

OUTLINE - DISCUSSION OF THE PSALMS - PART II

BEGINNING AND CONCLUDING PSALMS

I. The first two psalms serve as an introduction to the book of psalms.

A. The first psalm describes more God's guidance of the individual just man in the midst of the world, while the second describes more of His guidance of the whole world

1. Some texts combine the psalms together, but most separate them. The first psalm is a classic wisdom psalm, while the second psalm focuses kingship.

2. The beginning of the first psalms and the end of the second psalm are connected by the reference to happiness of the man who is righteous.

B. Psalm one introduces the classic wisdom literature distinction between the two paths, one of the wicked and one of the just. A person can choose either path, but not the consequences that follow.

1. The psalms most often attribute justice to God. The just man participates in His justice and thus in a way in His eternal life.

2. The psalm begins with a reference to human happiness and to "the man," which is Hebrew is Adam. There is a notion of the just man as going at least partially back to the order of the garden of Eden.

3. The psalm then uses a threefold warning against following, sitting, or standing in the counsel, way, or company of the wicked, sinners, or scoffers. The threefold repetition emphasizes the point of avoiding the wicked.

4. More positively, the psalm then celebrates those who study the law.

A. The law is not simply prescripts, although it involves that. To a Jew, the law (the Torah) is the entire providential, loving plan by which God guides the universe and His people. Thus the first five books of the Scriptures are

collectively "The Law."

B. To meditate on the law was to reflect upon God's loving power and thus to take it in a way into oneself. Thus, there was a delight in studying the law.

C. The psalm then turns to an agricultural analogy of water keeping a tree fresh and fruitful. Water is a natural symbol for God's grace, for it comes from the outside, not overwhelming its object (here the tree), but enhancing it. The water overwhelms only enemies.

D. Fruitful, faithful trees were a symbol of the original creation and of the messianic era. Gen. 2:10; Ezekiel 47:1-12; Rev. 22:1. Some Church fathers, applying this psalm to Jesus, saw His Cross as the quintessential fruitful tree.

E. The psalm then goes back to the wicked, comparing them to chaff, which the winds of time or the Spirit of God would eliminate. For similar analogies, see Isaiah 17:13; Matt. 13:24-30.

C. Psalm 2 is a quintessential royal psalm that contrasts the rebellion of the rulers of nations with the sovereignty of God and of His anointed king.

1. It may have been a coronation hymn.

2. It begins with the theme of rulers of nations being arrogant and not wanting to live under God's rule. It then turns to the mockery and anger that these nations will feel in the sight of heaven.

3. The anointed one here is the king of Israel, whom a prophet or priest would anoint. The Israelites originally wanted a "king like other nations have. See 1 Samuel 8. But here God promises a king different from other nations, fulfilling for example the prophecies of Isaiah 9:5ff.

4. God shows His authority, through the king, who paradoxically shepherds the nations with iron that smashes them. The idea is in part that, precisely by disciplining the powers of the world, God is guiding the nations. See Wisdom 12;1-2.

5. Hebrews 1:5, as well as Acts 4:25, and 13:16ff. apply this psalm to Jesus as the heir to David's throne, who now

guides His people.

6. The psalm concludes with theme of serving God and so having Him as a refuge, rather than opponent. Jesus likewise raises the status of all who obey and fear Him. See John 15:11ff.; Rev. 1:17.

II. Psalms 146-150 conclude the Book of Psalms with a call to praise, indicating that the praise of God is the high point of human life.

A. All of these psalms begin and end with the word hallelujah, or "praise the Lord." The term praise ("Hallel") is used 28 times in these psalms, out of a total of 119 occasions in the entire Book of Psalms.

- These concluding psalms reflect an environment of exuberant joy in praising God. They bring about this idea in slightly different ways.

- St. Augustine in his commentary to psalm 147 says that one's good works should act like the notes and harmony for the psalm of praise that is the Christian life.

B. Psalm 146 contrasts the praise of God, which opens to the door to the guidance of heaven with trust in worldly powers.

1. Unlike psalm 2, it does not condemn worldly powers, or princes, as wicked, but rather as subject to death.

2. The psalm then describes God ruling as a just ruler should (e.g., by giving justice to the oppressed, raising those bowed down, and thwarting the wicked), but with added power over the natural course of history. The eternal reign of God is contrasted with the transient reign of worldly powers. There is a sense of worship bringing one above the boundaries of time and history. The worship of God joins all people in time and space.

3. The psalm begins with the psalmist trying to rouse his own soul to praise God, but ends with a call for all of God's people to do so. The change is so natural that there is no clear point where the focus shifts.

C. Psalm 147 praises God for His guidance of His Chosen People, of all people, and of the universe.

1. It switches back and forth freely between God's providence toward Israel, God's providence toward the lowly, and His

guidance of nature. All three are connected.

2. God's majesty is shown by the fact that He names even the stars as subject of His. The pagans worshiped the stars as gods; and even Gen. 1:8 said they rule the night. God's sovereign control of them thus gives a vivid image of His majesty. Philippians 2:15 compares the just to stars shining in the darkness.

3. The psalm emphasizes the special nature of God's Chosen People, whom He has brought back from exile, and especially of Jerusalem, but also describes His providence for all.

4. Revering God, who is the source of all strength is thus more important than strength in the world.

D. Psalm 148 is a grand call for all angels, people, animals, and even inanimate nature to praise God.

1. The psalmist is so eager to praise God that he calls upon all to join him. He addresses first the angels and heavens above humanity, then the animals below humanity, then his fellow humans

2. Once again all people are called upon to praise God, but Israel has a special place.

3. The psalm reflects a notion that, not only Israel, but all of nature receives her fulfillment in the worship of God. See Gen. 2:1ff; Ex. 20:9, 31:12-17.

E. Psalm 149 connects the praise of God in the first half with the judgment of nations in the second half. It alternates between the music of worship and the metal of judgment.

1. Part of the idea is that the worship of God gives people the courage to throw off tyranny, as well as the right to judge nations. See Duet. 5:12-1; 1 Cor. 6:3.

2. It also seems that the worship itself brings judgment to the nations. This idea of alternating between praise and judgment is a common theme in the Book of Revelations. See also Isaiah 41-42.

F. Psalm 150 is a doxology for the whole Book of Psalms, calling for praise in all places, both for God's majesty in Himself and

for His deeds. The worship is to involve every sort of instrument likely representing all of life. The psalm ends with a call for all people to worship God.