears, but yet holding his ground by faith in the living God. Most of the Lord’s family have sailed on the sea which is here so graphically described.”³⁸

PSALM 42-III

Motyer divides Psalms 42 and 43, which once probably formed a single Psalm, into 3 equal sections marked by the placement of the refrain (42:6; 42: __; 43:5):

faith longing – 42:1-5
faith reviving – 42:6-11
faith responding – 43:1-5

PSALM 43-I

The 43rd Psalm was sung when Augustine was finally baptized by Ambrose in Milan in A.D. 387, after years of spiritual struggle. It was to the 43rd that Thomas Chalmers turned on May 18, 1843 at the first gathering of the Free Church of Scotland at what history knows as the “Disruption,” beginning their singing at verse 3:

O send Your light forth and Your truth;
O let them lead me well
And bring me to Your holy hill,
The place You choose to dwell.

PSALM 43-II

Matthew Henry calls it an “appendix” to Psalm 42, penned by the same hand and on the same occasion. All the themes of Psalm 42 continue in Psalm 43. Many commentators speculate that it was once one Psalm which for some (indiscernible) reason was divided. The question raised and answered in Psalm 42 (verses 5,11) is brought before us one final time:

O why, my soul, are you bowed down?
Why so discouraged be?
Hope now in God! I’ll praise Him still!
My Help, my God is He! (43:5)

PSALM 44-I

Set in the circumstances of national disaster, the 44th Psalm recalls the better “days of old” (verses 1-8) as it searches for reasons for the present calamities (verses 9-26). Spurgeon thought

³⁸Spurgeon.

it best suited to Christians suffering persecution, taking his cue from the Apostle Paul, who cites verse 22 in Romans 8:36 as typical of what awaits the people of God:

Just as it is written, "For Thy sake we are being put to death all day long; we were considered as sheep to be slaughtered."

PSALM 44-II

Motyer entitles Psalm 44 "when life is unfair and God is asleep." The psalmist recalls the past blessing of God (verses 1-8) which he contrasts with the present withdrawal of blessing, a withdrawal which defies explanation (verses 9-26). "God's ways are a mystery," explains Motyer. "The afflictions of life are often inexplicable to the human eye, and contrary to what God has already proved Himself to be."³⁹

PSALM 45-I

This is a royal Psalm, "a Song of Love," according to the superscription, and a Messianic Psalm probably written on the occasion of a royal wedding (see the references to the bridal train in verses 10-15, the splendor of the wedding party in verses 3-9). This exciting occasion ("my heart overflows") presents an idealized picture of the King which clearly looks beyond the sons of David to *the* Son of David. Verses 6 and 7 are quoted in the New Testament to prove the superiority of Christ.

But of the Son He says, "Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever, and the righteous scepter is the scepter of His kingdom. (Hebrews 1:8)

PSALM 45-II

Verse 4 inspired the hymn "Ride On! Ride On in Majesty!" The 45th was said to have been sung by Columba (521-597 A.D.) in his mission to the Scots (then the Picts), in a loud voice striking amazement and fear in their unconverted hearts. Henry calls it "an illustrious prophesy of Messiah the Prince."

PSALM 45-III

C. W. Lewis calls it "a laureate ode on a royal wedding" that in its own right is "magnificent," but which "is far more valuable for the light it throws on the Incarnation."⁴⁰ The arrival of the King in verse 2-9 corresponds with the coming of Christ at His birth, which is at the same time the arrival of "the great warrior and the great King . . . also of the Lover, the Bridegroom, whose beauty surpasses that of man."⁴¹ The bride in verses 10-17 corresponds to the church in its call to leave its household (verse 10) to be made a great nation (verse 16; Genesis 12:1ff).

³⁹Motyer, 514.

⁴⁰Lewis, 128.

⁴¹Ibid., 130.

PSALM 46-I

The opening verse,

God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

is among the best known and most beloved verses in the Psalter. Sometimes called “Luther’s Psalm,” his Reformation anthem, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” is based upon it. Kidner speaks of its “indomitable spirit,” its “robust, defiant tone.”⁴² Often turned to by persecuted Covenanters, Puritans and Huguenots, Spurgeon entitles it “The Song of Holy Confidence.”

PSALM 46-II

Shortly after the outbreak of WWII the young men of Scotland’s Isle of Lewis by the hundreds boarded ships to be sent to serve in the British armed services. Departure time corresponded with the conclusion of evening worship. Hundreds came pouring out of the churches and gathered at the docks to send them off. One of the young men began to sing Psalm 46.

“God is our refuge and our strength, in straits a present aid”

Thinking immediately of the old practice of “lining-out” the Psalms (i.e. the practice of a “precentor” singing a line of a Psalm and the congregation then repeating that line after him, and so on, to the end of the Psalm), the entire shipload of men and the hundreds of well-wishers on the shore spontaneously joined in singing the Psalm to its end. Those present referred to it as the most moving experience that they had ever witnessed.

PSALM 47

It is believed that Psalm 47 was written on the occasion of the transportation of the ark from the house of Obed-edom to the tabernacle in Jerusalem. This was a great public celebration, as David danced “before the Lord” and all Israel clapped and shouted and blew their trumpets (2 Samuel 6:14,15). “God has ascended with a shout, the LORD, with the shout of a trumpet” (verse 5). The Psalm is universal in scope, envisioning “all peoples” praising the God of Israel, who is King over “all the earth” (verses 2, 3, 7, 8, 9). It looks beyond the ark “to the ascension of Christ into the heavenly Zion,” says Matthew Henry. Consequently, in singing it, he continues, “we are to give honor to the exalted Redeemer, to rejoice in His exaltation, and to celebrate His praises, confessing that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

PSALM 48-I

Written to celebrate the victory of God’s people over an alliance of pagan kings (perhaps Ammon, Moab & Edom) during the reign of Jehoshaphat (4th king of Judah c 873-849). The identity of “Tarshish,” (verse 2) is unknown, but represents pagan naval power. The beauty of the preserved city of God, dwelling place of God and the people of God, is highlighted (verses 1-3), God’s destruction of His enemies is described (verses 4-8) and the goodness of God is promised (verses 9-14).

⁴²Kidner, 174.

PSALM 48-II

“The theme of elation after a great deliverance is continued but with this difference, that while Psalm 46 focuses on the threat that was removed and Psalm 47 on the Lord’s purposes of grace for the enemies that were overthrown, Psalm 48 stresses how unscathed is the city that has been in such danger.”⁴³

PSALM 49-I

This may be classified as a wisdom Psalm, calling all humanity to hear God’s wise instruction (verses 1-3). It’s theme is the futility of worldliness, summed up in its refrain,

But man in his pomp will not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. (verse 12; cf v. 20)

“This Psalm is a sermon,” says Matthew Henry. “In most Psalms, we have the penman praying or praising; in these, we have him preaching.”

PSALM 49-II

Life and death pose a “riddle” (verses 1-4) that the Psalmist sets out to answer. All die, alike the wise and the foolish, the rich and the poor, and their wealth dies with them (verses 5-13; 16-20). But there is life after death, and hope for those whom God redeems (14,15).

PSALM 50-I

Matthew Henry calls this “not a Psalm of praise” but “a Psalm of instruction . . . of reproof and admonition.” This Psalm envisions God summoning all the earth to appear before His judgment seat (verse 1). But it is His people Israel (verses 2-6) whom He particularly has in view, rebuking them for their religious formalism (verses 7-15), and their hypocrisy (verses 16-21), and whom He charges to worship aright (verses 22,23).

PSALM 50-II

The scene of Psalm 50 is Judgment Day, as God summonses all the earth (verse 1) and his covenant people (verses 2-6) to judgment. Motyer draws parallels between Psalm 50 and the covenant renewal service of Exodus 24:3-8. The Psalm is “thus very well suited to a festival of covenant renewal, providing as it does a framework for personal self-examination.”⁴⁴

PSALM 51-I

The greatest of all biblical confessions of sin (“the most eminent of the penitential Psalms,” says Matthew Henry), according to the superscription, Psalm 51 was written on the occasion of David’s sin with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11, 12). The efficacy of his repentance (verses 1-4) is found in 2 Samuel 2:13: The prophet Nathan declared,

“The Lord also has taken away your sin; you shall not die.” (2 Samuel 12:13b)

⁴³Motyer, 516.

⁴⁴Motyer, p. 517.

The Psalms concluding verses, “Build the walls of Jerusalem” (verse 18) show that Israel of old and the people of God today find language for confession and hope for forgiveness in this Psalm, as we pray through the mediation of our Lord Jesus Christ. Sometimes called “The Sinner’s Guide,” Luther said of it, “There is no other Psalm which is oftener sung or prayed in the church.”

PSALM 51-II

Psalm 51 is believed to have been written in the aftermath of David’s sin with Bathsheba. The dominant theme of the Psalm is David’s personal experience of sin and his moral accountability to God. There we read: “Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me” (verse 5). The NIV translates even more clearly, “Surely I have been . . . sinful from the time my mother conceived me.” We may remind ourselves that the non-living do not stand in any moral relationship to God, and neither do the non-human. Only human persons are ever “in sin;” inanimate objects and animals never are. Thus the humanity of the unborn is affirmed from the point of conception. This is consistently the biblical perspective. Throughout the Bible the personal history of various individuals is traced back to the womb (e.g. Job 3:3; Jeremiah 1:5; Luke 1:41, 44; Genesis 25:22, etc.)

PSALM 52

The superscription attributes authorship to David, written on the occasion (or to commemorate) “when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said to him, ‘David has come to the house of Ahimelech.’ ” David, in flight from Saul, had received provisions from Ahimelech the priest (1 Samuel 21:1-9). Informed by Doeg the Edomite, Saul responded by slaughtering Ahimelech and his whole household by the hand of the same Doeg (1 Samuel 22:8-23). David lamented his part in the bloodshed saying to Ahimelech’s surviving son Abiathar,

“I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about the death of every person in your father's household.” (1 Samuel 22:22)

He then wrote this Psalm in which he decries Doeg’s treachery (verses 1-4), anticipates the long arm of God’s justice (verses 5-7), and reaffirms his trust in God (verses 8,9). “Even the malice of a Doeg may furnish instruction to a David,” says Spurgeon.

PSALM 53

The 53rd is almost an exact replica of the 14th. “All repetitions are not vain repetitions,” says Spurgeon. Its theme is the evil nature of man. “David after a long life, found men no better than they were in his youth,” Spurgeon continues. “To impress (this theme) the more on us,” says Andrew Bonar, “the Psalm repeats what has been already sung in Psalm XIV.” In singing this Psalm, says Matthew Henry, “we ought to lament the corruption of the human nature, and the wretched degeneracy of the world we live in, yet rejoicing in hope of the great salvation.”

John Hus repeated Psalm 53 along with Psalm 51 at the place of his execution, the latter as a meditation of his own sin, the former as a meditation on the evil of his captors.

PSALM 54-I

According to the superscription, this Psalm was written by David when the “Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, ‘Is David not hiding with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?’” (1 Samuel 23:19ff; 26:1ff). That is, David in his flight from Saul finds himself in Ziph in southern Judah, now betrayed by the men of his own tribe, even though he had previously rescued one of their border towns from the Philistines (1 Samuel 23:1ff). This prayer for vindication should be understood against the background of betrayal and treachery.

PSALM 54-II

David responds to his betrayal by the southern Judeans (members of his own tribe) in Ziph by crying out to God that he might be delivered (vv 1-3), and that his attackers might be destroyed (v 5). Verse 4 is the hinge verse, that turns David’s prayer for help into a thanksgiving for deliverance. His confidence is in God’s help. Ultimately our enemies are up against God, not us.

PSALM 55

The Psalmist in Psalm 55 suffers from persecution by enemies (verses 1-8) and betrayal by friends (verses 12ff). He wishes to flee:

And I said, “Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest.” (verse 6)

The agonizing words of verses 12-14 and 20-21 prophetically anticipate the betrayal of Christ by Judas. The Psalmist turns to prayer, evening and morning and noon (3x/day) (verses 9-21) and places his trust in God (verses 22-23).

PSALM 56-I

The superscription tells us that David wrote this Psalm “when the Philistines seized him in Gath.” The incident is recorded in 1 Samuel 21:10-12. David fled from Saul to Achish king of Gath. Sensing that the servants of Achish might turn the king against David, he feigned insanity, even dribbling saliva on his beard. Achish responded

“Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?” (1 Samuel 21:14-15)

Filled with pleas and complaints, the refrain expresses David’s central conviction,

In God, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust; I shall not be afraid. What can mere man do to me? (Psalm 56:4; cf verse 11)

PSALM 56-II

David fled from Saul to Gath, the home town of Goliath, of all places. That he should seek refuge there shows both David’s courage and despair, or “the courage of despair,” as Kidner puts it.⁴⁵ This tactic fails, the Gathites are suspicious, and now David is “doubly encircled,” Kidner

⁴⁵p. 202.

notes once more.⁴⁶ Reduced to 400 men (1 Samuel 22:10), David writes out of his crisis and despair with hope. God knows, God cares, and will vindicate.

Thou hast taken account of my wanderings; put my tears in Thy bottle; are they not in Thy book? (Psalm 56:8)

“When his dangers and fears were greatest,” observes Matthew Henry, “he was still in tune for singing God’s praises.” Psalm 34 is a more distant reflection on the same incident, a “subsequent meditation,” as Motyer puts it, “that it was not the cleverness of 1 Samuel 21:12,13 but prayer that effected the escape.”⁴⁷

PSALM 57-I

The superscription identifies this as a “Mikhtam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave.” The meaning of “Mikhtam” is uncertain, the most likely suggestion is that it is a “covering,” in this case, a covering of the lips as a prayer is whispered in a time of peril, as in a cave. It is probably a reference to 1 Samuel 24:1-15, when David was hiding in a cave that Saul himself entered, a time of peril in David’s life when he could say, “there is hardly a step between me and death” (1 Samuel 20:3). This is a beautiful hymn of praise, “as full as it is brief,” says Spurgeon, with a stirring refrain in verses 5 and 11:

Be exalted above the heavens, O God; Let Thy glory be above all the earth.

PSALM 57-II

“This Psalm asks the question, ‘Where are you?’ The title says David was *in the cave* (more probably 1 Sa. 21 than 1 Sa. 24) but David places himself *in you, in the shadow of your wings* (1). In flight from Saul, and about to spend a night (4, *I lie*, ‘lie down’) as a lone fugitive, the cave looms above him, but he sees it as the outspread wings of his God. Because of this, the opening cry of prayer (1) turns into a concluding cry of praise (9,10); his confidence in prayer (2,3, *I cry . . . he sends*) turns into steadfastness in praise (7,8); and his sense of the power of his enemies (4) becomes a conviction that they are doomed (6). Yet what is important to David is not that he should be delivered or his enemies trapped but that God should be *exalted in glory* (5,11).”⁴⁸

PSALM 57-III

According to the superscription this psalm was written by David “when he fled from Saul, in the cave,” probably the cave of Adullam (1 Samuel 22:1-4 or perhaps 1 Samuel 24). David seeks refuge in prayer and sees in the cave divine provision as it becomes for him “the shadow of Your wings” (verse 1) and a place of praise.

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷Motyer, p. 521.

⁴⁸Motyer, p. 522.

PSALM 58

The 58th Psalm is a vehement cry to God against the injustice of those to whom the administration of justice is entrusted: the “gods,” who should probably be understood as “rulers” (NIV), and judges of verse 1. It may be divided into two sections:

- verses 1-7 David’s prayer for protection and deliverance from the unjust
- verses 8-17 David’s plea and prophecy of his enemies’ destruction

In this Psalm we foresee the destruction of the enemies of the people of God. Motyer’s comments on verse 6 are instructive:

“This is holy realism – like asking God to bankrupt the firms of arms dealers, or to make terrorist bombs explode in the hands of those who make or set them. If people are irreversibly set in their ways and immune to appeal, nothing is left but to consign them to God the all-holy.”⁴⁹

PSALM 59-I

According to the superscription, Psalm 59 was written concerning the occasion when Saul’s men “watched the house,” in which David was trapped, “in order to kill him.” David escaped through an upper window of his house, aided by Saul’s daughter, Michal (1 Samuel 19:11ff). Kidner reckons that the Psalm was written after David’s ascension as king (e.g. “my people” [verse 11]; worldwide effects of enemies’ defeat [verse 13]). It moves from pleas (verses 1-8) to trust (verses 9-15) to joyful confidence (verses 16,17).

PSALM 59-II

Yet another Psalm written out of David’s trials and tribulations (cf Psalms 52, 54, 56, 57), Spurgeon’s words are instructive:

“Strange that the painful events of David’s life should end in enriching the repertoire of the national minstrelsy; out of a sour, ungenerous soil spring up the honey-bearing flowers of psalmody. Had he never been cruelly hunted by Saul, Israel and the church of God in after ages would have missed this song. The music of the sanctuary is in no small degree indebted to the trials of the saints. Affliction is the tuner of the harps of sanctified songsters.”

We may, in singing this Psalm, says Henry, apply it to the enemies of God’s people, and “read their doom, and foresee their ruin.”

PSALM 60-I

According to the superscription, Psalm 60 was written after a victory over Edom “in the Valley of the Salt” (2 Samuel 8:3,13). Yet it recalls the struggle leading up to that victory. While David was with his army at the Euphrates in the north, Edom attacked in the south. Verses 1-3 refers to the havoc wrought by the invaders, including the breaching of Israel’s defense. Yet God still claimed Israel for His own, as the various places named in verses 6-8 indicate. Verse 8 promises

⁴⁹Motyer, p. 522.

the eventually submission of Moab (a washbowl) and Edom (a place where one throws one's shoe). Verses 9-12 look for victory only through God's help.

PSALM 60-II

“David was in trouble of his own making,” says Motyer.⁵⁰ When David's army was in the north opportunistically attacking the Syrians, the Edomites treacherously attacked Israel for the south, breaching its defense, causing all the land to quake (verse 2; 2 Samuel 8:3-7). Verses 1-3 recall and recognize the divine anger behind the troubles of that time and yet look with confidence for God's deliverance (verses 4,5). Motyer concludes, “The message is wider than the occasion: in every crisis – even one of our own culpable making – the solution is to repeat the promises of God and to unfurl the banner of prayer. When we are unfaithful, he abides faithful: he cannot deny himself (2 Timothy 2:13).”⁵¹

Verses 6-12 are repeated in Psalm 108:7-13 where again victory is sought only through the power of God.

PSALM 61

The 61st Psalm is a cry for protection (verses 1-4), prayed in confidence of God's answer (verses 5-7), and ends in praise (verse 8). It includes some of the most beloved devotional language found in the whole Bible, as he prays:

Lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For Thou hast been a refuge for me, a tower of strength against the enemy. (verses 2b-3)

PSALM 62

Spurgeon entitles this “The Only Psalm,” because of its repeated urging to wait upon God, and seek refuge in God alone. For example, verses 1 and 2:

My soul waits in silence for God *only*; from Him is my salvation. He *only* is my rock and my salvation, My stronghold; I shall not be greatly shaken.

Athanasius said,

“Against all attempts upon thy body, thy state, thy soul, thy fame, thy temptations, tribulations, machinations, deformations, say this Psalm.”

“In singing it,” says Matthew Henry, “we should stir up ourselves to wait on God.”

PSALM 63 - I

The superscription says this is “A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah.” Written perhaps when he was in the desert fleeing from Absalom (cf 2 Samuel 15:13ff; especially verse 23), the deprivations there supplied David with a metaphor for his soul. Even as his flesh yearns for water in a hot and dry place, so also,

⁵⁰p. 523.

⁵¹p. 523.

my soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee, in a dry and weary land where there is no water. (Psalm 63:1)

“There was no desert in his heart,” says Spurgeon, “though there was a desert around him.” “This Psalm has in it as much of warmth and lively devotion as any of David’s Psalms in so little a compass,” says Matthew Henry.

PSALM 63 - II

Older commentators classified this as an “imperial Psalm,” a “catholic” or “universal Psalm,” suited for all occasions. The *Apostolic Constitutions*, documents from the earliest centuries of the church, mandated that this Psalm be sung every day, typically as a morning Psalm. The Psalmist displays what C. S. Lewis calls an “appetite for God,” as his soul seeks “earnestly,” “thirsts,” “yearns” for God (verse 1). He finds God’s lovingkindness is “better than life” (verse 3), and His soul is “satisfied” (verse 5). “There may be other Psalms that equal this outpouring of devotion,” says Kidner, but “few if any that surpass it.”⁵²

PSALM 64

Like Psalm 63, the 64th finds David under attack by enemies. Whereas Psalm 63 focused on God, Psalm 64 focuses on the scheming, evil-talking, and evil-doing of the wicked (verses 1-6). The brevity of David’s description of God’s counterstroke (verses 7-10), “tells its own decisive tale,” notes Kidner.⁵³ “In singing this Psalm,” says Henry, “we must observe the effect of the old enmity that is in the seed of the woman against the seed of the serpent, and assure ourselves that the serpent’s head will be broken, at last, to the honour and joy of the holy seed.”⁵⁴

PSALM 65-I

This is a harvest Psalm of thanksgiving that celebrates the lavish gifts of God:

Thou has crowned the year with Thy bounty, and Thy paths drip with fatness. (verse 11)

It may be divided into two sections:

The glory of God in redemption (verses 1-8)

The glory of God in the fields of nature (verses 9-13)

PSALM 65-II

The immediate occasion of Psalm 65 would appear to be rain sent by God in answer to prayer, perhaps at a time of drought (verse 9; cf. 2 Samuel 21:1-14). It celebrates both God’s work in redemption (verses 1-8) and in the realm of nature (verses 9-13). A Psalm of David.

PSALM 66

Another of the great missionary Psalms (with Psalms 47, 67, 72, 96, 100, etc.), the 66th calls “all the earth” to witness the great salvation wrought by God for His people at the Red Sea (verse 6),

⁵²Kidner, p. 224.

⁵³Kidner, Vol. 1, p. 227.

⁵⁴Henry, Vol. 3, p. 472.

and join in His praise (verses 1-12). It even affirms, “all the earth *will* worship Thee” (verse 4). The voice shifts from the world to individual praise (verses 13-20) as individuals respond in dedication, testimony, and praise. The Psalm reminds us as well to keep short accounts with God, warning that,

If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear; (Psalm 66:18)

PSALM 67

Regarded by some of the ancient commentators as “The Lord’s Prayer of the Old Testament,” it has also often been called “The Missionary Psalm.” Its prayer begins at home, “Bless us” (verse 1), but reaches to the ends of the earth (verse 2ff). “Our love must make long marches,” says Spurgeon, “and our prayers must have a wide sweep, we must embrace the whole world in our intercessions.”

PSALM 68-I

Known as the Huguenot “battle Psalm,” and the “Marseillaise” of French Protestants. It was also the “psalm of battles” for English Puritans and Scottish commentators, as described in the former case below:

“The Psalms were ever on the lips of Cromwell and his invincible Ironsides in the Puritan struggle for liberty. They sang them as they marched; and as they marched, they conquered. During the night before the battle of Dunbar rain and sleet fell incessantly upon the unprotected Puritan host. Drenched with the rain, stiffened by the cold, faint from hunger, as the darkness melted into dawn, they crept through the cornfields where they had bivouacked, and when at last the rising sun burst over St. Abb’s head, with the shout upon their lips, “Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered,” [Ps. 68] they leaped to the attack, and the enemy, taken by surprise, were thrown into confusion and a precipitate flight that became a complete rout. After a pursuit and punishment lasting eight hours, a halt was made, only long enough, however, to allow the Puritans to sing the shortest of all the Psalms, the One Hundred and Seventeenth, when the pursuit was resumed with fresh vigor.”

– *The Psalms in Worship*, p. 513, 514

PSALM 68-II

The commentators identify the occasion of Psalm 68 with the transportation of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6:12ff; cf. 1 Chronicles 15:1-28).

As the ark moved in procession (cf. verses 24,25) the people of God recalled the journey of the ark from Sinai (verse 1 echoes Numbers 10:35, the outset of that journey) to Zion, the victories won and provisions made as God went before His people “when thou didst march through the wilderness” (verse 7).

We may also say that it anticipates the ascension of Christ, in which He led captivity capture and gave gifts to His church (verse 6; cf. Ephesians 4:7-16; Acts 2:33). From early times this has been a Psalm for Pentecost.

PSALM 69

A prayer of one who is persecuted by his enemies, the 69th is three times applied to Christ in the New Testament. When Jesus cleansed the temple the disciples recalled verse 9,

. . . zeal for Thy house has consumed me . . . (cf John 2:17)

The second half of the verse was applied to Christ by the Apostle Paul in Romans,

. . . and the reproaches of those who reproach Thee have fallen on me. (Psalm 69:9b; cf. Romans 15:3)

When explaining the world's hatred of Him, Jesus cited verse 4:

"They hated me without a cause" (John 15:25; cf Psalm 35:19)

All four gospels apply verse 21 to Jesus' cry of thirst on the cross and the response of the soldiers:

"They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink"
(cf. Matthew 27:34, 48; Mark 15:23; Luke 23:36; John 19:28)

"His footsteps all through this sorrowful song have been pointed out by the Holy Spirit in the New Testament," notes Spurgeon. "In singing this Psalm," says Henry, we must have an eye to the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that followed."

PSALM 70

Psalm 70 is a copy of Psalm 40:13-17, with minor variations. It was written for those who are under attack and afflicted. It is a cry for help, perhaps more urgent than Psalm 40:13-17 and with greater brevity than the 69th Psalm, which precedes it and contains many of the same sentiments. It is also an expression of faith in God as our ultimate good.

Let all who seek Thee rejoice and be glad in Thee; and let those who love Thy salvation say continually, "Let God be magnified." (Psalm 70:4)

PSALM 71-I

Kidner calls this "A Psalm for Old Age."⁵⁵ The Psalmist, perhaps David, now "old and gray" (verse 18), recalls God's faithfulness throughout his life, from birth to the present (verses 1-8), and cries out,

Do not cast me off in the time of old age; do not forsake me when my strength fails. (verse 9)

His cry for help continues (verses 9-13), perhaps occasioned by Absalom's rebellion or Sheba's insurrection. So also does his strong confidence in God (verses 9-24). "Never was his hope more established," says Matthew Henry (verses 16, 18, 20, 21), "never his joys and thanksgivings more enlarged" (verses 15, 19, 22-24). Spurgeon regards it as the utterance of "struggling, but unstagging, faith." Bishop John Jewell (1522-71), great defender of the Reformed Church of England, requested that this one be sung to him upon his deathbed.

⁵⁵Kidner, I.250.

PSALM 71-II

“In 1836 Charles Simeon retired after fifty-four years of ministry at Holy Trinity, Cambridge. A friend, discovering that he was still rising at 4:00 a.m. to light his own fire and spend time alone with God, remonstrated, ‘Mr. Simeon, do you not think that, now you are retired, you might take things more easily?’ ‘What?’ replied the old man, ‘Shall I not now run with all my might when the winning-post is in sight!’ Here is another old man (9, 18) running with all his might: ripe in experience of God (5, 6, 17), still challenged and pressured (4, 13), deeply reliant on prayer (1-9, 12-13), uplifted in praise (8, 14, 22-24), leaving the future to God (19-21), avid to prolong his testimony (17-18) – a glorious example for the retired, a challenging portrait for all.”⁵⁶

PSALM 72-I

Among the most clearly Messianic of Psalms, identified as a prayer of David (verse 20), but then perhaps fashioned into a Psalm by Solomon (as in the superscription). Though written by a king and dedicated to a king, it describes blessings and power “so far beyond the humanly attainable,” as Kidner puts it, “as to suggest for its fulfillment no less a person than the Messiah.”⁵⁷ It has inspired two excellent hymns: James Montgomery’s “Hail to the Lord’s Anointed” (1821), and Isaac Watts’ “Jesus Shall Reign” (1719). Psalm 72 was the favorite of the great Athanasius (c.296-373).

PSALM 72-II

J. A. Alexander describes Psalm 72 as “a glowing description of the reign of Messiah as *righteous* (verses 1-7); *universal* (verses 8-11); *beneficent* (verses 12-14); and *perpetual* (verses 15-17);” concluding with a doxology and postscript (verses 18-20).

PSALM 72-III

Only Psalms 127 and 72 have references to Solomon in their titles. It is a “prayer of David” (v. 20) dedicated to Solomon (the superscription), or perhaps actually written by Solomon. J. A. Motyer suggests that Solomon may have written it seeing “his empire as the first fruits of the world rule of the Messiah.” Yet, “at the same time the psalm runs beyond what even hyperbole could claim for any merely earthly and human king . . . only in the Messiah could (his high) calling become sober reality.”⁵⁸

PSALM 73-I

Psalm 73 marks the beginning of the third “book” of the Psalms (73-83). The 73rd Psalm provides the classic expression of the cry of the righteous—Why do we suffer while the wicked prosper? Verses 1-16 give voice to this complaint, followed by the answer of verses 17-28. When the Psalmist takes his eyes off of the wicked, returns to “the sanctuary of God,” then he perceives their “end,” that is, their destruction (verse 17). Conversely he sees afresh that God alone is enough for His people. “Besides Thee,” he says, “I desire nothing on earth” (verse 25f). “He that hath God hath all,” says Jonathan Edwards in his sermon on Psalm 73, entitled, “God the Best Portion.” The godly have the better portion, says Edwards, “even though they have no other portion but God.”

⁵⁶Motyer, 530.

⁵⁷Kidner, I, 254.

⁵⁸Motyer, 531.

PSALM 73-II

The theme of the 73rd Psalm is the same as that of the 37th (notice the helpful reversal of the numbers). Spurgeon calls that theme “The ancient stumbling block of good men,” that is, the prosperity of the wicked and the suffering of the righteous.

PSALM 73-III

Henry outlines the 73rd in this way:

- verse 1 – the sacred principle which he held onto in temptation
- verses 2-14 – “How he got *into* the temptation”
- verses 15-20 – “How he got *out* of the temptation and gained a victory over it”
- verses 21-28 – “How he got *by* the temptation, and was the better for it”

PSALM 74-I

Kidner calls this a “tormented Psalm,” lamenting national, not personal, disaster. Like Psalms 79 and 137 and the book of Lamentations, it is probably set in the context of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. The desecration of the temple is probably in view in verses 3-7, “The deplorable case of the people of God, at that time, is here spread before the Lord, and left with him,” says Matthew Henry. Even in the midst of the Psalmist’s cries hope shines through in verses 12-17.

PSALM 74-II

When 900 Covenanters were cornered by 3000 government troops on November 28, 1666, they sang the 74th as their plaintive cry before offering a gallant but futile resistance. “When we see how the faithful trusted and wrestled with their God in times of dire distress,” says Spurgeon, explaining the usefulness of this Psalm, “we are thereby taught how to behave ourselves in similar circumstances.”

PSALM 75-I

The 75th Psalm is a Psalm of Thanksgiving, praising God’s righteous judgment, which “puts down one and exalts another” (verse 7). He is “disposer supreme and judge of the earth,” in Motyer’s words.⁵⁹ Ker finds in it (along with the 48th & 72nd) “the law and the prophecy of all righteous government.”⁶⁰ “In singing this Psalm,” says Matthew Henry, “we must give to God the glory of all the revolutions of states and kingdoms, believing that they are all according to his counsel, and that he will make them all to work for the good of the church.”

PSALM 75-II

The psalmist gives thanks for the certainty and equity of God’s judgment.

PSALM 76-I

Psalm 76 is “a most jubilant war song,” says Spurgeon, perhaps “penned upon occasion of some great victory,” adds Matthew Henry. God is praised for His *past* deliverance of Israel (verses 1-6) and for His *future* deliverance and judgment of all the earth (verses 7-12). The God of the Bible

⁵⁹Motyer, p. 534.

⁶⁰Ker, p. 17.

is One to be feared (verses 7, 8, 11, 12). He so overcomes His enemies that even their “wrath” shall praise Him (verse 10). Matthew Henry finds it “a proper Psalm for a thanksgiving day.” It was a favorite of Scotland’s suffering covenanters, sung in celebration of certain of their deliverances and victories.

This God-centered Psalm may be divided as follows:

The Lord’s dwelling place – verses 1-3

The Lord’s majesty – verses 4-8

The Lord’s triumph – verses 9-12

PSALM 76-II

The psalmist celebrates God’s past and future victories over His enemies.

PSALM 77-I

The 77th is among the most sorrowful of all the Psalms. “This Psalm has much sadness in it,” says Spurgeon. “All who have known the enveloping pressure of a dark mood can be grateful for the candor of this fellow-sufferer,” says Kidner, “but also for his courage.”⁶¹ What begins as despair in verses 1-10, turns to hope in verses 11-15, as “his meditations run Godward,” says Spurgeon. It “begins with sorrowful complaints,” says Matthew Henry, “but ends with comfortable encouragements.” His intense suffering in verses 1-10 is rectified by remembering God’s past works in verses 11-20.

PSALM 77-II

Profoundly disturbed, the psalmist finds no comfort in God. Yet he returns again to the place of prayer, remembers the LORD’S wonders of old, and finds cause for hope.

PSALM 78-I

Psalm 78 reviews what Kidner calls the “turbulent adolescence”⁶² of Israel, from the time of its captivity in Egypt to the reign of David. It is designed to both “search the conscience,” recording the history of Israel’s unfaithfulness, history that must not repeat itself; and “warm the heart” as it reviews the mighty acts of God and His persistent faithfulness.⁶³ No mere historical “recapitulation,” it “is intended to be viewed as a parable setting forth the conduct and experience of all believers in all ages,” notes Spurgeon. Matthew’s Gospel cites verse 2, “I will open my mouth in a parable” (a *masal*, a proverb, as in the title of the book), as prophetic of the teaching ministry of Jesus (Matthew 13:35).

PSALM 78-II

Psalm 78 is a historical Psalm. From this we learn that there is much of value in the study of the history of Israel. It provides “a narrative of the great mercies God had bestowed upon Israel, the great sins wherewith they had provoked him, and the many tokens of his displeasure they had been under, for their sins,” says Matthew Henry. It is put in poetic and singing form, Henry

⁶¹Kidner, p. 276

⁶²Kidner, 280.

⁶³Ibid, 280.

continues, “that it might be better remembered, and transmitted to posterity, that the singing of it might affect them with the things here related, more than they would be with a bare narrative of them.”

PSALM 78-III

Psalm 78 is a historical Psalm, reviewing Israel’s history from the captivity in Egypt to the reign of David. It commends the teaching of redemptive history from generation to generation.

. . . He commanded our fathers, that they should teach them to their children, that the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born, that they may arise and tell them to their children, that they should put their confidence in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep His commandments, (Psalm 78:5b-7)

We note that perhaps *four* generations are in view in verses 3-4 and again in verses 5-8. There are the “fathers,” and their children, “the generation to come,” and finally their children (v 6). The church in all its teaching and preaching must think generationally and familialy. We must consider not just the present, but the impact of our instruction and practice for generations to come. At the heart of this endeavor to pass on the faith is the family. There can never be a substitute for “mothers’ tears and fathers’ prayers,” says Spurgeon.

PSALM 78-IV

The Psalm is a “parable,” an “instructive story or saying” meant to illustrate truth, “hidden things” (NIV verse 2) by which is meant the record of the past, which by itself is “a tangle of events, an enigma or riddle needing interpretation,” says Motyer. He continues: “This then is the purpose of the psalm; to clarify the riddle of the past so that it becomes a lesson for present and future.”⁶⁴

PSALM 79-I

Perhaps written after the fall of Jerusalem to the Babylonians by an eyewitness who deeply laments the devastation he has witnessed, and from which no relief has been found (verse 5). It serves as a lament of the church upon those occasions when “heathen hordes” have captured the church and are wreaking havoc upon its ministry and witness.

PSALM 79-II

The destruction of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple by the Babylonians in 587 is the occasion of the ancient lament, “how long, O Lord?” (verse 5).

PSALM 80-I

Psalm 80 is a lament for Israel’s national woes. Three times the refrain is repeated,

O God, restore us, and cause Thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved. (Psalm 80:3; cf verses 7,19)

Disaster has struck the northern tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh (verse 2). The

⁶⁴Motyer, p. 535.

occasion is likely to be the destruction of the northern kingdom of Israel by Assyria in 722. Note the contrast between God's smile in verse 3 ("cause Thy face to shine") and His frown in verse 16 ("the rebuke of Thy countenance"). "Desperate though the situation is . . . the sole needed remedy is that He should smile, so powerful is the favor of God and so disastrous His displeasure."⁶⁵ It may properly be sung "in the day of Jacob's trouble," says Matthew Henry, whenever that day may be.

PSALM 80-II

The psalmist addresses God as Shepherd (verses 1-6) and Vinedresser (verses 7-19) and the people of God as flock and vine at a time of divine rejection and national devastation. The heart of his prayer may be found in the refrain thrice repeated: "O God, restore us, and cause Thy face to shine upon us, and we will be saved" (see also verses 7,19).

PSALM 81-I

The 81st was probably designed for use either at the annual Feast of Tabernacles (hence the references to new moon and feast day in verse 3), which commemorated the wilderness journey (Leviticus 23:39) or Passover (Exodus 12:18). Verses 7-10 recall Meribah, when God brought water from a rock (cf Exodus 17:1-7; Psalm 95:8ff; 1 Corinthians 10:4), and the giving of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5). It is a Psalm of praise which nevertheless recalls Israel's sins at the time of the Exodus. God Himself laments,

Oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways! (Psalm 81:13)

PSALM 81-II

The 81st Psalm is the central Psalm of the Psalter (there are 5 "books" of the Psalter; the third book is Psalms 73-89, of its 17 Psalms the 81st is at the center). The central verse of this central Psalm provides the summary message:

"Hear, O My people, and I will admonish you; O Israel, if you would listen to Me!" (Psalm 81:8)

This, then is the central verse and summary message of the Psalter. Liturgically it was used as a part of the New Year's celebration mentioned in verse 3,

Blow the trumpet at the new moon, at the full moon, on our feast day.

PSALM 81-III

"The Psalm begins with the *ordinance* of God which the people must keep (verses 1-5), moves on to the *acts* of God in deed and word (verses 6-10), and ends with the *requirement* of God that his people should obey him."⁶⁶

PSALM 82

Psalm 82 is "rather characterized by strength than by sweetness," says Spurgeon. The scene of

⁶⁵Motyer, p. 537.

⁶⁶Motyer, p. 538.

Psalm 82 is God's courtroom in heaven, where God is calling lesser rulers and authorities to account. He rebukes them for their injustice and partiality (verse 2) and calls upon them to do justice (verses 3,4). Verse 5 probably describes "the plight of the misgoverned and misled," says Kidner. Verses 6-8 warn and exhort these rulers in light of God's coming judgment. It is designed, says Matthew Henry, to tell kings their *duty*, and to tell them their *faults*.

PSALM 83-I

The context of Psalm 83 is God's silence in the face of the conspiracies and attacks of the enemies of God's people. "O God, do not remain quiet; do not be silent; and O God, do not be still" (verse 1). Verses 6-8 list conspiring enemy nations; verses 9-12 individual enemies. Rather than associating Psalm 83 with a particular occurrence, Kidner identifies its concern as "the perennial aggression of the world against God and His people."⁶⁷ Interestingly, the Psalm calls for either the destruction of God's enemies (verses 13-15), or their conversion (verses 16-18).

PSALM 83-II

Matthew Henry says, "This, in the singing of it, we may apply to the enemies of the gospel-church, all anti-christian powers and factions, representing to God their confederacies against Christ and his kingdom, and rejoicing in the hope that all their projects will be baffled and the gates of hell shall not prevail against the church."

PSALM 84-I

"This sacred ode is one of the choicest of the collection," says Spurgeon. "It has a mild radiance about it," he continues, "entitling it to be called *The Pearl of the Psalms*." As in Psalms 27, 42, and 43, the Psalmist longs for the presence of God in the worship of God, from which he is for some reason excluded. God's "dwelling places" are "lovely" (verse 1), he longs for God's "courts," he sings for joy to the "living God" (verse 3). Indeed, nothing can compare with the delight of God's presence amongst His worshipping people.

For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness. (verse 10)

"He had a holy lovesickness upon him," says Spurgeon. For him, "God's worst is better than the devil's best."

PSALM 84-II

"If the 23rd be the most popular,
if the 103rd be the most joyful,
if the 119th the most deeply experimental,
if the 51st the most plaintive,
this is one of the most sweet of the Psalms of Peace"

—C. H. Spurgeon

⁶⁷???

PSALM 84-III

This is among the most devotional and experiential of all the Psalms, as the Psalmist finds lovely the “dwelling places” of God, and prefers a day in His courts to a thousand outside (verse 10).

PSALM 84-IV

The psalmist yearns for the presence of God which he experienced in connection with the temple and which parallels in experience in the assembly of the saints. Spurgeon entitled it “the Pearl of the Psalms.”

PSALM 85-I

Kidner titles this Psalm “Revival.” It ends with harmony:

Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth shall spring out of the earth; and righteousness shall look down from heaven. (Psalm 85:10,11)

But the path to this harmony has been difficult. God’s judgments have been hard, and God’s people have been pleading “restore us, O God . . . revive us again” (verses 4,6). Matthew Henry suggests the occasion of the return of Israel from captivity in Babylon, “when they still remained under some tokens of God’s displeasure,” though much had already been forgiven and restored.

PSALM 85-II

Spurgeon calls this “the prayer of a patriot for his afflicted country, in which he pleads the Lord’s former mercies, and by faith foresees brighter days.” The promise of verses 8-13 is fulfilled in Christ. In Him righteousness and peace kiss. “The presence of Jesus the Savior reconciles earth and heaven,” says Spurgeon, and “secures to us the golden age, the balmy days of universal peace.”

PSALM 86-I

This Psalm is particularly known as “David’s prayer,” as the title indicates. Kidner speaks of it as “a lonely prayer of David.”⁶⁸ It combines both praise for the greatness of God and pleas for help. Yet as Motyer points out, David’s need is not specified until verse 14. Seven times he refers to God as Lord, the sovereign one. “The need (14) is not specified until David has first explored his relationship with God (verses 1-6) and renewed his commitment (verses 11-12).” He continues:

“At a deeper level we may say that his prayer is more occupied with ‘telling God about God,’ dwelling meditatively on the divine nature, than with ‘telling God about me.’”⁶⁹

PSALM 86-II

Psalm 86 is a model prayer for troubled times as David lays down His head on what Motyer calls “the pillow of sovereignty.”

It may be divided as follows:

verses 1-6 The Sovereign who hears prayers

⁶⁸Vol 2, 311.

⁶⁹Motyer, p. 541.

verses 7-13 The Sovereign who alone is God
verses 14-17 The Sovereign who is sufficient

PSALM 86-III

At a time of trouble, David turns to prayer (verses 1-7), combining praise (verses 8-10), teachability (verse 11), thanksgiving (verses 12, 13), and petition for deliverance (verses 14-17).

PSALM 87-I

John Newton (1725-1807) based his great hymn “Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken” on the 87th Psalm. Note especially verse 3:

Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God.

Kidner calls Newton’s hymn “the most memorable commentary on the Psalm.”⁷⁰ Both hymn and Psalm envision Gentiles and even old enemies (Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, Ethiopia in verse 4) among inhabitants and citizens of Zion, or Jerusalem. Zion used here “as a type and figure of the gospel church,” says Matthew Henry.

PSALM 87-II

Psalm 87 celebrates Zion, or Jerusalem, the dwelling place of God, and anticipates the inclusion of the nations, even of Israel’s ancient enemies (verse 4) as among her inhabitants.

Psalm 88-I

“There is no sadder prayer in the Psalter,” says Derek Kidner.⁷¹ “Assuredly, if ever there was a song of sorrow and a psalm of sadness, this is one,” said Spurgeon. The only ray of hope is to be found in the first verse. The God before whom he pours out his soul is,

“O LORD, the God of my salvation.”

Otherwise the psalm begins in the night (verse 1) and ends in darkness (verse 18). Henry points out that “it does not conclude, as usually the melancholy psalms do, with the least intimation of comfort or joy, but from first to last, it is mourning and woe.” The worshiper’s role in singing this Psalm is to be a “companion in prayer,” says Kidner, with those who are despondent or outcasts.⁷²

PSALM 88-II

J. A. Motyer divides this “Psalm without hope” into 3 parts:

verses 1-9a – Life without hope
verses 9b-12 – Death without hope
verses 13-18 – Question without answer

⁷⁰II, 314.

⁷¹II, 316.

⁷²II, 317.

Motyer summarizes its contents:

“Someone who is committed to prayer finds no remedial answers to suffering. The wrath of God (7), the alienation of friends and inescapable (8) debilitating grief (9) fills the whole of life; the upward look sees only wrath, the inward look, terror (16); the outward look, present threats and absent friends (17-18) and the forward look, unrelieved darkness (18).”⁷³

PSALM 88-III

J. A. Motyer summarizes the pastoral significance of this bleakest of all Psalms:

“Most pastors will have had to minister in such a situation, holding the hand of a dear fellow-believer sinking into seemingly comfortless sorrows and facing eternity without assurance. And most believers will have encountered – in lesser or greater degrees – the dark valley which excludes sunlight and where Jesus and his love, the gospel and its assurance, heaven and its compensations all refer to someone else. The psalm tells us that unrelieved suffering may still be our lot. It reminds us that we are not in heaven yet but part of a groaning creation (Romans 8:18-23). It sets before us a shining example of the faith that holds on and of resolute occupancy of the place of prayer. Here is one walking in darkness, without light, and trusting in the name of the Lord and leaning on his God (Isaiah 50:10).”⁷⁴

PSALM 89-I

The background to this great hymn of praise (verses 1-18) is God’s promise to David of a dynasty which would endure forever (verses 1-4, 19-37, especially verses 29 and 33-37; cf 2 Samuel 7:13ff). This is contrasted with the current circumstances, the destruction of the Davidic monarchy, described in verses 38-45, and the cries for restoration in verses 46-52. The Psalm, in other words, deals with the age-old problem of the discontinuity between the promises of God (which are wonderful, verses 1-37) and the circumstances of life (which are terrible and flatly contradict the promises, verses 38-45). The Psalm impels us to look to one “greater than David” in whom “the fulfillment will altogether outstrip the expectation,” as Kidner puts it.⁷⁵

PSALM 89-II

Spurgeon calls this the “Covenant Psalm,” and describes it as a “most precious Psalm of instruction.” Amidst devastation (verses 38-45), the Psalmist cries for help (verses 46-52) on the basis of God’s covenant with David. The Davidic promises are so exceptional that they could only be fulfilled in David’s Son, Jesus the Christ (e.g. verses 19, 20, 27, 29, 36). “He builds all his hope upon God’s covenant of David, as a type of Christ,” says Matthew Henry. So much is this the case that Christopher Wordsworth called this “a carol of Christmas” (quoted in Spurgeon).

⁷³Motyer, p. 542

⁷⁴Motyer, p. 543.

⁷⁵p. 319.

PSALM 90-I

The first Psalm of Book IV of the Psalter, Kirkpatrick characterized the tendencies of the four books of the Psalter in this way:

- Book I (1-41) – personal
- Books II & III (42-89) – national
- Books IV & V (90-150) – liturgical

The superscription attributes the authorship to Moses. The 90th Psalm is a sobering meditation contrasting the eternal God with finite man. Often used at funerals, it is “supremely matched to times of crisis,” as Kidner says, particularly in Isaac Watt’s paraphrase, “Our God, Our Help in Ages Past” (1719).⁷⁶

PSALM 90-II

As to the superscription this is “a prayer of Moses, the man of God.” An extended meditation on man’s mortality and God’s eternity, the setting may well be Moses’s own generation, doomed to wander in the wilderness. Psalm 90 is the first Psalm of Book Four of the Psalter (Psalms 90-106).

PSALM 91-I

Elisabeth Eliot based the title of her biography of martyred missionary Jim Eliot, *The Shadow of the Almighty*, from the first verses of Psalm 91:

He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

“This is a Psalm for danger,” says Kidner.⁷⁷ It speaks strongly of God’s care for His people, who is their *shelter, refuge, fortress, shield, bulwark, and dwelling place* (verses 1, 2, 4, 9). This promise of protection was particularly fulfilled in God’s care for Jesus, as is clear from verse 12 (even the devil got that one right – Matthew 4:6).

The narrator’s voice shifts to the first person in verses 14-16, from the Psalmist praising God, to God as He pledges to deliver his faithful servant.

PSALM 91-II

Spurgeon calls Psalm 91 a “matchless ode,” even a “heavenly medicine.” “In the whole collection there is not a more cheering Psalm,” he says. Nineteenth-century hymn writer James Montgomery based his hymn, “Call Jehovah Thy Salvation” upon it.

PSALM 92-I

According to the superscription, this is a “Song for the Sabbath day.” The joyful tone of this Psalm, “For Thou, O LORD, hast made me glad . . . I will sing for joy” (verses 3,4), demonstrates that the Sabbath was meant to be a day of joyful worship, a “delight,” not a burden

⁷⁶Kidner, II, 328.

⁷⁷II, 331.

(Isaiah 58:13ff). “Praise, the business of the Sabbath, is here recommended,” says Matthew Henry. “Praise is Sabbatic work,” agrees Spurgeon, “the joyful occupation of resting hearts.” It is of interest to note that Spurgeon could say of the worship of his day (1890's) “no Psalm is more frequently sung upon the Lord’s day than the present.”

PSALM 92-II

The psalmist contrasts the righteous who delight in singing the praises of God and in contemplating His works with the uncomprehending wicked who are doomed to perish.

PSALM 93-I

This is the first of a group of Psalms that celebrate the LORD reigning as King (e.g. Psalms 93-100) or King equivalent (“judge”). Spurgeon calls it, “The Psalm of Omnipotent Sovereignty.” The floods and waves of verses 3-4 are metaphors of enemies and opposition, of which the LORD is more mighty (verse 4).

PSALM 93-II

Motyer suggests that Psalms 93-100, a Psalm group which underscores the theme of kingship, may have been collected for use at the Feast of Tabernacles, a feast which celebrated both the year’s final harvest (Exodus 23:16; Deuteronomy 16:13) and the Lord’s victory over Egypt (Leviticus 23:39-43). In Psalm 93 the king who established and rules the world rules also the pounding waves (verse 4).

PSALM 94-I

The day after September 11, 2001, the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the Independent Presbyterian Church of Savannah, Georgia closed its Wednesday noon prayer service with the singing of this Psalm. Sometimes an event of that nature is required before modern worshipers can understand the imprecations of the righteous. But in that context it was both understandable and comforting to sing at the outset:

- 1 God of vengeance, O Jehovah,
God of vengeance, O shine forth!
- 2 Rise up, O You Judge of Nations!
Render to the proud their worth.
- 3 O LORD, how long shall the wicked,
How long shall the wicked boast?
- 4 Arrogant the words they pour out,
Ill men all, a taunting host.

And to conclude:

- 22 But the LORD is still my stronghold;
God, my Refuge, will repay.
- 23 He’ll for sin wipe out the wicked;
Them the LORD our God will slay.

PSALM 94-II

The 94th Psalm gives expression to the ancient complaint, “How long O Lord, shall the wicked prosper?” (see verse 3). He complains of his wicked oppressors in verses 1-6; he mocks their

skepticism and unbelief in verses 7-11; declares his dependence upon God in verses 12-23. Matthew Henry summarizes,

“In singing this psalm we must look abroad upon the pride of oppressors with a holy indignation, and the tears of the oppressed with a holy compassion; but, at the same time, look upwards to the righteous Judge with an entire satisfaction, and look forward, to the end of all these things, with a pleasing hope.”

PSALM 95-I

Known by the Latin name *Venite* (Latin for “O Come”), this Psalm has been widely used in Christian worship. It has two distinct parts:

verses 1-7a	a call to worship
verses 7b-11	a call to “hear (God’s) voice” in worship

It reminds us that to “hear His voice” is a central element of true worship. Hebrews 3:7-4:13 applies verses 7b-11 of this Psalm extensively, reminding us that “Today” is ever present (verse 7b), and that His “rest” is not merely Canaan, but salvation (verse 11).

PSALM 95-II

Frequently used as a call to worship, “it has about it a ring like that of church bells,” says Spurgeon. At first (verses 1-7a), it invites us to worship with a “lively peal,” he notes. But then in verse 7b, as it recalls Israel’s rebellion, it drops “into a funeral knell as if tolling at the funeral of the generation which perished in the wilderness.”

PSALM 96

Sung on the occasion of the transporting of the ark from the home of Obed - Edom to Jerusalem (1 Chronicles 15–16; 2 Samuel 6) it looks beyond that time to the glories of the kingdom of Christ, and especially of the inclusion of the Gentiles in that kingdom. This was the Psalm most commonly turned to by Christians suffering under the persecutions of the Roman emperor, Julian the Apostate, nephew of Constantine (AD 361–363).

PSALM 97

As Psalm 96 celebrates gospel proclamation and worship among the Gentiles, Psalm 97 rejoices in the extending of Christ’s rule to the ends of the earth (verses 1-6), including the defeat of idolatry and false religion (verses 7-9). It concludes with a call to the righteous to holy rejoicing (verses 10-12).

PSALM 98

The 98th Psalm celebrates the coming of the Lord and the establishment of His kingdom. “O sing to the Lord a new song, for He . . . has made known His salvation . . . shout joyfully . . . sing praises . . . before the Lord; for He is coming to judge the earth” (verses 1,2,4,5,9). Isaac Watts in his *The Psalms of David Imitated* (1719) rendered the opening verse,

“Joy to the World! The Lord is come
Let earth receive her King”

The text of his free rendering is evident throughout our more literal metrical version.

PSALM 99-I

The 93rd-100th Psalms celebrate the advent and rule of God. The mood of the 99th is that of solemn reverence before the One who,

“sits enthroned above the cherubim, let the earth quake” (verse 1)

“Holy is He,” the Psalmist repeats (verses 3, 5, 9). Matthew Henry reminds us to see in the references to Old Testament ordinances (seat between the cherubims i.e. the mercy-seat, Zion, cloudy pillar, holy hill) “the types and figures of Evangelical worship.”

PSALM 99-II

The “holy is He” refrain divides the Psalm into 3 parts. Motyer supplies the following outline:

verses 1-3	The grace of the Holy One
verses 4-5	The law of the Holy One
verses 6-9	The fellowship of the Holy One

Moses, Aaron, and Samuel are mentioned not as exceptions, but as typical of those who serve God.

PSALM 100-I

Longfellow, in the epic poem “Courtship of Miles Standish,” refers to Psalm 100 sung to the Old Hundredth as the “grand old Puritan anthem.” The words date to William Kethe in 1561, and the music to the primary composer of the tunes of the *Genevan Psalter*, Louis Bourgeois, published in 1551. It establishes the principle that worship begins with the praise of God:

Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name. (verse 4)

PSALM 100-II

Both Henry and Spurgeon refer to the frequency with which Psalm 100 is sung in the churches. “It is with good reason that many sing this Psalm very frequently in their religious assemblies,” says Matthew Henry, “for it is very proper both to express, and to excite pious and devout affections toward God.” “Let us sing the Old Hundreth’ is one of the every-day expressions of the Christian church, and will be so while men exist whose hearts are loyal to the Great King,” adds Spurgeon. He continues, “Nothing can be more sublime this side of heaven than the singing of this noble Psalm by a vast congregation.”

PSALM 100-III

Upon sighting land on November 2, 1620, the passengers on the Mayflower were led by their religious leader, William Brewster, in the singing of Psalm 100 out of the old Ainsworth Psalter, to the tune we will use, the Old Hundredth.

PSALM 100-IV

Known by its Latin name *Jubilate Deo* (Latin for Be Joyful in God), Psalm 100 identifies where well-ordered worship begins: with the prayer of God:

Enter His gates with thanksgiving, And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him; bless His name. (Psalm 100:4)

PSALM 101

The voice in this Psalm is that of David, who is determined to administer a just reign, personally (verses 1-4), among his officials (verses 5-7), and throughout the whole land (verse 8). “It is an excellent plan or model for the good government of a court, or the keeping up of virtue or piety, and by that means, good order, in it,” says Matthew Henry. Its high aspirations can be applied to anyone running any organization, including heads of households. It is “the house-holder’s psalm,” says Henry. Ultimately, in light of the failures of David and his successors, it points to “the perfect David-to-come,”⁷⁸ the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

PSALM 102-I

The superscription entitles this Psalm “A Prayer of the Afflicted, when he is faint, and pours out his complaint before the Lord.” What begins with complaints because of the reproaches of the enemies of God’s people in verses 1-11, turns to praise and confidence in God’s gracious deliverance of His people in verses 12-28. It is “as eminently expressive of consolation as of desolation,” says Spurgeon.

Verses 24-27 are cited in Hebrews 1:10-12 and applied to Christ, making this a Messianic Psalm. It attributes creation, eternity, and immutability to the Son. One commentator finds “no grander missionary hymn than verses 13-22.”⁷⁹

PSALM 102-II

As David Brainerd, who did so much to spark the modern missionary movement, lay dying at the age of 29, he asked if he and his esteemed visitor, Jonathan Edwards, might sing together a psalm “concerning the prosperity of Zion,” that is, a psalm whose theme was the extension of Christ’s kingdom around the world. This was a subject, according to Edwards, with which “his mind was engaged in the thoughts of, and desires after, above all things; and at his desire we sang a part of the 102nd Psalm.”⁸⁰

PSALM 103-I

Psalm 103 has long been a favorite of Psalm-lovers. It is a companion of Psalm 104 (with similar opening and closing and parallel themes). “In the galaxy of the Psalter these are twin stars of the first magnitude,” says Kidner.⁸¹ H. F. Lyte based his beloved hymn, “Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven” on this Psalm. James Angell James had his family read it every day. The Presbyterians in Scotland frequently sang Psalm 103 in connection with the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

⁷⁸McTyer, p. 551.

⁷⁹Ker, p. 128.

⁸⁰Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1985), 551.

⁸¹II, 364.

PSALM 103-II

“This Psalm calls more for devotion than exposition,” says Matthew Henry, “it is a most excellent Psalm of praise.” Spurgeon identifies it as one of those “all comprehending Scriptures,” which is even “*a Bible in itself*.” It “might alone almost suffice for the hymn-book of the church,” he exclaims.

PSALM 103-III

Spurgeon is euphoric in his praise of Psalm 103:

“As in the lofty Alps some peaks rise above all others, so among even the inspired psalms there are heights of song which overtop the rest. This one hundred and third psalm has ever seemed to us to be the Monte Rosa of the divine chain of mountains of praise, glowing with a ruddier light than any of the rest. It is as the apple tree among the trees of the wood, and its golden fruit has a flavour such as no fruit ever bears unless it has been ripened in the full sunshine of mercy. It is man’s reply to the benedictions of his God, his Song on the Mount answering to his Redeemer’s Sermon on the Mount . . . Our attempt at exposition is commenced under an impressive sense of the utter impossibility of doing justice to so sublime a composition; we call upon our soul and all that is within us to aid in the pleasurable task; but, alas, our soul is finite, and our all of mental faculty far too little for the enterprise. There is too much in the psalm for a thousand pens to write, it is one of those all-comprehending Scriptures which is a Bible in itself, and it might alone almost suffice for the hymn-book of the church.”

PSALM 103-IV

Psalms 103 and 104 appear to be companion Psalms, beginning and closing with the same lines. Psalm 104 is a hymn of creation, Psalm 103 is a hymn of redemption. “In the galaxy of the Psalter these are twin stars of the first magnitude,” says Kidner.⁸² It inspired H. F. Lyte’s “Praise, my soul, the King of Heaven) (1834). Henry speaks of it as “most excellent psalm of praise,” calling “more for devotion than exposition.” Spurgeon calls it “the Monte Rosa of the divine chain of mountains of praise, glowing with a ruddier light than any of the rest.” He calls it “one of those all-comprehending Scriptures which is a Bible in itself, and it might alone almost suffice for the hymn-book of the church.”

PSALM 104-I

C. S. Lewis speaks of this Psalm as “the great Psalm especially devoted to Nature.”⁸³ It celebrates God’s works of creation and providence, exclaiming,

O Lord, how many are Thy works! In wisdom Thou hast made them all; The earth is full of Thy possessions. (Psalm 104:24)

Spurgeon finds “the spirit of ardent praise” throughout the Psalm. “The whole (Psalm) lies before us as a panorama of the universe viewed by the eye of devotion,” he says. The 13th and 14th verses were sometimes thought particularly appropriate for the showers of May and springtime.

⁸²II, 364.

⁸³*Reflections*, 84.

PSALM 104-II

“Variety and breadth, sharpness of detail and sustained vigor of thought, put this Psalm of praise among the giants,” says Kidner.⁸⁴ Sir Robert Grant’s hymn, “O Worship the King,” is a loose paraphrase of this Psalm. We sing it to the tune *Lyons*, associated with that great hymn.

PSALM 104-III

Spurgeon calls Psalm 104 “a poet’s version of Genesis.” Its structure roughly follows the days of creation, as many commentators have pointed out, as follows:

Day 1 – verse 2a

Day 2 – verses 2b-4

Day 3 - verses 5-9; 14-17

Day 4 - verses 19-21

Day 5 - verses 25,26

Day 6 - verses 21-24; 27,28

and ending with a crescendo of Praise (vv 31-35).

PSALM 105-I

We know from 1 Chronicles 16 that Psalm 105 was sung at the time of the offering of the morning sacrifice, along with Psalms 90 and 106. This means that the recounting of salvation history, specifically in Psalm 105 the saving acts of God in the Exodus, was at the center of Israel’s worship.

PSALM 105-II

Psalm 104 celebrates God’s works in creation and providence. Psalm 105 moves on to celebrate God’s works in redemption, specifically in the exodus, where God delivered His people from Egypt. Psalm 106 takes the time line one step further, celebrating the events of the wilderness wandering (Numbers).

PSALM 105-III

1 Chronicles 16:8-22 records the use of Psalm 105, along with Psalms 96 and 106, as a prayer of thanksgiving on the occasion when the ark of the covenant was first placed in the Tabernacle. It centers on God’s faithfulness to Israel amidst the wilderness wandering. Whereas Psalm 104 directs us to praise God for His creation and providence, Psalm 105 directs us to praise God “for His special favors to his church,” says Matthew Henry.

PSALM 105-IV

After an opening section of praise (verses 1-7), Psalm 105 deals with Israel’s history in three stages:

Patriarchal period – through the sojourn in Egypt – verses 7-24

Exodus – verses 25-38

Journey through the wilderness to Canaan – verses 39-44

Motyer concludes,

⁸⁴Kidner, p. 367.

“The survey covers many years but paints one picture: a faithful, promise-making, promise-keeping God; mysterious in his ways but ever mindful of his people, ever planning ahead for their good, ever meeting their needs.”⁸⁵

PSALM 106-I

We know from 1 Chronicles 16 that at the time of the morning sacrifice, Psalm 106 was sung, along with Psalm 105, as a recounting of salvation history. Psalm 105 recalls the saving acts of God in the Exodus; Psalm 106, God’s provision for Israel in the wilderness wandering. Remembering God’s saving acts is at the heart of all biblical worship.

PSALM 106-II

Psalm 106 recalls the exodus and wilderness wandering, contrasting Israel’s unbelief and sin with the LORD’S lovingkindness and faithfulness.

PSALM 107-I

Book V of the Psalter begins with Psalm 107. It contains several important groupings of Psalms:

1. Egyptian Hallel (113-118, sung at Passover)
2. Psalm 119 (a collection of 22 Psalms all by itself)
3. Songs of Ascents (120-134, sung by pilgrims on the approach to Jerusalem)
4. Hallel (145-150, each beginning and ending with “Hallelujah”)

Psalm 107 is a Psalm of thanksgiving, set in the context of distress:

desert wasteland (verses 4-9)
imprisonment (verses 10-16)
afflictions (verses 17-22)
stormy seas (verses 23-32)

The refrain is repeated, which is itself a variation on verse 1.

Let them give thanks to the Lord for His lovingkindness, and for His wonders to the sons of men! (Psalm 107:8; cf verses 15, 21, 31)

Spurgeon identifies its theme as “thanksgiving, and the motives for it,” calling it a “choice song for the redeemed of the Lord.”

PSALM 107-II

The great Scottish missionary to India, Alexander Duff, barely escaped with this life on his first voyage to India, when his ship sunk off the coast of South Africa. His library of 800 books was lost, excepting his Bible and Scottish psalm book, which washed up on the shore. When a sailor brought it to him, Dr. Duff knelt in the sand with the other passengers and read the 107th Psalm.

⁸⁵p. 554.

He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so he bringeth them unto their desired haven. (Psalm 107:29,30 KJV)

PSALM 108-I

Two Psalm endings, 57:7-11 (verses 1-5) and 60:5-12 (verses 6-13) combine to form the 108th. Yet “it is no (mere) anthology,” says Motyer. “David drew on his earlier psalmody and fashioned it afresh for new needs,” he continues.⁸⁶ It opens with thanksgiving (verses 1-6) and ends with the promise of triumph (verses 7-13). The place names in verses 7 and 8 are a way of indicating dominion over the whole land of Israel; Moab, Edom & Philistia (verses 9, 10) are principle enemies over whom victory is promised. Spurgeon entitles it, “The Warrior’s Morning Song.”

PSALM 108-II

Psalm 108 is composed of two previous Psalms, 57:7-11 and 60:5-12, with only minor variations. The places named in verses 7-8 are cited as a means of indicating dominion over the whole land of Israel, and in verse 9 Moab, Edom and Philistia are Israel’s principal enemies over which victory is promised.

PSALM 109-I

Psalm 109 is a complaint (verses 1-5), followed by a long imprecation (verses 6-19), followed by a plea for help (verses 20-29). It concludes with thanksgiving and praise (verses 30,31). The imprecations are severe. C. S. Lewis finds the “spirit of hatred” to be at its “worst” in Psalm 109.⁸⁷

There is no consensus as to how to understand the imprecations. The shift from plural to singular in verses 6-19 lead some to read the verses as the voice of David’s enemies, and typologically, the voice of Jesus’ accusers.

On the other hand, verse 8 is applied by Luke to Judas (Acts 1:16). Following this example, we should understand the Psalms imprecations as aimed “in full force against the implacable enemies and persecutors of God’s church and people, that *will not repent to give him glory*,” says Matthew Henry. Spurgeon would have us understand the imprecations as the Psalmist’s “prophetic denunciation” of the wicked, and in particular one “son of perdition” who he foresees with “prescient eye.” Spurgeon explains further:

“We would all pray for the conversion of our worst enemy, and David would have done the same; but viewing the adversaries of the Lord, and doers of iniquity, as such, and as incorrigible we cannot wish them well; on the contrary, we desire their overthrow, and destruction.”

PSALM 109-II

Though Psalm 109 is “the most outspoken of the imprecatory Psalms” and “has attracted a bad press,” Motyer sees no conflict with the spirit and ideals of the New Testament. The Psalmist

⁸⁶Motyer, p. 558.

⁸⁷ *Reflections*, p. 20.

loves and prays for his enemies (verses 4,5). He does not retaliate. “His response to hurt and malice is to bring it to God in the place of prayer and to leave it there”⁸⁸ (cf. Romans 12:19). If we find the content of his prayer to be too severe we should recognize that he only prays for God to do to His enemies that which He has already promised to do. Motyer continues, “If we retreat into unreality with a general petition where the psalmist ventured to express scriptural realism, we should at least be aware of what we are doing.”⁸⁹

PSALM 109-III

Falsely accused before a corrupt court, the psalmist prays for a reversal of roles and of intended outcomes and the imposition of divine justice. A Psalm of David.

PSALM 110-I

Cited by Jesus, by the Apostles in their early sermons, and by the writers of the New Testament, Psalm 110 is among the most important Messianic Psalms. It is quoted in the New Testament to prove,

1. That Messiah is both David’s son and David’s Lord (Matthew 22:41-45; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44); “hinting,” as it does so, “at the mystery of incarnation by pointing out a difficulty which only it could solve,” says C. S. Lewis;⁹⁰
2. That Jesus ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34-36);
3. That Jesus is superior to the angels (Hebrews 1:13);
4. That Jesus is a priest-king, that His is a royal priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:15ff; cf Genesis 14:17-24).

PSALM 110-II

“This Psalm is pure gospel,” said Matthew Henry. It has been called “the crown of all the Psalms.” It’s opening verse,

The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at My right hand, until I make Thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet,”

is prophetic of Jesus’ ascension and session at the right hand of God (Acts 2:34-36). Its fourth verse,

The Lord has sworn and will not change His mind, “Thou art a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek,”

of Christ’s royal priesthood, a priesthood superior to that of Aaron (Hebrews 7:15ff)

PSALM 110-III

“In singing this psalm we must act faith upon Christ, submit ourselves entirely to him, to his grace and government, and triumph in him as our prophet, priest, and king, for whom we hope to be ruled, and taught, and saved, for ever, and as the prophet, priest, and king,

⁸⁸Motyer, p. 559.

⁸⁹Ibid.

⁹⁰C. S. Lewis, *Reflections*, p. 118.

of the whole church, who shall reign till he has put down all opposing rule, principality, and power, and delivered up the kingdom to God the Father.”

— Matthew Henry

PSALM 110-IV

“This psalm is one of the fullest and most compendious prophecies of the person and offices of Christ in the whole Old Testament,” said Edward Reynolds, one of the Westminster Divines, and later bishop of the Church of England.

PSALM 110-V

When Abraham met Melchizedek, King of Salem (Genesis 14:14-15), he recognized his priesthood and the “Most High God” whom Melchizedek worshiped as his own (Genesis 14:22). Years later Joshua encountered Adonizedek in Jerusalem. (Their names have the same form and same meaning: King of righteousness and Lord of righteousness). This suggests continuation of the priest-kingship in Jerusalem. When David took Jerusalem, he would have sat on Melchizedek’s throne (2 Samuel 5:6-9), “heir to the priestly-kingship validated by Abraham. This would account for Psalm 110,” says Motyer.⁹¹ David, the imperfect priest-king, anticipates our Lord Jesus Christ, who perfectly fulfilled the type of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:15ff).

PSALM 111-I

Psalms 111 and 112 have much in common. Each is an acrostic, each has 22 lines beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, each begins with “Hallelujah” or “Praise the Lord,” and their subject matter runs parallel, this one telling of God, the next of the man of God. The goodness of God’s works is underscored. Spurgeon entitles it, “The Psalm of God’s Works.”

PSALM 111-II

The 111th is a psalm of praise for God’s redemptive works. It is also an acrostic psalm, each of 22 lines starting with the successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

PSALM 112-I

The second of three Psalms that begin with “Hallelujahs,” and the second of two acrostic Psalms (111th), both of which have 22 lines beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The theme of the first is God, and this Psalm, the man of God. Many have seen the 112th as exposition of the last verse of the 111th:

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever. (Psalm 111:10)

Matthew Henry urges us to sing this Psalm with attention to the keys to our happiness as secured through our holiness.

PSALM 112-II

Like Psalm 111, Psalm 112 is an acrostic psalm, but whereas the theme of the 111th is the *works* of God, the theme of the 112th is the *man* of God.

⁹¹p. 560.

PSALM 113-I

The first of the Egyptian “Hallel” Psalms (113-118) sung in connection with the Passover meal (first two before, last four afterward). This is a Psalm of “pure praise,” says Spurgeon, highlighting God’s “greatness and condescending goodness.” He is not only “enthroned on high” (verse 5), but also “raises the poor” and “lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes” (verse 7). Its suitability for Passover observance can be seen, as the people of God recall the Lord’s liberation of an enslaved people and their deliverance into the Promised Land.

PSALM 113-II

The 113th praises God both for his transcendence (verses 1-6), and His presence with His people (verses 7-9). This is the first of what is called the “Egyptian Hallel,” that is, the psalms of praise sung in connection with the Passover observance (Psalm 113-118), undoubtedly sung by Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper (Matthew 26:30, Mark 14:26).

PSALM 114-1

Entitled “Song of the Exodus” by Spurgeon, the 114th Psalm celebrates with what Kidner calls “flights of verbal fancy” the mighty acts of God in delivering Israel from Egypt.⁹² Kidner calls it a “masterpiece,” Spurgeon “sublime,” asserting that “true poetry has here reached its climax.” As we sing it, we look beyond the Exodus to God’s greater acts of redemption in Christ Jesus.

PSALM 114-II

Psalms 113-118 formed a part of the Passover celebration. Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the meals, Psalms 115-118 after. Together they were called “the Egyptian Hallel” and provide a “commentary in song” on Exodus 6:6-7.⁹³ Psalm 114 celebrates the Exodus redemption, when God’s people were His sanctuary (verse 2), when the Red Sea and Jordan River were parted (verses 3,5; Exodus 14:21ff; Joshua 3:14ff) and Sinai was visited with divine manifestations (verses 4,6; Exodus 19:16ff). Yet the same fearsome God before whom the created order shakes also provides for the needs of His people brings water from a rock (verse 8; Exodus 17:1-7).

PSALM 115-1

No Psalm begins without a higher note of praise than does the 115th:

Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory because of Thy lovingkindness, because of Thy truth. (verse 1)

It deals with the constant taunt endured by those who worship an invisible God:

Why should the nations say, “Where, now, is their God?” (verse 2)

The Psalmist answers with the contemptuous description of idols in verses 4-8 (duplicated in Psalm 135:15-18). The futility of idol worship is contrasted with the trustworthiness of Israel’s God in verses 9-18.

⁹²Kidner, 403.

⁹³Motyer, 562.

PSALM 115-II

Non Nobis Domine, “Not to us, O Lord,” was the battle song of King John Sobieski of Poland when he defeated a huge Turkish army at the gates of Vienna on September 12, 1683, the high-water mark of the Muslim advance into Europe.

PSALM 115-III

“During the seventeenth century the followers of the False Prophet swept across the Hellespont, and with lust of blood and fiery sword were laying waste eastern Europe. To the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty, came Sobieski, afterward King John III. of Poland, met the fanatic host of Khotin, turned them back into the sea, lifted high the Cross above the Crescent, and thus forever put an end to the dream of Mohammedan conquest in Europe. When the victory was complete these soldiers of the Lord of Hosts gave tongue to their rejoicing in the words of the One Hundred and Fifteenth Psalm:

Not unto us, Lord, not to us,
But do Thou glory take
To Thy own name, ev’n for Thy truth,
And for Thy mercy’s sake.

With a burst of enthusiasm truly indescribable, the great army took up the final words:

O wherefore should the heathen say,
Where is their God now gone?
But our God in the heaven is,
What pleased Him He hath done.”⁹⁴

PSALM 116

“There is an infectious delight and touching gratitude about this Psalm,” says Kidner.⁹⁵ Another of the Paschal Hallel Psalms (113-118), it seems clearly to refer to Passover observance, and has been often used by Presbyterians in observing the Lord’s Supper.

I shall lift up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. (verse 13)

Matthew Henry calls it a thanksgiving Psalm. It speaks of great trials and gracious deliverances; it is “the personal tribute of a man whose prayer has found an overwhelming answer.”⁹⁶ According to Ker, it served as a burial song for the early church.

Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His godly ones. (verse 15)

Motyer finds the center of Psalm 116 in verses 8-11, where the crisis of afflictions approaching death (verses 1-3) and the cry of prayer (verse 4) are met by faith:

I believed when I said, “I am greatly afflicted.” (Verse 10)

⁹⁴*The Psalms in Worship*, p. 513

⁹⁵Kidner, 407.

⁹⁶Ibid.

The response of thanksgiving follows in verses 12-19.

PSALM 117-I

The shortest “chapter” of the Bible, it is “short and sweet,” says Matthew Henry. While it is “very little in its letter,” says Spurgeon, it “is exceedingly large in its spirit.” The Apostle Paul quotes it to prove that the promises of God in the Old Testament anticipate the Gentiles glorifying God for His mercy:

And again, “Praise the Lord all you Gentiles, and let all the peoples praise Him.”
(Romans 15:11; Psalm 117:1)

“All nations,” and “all peoples” shall laud and praise God for His lovingkindness (*hesed*) and His truth.

PSALM 117-II

The 117th Psalm was once called “Dunbar’s Psalm” because of the role it played in the Battle of Dunbar, where Cromwell decisively defeated the royalist Scots army in 1650, as described below:

“The Psalms were ever on the lips of Cromwell and his invincible Ironsides in the Puritan struggle for liberty. They sang them as they marched; and as they marched, they conquered. During the night before the battle of Dunbar rain and sleet fell incessantly upon the unprotected Puritan host. Drenched with the rain, stiffened by the cold, faint from hunger, as the darkness melted into dawn, they crept through the cornfields where they had bivouacked, and when at last the rising sun burst over St. Abb’s head, with the shout upon their lips, ‘Let God arise, and let His enemies be scattered,’ (Psalm 68) they leaped to the attack, and the enemy, taken by surprise, were thrown into confusion and a precipitate flight that became a complete rout. After a pursuit and punishment lasting eight hours, a halt was made, only long enough, however, to allow the Puritans to sing the shortest of all the Psalms, the One Hundred and Seventeenth, when the pursuit was resumed with fresh vigor.”⁹⁷

PSALM 118-I

Among the most clearly Messianic of the Psalms, the 22 verse,

The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone

was cited by Jesus to the chief priests and elders (Matthew 21:42), by Peter before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:11), and in his first epistle (1 Peter 2:7,8), in each case identifying Jesus as the rejected stone which became the corner stone.

In addition the multitudes cried out verses 25 and 26 on Palm Sunday as Jesus entered Jerusalem,

“Hosanna to the Son of David,
Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord;

⁹⁷*The Psalms in Worship*, pp. 513, 514.

Hosanna in the highest!” (Matthew 21:9)

PSALM 118-II

This Psalm was often a favorite of Christian armies and monarchs, especially in times of battle. It was sung by the army of William of Orange when he landed at Torbay, en route to the English throne in the Glorious Revolution of 1688, in a service conducted by William Castares (1649-1715), a leading minister of the Church of Scotland.

PSALM 118-III

Luther said of the 118th:

“This is my psalm, my chosen psalm. I love them all; I love all Holy Scripture, which is my consolation and my life. But this psalm is nearest my heart, and I have a familiar right to call it mine. It has saved me from many a pressing danger, from which nor emperor, nor kings, nor sages, nor saints could have saved me. It is my friend, dearer to me than all the honours and power of the earth.”⁹⁸

PSALM 118-IV

The 118th is the last of the Hallel Psalms (113th-118th) sung to conclude the Passover celebration. It seems to have been sung at the dedication of the foundation of the temple in Ezra 3 (verses 10,11 record the first and last sentences of this Psalm, from which it may be concluded that the whole Psalm was sung.)

PSALM 118-V

“In the religious wars of France the Psalms became the Huguenots “Marseillaise.” They sounded as the war- cry above all the battlefields of Coligny and Henry of Navarre. Before the battle of Courtras (October 20, 1587), falling upon their knees, the Huguenots chanted the One Hundred and Eighteenth Psalm:

“This day God make; with cheerful voice
In it we’ll triumph and rejoice.
Save now, O Lord, we plead with Thee;
Lord, send us now prosperity.” (vv 24,25)

Pointing to the kneeling host, a certain young gallant said to the commander of the Catholic forces, “See, the cowards are afraid; they are confessing themselves.” To which a scarred veteran made answer, “Sire, when the Huguenots behave like that, they are getting ready to fight to the death.” And as if to make good the veteran’s declaration, leaping from their knees, with Henry at their head, they swept on to decisive victory.⁹⁹

PSALM 119-I

The longest of the Psalms, it is also “from the literary or technical point of view . . . the most formal and elaborate of them all,” says C. S. Lewis.¹⁰⁰ It consists of 22 eight-verse sections, each section labeled by and each verse in the section beginning with the succeeding letter of the

⁹⁸Prothero, p. 122.

⁹⁹*The Psalms in Worship*, p.513.

¹⁰⁰*Reflections*, p. 58.

Hebrew alphabet: Aelph, verses 1-8; Beth, verses 9-16; Gimel, verses 17-24; etc. Contrasting it with Psalm 18, which is “a sudden outpouring of the heart,” Lewis says Psalm 119 “is a pattern, a thing done like embroidery, for the love of the subject and for delight in leisurely, disciplined craftsmanship.”¹⁰¹

PSALM 119-II

The Psalmist celebrates the Law of God using its synonyms over and over again: law, word, statutes, commandments, testimonies, ordinances, precepts, etc. His outlook on the law is similar to his approach to poetry: “both involved exact and loving conformity to an intricate pattern,” says C. S. Lewis. He loves and delights in and wonders at the law of God. “The Order of the Divine mind, embodied in the Divine Law, is beautiful. What should a man do but try to reproduce it, so far as possible, in his daily life?” says Lewis, summarizing the perspective of the Psalmist.¹⁰²

PSALM 119-III

Kidner calls this a “giant among the Psalms.”¹⁰³ For Motyer it is “an inexhaustible treasury.”¹⁰⁴ “This is a psalm by itself, like none of the rest; it excels them all, and shines brightest in this constellation,” says Matthew Henry. Spurgeon cites W. Simmons who called it “a star in the firmament of the psalms, of the first and greatest magnitude.” It is an acrostic Psalm, with each successive Hebrew letter introducing an eight-verse section, each verse of which begins with that letter. Spurgeon, again citing W. Simmons, who calls it “a spiritual alphabet framed and formed according to the Hebrew alphabet.” Its highly organized structure may be contrasted with its thematic incoherence. “Like Solomon’s proverbs, it is a chest of gold rings, not a chain of gold links,” says Henry. Only five of its 176 verses fail to repeat one of many synonyms for God’s word (e.g. law, statutes, precepts, commandments, etc.).

PSALM 119-IV

“This sacred ode is a little Bible, the Scriptures condensed, a mass of Bibline, Holy Writ rewritten in holy emotions and actions. Blessed are they who can read and understand these saintly aphorisms; they shall find golden apples in this true Hesperides, and come to reckon that this Psalm, like the whole Scripture which it praises, is a pearl island, or, better still, a garden of sweet flowers.” — C. H. Spurgeon

PSALM 120-I

The first of the fifteen Songs of Ascents (Psalms 120-134) (Psalms believed to be used by pilgrims as they journey up to Jerusalem at festival times), Psalm 120 begins the series with the pilgrim in a distant land, in Meshech, to the far north, and Kedar, among Arab neighbors of Israel to the southeast (verse 5). Coupled together in this way they represent “the Gentile world, far and near, in which Israel is dispersed,” says Kidner. The pilgrim finds himself, says Kidner, amidst alien company, “as foreign as the remotest peoples, and as implacable as his Arab kinsmen.”¹⁰⁵ In this hostile setting, the Psalm is a cry to God for help.

¹⁰¹*Reflections*, pp. 58,59.

¹⁰²*Reflections*, p. 59.

¹⁰³II, p. 416

¹⁰⁴p. 566

¹⁰⁵Kidner, 431.

PSALM 120-II

Psalm 120 marks the transition from the longest of the Psalms (119th) to a series of short Psalms known as the “Songs of Ascents,” called by Motyer “possibly the loveliest single group of Psalms in the whole psalter.”¹⁰⁶ “Suddenly we have left the continent of the vast Hundred and Nineteenth Psalm for the islands and islets of the Songs of Degrees (Ascents),” says Spurgeon. Sung by pilgrims journeying up to Jerusalem, the 120th reminds us that those who seek to worship God in spirit and truth can expect opposition from the ungodly.

PSALM 121

A “song of ascents” written for pilgrims on the ascent to Jerusalem. The pilgrim lifts his eyes to the hills, to Jerusalem and the Temple, and beyond them to God who is his keeper and help. Spurgeon names it “a Psalm to the Keeper of Israel.” For generations the people of God have been comforted in knowing that while they sleep, the Keeper of Israel “will neither slumber nor sleep” (verse 4). In both Scotland and in the United States it has long been associated with the tune “Dundee.”

PSALM 122

This “brief but spirited Psalm” (Spurgeon) marks the arrival of the pilgrim within the gates of Jerusalem. After enduring much trouble and danger in getting there (Psalms 120,121), his joy is overflowing,

I was glad when they said to me, “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” (verse 1)

Likewise, preeminent is his esteem (verses 3-5) and concern for Jerusalem (verses 6-9). We sing this Psalm, as Matthew Henry says, with “an eye to the gospel church, which is called the ‘Jerusalem that is from above.’”

PSALM 123-I

The pilgrim traveler has been ascending, looking up to the hills (Psalm 121), then to the temple (Psalm 122), and how he lifts his eyes above his worldly setting to the God who is “enthroned in the heavens” (verse 1). He likens himself to the servant and the maid, looking constantly to their master for some sign of favor or some opportunity for service (verse 2). Spurgeon calls it “the Psalm of the eyes.” At the same time the psalmist suffers from the contempt of the proud who mock the religious (verses 3,4). Matthew Henry says that as we sing it

“we must have an eye up to God’s favor, with a holy concern, and then an eye down to men’s reproach, with a holy contempt.”

PSALM 123-II

The eyes in this “Psalm of the Eyes” (Spurgeon) represent “longing, need, expectancy,” says Motyer.¹⁰⁷ Servants look to their masters, but we, the earthly church, look to the Lord for the grace that we need to face our enemies.

¹⁰⁶Motyer, 572.

¹⁰⁷p. 573.

PSALM 124-I

In Scotland this was at one time known as “Durie’s Psalm.” Here is the story

“The year was 1582, and Scotland was in the midst of a political and religious conflict which shook its church to the foundations. The issue at hand was: Does the King have authority over the Church, or is the Church answerable only to God?

“John Durie was one of the many men who became embroiled in this conflict, and, like many, he suffered hardship as a result of his position. Durie’s belief that the Church was answerable only to God led to a decision by the Privy Council on May 23, 1582 to remove him from his parish and exile him from Edinburgh.

“A few months later, however, Durie was permitted to return to the city, and on September 4, 1582, he was joyfully greeted by a great crowd of people when he entered the gates of Edinburgh. Calderwood’s History recounts what happened.

‘At the Nether Bow they took up the 124th Psalm, “Now Israel may say, and that truly,” and sang it in such a pleasant tune, in all the four parts, these being well known to the people, who came up the street bareheaded and singing, till they entered the kirk. This had such a sound and majesty as affected themselves and the huge multitude of beholders who looked over the shots and forestairs with admiration and amazement. The Duke [Lennox, an enemy of Durie,] himself was a witness, and tare his beard for anger, being more affrayed at this sight than anything he had ever seen since he came to Scotland. When they entered the kirk Mr. Lawson made a short exhortation in the reader’s place to thankfulness, and after the singing of a psalm the people departed with great joy.’ ”¹⁰⁸

PSALM 124-II

A “Song of Ascents” (sung by pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem), Kidner associates it with David’s ascent to the throne and the attempt of the Philistines to destroy his monarchy in its infancy (2 Samuel 5:17ff). The danger it speaks of is very great, the people of God are about to be overwhelmed, and would have been, “had it not been the LORD who was on our side.” It ends with a summary statement which became the standard “call to worship” among the Reformed churches:

Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth. (verse 8)

PSALM 124-III

This “Song of Ascents” speaks of a great deliverance of the people of God when they were at the brink of ruin. It points us beyond God’s deliverances of us from particular dangers to His

¹⁰⁸*Trinity Psalter: Music Edition*, p. 293. The “Calderwood” referred to is David Calderwood (1575-1650), and his *History* is *The True History of the Church of Scotland*. It was written in the 1640’s, and published posthumously in the Netherlands in 1678. James Melville (1556-1614) recorded a similar account of this event in his diary entry in 1582.

ultimate rescue of us from sin and hell through our Lord Jesus Christ. “From all confidence in man may we be rescued by a holy reliance upon our God,” concludes Spurgeon.

PSALM 124-IV

Psalms 124 presents four pictures of danger facing the people of God: earthquake (3b, cf Numbers 16:30), flood (4a), beast (6), and fowl (7). From these threats the people of God emerge unscathed with their enemies destroyed. Verses 1 and 8 tell why: because the LORD, who made heaven and earth, is on our side. “Only a God of total, sovereign and worldwide command (8) could have done such things—and this god is *the LORD* committed to and unfailingly on the side of his people (1-2).”¹⁰⁹

PSALM 125-I

As the pilgrims ascend to “Mount Zion” (verse 1), to “the mountains that surround Jerusalem” (verse 2), they see beyond the scenery to the Lord in whom they place their trust, who “surrounds his people” (verse 3). In the Lord, they are “as Mt. Zion” and “cannot be moved.” Ker reports that it was frequently sung by both the Scottish Presbyterians and the French Huguenots in times of danger.

PSALM 125-II

The sixth of the “Song of Ascents” likens the safety of the people of God to the stability of Mount Zion, the LORD surrounding His people even as the mountains surround Jerusalem.

PSALM 126

A “Song of Ascents” (Psalms 120-134), verses 1-3 recall a sudden, unanticipated, dream-like deliverance of God from some hardship, whether famine, plague, siege, or captivity. Verses 4-6 plead for a present deliverance using two differing pictures of restoration. First, to be restored “as the streams in the South” (Negev) (verse 4) is to be restored suddenly, as in the bounty brought by a desert storm. Second, to “sow in tears” (verse 5) recalls the hard toil, delay, and slow progress of farming, finally followed by joyful harvest. Christians may sing it recalling their deliverance from captivity in sin, whether instantly or in stages, and rejoice in the harvest they enjoy in Christ.

PSALM 127-I

Psalms 127 teaches us both the foundation of the family (and all of life):

Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it; (verse 1)

and of the fruit of faithful family living:

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; the fruit of the womb is a reward. (verse 3)

Spurgeon calls it “The Builder’s Psalm.” He says, “We are here taught that builders of houses and cities, systems and fortunes, empire and churches all labour in vain without the Lord; but under the divine favour they enjoy perfect rest.”

¹⁰⁹Motyer, 573.

PSALM 127-II

“In singing this Psalm we must have our eye up unto God for success in all our undertakings and a blessing upon all our comforts and enjoyment, because every creature is that to us which he makes it to be and no more”—Matthew Henry

PSALM 127-III

“127 covers three areas of human activities and potential anxiety – the house, the city (1) and the family (3-5) – and affirms that without the Lord we can do nothing. Vs 1–2 seem to suggest ‘Leave it all to God; let go and let God’, and enjoy a restful life. But in the Bible, the opposite of rest is not work but restlessness, and 3–5 add a corrective. The Lord has ordained the human activities of begetting, conceiving and bearing. Yet, the Bible insists, it is not human but divine agency that ‘opens the womb’ or, indeed, ‘closes’ it (Gn. 29:31;30:2). Children are not our achievement but his gift (3). So is a completed house and a guarded city (1–2). All life must be lived to the full, all its joys enjoyed and its duties performed in unworried reliance on him who is the doer of all. Joyful activity, toilsome activity – but full of untroubled rest.”¹¹⁰

PSALM 128-I

Matthew Henry classifies this as a “family Psalm.” Like Psalm 127, the 128th speaks of the blessings of God in this world upon the family of the man who fears God. His work shall *prosper* (verse 2), his wife will be *fruitful* (verse 3a), his children *plentiful* (verse 3b), and the blessing of God shall extend to his *children’s children* (verse 6). “We must sing this Psalm in the firm belief of this truth,” says Matthew Henry, “that religion and piety are the best friends to outward prosperity.”

PSALM 128-II

Psalm 127 tells how the “house” or family is to be built, Psalm 128 “draws a picture of that house built,” says Spurgeon. It is a family hymn, particularly suited for a wedding, a birth, a baptism, or other family occasion. It “rings with happiness,” says Motyer.¹¹¹

PSALM 129-I

A “Song of Ascents” (Psalms 120-134), Israel is exhorted to recall its persecutors and God’s deliverances. “Whereas most nations tend to look back on what they have *achieved*, Israel reflects here on what she has *survived* (my emphasis),” notes Kidner.¹¹² The plowed furrows of verse 3 refer to the wounds of a scourged man, a metaphor for suffering Israel. “Zion” (verse 5) is Jerusalem, “the city of our God” (48:1), even “His abode” (68:16). Christians sing this Psalm as citizens of what Matthew Henry calls “Gospel-Israel,” which “has weathered many a storm and is still threatened by many enemies.” The tune, Old 110th, is an adapted Genevan tune of Louis Bourgeois, written in 1551.

PSALM 129-II

Verses 1-4 speak of what Israel has survived. Verses 5-8 pray, or even prophesy of what will become of her enemies, whether ancient Egypt, the Philistines, Assyrians, or Babylonians.

¹¹⁰Motyer, p. 574.

¹¹¹Motyer, 574.

¹¹²Kidner, p. 444.

PSALM 130-I

“De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine, prayed Javier Ruperéz, Spain’s ambassador to the U.S., at St. Matthew’s Cathedral in Washington, D.C. on March 15, in the aftermath of the March 11, 2004 terrorist attack in Madrid that claimed 200 lives: “Out of the depths, I call to you, O Lord” (verse 1). A penitential Psalm (along with 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, and 143), Luther considered it a “Psalmi Paulini,” a “Pauline Psalm,” because of the clarity with which it expresses the soul’s journey from conviction of sin to justification by faith.

PSALM 130-II

The Puritan John Owen wrote an extensive exposition of this Psalm, three-fourths of which is taken up with the 4th verse. “But there is forgiveness with Thee, that Thou mayest be feared.” His exposition had a profound impact on both John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards.

PSALM 130-III

The sixth of the seven penitential Psalms (preceded by 6, 25, 32, 38, 51) it is also the eleventh of the “songs of Ascents,” that is, of the songs sung by pilgrims preparing for worship while journeying to the temple in Jerusalem. It was considered by Luther a “Pauline Psalm” because of the clarity with which it displays the doctrine of justification by faith.

PSALM 131-I

This Psalm describes the childlike trust that is to characterize the child of God (cf. Matthew 18:1-4). A “weaned child” is a child who “no longer frets for what it used to find indispensable,” says Kidner.¹¹³ He is “like a child grown past the instinctive demands and fretfulness of infancy and now content, as a toddler, simply to be with mother,” says Motyer.¹¹⁴ Perhaps written at a time when David was accused by King Saul of being an overreaching, vainly-ambitious man who sought to usurp his throne, David appeals to God, that he has aimed at nothing high or great (verse 1).

PSALM 131-II

Spurgeon calls Psalm 131 “one of the shortest to read but one of the longest to learn.” It is “a short ladder if we count words,” he observes, “but yet it rises to great height, reaching from deep humility to fixed confidence.”

PSALM 132-I

Motyer calls this “beautifully constructed poem,” apparently written by one of David’s descendants, a “meditation on 2 Samuel 7” (575). There David proposed to build the Lord a house, and God countered that, no, He would build David’s house. This Psalm may be outlined as follows:

- vv 1-7 A prayer that the LORD would remember David’s oath to build His house
- vv 8-10 A prayer that the promise of God’s presence, represented by the ark, might be fulfilled (see perhaps 1 Chronicles 15 or 2 Chronicles 5:2ff; cf. 2 Chronicles 6:41ff)
- vv 11-18 A reminder of the promises of the covenant to David, that He will build David’s house and dwell amongst his descendants (see especially verse 14)

¹¹³Kidner, Vol. 2, p. 448.

¹¹⁴Motyer, p. 575.

“In singing this psalm we must have a concern for the gospel church as the temple of God,” says Matthew Henry, “and a dependence upon Christ as David our King, in whom the mercies of God’s are sure mercies.”¹¹⁵

PSALM 132-II

The thirteenth “song of Ascents” the pilgrim recalls the promises that God’s presence would be known in the temple and that David’s descendants would rule from Zion forever, a promise fulfilled in Christ.

PSALM 133-I

A “song of Ascents” (songs sung by pilgrims on their journey to Jerusalem at festival time), this Psalm celebrates the rich fellowship enjoyed by like-minded pilgrim believers. The “precious oil” of verse 2 and the “dew of Hermon” in verse 3 are both elements that refresh the weary. Harmony among believers does this: it refreshes, revitalizes, strengthens. The KJV added this explanatory heading: “The benefit of the communion of saints.”

PSALM 133-II

The fourteenth “song of Ascents” is a prayer by the pilgrim for unity and refreshing fellowship among those worshiping at Zion.

PSALM 134-I

An evening Psalm, the last of the “Psalms of Ascents” (Psalms 120-134, believed to be sung by pilgrims on their journey from Jerusalem and the temple). The “night” refers to evening prayer (1 Chronicles 23:30). “Lift up your hands” refers simply to the worshipers’ posture in prayer, not to a physical response to high inspiration. Some have seen in this Psalm an antiphonal structure: verses 1, 2 sung by pilgrims to the Levites; verse 3 sung by the Levites in response. Spurgeon suggests that it was sung antiphonally as the pilgrims left the temple for home, verse 3 being the Levites departing benediction.

PSALM 134-II

The fifteenth and final “song of Ascents,” is a call to worship, the pilgrims calling the priests to “bless the LORD” (verses 1, 2) who in turn bless the assembled worshipers (verse 3).

PSALM 135-I

Psalm 135 is a hymn of praise to God for His works in providence and redemption. It mocks the idols of the nations (verses 15-18), in language which is almost identical to that found in Psalm 115:4-6,8. Much of the language of the Psalm is drawn from other places, yet, as Spurgeon says, it is “full of life, vigor, variety, and devotion.”

PSALM 135-II

Following immediately upon the “Pilgrim Praise” of the “Songs of Ascents” (as Psalms 120-134 identify themselves), Psalm 135 “traces the steps of the great foundational pilgrimate from Egypt to Canaan,” says Motyer.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵Henry, p. 741.

¹¹⁶Motyer, p. 576.

PSALM 136-I

Known as the Great Hallel (“the great Psalm of Praise”) in the Jewish tradition, “it contains nothing but praise,” observes Spurgeon. It may be outlined as follows:

verses 1-3	Praise to God for His supremacy
verses 4-9	Praise for the Creator
verse 10-26	Praise the Redeemer (redemption from Egypt)

The great truth of which it sings is that God’s “lovingkindness is everlasting,” that is, His love is unchanging. Milton based his hymn, “Let us with a gladsome mind,” written when he was 15, upon this psalm.

PSALM 136-II

The Trinity Psalter version of Psalm 136 may be traced to John Craig (c. 1512-1600), colleague of John Knox, and was first found in the Scottish Psalter of 1564 (along with Psalms 145 and 143).

PSALM 137-I

Spurgeon finds this to be “one of the most charming compositions in the whole Book of Psalms for its poetic power.” The setting of this Psalm is the exile in Babylon. “Even line of it is alive with pain,” says Kidner.¹¹⁷ The Psalm appeals to God to repay the Babylonians according to the principle of the *lex talionis*, even as He has already promised to do (Jeremiah 51:56). What do they deserve? The degree of suffering that they have inflicted on others.

Kidner finds the last verse “appalling,” C. S. Lewis “devilish.” “Let those find fault with it who have never seen their temple burned, their city ruined, their wives ravished, their children slain,” says Spurgeon. “They might not, perhaps, be quite so velvet mouthed if they had suffered in this fashion.” Spurgeon suggests it be viewed as prophesy of what actually happened, as Babylon came to be “scourged with her own whip of wire.”

Timothy Dwight based his “I Love Thy Kingdom, Lord” upon this Psalm.

PSALM 137-II

Matthew Henry counsels us to comfort ourselves as we sing/read this Psalm “in the prospect of the deliverance of the church and the ruin of its enemies, in due time, but carefully avoiding all personal animosities, and not mixing the leaven of malice with our sacrifices.” The captives, he notes (as he divides the Psalm),

- cannot enjoy themselves (verses 1,2)
- cannot humor their proud oppressors (verses 3,4)
- cannot forget Jerusalem (verses 5,6)
- cannot forgive Edom & Babylon (verses 7-9)

PSALM 137-III

Motyer sets the context of Psalm 137 in Jerusalem among the recently returned exiles. They recall their captivity, how their captors demanded that they sing (verse 3) but they could not, for “the Lord’s songs are statements of truth and acts of worship, not items in a concert.” In verses 7-

¹¹⁷Kidner, II, 459

9 the Psalmist cries for justice. Motyer explains:

“The psalmist asks nothing about Babylon but notes (and who can contradict him?) that when Babylon is treated in the same manner as Babylon treated Jerusalem, it will be right. The Judge of all the earth (Genesis 18:25) will have acted (Romans 2:5-6). (Verse) 8 recognizes the justice of what Babylon did to Jerusalem (you have done, ‘you repaid’). The ruins they see evidence the justice with which the world is run by a Holy God; that justice will be Babylon’s portion. (Verse) 9 records the savagery of Babylonian ‘justice’ (cf. 2 Kings 8:12; Isaiah 13:16; etc) and as they did so it will be done to them. Does the Psalmist say he wants it to be so? No, only that it will be so. That is the sort of world we live in under God.”¹¹⁸

PSALM 138-I

The first of 8 Davidic Psalms which conclude his contribution to the Psalter, nothing is known of the occasion of this Psalm. What we do know is “that prayer was answered in a way that gave David new vitality so that he wanted to sing the Lord’s praise into the face of every so-called ‘god’” (cf. v. 1-3).¹¹⁹ The psalmist was quiet before his taunters in Psalm 137. “Here we see the excellence of a brave confession,” says Spurgeon.

PSALM 138-II

Psalm 138 is a hymn of praise in which David celebrates answered prayer. He does so by praising God in the face of false gods and his enemies.

PSALM 139-I

This Psalm beautifully contemplates the omniscience and omnipresence of God, not in the abstract, but in a way that is deeply personal. J. A. Motyer summarized its theme as “No escape and no regrets.” As the Psalmist considers the ever-present, all knowing Creator, such knowledge, he says, is “wonderful” (verse 6) and “precious” (verse 17). Troubled by the imprecations of verses 19-22? Motyer’s words are poignant:

“To say that the cry for judgement is astray from the Jesus of Lk. 23:34 is to forget the Jesus of Mt. 7:23; 25:41, 46a; Rev. 6:15ff – the biblical dimension of the wrath of God. Maybe if we matched the spirituality of verses 1-18 we would be in a position to judge the morality of 19-24. Indeed if we shared his commitment to moral emotions (21) and his unreserved commitment (23-24) we would find no other words possible. If these verses shock, the fault is more likely in us. Were we under threat as David was, we would better appraise his words; but, deeper than we are in suffering, he was also higher in holiness. To side with God is to identify with the totality of his revealed character and ways.”¹²⁰

PSALM 139-II

Motyer divides Psalm 139 as follows:

verses 1-6	–	God the all knowing
verses 7-12	–	God the all present

¹¹⁸Motyer, 577-78.

¹¹⁹Motyer, p. 578.

¹²⁰J. A. Motyer, “Psalms,” *New Bible Commentary*, 21st Century Edition, p. 579.

verses 13-18 – God the all creating
verses 19-24 – God the all holy

His exposition of verses 19-24 is especially insightful:

“The verses are in three pairs. **19-20** Identifying with the Lord. Since he will slay the wicked in his own time, I will separate from them now. **21-22** Siding with the Lord. They hate him; I hate them. **23-24** Pleasing the Lord. Come into my heart with full divine scrutiny; take control of my ways to eradicate and direct.”¹²¹

Kidner adds this helpful comment on verses 19-22:

“For all its vehemence, the hatred in this passage is not spite, but zeal for God.”

PSALM 139-III

Notice that Psalm 139 affirms the humanness of the unborn.

For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb.

God’s creative work in the womb began with the “inward parts,” the *kilyah*, defined by the commentators as the “seat of emotions . . . character” or the “inward man.” What is first formed in the womb is the fundamental element of the personality, thus, “Thou didst weave *me*.” He continues: “My frame was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret and skillfully wrought . . . Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance (“unformed body”—NIV); and in Thy book they were all written, the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.” Notice the Psalmist numbers among his allotted days those when he was still “unformed substance” (*golem*), a word which refers to the “unformed embryonic mass” (Hengstenberg). Notice also the personal pronouns. “I” was made in secret; it was “my” substance; they were days ordained for “me.” One’s humanity begins not at birth, but in the womb, in the very beginning stages of development.

PSALM 140-I

“The single theme of malicious intrigue dominates this psalm,” says Kidner.¹²² Spurgeon entitles it “The Cry of the Hunted Soul.” “Few short Psalms are so rich in the jewelry of precious faith,” he continues. Verses 1-5 describe the plots and schemes of the wicked; verses 6-11 plead for divine deliverance. Verse 3 is quoted in Romans 3:13 as the culmination of the Apostle Paul’s proof of the universality of human depravity.

PSALM 140-II

Motyer sees in Psalms 140-145 a “linked Davidic group,” united together in Psalm 142 by the context of David’s “bad experiences with Saul.”¹²³ He divides the psalm into two prayers and affirmations:

verses 1-7 – prayer for protection from enemies

¹²¹Motyer, p. 579.

¹²²II, 468.

¹²³Motyer, 579.

verses 8-13 – prayer for disaster to be visited upon enemies

PSALM 141-I

Kidner finds a “Puritan vigor and single-mindedness” about this Psalm, which he characterizes as “a prayer against insincerity and compromise.”¹²⁴ We note that David orders his prayers according to the pattern of the daily sacrifices: morning (Psalm 5:3) and evening (141:2). His is a “disciplined devotion,” says Kidner, suited to a disciplined godliness which prays,

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips. (verse 3);

and even invites the rebukes of the righteous (verse 5).

PSALM 141-II

Motyer identifies Psalm 141 as a prayer under the provocation of enemies. He divides it as follows:

verses 1-4	–	effective prayer
verses 5,6	–	sustained prayer
verses 7-10	–	sheltering prayer

PSALM 142-I

As St. Francis of Assisi lie dying, his brethren sang Psalms to him. Repeatedly he returned to Psalm 142 as one for which he had a special fondness. Written, according to the superscription, when David was “in a cave,” hiding no doubt from Saul (e.g. 1 Samuel 22:1, 24:3), it teaches us “how to order our prayer in times of distress,” says Spurgeon. “The gloom of the cave is over this Psalm,” he continues, “and yet as if standing at the mouth of it the prophet-poet sees a bright light a little beyond.”

PSALM 142-II

Like Psalm 57, the superscription of Psalm 142 indicates that David wrote this Psalm while “in the cave,” in flight from Saul. But its mood is very different. Psalm 57 is “bold and animated,” as Kidner points out. But here David is troubled, even overwhelmed (verses 2,3). “It teaches us principally by example how to order our prayer in times of distress,” says Spurgeon.

PSALM 143-I

Last of the seven penitential Psalms (Psalms 6, 25, 32, 38, 51, 130, 143). The Psalmist says,

. . . for in Thy sight no man living is righteous. (verse 2b)

Aside from this one verse, it is hard to say why it was classified with the penitentials. “It seems to us rather martial than penitential,” says Spurgeon. He labels it “the outcry of an overwhelmed spirit,” which, as Matthew Henry describes it, is “full of complaints of the great distress and danger he was in.”

¹²⁴Kidner, II, 470.

PSALM 143-II

David pleads to be heard in prayer in verses 1-4, recalls God's faithfulness in the past in verses 5 & 6, and then eleven petitions for deliverance may be found in verses 7-12, culminating in the cry for his enemies destruction. "There are circumstances (like David's) where there is no deliverance without destruction," says Motyer, "and to pray for the one is to pray for the other."¹²⁵

PSALM 144-I

"There is a warrior's energy in this psalm," notes Kidner.¹²⁶ He calls it a "mosaic" of phrases taken from other psalms, most notably Psalm 18. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) called for the 2nd Crusade (1147-49) in a sermon based on verse 1:

Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle;
(verse 1)

PSALM 144-II

Psalm 144 answers the complaints and despair of Psalms 140-143, with the arrival of what Motyer calls "the long-awaited morning."¹²⁷ He divides it into 3 sections:

verses 1-4	–	Thanksgiving for past deliverances
verses 4-11	–	Pleas for present deliverance
verses 12-15	–	Prayer for future prosperity

PSALM 145-I

The 145th is a great hymn of praise, the last designated as a Psalm of David in the Psalter. It is "the crown jewel of praise," says Spurgeon, celebrating God's greatness and goodness, His kingdom and power, His providence and mercy. "It is altogether praise," says Spurgeon, "and praise pitched in a high key." It is an alphabetical Psalm, excepting the letter nun. The version we sing is based on that of John Craig, a colleague of John Knox, and was first published in the Scottish Psalter of 1564.

PSALM 145-II

The 145th Psalm is an alphabetic acrostic, though omitting the letter nun (n). This has caused the commentators and critics some consternation. Motyer rather sees theological meaning:

"... we should at least consider that the poet deliberately omitted one letter in order to indicate that, not even with the help of revelation, can the human mind fully grasp the glories of God."¹²⁸

PSALM 146-I

The final five Psalms begin and end with "Hallelujah," as they bring the Psalter to a close. Spurgeon calls this a journey through "the Delectable Mountains." "All is praise to the close of the book." Verses 1-5 describe the happiness of those who trust in God, not man; verses 5-10

¹²⁵Motyer, 580.

¹²⁶Kidner, II, 477.

¹²⁷Motyer, 580.

¹²⁸Motyer, p. 581.

provide reasons for trusting in God, found in His works and ways. One commentator identifies its message as “The Gospel of Confidence.”

PSALM 146-II

The last five psalms begin with the word, “Hallelujah,” or “praise the Lord” and so have been called the “Great Hallel,” bringing the psalter to a close with a crescendo of praise. Psalm 146 praises the Lord’s trustworthiness.

PSALM 147-I

Kidner divides this Hallel (“Hallelujah” or “Praise the Lord”) Psalm into 3 sections:

verses 1-6	praise for the God who redeems
verses 7-11	praise for the God who cares
verses 12-20	praise for the God who commands

“It is easy,” says Matthew Henry, “in singing this psalm, to apply it to ourselves, both as to personal and national mercies.” Henry then adds this caution: “were it but as easy to do so with suitable affections.”

From verse 18 came the motto chosen to celebrate England’s victory over the Spanish Armada: Affavit Deus (Wind of God).

PSALM 147-II

The second of the psalms of the “Great Hallel,” the setting of Psalm 147 may be the post-exile period in which Jerusalem was being rebuilt. It extols the greatness of God.

PSALM 148-I

The final five psalms of the psalter all begin with “hallelujah” or “praise the Lord” (as the Hebrew may be rendered), and move progressively from individual praise (146) to congregational praise (147) to creation praise (148) to kingdom praise (149) to universal praise (150). Beginning with the angels in heaven (verses 1,2) and descending to the various creatures on earth (verses 3-10), calling upon all the families of earth (verses 11-13) and finally the chosen people Israel (verse 14), Psalm 148 summons all creation to “praise the LORD” (verses 1,14).

PSALM 148-II

“As a flash of lightning flames through space, and enwraps both heaven and earth in one vestment of glory, so doth the adoration of the Lord in this psalm light up all the universe, and cause it to glow with a radiance of praise. The song begins in the heavens, sweeps downward to dragons and all deeps, and then ascends again, till the people near unto Jehovah take up the strain” (Spurgeon).

PSALM 148-III

Psalm 148 calls upon all creation to “praise the LORD.” It may be divided as follows:

verses 1-6	Heavenly creatures are called upon to praise the LORD
	– both intelligent beings (verses 1-2)
	– and unintelligent (verses 3-6)

- verses 7-14 Earthly creatures are called upon to praise the LORD
- both unintelligent (verses 7-10)
 - intelligent (verses 11-13)
 - and especially God’s own people (verse 14)

PSALM 149-I

Psalm 148 is a Psalm of praise to God, the creator. Psalm 149 is a psalm of praise to God the redeemer. In particular it celebrates victory over the enemies of Israel. Kidner divides the Psalm in two:

the church jubilant (verses 1-5);
and the church militant (verses 6-9).

The military metaphors of verses 6 and 7 represent “the extension of the kingdom of peace . . . the spreading gospel,” says Motyer.¹²⁹ The Psalm anticipates the establishment of Messiah’s kingdom, when Christ goes forth conquering, and to conquer (Revelation 6:2).

PSALM 149-II

The fourth psalm of the “Great Hallel,” verses 6-9 suggest a martial setting, perhaps as a song sung in celebration of a military victory. Like Psalm 148, it is a summons to worship.

PSALM 150-I

“We have now reached the last summit of the mountain chain of Psalms. It rises high into the clear azure, and its brow is bathed in the sunlight of the eternal world of worship. It is a rapture. The poet-prophet is full of inspiration and enthusiasm. He stays not to argue, to teach, to explain; but cries with burning words, ‘Praise him, Praise him, Praise ye the LORD.’” (Spurgeon)

PSALM 150-II

Each of the last five Psalms begins with the call to “Praise the Lord.” Thirteen times the word “praise” is used in Psalm 150. Kidner points out that while each of the first four books of the Psalms ended in doxology, the fifth rounds off the whole Psalter with an entire psalm of praise. Its “brevity” he finds “stimulating.” He calls it “a sustained fortissimo of response.”¹³⁰ Its purpose, suggests Matthew Henry, may be to show what is the purpose of all the Psalms, that is, “to assist us in praising God.”

¹²⁹Motyer, p. 583.

¹³⁰Kidner, p. 490.

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ON THE PSALMS GENERALLY

“A Psalms is the calm of souls, the arbiter of peace: it stills the stormy waves of thought. It softens the angry spirit and sobers the intemperate. A Psalm cements friendship; it unites those who are at variance; it reconciles those who are at enmity. For who can regard as an enemy the man with whom he has joined in lifting up one voice to God? Psalmody therefore provides the greatest of all good things, even love, for it has therefore invented concerted singing as a bond of unity, and fits the people together in the concord of one choir. A psalm puts demons to flight; it summons the angels to our aid; it is a weapon in the midst of alarms by night, a rest from the toils of day; it is a safeguard for babes, a decoration for adults, a comfort for the aged, a most fitting ornament for women. It makes deserts populous and market-places sane. It is an initiation to novices, growth to those who are advancing, a confirmation to those who are being perfected. It is the voice of the church; it gladdens festivals, it creates godly sorrow. For a Psalm calls forth tears from a stony heart. A Psalm is the employment of angels, heavenly converse, spiritual incense. What mayest thou not learn thence? The heroism of courage; the integrity of justice; the gravity of temperance; the perfection of prudence; the manner of repentance; the measure of patience; in a word every good thing thou canst mention. Therein is a complete theology; the prediction of the advent of Christ in the flesh, the threatening of judgment, the hope of resurrection, the fear of chastisement, promises of glory, revelations of mysteries; all, as in some great public storehouse, are treasured up in the Book of Psalms.” – **Basil the Great** (330–379)

Chrysostom (c.349–407) also tells how the Psalms enlivened the life of believers in his day: “David is always in their mouths, not only in the cities and in the churches, but in the courts, in the mountains, in the deserts, in the wilderness.”

Council of Braga (350 A.D.) made the following enactment: “Except the Psalms and hymns of the Old and New Testaments, nothing of a poetical nature is to be sung in the church.”

“The voice of Christ and His Church is well-nigh the only voice to be heard in the Psalms.” – **Augustine** (354–430)

“We intend after the example of the prophets and primitive Fathers to turn the Psalms into the vulgar tongue for the common people, so that the Word of God may remain among the people even in singing.” – **Martin Luther** (1483–1546)

“Above all this, the book contains divine and helpful doctrines and commandments of every kind. It should be precious and dear to us if only because it most clearly promises the death and resurrection of Christ, and describes His kingdom, and the nature and standing of all Christian people. It could well be called a ‘little Bible’ since it contains, set out in the briefest and most beautiful form, all that is to be found in the whole Bible, a book of good examples from among the whole of Christendom and from among the saints, in order that those who could not read the whole Bible through would have almost the whole of it in summary form, comprised in a song booklet.” – **Martin Luther** (1483–1546), *Preface to the Psalms*, 1528

“Moreover, men, women, and children should be exhorted to exercise themselves in Psalms, that

when the Kirk doth convene and sing they may be the more able together with common hearts and voices to praise God.” – *The First Book of Discipline of the Kirk of Scotland*, 1560

“The main subjects of these songs were the glorious things of the Gospel, as is evident by the interpretation that is often put upon them, and the use that is made of them, in the New Testament. For, there is no one Book of the Old Testament that is so often quoted in the New as the Book of Psalms. Here Christ is spoken of in a multitude of songs.” – **Jonathan Edwards** (1703–1758)

I want a name for that man who should pretend that he could make better hymns than the Holy Ghost. His collection is large enough: it wants no addition, it is perfect, as its author, and not capable of any improvement. Why in such a case would any man in the world take it into his head to write hymns for the use of the Church? It is just the same as if he was to write a new Bible, not only better than the old, but so much better, that the old may be thrown aside. What a blasphemous attempt! And yet our hymn-mongers, inadvertently, I hope, have come very near to this blasphemy; for they shut out the Psalms, introduce their own verses into the Church, sing them with great delight, and as they fancy with great profit; although the whole practice be in direct opposition with the blessing of God. – **William Romaine** (1714–1795), “An Essay on Psalmody,” *Works* (London: T. Chapman, 1796), Vol. VIII, p. 465.

“There is nothing in true religion – doctrinal, experimental, and practical – but will present itself to our attention whilst we meditate upon the Psalms. The Christian’s use of them in the closet, the minister’s in the pulpit, will generally increase the growing experience of the power of true religion in their own hearts.” – **Thomas Scott** (1747–1821)

If there is any one thing connected with the manner of conducting the religious services of the Sabbath by the Puritan forefathers of New England which we ought to imitate or restore, is that of singing – of singing the Psalms, of singing the Psalms by a choir consisting of the whole congregation, both young men and maidens, old men and children.” – **Lowell Mason** (1792–1872)

“With additional light which has been under the Christian revelation, the Psalms have not been superseded. The Christian looks to the Psalms with an interest as intense as did the ancient Jew . . . They will retain their value in all time to come, nor will there ever be in our world such advance in religious light, experience, and knowledge, that they will lose their relative place as connected with the exercise of practical piety. David is the Psalmist of eternity; a thousand eulogies have been uttered over these hymns of the heart, these soul songs of all God’s children.” – **Albert Barnes** (1798–1870)

“To this day the Psalter stands as the great treasury of praise and prayer, the authentic liturgy of the Church, which can never grow obsolete; which presents every varying mood of holy experience; and by its divine flexibility and expansion is equally suited to every revolving period of the body of Christ.” – **J. W. Alexander** (1804–1859), *God is Love* (1860; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 93,94.

“. . . in their wonderful modulations from confession to praise, (the Psalms) suit themselves to all

conditions of believers and the church.” – **J. W. Alexander** (1804–1859), *God is Love* (1860; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 93,94.

“There can be conceived no mode of singing God’s praise, more simple, grave, impressive and truly Protestant, than the chanting of the very words of Scripture by all the voices of a congregation.” – **J. W. Alexander** (1804–1859), *God is Love* (1860; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1985), 93,94.

“The Book of Psalms, standing midway between both covenants, and serving equally to the members of each as the handmaid of a living piety, is a witness of a living piety, is a witness of the essential identity of their primary and fundamental ideas. There the disciples of Moses and of Christ meet as on common ground, the one taking up as their most natural and fitting expressions of faith and hope the hallowed words which the other had been wont to use in their devotion ages before, and then bequeathed as a legacy to succeeding generations of believers.” – **Patrick Fairbairn** (1805–1874), *Typology of Scripture*

“All the wonders of Greek civilization heaped together are less wonderful than is the simple Book of Psalms – the history of the human soul in relation to its Maker.” – **William Gladstone** (1809–1898)

“There are a great many hymns that tell us to praise God and that tell us about praising God; but how few hymns of uninspired writers contain the very thing itself and burst forth in high jubilation. How little literature there is that is suited to the purposes of praise, except David’s spiritual Psalms and Hymns, which not only pour out to God everything the soul can command, but summon the angels, the heavens, the earth, the elements, mountains and hills, trees, beasts, kings, prophets, priests, and all people, and the everlasting spheres to praise Him.” – **Henry Ward Beecher** (1813–1887)

Dean Stanley (1815–1881), in his lectures on the “History of the Jewish Church,” says, “In the first centuries the Psalms were sung at the love-feast and formed the morning and evening hymns of the primitive Churches. ... They were sung by the plowmen of Palestine in the time of Jerome; by the boatmen of Gaul in the time of Sidonius Apollinaris . . .”

“The Psalter is the first hymn-book of the Church, and it will outlive all other hymn-books. Its treasury of pious experience and spiritual comfort will never be exhausted.” – **Dr. Philip Schaff** (1819–1893)

Dr. W. G. Blaikie (1820–1899), of Scotland, after comparing the Psalms with hymns of other religions, and having shown, as he expresses it, their “towering preeminence,” concludes his discussion as follows, “The Psalms have proved real forces in human life, enlightening, guiding and comforting, strengthening and purifying character, teaching men’s hands to war and their fingers to fight, inspiring the faith that removes mountains, and the hope that even in the lowest depth of adversity waits patiently for the dawn The Psalms cannot be of mere human manufacture. Reason itself demands for them a higher origin. They are like the stars,

‘Forever singing as they shine:
The Hand that made us is divine.’”

“The Psalter may be regarded as the heart-echo to the speech of God, the manifold music of its wind-swept strings as God’s breath sweeps across them.” – **Alexander Maclaren** (1826–1910)

“The Book of Psalms instructs us in the use of wings as well as words; it sets us both mounting and singing. Often have I ceased my commenting upon the text, that I might rise with the Psalm and gaze upon visions of God.” *The Treasury of David*, by **C. H. Spurgeon** (1834–1892)

“In these busy days it would be greatly to the spiritual profit of Christian men if they were more familiar with the Book of Psalms, in which they would find a complete armor for life’s battles and a perfect supply for life’s needs. Here we have both delight and usefulness, consolation and instruction. Of every condition there is a Psalm and suitable and elevating. The Book supplies the babe in Christ with penitent cries and the perfected saint with triumphant songs. Its breadth of experience stretches from the jaws of Hell to the gates of Heaven. He who is acquainted with the marches of the Psalm country knows that the land flows with milk and honey, and he delights to travel therein.” – **C. H. Spurgeon** (1834–1892)

“(The Psalms) are like some marble staircase, trodden by myriads of feet, yet unworn and clear-cut still, up which we too may pass from the blessedness of the initial verse to the ringing hallelujahs that peal out their inspired anthems in the closing sentence of this Golden Book of the inner life.” – **F. B. Meyer** (1847–1929)

“More than any other book, the Psalms have influenced human life and action, have inspired writers for their best work, have been the most familiar to the great men of all time, have most comforted humanity in times of trial, and have been most intimately associated with the momentous events of history. With the singing of the Psalms the Pilgrim Fathers set sail in the *Mayflower*; the Bay Psalm Book was the third (sic) book printed in America; till the end of the eighteenth century the Psalms were exclusively sung in the Churches; in 1787 Benjamin Franklin, quoting Psalm cxxvii., moved that the Convention that was framing the Constitution for the United States should offer prayer for divine aid in their difficult work. If you could have one book, many would say: The one book would be the Psalms, in which is included, as Heine says, ‘The whole drama of humanity.’” *The Psalms in Human Life*, by **Rowland E. Prothero** (1851–1937)

Dr. Henry Van Dyke (1852–1933), in “the Story of the Psalms,” has very beautifully described their striking adaption to meet the needs of various classes and conditions. He says: “With the music of the Psalms the shepherd and plowmen cheered their toil in ancient Palestine; and to the same music the Gallic boatmen kept time as they rowed their barges against the swift current of the Rhone. A Psalm supplied the daily grace with which the early Christians blessed their food; and the same Psalm was repeated by the communicants as they went to the Lord’s Table. St. Chrysostom, fleeing into exile; Martin Luther, going to meet all possible devils at Worms; George Wishart, facing the plague at Dundee; Wycliff, on his sick bed, surrounded by his enemies; John Bunyan, in Bedford gaol; William Wilberforce, in a crisis when all his most strenuous efforts seemed in vain, and his noble plans were threatened with ruin – all stayed their hearts, and renewed their courage, with verses from the Psalms. The Huguenots at Dieppe marched to victory chanting the Sixty-Eighth Psalm; the same stately war-song sounded over the field of Dunbar. It was a Psalm that Alice Benden sung in the darkness of her Canterbury dungeon; and the lips of the Roman Paulla, faintly moving in death, breathed their last sigh in the

words of a Psalm. The motto of England's proudest university is a verse from the Psalms; and a sentence from the same Book is written above the loneliest grave on earth, among the snows of the Arctic Circle. It is with the fifth verse of the Thirty-First Psalm that our Lord Jesus Christ commended His soul into the hands of God; and with the same word St. Stephen, St. Polycarp, St. Basil, St. Bernard, St. Louis, Huss, Columbus, Luther, and Melancthon - yea, and many more saints, of whom no man knoweth, - have bid their farewell to earth and their welcome to heaven. And so it is that these Psalms come to us with a power and a sweetness which has grown through all the centuries, a life precious and manifold. But not this alone; for they breathe also the fragrance of all that is highest and best in the mortal."

"As a child Jesus heard these psalms sung; as a child He joined the 'grown-ups' in singing them. When He attended the feast of the Passover as a lad, the Hallel fell upon His ear. Who can tell? Perhaps the questions the twelve-year-old Jesus put to the teachers in the temple concerned texts and issues drawn from the Hallel and from the hymns which the pilgrims sang upon entering Jerusalem. As a child, then, Jesus grew up by the psalms; as perfect man He grew *towards* the psalms. As a man He has now grown into maturity *with* the psalms and before the eyes of God."
- **Klaas Schilder** (1890-1952)

"Whenever the Psalter is abandoned, an incomparable treasure vanishes from the Christian church. With its recovery will come unsuspected power." - **Dietrich Bonhoeffer** (1906-1945), *Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1970), 26.

The Psalms are God's songs for a Church militant as yet, in the very thick of the conflict "twixt truth and falsehood, and the good and evil side." Consequently, here and there through them we discover the devotional and ethical giving way to the martial note, and the ear catches the call to arms, the tramp of marching armies, the noise of battle, the shout of the conqueror, and the despairing wall of the conquered. Quite fittingly, therefore, these Psalms have been treasured in the heart and written upon the banners and sounded upon the lips of God's militant host, whose age-long cry has been, "Give me liberty, or give me death." - *The Psalms in Worship*, 1907, p. 513

The Fathers of the Early Church, like Origen, and Jerome, and Ambrose, and Augustine, loved them; through the Dark Ages the monk in his monastery cell as he gave himself unceasingly to their chanting was comforted by them; martyr after martyr as they went to the flames or the rack leaned upon them. They have been the home-songs of countless multitudes whose names history does not record; they have been the heart-songs of humanity. They have lived longer than any other songs; they have broken through the limitations of age and race and creed to a greater degree than any other songs; they have comforted more saints amid the fires of persecution than any other songs; they have interwoven themselves into more characters than any other songs; they have formed the dying utterances of more of God's people than any other songs. As we join our voices in the singing of them to day we are indeed joining our voices with a great multitude such as no man can number - a multitude of the most godly and the most heroic souls this world has ever known. - *The Psalms in Worship*, 1907, p. 525

If it were asked, "What have the Psalms done?" I would answer, for one thing they have made men - men heroic mold, of lofty faith, of fearless soul, who bowed the knee to none save God,

and loved their liberty more than they loved their lives. Of them it might be said, as Lelievre, the Frenchman, writes of the Huguenots – for the character of Puritan and Huguenot was of the same fine moral fiber: “the effect of the Psalms on the character of the Huguenots was wonderful. They nourished the moral life of a race of men such as the world will perhaps never see again.” Yes, the world would be infinitely poorer without these Puritans – worshippers of God, haters of unrighteousness, singers of Psalms, great nation-builders. – *The Psalms in Worship*, 1907, p. 515-516

The Psalms in America are a part of the national heritage, since they were so closely identified with its early history, wrought so mightily into the lives of those who made it, and have entered so largely into the religious experience and practice of the people from the first day to this. In the hour when the Pilgrim Fathers were about to sail from Leyden, not in quest of the Golden Fleece, not in search of the fabled wealth, but to find a haven of liberty and lay the foundations of a mighty nation, kneeling on the sands of Deift Haven, after prayer by the minister commending them to the God of the winds and the waves, they all joined in singing Luther’s favorite Psalm, the Forty-Sixty,

“God will our strength and refuge prove,
In all distress a present aid;
Though waters roar and troubled be,
We will not fear or be dismayed,”

and then sailed away in the Speedwell. To the strains of a similar Psalm the Mayflower spread her sails for her perilous journey across the seas. Arriving at the shores of the New World on the Sabbath, a day holy to the Lord among these Puritans, they spent the day aboard the ship in the customary acts of religious worship, a part of which was the singing of the Psalms. Thus the first sacred song that ever went echoing along that “rock-bound coast,” or broke the stillness of slumbering forests, was one of the old Hebrew Psalms which David, twenty-five centuries before, was accustomed to waken the echoes amid the hills and valleys of Judea. On the morrow, as those men stood, axe in hand, confronting the savage growths of a new continent and the unknown dangers from still more savage men and beasts, to the singing of a Psalm there was laid the foundation-stone of the great Republic forever dedicated to “the service of civil liberty and the religion of the Protestant Church.” What men they were, those pioneers of American history! – *The Psalms in Worship*, 1907, p. 515

If the harp of David presided at the laying of the foundation-stone of the nation, not less were its notes distinctly heard when the “coping-stone of American independent” was securely placed. the Constitutional Convention, which met at Philadelphia in 1778, during its early sessions was rife with dissensions; mutual distrust and jealousy seriously retarded its work, and the obstructive tactics of those opposed to the union of the colonies became so great as to draw from Washington, its President, the declaration, “It is all too probable that no plan which we propose can be adopted.” At this juncture Benjamin Franklin arose and offered his historic notion that henceforth “prayers imploring the assistance of heaven and its blessings upon our deliberations be made every morning in this assembly before proceeding to business,” and concluded a most eloquent plea in its behalf by quoting these words from the One Hundred and Twenty-Seventh Psalm, “Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.” And almost from that hour the Assembly went steadily forward with its task and ultimately produced a document

forever immortal. Indeed, throughout colonial times and the early formative period of the nation the Psalms left their impress upon human thought, shaped ideals, molded public opinion, colored the literature, and even reflected themselves in the laws. – *The Psalms in Worship*, 1907 p. 516

For Protestant England the history of missions to the heathen begins with John Eliot, the son of a Hertfordshire yeoman. By means of his metrical version of David's Psalms in their own dialect he sang his way into the hearts of the red men of the New England forests. From Eliot and Brainerd William Carey traced his spiritual lineage; from them Henry Martyn caught his inspiration and David Livingstone drank in long draughts of his spiritual enthusiasm. – *The Psalms in Worship*, 1907, p. 523

Calvin's Implementation of Metrical Psalm-Singing in Geneva

“Moreover, that which St. Augustine has said is true, that no one is able to sing things worthy of God except that which he has received from Him. Therefore, when we have looked thoroughly, and searched here and there, we shall not find better songs nor more fitting for the purpose, than the Psalms of David, which the Holy Spirit spoke and made through him. And moreover, when we sing them, we are certain that God puts in our mouths these, as if He Himself were singing in us to exalt His glory. Wherefore Chrysostom exhorts, as well as the men, the women and the little children to accustom themselves to singing them, in order that this may be a sort of meditation to associate themselves with the company of angels.” – **John Calvin** (1509–1564), *Preface to the Psalter*, 1543

The distinctive musical contribution of the Reformed Churches to Christendom has been the congregational singing of the Psalms. The Lutherans sang hymns. The late-medieval church choirs sang Latin renderings of the Psalms using Gregorian tunes. The early Swiss Reformers (Zwingli, Farel) did not sing at all. The movement to promote Psalmody in the Reformed churches was in this sense unprecedented. It also “had no element of spontaneity,” says hymnologist Louis Benson. “It was not even a popular movement, but the conception of one man's mind and the enterprise of one man's will.” That enterprising, innovative man was none other than John Calvin.

Calvin's program of reform was disrupted by his banishment along with William Farel in April of 1538. He appealed to the Synod which met at Zurich, compromised on a number of points, but held fast on two. First, communion should be administered more frequently. Second, the singing of Psalms should be made a part of public worship. His return to Geneva was contingent on the acceptance of these two principles. “It excites a certain surprise,” says Louis Benson, “. . . that at such crisis in church affairs he should make the inauguration of Psalmody the *sine qua non* of his return to Geneva.” For Calvin, the singing of the Psalms was an essential element in the life and health of the church.

The congregational singing of Psalms was central to Calvin's whole program of liturgical reform. Yet as Benson points out, “it was the element of the program for which he found least sympathy among his colleagues and least preparation among the people.” Strategically then, he proposed to begin with the children. In 1542, a “singing school” was established and a teacher hired to teach

the children of Geneva “to sing the Psalms of David.” Beginning with the children the Reformed church learned to sing the newly rhymed and metered words, and newly composed music.

When Calvin returned from banishment in Geneva in 1541, he immediately obtained permission from the Town Council to introduce Psalm-singing into the public worship. The task of putting the Psalms in singable form, having already begun a few years before, was continued. Clement Marot, a court poet and leading lyricist of that day, provided renderings for the first 30 Psalms, Theodore Beza the remaining 120. Louis Bourgeois wrote 83 original melodies. An unknown hand contributed tunes for most of the remaining Psalms, and the goal was nearly achieved of providing one tune for every Psalm. The work progressed slowly. Not until 1562, some 24 years after its inception, was the *Genevan Psalter* finally complete.

One could argue that the *Genevan Psalter*, the prototype of all subsequent of Psalters, has been the most used “hymnbook” in the history of the church. As Calvinistic Reformation spread, so did the practice of congregational Psalm-singing. The Reformed churches in France, the Netherlands, and Germany, as well as the Presbyterian church in Scotland and later the Puritan churches in America, were all exclusively Psalm singing until the beginning of the 19th Century. In the French and Dutch churches, the old Genevan settings and tunes are still used extensively four hundred and fifty years later!