

that of the whole; at the same time a discovery of the instrumentalities and the occasions of producing the Psalms, certainly, is fitted to help greatly in the right understanding of them.

And here it is proper to advert to some Hebrew terms which in our translation are retained along with the titles of the Psalms. Some Psalms are entitled *Michtam*, that is, *golden*, and are supposed to be so called because it is thought they were originally written in golden letters on account of their particular beauty. Others are styled *Mithqil*, which, as such Psalms are especially calculated to give instruction, at the word signifies. *Mizmorim* is an Hebrew name indicating a Psalm of consecration, or an elegy. *Mizmorim* means meditation, denoting that the Psalm furnishes special matter for that exercise. Respecting the title *Nehal*, which occurs very frequently, there has been a variety of opinions. Some consider it a musical note pointing out some change in the singing or playing; others regard it as marking something emphatic, and worthy of being specially attended to. In the Greek translations of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, it is rendered by a word signifying a rest or pause. It is plainly not a component part of any sentence where we meet with it, and as its precise meaning or use cannot now be found out, we may just let it alone. *Neginoth*, *Nehiluth*, *Shemunoth*, *Githuth*, seem to refer to particular musical instruments, some played with the fingers, others with the breath, which were used along with the Psalms to which they are prefixed.

The Psalms are all of that species of poetry called *lyric*, that is, adapted to music, from an instrument usually in common use, the *lyre*. Among the Jews, and also the first Christians, they do not seem to have been sung just as we do, but rather *chananted*, that is, repeated in a slow, solemn, musical manner. That they were intended to be used musically, while the particular mode of doing it is not prescribed, is evident. Proper music combined with suitable words, is a powerful assistant to devotional feeling and exercise, and to piety in the heart. It composes, pleases, and elevates the soul, giving greater effect to the sentiments which are expressed, and to the emotions they should excite.

The Poetry in the Psalms is of various character. Some of them are highly impassioned, others more grave and composed. Some of them give utterance to the strongest feelings of sorrow, or of joy, of apprehension or of desire, and not unfrequently do we find a great intensity in the same Psalm. The commencement of it expressing the writer's natural feelings under the influence of the circumstances in which he is placed; and the latter part of it containing the language of his faith and personal confidence, when looking to the mercy and goodness of Jehovah as his God and Friend. Some of the Psalms are didactic in power, that is, they have it more particularly for their object to teach truth, "delivering great maxims of life, or the precepts of religion, in solemn, but for the most part simple, strains." For example, the longest of them all, the 119th, and likewise the other alphabetical Psalms, so called because each verse or stanza begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, in successive order. Of these, including the 119th, there are eight. About one-seventh of the Psalms are elegiac, or well adapted to positions on mournful subjects. Such are what are called *penitential Psalms*, or those which relate to the distresses, griefs, fears, and mental depression of the Psalmist, whatever they may be. Some Psalms are enigmatic, or parabolic, stating important religious doctrine in a striking figurative manner, very easy to be understood by those who are willing to learn. In short, this book presents to us a wide diversity of composition and topics, and thus it is richly fitted to afford the Christian saint both thought and language, well suited to his condition whatever it is, whether prosperous or adverse, joyous or grievous, and especially when his situation is trying. The Psalms, therefore, independent of their poetical beauties and excellencies, which are unequalled both in respect of style and particularly of sentiment, constitute an ample storehouse, a precious and inexhaustible treasury, from which we may derive all that we need for instruction and comfort; for the direction of our faith and hope, for raising us above the world, and enabling us to make God our grand dependence and our portion for ever.

There is an important question relative to the meaning of the Psalms which deserves particular notice. The question is, What is their full import? Are we to restrict it to the obvious and literal sense? Or are we to extend it further, seeking a deeper spiritual significance? Some, both among ancient and modern expositors, particularly Bishop Horne, in his ingenious preface to his commentary on the Psalms, contend for the latter mode of understanding them, as affording the proper key to unlock and place before us all the rich ore which they contain. They strenuously allege that Messiah is personified in the person, life, work, and kingdom of David, the author of the Psalms; that they all testified of and are applicable to Him, in their full bearing, besides their primary and literal sense. That a considerable number of those relate to our Lord Jesus Christ, and were prophetic of his coming into the world, and of what he was to undergo and accomplish, is certain, for we have proof of this in the New Testament; there have his own testimony and that of his Apostles, and where they lead without doubting we may safely follow. The 2nd, 5th, 16th, 22nd, 24th, 30th, 40th, 45th, 63rd, 69th, 72nd, 85th, 89th, 109th, 110th, 118th, 135th, 136th, 137th, 138th, 139th, 140th, 141st, 142nd, 143rd, 144th, 145th, 146th, 147th, 148th, 149th, 150th, 151st, 152nd, 153rd, 154th, 155th, 156th, 157th, 158th, 159th, 160th, 161st, 162nd, 163rd, 164th, 165th, 166th, 167th, 168th, 169th, 170th, 171st, 172nd, 173rd, 174th, 175th, 176th, 177th, 178th, 179th, 180th, 181st, 182nd, 183rd, 184th, 185th, 186th, 187th, 188th, 189th, 190th, 191st, 192nd, 193rd, 194th, 195th, 196th, 197th, 198th, 199th, 200th, 201st, 202nd, 203rd, 204th, 205th, 206th, 207th, 208th, 209th, 210th, 211st, 212th, 213th, 214th, 215th, 216th, 217th, 218th, 219th, 220th, 221st, 222nd, 223rd, 224th, 225th, 226th, 227th, 228th, 229th, 230th, 231st, 232nd, 233rd, 234th, 235th, 236th, 237th, 238th, 239th, 240th, 241st, 242nd, 243rd, 244th, 245th, 246th, 247th, 248th, 249th, 250th, 251st, 252nd, 253rd, 254th, 255th, 256th, 257th, 258th, 259th, 260th, 261st, 262nd, 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dow the history of the Jews is a fundamental part of revealed religion. Many were, probably, composed on occasions of remarkable passages in David's life, his dangers, his afflictions, his deliverances. But of those which relate to the public history of the natural Israel, there are few in which the fortunes of the mystical Israel, the Christian Church, are not adumbrated, and of those which relate to the life of David, there are none in which the *Son of David* is not the principal and immediate subject. David's afflictions are *Messiah's* sufferings, David's penitential supplications, the supplications of *Messiah* in agony. David's songs of triumph and thanksgiving, are *Messiah's* songs of triumph and thanksgiving for his victory over sin, death and hell. In a word, there is not a page in this book of Psalms in which the pious reader will not find the Saviour, if he read with a view of finding him, and it was just eunuchism upon it that came from the pen of one of the early fathers, that it is a complete system of Divinity for the use and edification of the common people of the Christian Church.

There can be no doubt that there is much of *Christ* in the Psalms; they are cited more frequently in the New Testament as referring to him than to any other book in the Old Testament; but whether they all apply to him, directly or indirectly, is another matter. There does not seem Scripture reasons for thinking that they do. Oh! may the Holy Spirit, by whose suggestion and guidance these admirable compositions were penned, as a most rich and invaluable donation to the Church of God in all ages, open our understandings to understand them truly and extensively, and enable us to make that use of them which will improve of them by which they will be brought to us with spiritual benefit and enjoyment, for which we shall have cause to praise God fervently, world without end.

These remarks, which have been lengthened more than was intended, but which so far from exhausting the rich subject, only throw a few faint beams upon it, shall now be closed by a brief statement of some rules which they who wish to study the Psalms to advantage will do well to follow:

1. We should endeavour to *find* out the general scope and design of each Psalm. In this we may obtain some aid from the title which is prefixed, when there is one. But as these inscriptions are not always to be depended on as genuine and accurate, we should set ourselves to a diligent and attentive consideration of the Psalm itself, and thus try to ascertain as clearly as possible its leading import; and by humble and patient research, and seeking divine teaching, much may be done, indeed, all that is necessary for profiting to our souls.

2. We should compare the Psalms historically, that is, we should compare those of them which appear to call for this with the narratives of the Old Testament, especially those which relate to David, and to the Jews in general, from the origin of their monarchy, to their return from the Babylonian captivity. In particular, the two books of Samuel are of great importance for illustrating the Psalms, to many of which they may be regarded as a sort of key.

3. Such references to the Psalms as are to be found in the New Testament, we should carefully examine, as these will afford us the general import of the Psalms in question, however short we may be of fully understanding others; and as has been already hinted, we have this great advantage with regard to not a few Psalms.

4. Wherever we can do it, we should ascertain, as well as possible, the author of the Psalm under consideration. This most evidently much subserve our understanding it; and the more familiar we become with the historical books of the Old Testament, and particularly with the occurrences of David's eventful life, the more enable will we be to decide upon the author of such a Psalm, and when it was composed. See, therefore, reflecting reader, how valuable it is to know the Scriptures thoroughly, as a mighty help to comprehending each part of them.

5. We should especially be concerned to read and ponder the Psalms, and indeed the whole of Scripture, in a pious and devotional frame of mind, and with constant prayer to God, that he would illuminate us, opening the eyes of our mind to see the wondrous things in his word;—that he would spiritualize our affections;—that he would so qualify us that we might be enabled to apply his word to our own hearts with truth. Unless our Scripture exercises are of this character, they are unwholesome, not pleasing to God, and without substantial profitableness and saving good to us; and if we fall of becoming wise unto salvation through faith in Christ Jesus, by means of the holy Scriptures, with which we are so highly favoured, we come short—of what? Oh true blessedness here and hereafter; and ours shall be the condemnation of knowing, or having had it fully in our power to know, our Lord's will;—that he would so qualify us that we might be enabled to apply his word to our own hearts with truth. 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