PSALMS

“In the book of Psalms we meet the religion of Israel at its greatest depth and its most passionate intensity. The psalmists fell heir to the profound insights and spiritual experiences of the prophets. These latter were Israel’s intellectual and spiritual pioneers, blazing new paths to God and clearing new trails for human feet. The psalmists largely found ready at hand these insights. They took them up, lived their way into them experimentally, applied them to the life of individuals and of the community and linked them to the religious worship that centered in the Temple, all the while both deepening and intensifying them.

“Coming from a vast variety of individuals who had learned both how to exult in unspeakable joy and to cry out unto God from the deeps of inexpressible anguish, it is a mirror of the life of the soul, not of Israel merely, but of humanity. It is the noblest book of devotion possessed by men, and comes down to us enhanced by the reverence of centuries to which it has contributed both strength and light” (*ABC* 509).

“ It is the hymn and prayer book of the second Temple. Many hymns are pre-exilic in origin, but in every case in their present arrangement they have been collected and edited for the post-exilic period.” (*ABC* 512).

“In the light of ancient Near Eastern literature it is probable that the original of almost every ps. was composed in pre-exilic times for use in public worship during the period of the monarchy. Once introduced into worship, however, a ps. would naturally be adapted and revised to make it appropriate to changing circumstances. PSS. originally spoken by the king at a time of national stress came to be used by individuals for crises in their personal lives” (*IBC* 253).

**“The Question of Davidic Authorship.** The titles offer data concerning the authorship of the psalms. Seventy-three are attributed to David, twelve to Asaph, nine to the sons of Korah, two to Solomon, one to Heman the Ezrahite, one to Ethan the Ezrahite, and one to Moses. To each of these names Ii prefixed the preposition “of” or “belonging to,” which originally may have designated the collection from which the psalm was taken rather than authorship. But when the historical notes to the “of David” psalms were added, a process till going on about 200 B.C., the phrase was interpreted as denoting authorship.

“Now we know that David was a musician (I Sam. 16:14), and that he wrote secular poetry. He may therefore have written religious poetry. But the fact of Davidic authorship of any of the psalms cannot be maintained with absolute confidence. . . The authors of some of the psalms attributed to David represent the peaks of O.T. spiritual insight” (*ABC* 512).

Ps 23:1, 4, 6

1The Lord *is* my shepherd;

“The author of this priceless jewel of the Psalter has fallen heir to the great prophetic insights of Jer. 23:1-4 and Ezek. 34 and Isa. 40:11, where Jehovah is represented as shepherd of Israel. Kings and officials were commonly so designated in Egypt, Babylonia, Israel, and Greece. But Israel with tenderest associations applied the term particularly to illumine the character of her God” (*ABC* 526).

“The psalm begins with a simple profession. In the ancient world, kings were known as shepherds of their people. Thus to profess ‘The Lord is my shepherd’ is to declare one’s loyalty to God and intention to live under God’s reign. . . In contrast to the failure of earthly kings, God does what a shepherd is supposed to do: provide life and security for the people (see Ezek 34:11-16). Thus the psalmist affirms, ‘I shall lack nothing,’ as v. 1 ibs better translated. The rest of the psalm explains how God fulfills the role of a good shepherd” (*NIBC* IV.767).

“The sheep whom Jehovah shepherds are conscious of no lack. He provides the three things needed by sheep – pasturage, rest, and water. . . He knows how to lead the flock along the current of the torrential mountain wadies, until he finds a clear, placid pool of still water, i.e., ‘waters of quietness,’ where the sheep may drink with comfort and safety, and find the refreshment that recreates and restores” (*ABC* 526).

3 He restoreth my soul;

To the Hebrews the word *nephesh* could mean either “soul” or “life,” Kent translates: “He continually restoreth my life.” J. M. P. Smith offers the rendering "He gives me new life"; while Moffatt translates, "He revives life in me."

he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.

“In the plain, straight, and safe paths, in which the sheep of the Lord’s pasture are neither hurt, nor wearied, nor in danger of wandering. By his word and his providence he directs me to the right ways of truth and holiness, and by his Spirit he inclines and enables me to choose those ways, and to continue to walk therein; *for his name’s sake —*Not for any merit in me, but merely for the demonstration and glory of his mercy, faithfulness, and goodness” (Benson Commentary, [www.biblehub.com)](http://www.biblehub.com)).

“An Eastern shepherd goes before, whereas a Western one usually follows, his flock. Briggs comments that "the divine name, or honor is involved in guiding rightly.” Moffatt translates, "He guides me by true paths, as he himself is true.”

6Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

“Most translations suggest that God’s goodness and *hesed* will ‘follow’ the psalmist, but the Hebrew verb *radap* has the more active sense of ‘pursue.’ God is in active pursuit of the psalmist! This affirmation is particularly noteworthy in view of ‘the presence of my enemies.’ Ordinarily in the psalms, it is precisely the enemies who ‘pursue’ the psalmist. Here the enemies are present but have been rendered harmless, while God is in active pursuit.

“The ‘stay in the sanctuary is probably metaphorical for keeping close contact with the personal God. In any case, the mention of ‘the house of the Lord’ is significant. To be in ‘the house of the Lord,’ literally or metaphorically, provides a communal dimension to this psalm that is usually heard exclusively individualistically” (*NIBC* IV.769).

“What he now enjoys is but prophetic of what he will enjoy his life-long. Goodness and mercy, personified as angelic spirits, will ever ‘pursue’ him, and – here with tender, heartfelt exaggeration – he will practically spend his days in the Temple, where God is peculiarly near” (*ABC* 526).