

Contemporary Mystic Christianity **Bible Self-Study Supplement**

The Background of The Psalms

Historic Background

Many volumes have been written and much time spent in discussing the authorship of the Psalms. To the occultist, however, the important fact under consideration is not who wrote them, but how best to utilize them in daily living. David means "the well-beloved of the Lord." Whether or not the Psalms were written by David, King of Israel, it is clear that they were given under the inspiration of an Initiate, and such are always well-beloved of the Lord (Law). They depict the way of progress up to the point of conscious union with Deity, this highest spiritual attainment being described in the 23rd Psalm. The Path ascending thereunto leads from the dedication of the life to Spirit, through the many trials and temptations expressed in the laments, on to the chants of the overcoming — all to be climaxed in this, the perfect song of spiritual at-one-ment.

It is not long since most Christians accepted the entire book of Psalms as being the work of David; yet this is by no means the oldest, nor yet the original tradition. The Hebrews disclaimed the idea that David was sole author of all the Psalms, attributing some to other Bible characters such as Adam, Melchizedek, Moses and Abraham, besides

those whose names are mentioned in our existing text: Solomon, David, Heman, Jeduthun, Asaph and the Sons of Korah. The 127th Psalm is not accepted as the work of Solomon in the Hebrew tradition, nor is the 72nd. Esoterically such Psalms vibrate to the keynote of Solomon, that is, they were written under the inspiration of his blessed power in the inner worlds, and reflect his wisdom.

Although David was Israel's foremost patron of the art of song and music, it should be plain to the modern student that the Psalms are in fact a Bible in miniature, being culled from every period of Hebrew history, from the very earliest shepherd and nomad songs to the skillfully contrived lyrics of the Second and Third Temples. Thus Athanasius considered them an epitome of the entire sacred volume, and Basil referred to them as a compendium of all theology. Indeed, the entire galaxy of earlier Church Lights regarded these lovely songs — with profound veneration. It is said that St. Ignatius introduced antiphonal singing of the Psalms in accordance with a tradition of the Church at Antioch.

Chrysostom writes: "If we keep vigil in the Church, David comes first, last and midst. If, early in the morning we seek for a melody of hymns, first, last and midst is David again. If we are occupied with a funeral, solemnities of the departed; if virgins sit at home and spin, David is first, last

and midst. In the monasteries, amongst those holy choirs of angelic armies David is first, last and midst. In the convents of Virgins where there are bands of them who imitate Mary; in the deserts where men are crucified to this world and having their conversations with God, first, midst and last is David."

Under the Benedictine ruling (sixth century) the whole of the Psalter was gone through in each seven days, candidates for ordination were required to know the entire Psalter from memory. Canons to the same effect were passed by the Eighth Council of Toledo (635) and of Orviedo (1050). These last items are mentioned only to show the great importance which the early Christian Church attached to the Book of Psalms as a manual of true esoteric instruction for its neophytes.

The Book of Psalms was primarily the hymn book of the Second Temple. The Temple music consisted almost wholly of the singing of the Psalms, but there was instrumental accompaniment, as shown by the internal structure of many of the Psalms, as well as by traditions which have come down to us. In the ceremonies of the Second Temple the Hebrews endeavored to follow, as closely as they knew how, the order of service of the First or Solomonic Temple. The loss of some of their literature during the Exile made it impossible to reconstruct the services exactly in the manner

of Solomon's day, and, moreover, these had been gradually modified during the interim between the reign of Solomon and the Exile.

After the Exile, the tribe of Levites were fused with the staff of singers; these Levites, it will be recalled, were at one time priests of subsidiary shrines throughout Palestine. Their shrines and powers were curtailed at the time Deuteronomy was discovered, and they were made completely tributary to the Jerusalem priesthood after the Exile. In our volume on the Hexateuch we have traced the origin of the Levites as given traditionally; for from ancient times the Levites are shown associated with certain esoteric doctrines handed down by Moses, and they fell into subordinate positions only when many of the Mosaic Mysteries had been lost or deliberately suppressed by evil priests. The Second Temple, established after the Exile, represented a reform movement in Palestine, not only making radical innovations, but introducing Aramaic as the official language of the country, with Hebrew reserved for Temple use, hence becoming a sacred "dead" language, like Latin in the Catholic Church today. Palestine was thus the last of the Semitic nations to adopt Aramaic as the official language. Chaldea, Assyria — even Persia — had long since done so. This is the language the Master Jesus spoke.

We mention in passing that when Aramaic became the official language of Palestine, the nation was in fact reverting to the ancestral speech of Abraham, as shown in the saying, "A wandering Aramaean was my father" (Deuteronomy 26:5) — from a liturgy of Shechem. Also we know that Abraham came from Chaldea. When he journeyed to Canaan he adopted the Amorite, or Canaanite, tongue which is closely related to the Phoenician; a change which is clearly indicated in the Apocrypha in the statement that the Archangel Michael led Abraham into the land of Canaan and there taught him the Hebrew language. Hebrew is therefore Canaanite with certain modifications due to differences in racial origins.

The fact that the Hebrew tongue was so clearly similar to Phoenician makes understandable the friendly relationship existing between Phoenicia and Palestine, as so beautifully evidenced in the friendship between David and Solomon and the Kings of Tyre. Hebrew is, generally speaking, the sacred language of the Old Testament, Aramaic of the New, for the teachings of Christ were originally given in the language spoken by the people, Aramaean, and only later translated into Greek.

The return from Babylon and exile to Jerusalem is portrayed in the plaintive and haunting 137th Psalm (*In the interpretation of the Psalms the author has retained the*

text of the King James Version conjoined with the poetical metres of the American Revised Version.):

By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept,
When we remembered Zion.

Here historical events are used as a cloak for the mysteries of Initiation. Babylon symbolizes the lower nature and Zion the higher. Always the lament of the spirit is to return to its eternal home. Jerusalem, the city of peace, the great love or light center, the heart of man.

There were twenty-four thousand Levites who served in the Temple. These were divided into twelve sections, two thousand to serve each month. The latter were again divided into groups or companies of five hundred to serve each week. These are the "courses" mentioned in the New Testament, as, for example, when speaking of Zacharias: "Now it came to pass, while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course ... there appeared unto him an Angel of the Lord," etc.

The work of these Temple musicians and servants was exceedingly strenuous and the discipline strict. During their terms of service they slept in the great basement of the Temple building, and any refraction of the laws of obedience was severely punished. If the Lord of the Mansion (Temple

director) discovered a Levite who was not "living the life", he was beaten with a club, and his clothes burned. When cries were heard coming from the Temple, those outside would say, "Some poor son of Levi is being punished for disobedience." In such obscure items do we trace the course of spiritual disintegration in the Temple, where observance of the letter of the Law superseded its observance according to Spirit and Truth.

It appears, however, that certain of the Levites in earlier times were, in actual fact, slaves who were donated to the Temple service by their masters, which may account for their harsh treatment. When slavery was abolished in this connection they became part of the established Temple caste, but, it would seem, a certain odium must still have clung to them.

Robed in pure white linen the Levites took their positions, two hundred and fifty to the right and two hundred and fifty to the left of the officiating priest. Each day special Psalms were sung or intoned for the purpose of producing definite effects upon the hearers, emotional, mental and spiritual. A daily service was held at sunrise and again at sunset, and these possessed a more than ordinary potency.

The Psalms of the Burnt Offerings are numbered 24, 48, 82, 94, and 93. The Sabbath Psalm is number 92. Psalms 86, 105 and 106 were also sung daily. Their suitability for

this use needs no elucidation, as it is obvious, and we are concerned primarily with the esoteric, not the liturgical, value of these ancient songs.

Origen states that the 92nd, or Sabbath Psalm, is attributed to Moses in an ancient Hebrew tradition, and so also are Psalms 90 to 100. Esoterically we may approve this statement, because these Psalms are keyed to the vibratory power of the Mosaic Mysteries. The 89th Psalm, attributed to Abraham under the pseudonym of Ethan the Ezrahite, obviously belongs to a later period of history, and its true place is to be sought for in esotericism. Again, we read with interest the Psalm of Melchizedek, number 110, wherein occur the lines, "Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek." What is the Order of Melchizedek? It is figured in the Supper served to Abraham: the bread and wine typifying the spiritual King-Priest, the Christed Initiate.

On the day of the destruction of the First Temple, as the Chaldean invaders entered the sacred edifice, the Levites stood together singing the last verse of the 94th Psalm: "And he shall bring upon them their own iniquity and shall cut them off in their own wickedness."

The 68th Psalm was chanted on the historic occasion of the re-dedication of the Second Temple, in the Maccabean processional.

The 5th Psalm was a morning prayer, chanted or sung as the watchers laid the holy fires for the sunrise service, and the 4th was an evening prayer.

The Second Temple was destroyed on the same day of the same month as was the First Temple, the 9th of August (the month Ab), just four hundred years later; again the Levites stood together watching the flames consume their beloved house of God, chanting the 94th Psalm to the accompaniment of roaring fire and falling timber.

Until its destruction in 70 A.D., the Third, or Herodian Temple, resumed the ancient worship, and Jerusalem vibrated to its mystic music. The Songs of the Seasons were celebrated in their course, and the powerful Psalms devoted to the Festivals were sung. Of these, the 24th Psalm was set to the rhythms of the Vernal Equinox. Its great climactic chorus carries the vibration of the fiery masculine sign Aries:

Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
And be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors:
And the King of glory will come in.
Who is the King of glory?
Jehovah strong and mighty,
Jehovah mighty in battle.
Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
Yea, lift them up, ye everlasting doors:

And the King of glory will come in.
Who is this King of glory?
Jehovah of hosts,
He is the King of glory.

In this Psalm of the Spring Equinox the Christian finds a chant of the Resurrected Christ, who each year at this season "ascends to His Father," and as He rises spiritually, so do the souls of all attuned to Him rise with Him, until at the Summer Solstice they hear with the interior ear the heavenly prototype of the Mystery hymned in Psalms 114 and 119 (A Song of Degrees) sung in the Hebrew processional commemorating the Feast of the Summer Solstice, in which the significant lines occur:

The stone which the Builders rejected
Is become the head of the corner,
This is Jehovah's doing:
It is marvelous in our eyes!

As the Sun in Aries was celebrated by a chant in the major key, the Autumn Equinox, when the Sun passes into Libra, was celebrated in the minor, to the accompaniment of stringed instruments. The Presentation of the First Fruits was begun to the singing of Psalm 132, called "A Song of Ascents," which concludes with these mystic words:

There will I make the horn of David to bud: I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed. His enemies will I clothe with shame; But upon himself shall his crown flourish.

The processional entered the city singing Psalm 122:

I was glad when they said unto me,
Let us go unto the house of the Lord,
Our feet are standing
Within thy gates, O Jerusalem,
Jerusalem, that art builded
As a city that is compact together;

For there are set thrones for judgment,
The thrones of the house of David,
Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:
They shall prosper that love thee,
Peace be within thy walls,
And prosperity within thy palaces.
For my brethren and companions' sake,
I will now say, Peace be within thee.
For the sake of the house of Jehovah our God
If will seek thy good.

As they ascended the Temple hill, the voices took up the chant of Psalm 150, the last Psalm given in our text, which consists entirely of songs of Praise for the Eternal Glory.

Praise ye Jehovah.
Praise God in his sanctuary:
Praise him in the firmament of his power.
Praise him for his mighty acts:
Praise him with psaltery and harp.
Praise him with trumpet sound:
Praise him with timbrel and dance:
Praise him with stringed instruments and pipe.
Praise him with loud cymbals:
Praise him with high sounding cymbals.
Let everything that hath 'breath praise Jehovah.
Praise ye Jehovah.

As the multitude reached the Temple proper they were greeted by the assembled Levites singing Psalm 30:

I cried unto thee, and thou hast healed me.
O Jehovah, thou hast brought up my soul from Sheol;
Thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to
the pit.
Sing praise unto Jehovah, O ye saints of his,
And give thanks to his holy memorial name.
Weeping may tarry for the night,
But joy cometh in the morning.

Josephus says that at the Equinox the light from the Sun was free to travel along an open passage to the Holy of Holies, where it illumined the breastplate of the High Priest,

a visible manifestation of the Shekinah glory. The High Priest, at least in Temple times, entered the Holy of Holies but once each year, at the Feast of Atonement, celebrated under the Autumn Equinox which was then in Libra.

The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated for a period of seven days, corresponding to the five planets and Sun and Moon known to ancient astronomy. It belonged to the autumnal Festivals, as did the Feast of the Ingathering, for which Psalms 62 and 63 were chanted. These therefore sound the keynote of Libra:

My soul waiteth in silence for God only:

From him cometh my salvation.

He only is my rock and my salvation:

He is my high tower (defense); I shall not be greatly moved.

O God, thou art my God; earnestly will I seek thee:

My soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee,

In a dry and weary land, where no water is.

So have I looked upon thee in the sanctuary,

To see thy power and thy glory.

For thou hast been my help,

And in the shadow of thy wings will I rejoice.

My soul followeth hard after thee:

Thy right hand upholdeth me.

Psalm 65 is a harvest hymn celebrating the autumnal marriage feast of Heaven and Earth, which is also a propitious time for the aspirant to rend the veil and pass into the Holy of Holies, there to become the bride of the Lamb (Libra is ruled by Venus in its masculine aspect as Eros, the God of Love, called by the Greeks, Lover of Souls):

Thou crownest the year with thy goodness ...

The little hills rejoice on every side.

The valleys are covered with corn; they shout for joy,
they also sing!

Psalm 66 is a Benediction Song of the harvest ceremonial. All intone the power of the Holy Name in which this mighty force is concentrated and afterward disseminated in blessing upon the assembled throngs. The inner work here is concerned with raising the vibratory rhythms of the Earth.

Make a joyful noise unto God, all ye lands,

Sing forth the honour of His name.

The Aristotelian philosopher, Theophrastus, traveled in Judea, and his comments on the Second Temple have come down to us. He speaks of worshippers gazing upward at the stars throughout the night, calling on God in prayer. This

would seem to be referred to in the 8th Psalm and in the 134th, titled Greetings of Night-Watchers:

How excellent is thy name in all the earth
Who hast set thy glory upon the heavens!
Out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou
established strength.

When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers,
The moon and the stars, which thou hath ordained;
What is man, that thou art mindful of him:
And the son of man, that thou visitest him:
For thou hast made him but little lower than the Angels,
And crownest him with glory and honor.

Behold, bless ye the Lord (Law), all ye servants of the
Lord,
That by night stand, in the house of the Lord.
Lift up your hands in the sanctuary,
And bless ye the Lord.
The Lord bless thee out of Zion;
Even he that made Heaven and Earth.

Esoteric Background

In the Song of Degrees mentioned above occur the significant verses: "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except the Lord keep the city, the watchmen waketh but in vain." This refers to the Invisible

Temple of Initiation that interpenetrated the Temple built by Solomon on Mt. Moriah, which is the prototype of the House of the Holy Grail, abode of supernatural Powers. It is from the Hierophants of this secret Temple that many of the Psalms have come, indirectly, to be sure, through the neophytes, but bearing the seal of the Temple. They run the gamut from weakness and despair to triumph and delight: "Out of the depths have I cried unto thee;" "I have gone astray like a lost sheep." Physiological problems are hinted at in the initiatory hymns: "The plowers plowed upon my back: they made long their furrows. The Lord is righteous: He hath cut asunder the cords of the wicked." But ultimately the neophyte learns to sing a "new song": "I have ordained a lamp for mine anointed," and, "upon himself shall his crown flourish."

The neophyte who has learned at last to function consciously on the inner planes recognizes the law of increase which must always work through praise; for praise is blessing, and to bless means to multiply the good. "Let everything that hath breath praise Jehovah" (the Lord or Law).

During the Jehovistic, or Old Testament Dispensation, the ethereal soul body (aura) built by the successful neophyte possessed a dazzling whiteness. Not yet was it colored by the golden light of the Christ. The dove has always been

symbolic of the powers of the Holy Spirit, and the whiteness of doves' wings signifies the liberation of the soul of the worthy neophyte from the prison-house of the body in Initiation, wherefore the Initiate Teacher sings: "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then would I fly away and be at rest!"

The Psalms are songs of the heart, and only as the heart becomes illumined by pure and holy living can their deepest, inner meaning be revealed. The heart is the great center of the transmutation process: it is the "holy cup," the "golden chalice" within the temple of the body. As the base metals of the lower nature are transformed into the gold of spiritual essence, the heart is seen to radiate a lustrous glory of light, similar in quality, though not in brilliancy, to that portrayed by artists as surrounding the heart of Christ Jesus. As this sacred fire within the body arises to revivify the spiritual organs in the head, its radiations become a veritable crown or halo of light. Hence the psalmist declares: "Thou wilt prepare their heart." And at this attainment he sings: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

The climax of praise, the understanding and revealing of the power of Love, the complete at-one-ment of the spirit, enveloped and enfolded in the golden aura of a completed faith and a perfect trust in the "way of God to man," form

the motif of the most beautiful of all these initiatory Songs, the 23rd. (This will be studied in a later chapter.) In no spiritual literature is there to be found more complete assurance of the victory of Spirit than in the concluding words of this famous Psalm; "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." And these triumphant words of the "sweet singer of Israel" are, as it were, the human echo of the blessed assurance we have received from the greatest of all Shepherds — the promise which the Christ gave just before His Ascension, when He said: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

The Masonic Lost Word and the Unpronounceable Name J.H.V.H.

Each year at the autumnal Feast of the Atonement, which as we know, celebrates the Equinox (at this time in Libra-Scorpio), the High Priest entered the dark Holy of Holies, and as he passed through the Veil he pronounced the Sacred Name, JHVH. The pronunciation of this Name is the quintessential mystery of the Masonic tradition of the Lost Word. On all ordinary Temple occasions the most holy Name was not pronounced, nor was it known but to a chosen few in the Temple service. It is said that it was sung by certain chosen ones among the Temple choirs during the service of song, but its pronunciation was drowned in the other voices so that none was the wiser. It was transmitted from mouth

to ear, and never committed to writing. Substitutes for the most holy Name were used in the services, chief of which was Adonai, "LORD," It is difficult for Christians to realize that the word "Jehovah" was never used by the Hebrews, and that it is not a translation of any true Hebrew word. JHVH possesses, in fact, no known translation either in Hebrew or English. No living person, outside the ranks of the exalted Initiates, now knows the Word, or its rightful pronunciation.

In early Christian ages, in the centuries of the Roman Empire, the word "Lucifer" referred to Venus, the Morning Star, which the Christians took to represent the Risen Christ, who heralds the Cosmic Dawn. These early Christians actually called Jesus "Lucifer," meaning, of course, "the Light-Bearer."

Max Heindel speaks of both Jehovah and Lucifer as among the Elohim, or Creative Intelligences, who helped fashion our universe "in the beginning." That the Elohim Lucifer is also to be reckoned among the Sons of God is allegorized in the Book of Job, where Satan appears before the Throne of God and receives permission to tempt that holy man. Modern scholars assert that the first chapter of Genesis (including the first three verses of the second chapter), where these dual-sexed Creative Beings are referred to as Elohim, originated in Babylon during the

Exile, and seem to be the work of a priestly writer there. This writer could not have failed to be profoundly influenced by the ancient Chaldean Mysteries, which, after all, were at least partially familiar to him through traditions dating from Abramam, the Chaldean Prince. There is no reason to suppose these Mysteries were wholly new and unfamiliar to the Hebrews, even though they had few written documents.

We would be wrong, therefore, to suppose the priestly writer plagiarized the Chaldean originals; it is clear that he adapted the Wisdom Teaching to the needs of his own day and of his own people, and in accordance with the Cosmic Plan for the Holy Land of Palestine; just as modern scientists do not hesitate to use the work of preceding scientists upon which to build their own, work of investigating the unknown forces of nature. Even in such wise did the learned Kepler use the accumulated data of Tycho Brahe, by means of which he discovered the astronomical laws which bear his name. The Hebrew seers were concerned not with the external laws of the universe (that was the work of the Greeks), but with the science of the soul, the nature of the spiritual world, and they were willing to accept new light from every available source. Had the Hebrews not been thus open-minded, they could never have prepared the path for the coming of the Christ.

St. Paul said, "Let that Spirit be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." What was that Spirit which was in Christ Jesus? One knows that in modern terminology it is called the Wisdom Aspect of Deity, the Life Spirit, and kabbalistically it is called Hokhmah, which means Wisdom also. It was the Spirit of Universal Wisdom which was vitalized in Christ Jesus, and, in the Messianic teaching of Israel, constituted His Christhood. Hokhmah was the principle, or Attribute, of Divine Wisdom, but we gradually see how the mystic visions of the seers and prophets, particularly after the Exile, revealed Hokhmah as a real Archangelic Presence. This is not the result of a thin imagining, or vague fancy on the part of the Hebrew and Persian seers; in the so-called astral world the Principles of Deity are actually visible under various forms, some of them manlike, and while it is true that these forms and figures are symbolical and that they are colored by the imagination of the seer, the truth yet remains that a definite, specific intelligence is active within them, and we should err greatly if we dismissed them as mere figments of the subconscious.

Ellen McCaffery states, in her *Lessons on Astrology*, that in certain medieval manuscripts the Christ was shown inscribed about with a twelve-pointed star, indicating His exquisite and complete perfection. Hokhmah is kabbalistically attributed to the "Sphere of the Zodiac", and

therefore of necessity, to the serpentine ecliptic with which it equates. If we say, "Sphere of the Fixed Stars," including in this term the serpentine ecliptic and its zodiacal divisions, we shall, perhaps, have a better idea of the attribution. As observed in the first volume of this series, the signs of the Zodiac were called "the twelve banners of Adonai." Hokhmah is thus the Spirit which guides the workings of the Fixed Stars, and in particular, the stars comprising the Zodiac. It correlates with the mysterious Tetragrammaton, and the Cross of Christ is that same Tetragrammaton, for the Greek letters INRI, hung on the Cross, are the equivalent of IHVH, as we have shown in previous writings.

— ***Corinne Heline***