

THE PSALMS

A THEOLOGICAL
COMMENTARY

VOLUME ONE

INTRODUCTION

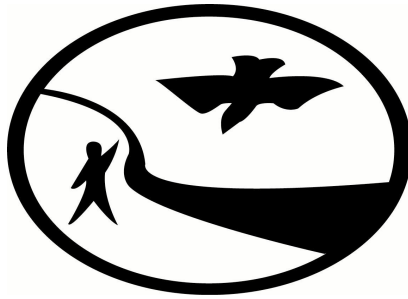
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PREFACE

The Psalms have always been special for both Jews and Christians. In Biblical times the Psalms formed the very backbone of Israel's worship to their God. The Church has used the Psalms in various ways: Christians have not only used them for their personal and corporate worship over the centuries, but also to inform them as they created new forms of worship – hymns and liturgies, for example.

In our modern day, however, Christian worship makes use of the Psalms only in marginal ways. We've strayed away from the old hymns that relied on the doctrinal teachings of the Psalms; as a result, we know little (or care little!) for what the Psalms are really saying. Most churches in fact have even dispensed with the old hymns of Church tradition. We now occasionally use the book of Psalms for devotional literature, and only a few select passages at that – positive emotional expressions that make us feel comforted and loved. Most of the Psalms describe an ancient culture that we don't understand anymore. In fact most of the subject material of the Psalms would offend modern churchgoers, with its seemingly vengeful and warlike God who focused on issues that mean nothing to us.

But the Psalms were not created by man; they were created by God. David *learned* this

truth from his God and wrote down what God revealed to him.

All this he [*God*] made clear to me in writing from the hand of the LORD, all the work to be done according to the plan. (1 Chronicles 28:19)

David learned how to approach Israel's God, and he learned what issues were on God's heart. He was passionate about God's will being fulfilled on earth. He knew what the people of Israel had to do to please their God; he wrote things that would truly glorify God. The LORD put David in this critical place in history just for this very purpose – to inform the Israelites (and us) about the kind of worship that identified, and glorified, the only God. The Mission? To bless the people of God with the Covenant Promises first given to the Patriarchs, in strict accordance with the Law of God, by means of a divinely structured Kingdom on earth.

The Psalms weren't an option for God's people, they were *mandatory*. And if we want to please God, this is how we also must worship him. It's a pattern for the entire Church – past, present and future.

So when today's worship leaders ignore the Psalms and formulate a new kind of worship that reflects our present culture's changing fads, they are ignoring God's commands to their spiritual harm. We may be enjoying ourselves in our modern "worship" services, but we aren't

going to get anywhere with God if we don't approach him according to the pattern that David first learned. The King of kings must be feared and worshiped – *his* way.

The main reason we don't understand David's God is that we don't understand the issues of the Old Testament. David was working with a thousand years of Israel's history; Israel had a rich relationship with God that meant a great deal to them, physically and spiritually. So if we want to know their God, we can't ignore the Old Testament, or just pick and choose a few favorite themes from its stories. We have to go back to the beginning and learn its fundamental lessons. As we do this, David's Psalms will then make more sense to us. If we don't do that, they will only continue to be an empty form for our own worship, but basically unintelligible and subjective.

The purpose of this Commentary is to bring out that rich spiritual heritage of Israel's history and watch David use it in his worship as it was designed both for individuals and for the congregation. We need to take seriously the fact that these Old Testament concepts form the eternal foundation for Christ's Church as well. David wasn't just seeing God in Heaven; he was learning about the eternal Son who stands before his Father and glorifies him in a way that is pleasing to him. Our great High Priest taught

David and others what life is really like in God's presence.

If we want to worship David's God, we have to take David's hand and let him lead us into God's presence. He knew the Way.

Hear this, all peoples!

Give ear, all inhabitants of the world,

both low and high,

rich and poor together!

My mouth shall speak wisdom;

the meditation of my heart shall be understanding.

(Psalms 49:1-3)