



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

and God's great displeasure therefor. The description is such as can only be referred to the state and workings of a conscience painfully sensible of sin, and of the presence of an incensed Deity.

THE MESSIANIC ELEMENT IN THE PSALMS.

BY REV. T. K. CHEYNE, M. A.,

Fellow and Lecturer of Balliol College, Oxford.

There is much haziness in the minds of most persons as to the meaning of the words Messiah and Messianic. I have, therefore, first of all to state in what sense I here use these words. I would venture to define the word Messiah as meaning one who has received some direct commission from God determining his life's work, with the single limitation that the commission must be unique, and must have a religious character. Thus Cyrus will not be a Messiah, because 'his function was merely preparatory; he was to be instrumental in the removal of obstacles to the realization of [God's kingdom]' (*I. C. A.*, p. 166). An individual priest will not be a Messiah, because he has received no unique personal commission; even the High Priest Joshua is only represented as typical of Him who was to be pre-eminently the Messiah (*Zech. III.*, 8). David was a Messiah (compare *Ps. XVIII.*, 50), because he was God's vicegerent in the government of His people Israel; the laws which David was to carry out were not merely secular, but religious, and of Divine appointment. Each of David's successors was in like manner theoretically a Messiah. The people of Israel was theoretically a Messiah, because specially chosen to show forth an example of obedience to God's laws (*Ex. XIX.*, 5, 6), and to preach His religion to the Gentiles (*Isa. II.*, 3; *LV.*, 5). Above all, a descendant of David who should take up the ill-performed functions of his royal ancestors was to be, both in theory and in fact, the Messiah (*Isa. IX.*, 6, 7, &c.); and so, too, was the personal Servant of Jehovah (*Isa. LXI.*, 1), who was both to redeem His people from their sins, and to lead them in the performance of their commission.

Hence we may reckon five groups of Messianic psalms:—I. Psalms which refer to a contemporary Davidic king, setting him, either directly or by implication, in the light of his Messianic mission. II. Those entirely devoted to the future ideal Davidic sovereign. III. Those which relate to the future glories of the kingdom of God, but without expressly mentioning any Messiah. IV. Those which, though seemingly spoken by an individual, in reality describe the experiences of the Jewish nation in their unsteady performance of their Messianic commission. V. Those in which, with more or less consistency, the psalmist dramatically introduces the personal and ideally perfect 'Servant of Jehovah' (to adopt the phrase in *Isa. XLII.*, &c.) as the speaker.

On the first group there cannot be much difference of opinion. It contains Psalms *XX.*, *XXI.*, *XLV.*, *CI.*, *CXXXII.* The interest of the interpreter is more awakened by the second group, containing Psalms *II.*, *LXXII.*, *CX*: In *Ps. II.* we are presented first with a picture of the whole world subject to an Israelitish king, and vainly plotting to throw off the yoke; then with the divine decree assuring universal dominion to this particular king; then with an exhortation to the kings

of the earth to submit to Jehovah's Son.¹ It is, I know, commonly supposed that the psalm has a primary reference to circumstances in the life of David, but the ordinary Christian instinct seems to be much nearer the truth. Even granting for the moment that the chiefs of the Syrians and the Ammonites could be dignified in liturgical poetry with the title 'kings of the earth,' there is not the slightest indication in 2 Sam. vii. or elsewhere, that a prophet ever conveyed an offer to David of the sovereignty of the whole world. Even Jewish tradition, so zealous for the honor of the Davidic lyre, has not ascribed this psalm to David. Who, then, can the Son of Jehovah and Lord of the whole earth be but the future Messiah, whom the prophets describe in such extraordinary terms? Why should we expect the psalms always to have a contemporary political reference? If one psalmist (see below) takes for his theme the Messianic glories of Jerusalem, why may not another adopt for his the glories of the Messiah himself?

The same arguments apply to Ps. LXXII., which a Unitarian divine pronounces 'the most Messianic in the collection,' adding that it 'is applied by Bible readers in general, without hesitation or conscious difficulty, to the Messiah of Nazareth, as beautifully describing the spirit of His reign.'² The judgment of the plain reader is not to be lightly disregarded, and though Mr Higginson goes on to speak of 'its true historic marks, which assign it distinctly to the accession of Solomon,' other critics (e. g., Hupfeld) altogether deny these, and the Messianic interpretation has not yet been satisfactorily refuted. The psalm is not, indeed, a prediction (as King James's Bible makes it), but is at any rate a prayer for the advent of the Prince of peace and of the world, Ps. cx., again, is as a whole only obscure to those who will not admit directly Messianic psalms. How significantly the first of the two Divine oracles opens, with an invitation to sit on the throne, 'high and lifted up' (Isa. vi., 1), where the Lord Himself is seated! Can we help thinking of the 'El-g'bbôr in Isaiah (ix., 6), and still more of the 'one like a son of man' who 'came with the clouds of heaven,' and was 'brought near before the Ancient of days' (Dan. vii., 13)? True, that 'son of man' is not said to be a priest, but he agrees with the personage in the psalm in that he is conceived of as in heaven, and as waging war and exercising sovereignty on earth from heaven. Neither in Daniel nor in the psalm is anything said about the Davidic origin of the high potentate, but his nature and functions are clearly those of the Davidic Messiah. The priestly character of the 'lord' in Ps. cx., 1, can be fully explained from Zech. iii., 8; vi., 11-13, where a priestly element in the Messianic functions is distinctly recognized.

Over the third group I may pass lightly. It contains some late psalms, such as xcvi.-c., in which, the happiness of being under Jehovah's personal government is celebrated, and also Ps. LXXXVII., in which, chief among the Messianic privileges of Jerusalem, the conversion of the heathen is represented as their being 'born again in Zion' (compare Isa. XLIV., 5).

The fourth contains a number of psalms commonly regarded as Davidic, and as typically Messianic, and some which are merely supposed to describe the sufferings of a pious individual. In both subdivisions the language is often hyperbolic, which is explained in the case of the former by the typical character of the writer, and the overruling influence of the Spirit. A similar explanation might plausibly

¹ The Aramaic *bar*, not admitting the article, suited the unique position of the personage spoken of.

² Higginson, *Ecce Messias*, p. 30.

be offered for the seeming hyperboles of the latter subdivision, for every pious sufferer is in a true sense a type of Jesus Christ. But it is much simpler to suppose that these psalms really describe the experiences of the Jewish nation in the pursuit of its Messianic ideal: the supposed speaker is a personification. This is no arbitrary conjecture. The Jewish nation and its divinely appointed ideal were, in fact, to the later prophets and students of Scripture a familiar subject of meditation. I need hardly remind the reader of the 'Servant of Jehovah' in some parts of 2 Isaiah, but may be allowed to state my opinion that one principal object of the book of Jonah was to typify the spiritual career of Israel, and that the so-called Song of Solomon was admitted into the Canon on the ground that the Bride of the poem symbolized the chosen people. Can we wonder that some of the psalmists adopted a similar imaginative figure?

One of the most remarkable of these psalms is the eighteenth. It is probable enough that the psalmist in writing it had the life of David in his mind's eye; but it would be unreasonable to suppose that he merely wished to idealize a deceased king, or even the Davidic family. The world-wide empire claimed by the supposed speaker, and the analogy of cognate psalms, are totally opposed to such a hypothesis. But when we consider that the filial relation to God predicated of David as king in 2 Sam. vii. is also asserted of the Israelitish nation (Ex. iv., 22; Hos. xl., 1; Ps. lxxx., 15), and that in Isa. lv., 3-5 the blessings promised to David are assured in perpetuity to the faithful Israel, it becomes difficult to deny that David may have been regarded as typical of the nation of Israel.—Another of these psalms is the eighty-ninth, which supplies further evidences of the typological use of David. The psalmist has been describing the ruin which has overtaken the Davidic family, but insensibly passes into a picture of the ruin of the state, and identifies 'the reproach of the heels of thine anointed' (v. 51) with 'the reproach of thy servants' (v. 50).—Ps. cii. may also perhaps be included in this group. The expression in vs. 3-9 are, some of them at least, far too strong for an individual, whereas in the mouth of the personified people they are not inappropriate. The words in v. 23 'he hath shortened my days' (virtually retracted in v. 28) remind us of Ps. lxxxix., 45; and those in the parallel clause, 'he hath weakened my strength in the way,' are perhaps an allusion to the 'travail in the way' of the Israelites in the wilderness (Ex. xviii., 8). There are some reasons, however, for rather placing this psalm in the next group.

The remaining members of the fourth group are the so-called imprecatory psalms¹ (e. g., v., xxxv., xl., lv., lviii., lxix., cix.). As long as these are interpreted of an individual Israelite, they seem strangely inconsistent with the injunctions to benevolence with which the Old Testament is interspersed.² If, however, they are spoken in the name of the nation—'Jehovah's Son,' their intensity of feeling becomes intelligible. Certainly it was not 'obstinate virulence and morbid moroseness' which inspired them, for 'each of the psalms in which the strongest imprecatory passages are found contains also gentle undertones, breathings of beneficent love. Thus, 'When they were sick, I humbled my soul with fasting; I behaved myself as though it had been my friend or brother.' 'When I wept and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach.' 'They have re-

¹ Some of these psalms, however (xxxv., xl., lv., lxix.), belong more properly to the fourth group.

² Ex. xxiii., 4, 5; Lev. xix., 18; Prov. xx., 22, xxiv., 17, 18, 29, xxv., 21, 22, compare Job xxxi., 29, 30.

warded me evil for good, and hatred for my love!'¹ And, 'finally in the most awful of these psalms, the denunciations die away into a strain which, in the original, falls upon a modern ear with something of the cadence of pathetic rhyme (*V'libbî khālāl b'q'irbî*, "and my heart is pierced through within me").'²

Among the psalms not ascribed to David which belong to this group is the forty-first, from which a quotation is made in a Messianic sense in John XIII., 18. It is only the people of Israel which can at once confess its former sins (v. 4), and appeal to its present 'integrity' (v. 12).—The fifth and last group marks the highest level attained by the inspired poets. It contains Ps. xxii., xxxv., xl., lv., lxix., cii. I cannot think that the persistency of the traditional interpretation, at any rate as regards the two first of these psalms, is wholly due to theological prepossessions. In some of its details, the traditional Christian interpretation is no doubt critically untenable, but in essentials it seems to me truer than any of the current literary theories. Let me briefly refer to the twenty-second psalm, which presents such striking affinities with 2 Isaiah. In two respects it is distinguished from most others of the same group; it contains no imprecations and no confessions of sinfulness. It falls into two parts. The first and longer of these is a pathetic appeal to Jehovah from the lowest depth of affliction. The speaker has been God's servant from the beginning (vs. 9, 10), yet he is now conscious of being God-forsaken (v. 1). Not only are his physical sufferings extreme (vs. 14-17), but he is the butt of scoffers and a public laughing-stock (vs. 6, 7). Who his enemies are—whether heathen oppressors or unbelieving Israelites—is not here stated, but from a parallel passage (Ps. xlix., 8) it is clear that the hostility arises, partly, at least, from the sufferer's fellow-countrymen. Only after long wrestling with God does the psalmist attain the confidence that he has been heard of Him (v. 21). At this point the tone suddenly changes. The prayer becomes a joyous declaration of the answer which has been vouchsafed, and a promise of thank-offerings. 'But he does not end there. He treats his deliverance as a matter of national congratulation, and a cause of more than national blessings. He not only calls upon his fellow-countrymen to join him in his thanksgiving (v. 23), but breaks out into an announcement which draws the whole world within the sphere of his triumph (vs. 27, 28, 31).'³ I need not stay to point out how unsuitable is language of this description to any of the Israelites mentioned in the Old Testament, and how unnatural it is that the establishment of God's universal kingdom should be placed in sequence to the deliverance of an individual sufferer.⁴ The difficulties are strikingly analogous to those which meet us in 2 Isaiah.⁵ There, as here, some

¹ Bishop Alexander, *Bampton Lectures on the Psalms*, 1876, p. 53 (Ps. xxxv., 13, lxix., 10, 11, cix., 4, 5).

² *Ibid.*, p. 57. (It is not necessary to assume that the faithless friends in Ps. xxxv., lv., are mere figures of speech.)

³ Maitland, *The Arguments from Prophecy* (S. P. C. K.) pp. 95, 96.

⁴ Hupfeld, I know, denies that the anticipations expressed in vs. 27-31 stand in any relation to the deliverance of the speaker. But by this denial he destroys the unity of plan of the poem; it is certain, too, that the later O. T. writers often connect the conversion of the heathen with the sight of the wonderful deliverance of Israel. And the very connection which Hupfeld denies in Ps. xxii., he grants in the parallel passage in Ps. cii. (vs. 16-18).

⁵ It would be instructive to make out a list of the numerous parallels in these psalms to 2 Isaiah and the book of Job (for the author of Job, as we have seen, is not without flashes of Gospel light). Comp. for instance, Ps. xxii., 6, 'I am a worm,' with Isa. xli., 14; Job xxv., 6; *ibid.* 'and no man,' with Isa. lii., 14, liii., 2; *ibid.* 'despised of people,' with Isa. xlix., 7; vs. 16, 17, with Job's descriptions of his sickness; vs. 26, 28, with Isa. lv., 1, 21. Vs. 27-29 also find their best commentary in Isa. lii., 14, 15.

features of the description seem to compel us to explain them of an individual Israelite, while others remain unintelligible unless referred in some way to the people of Israel, with its Messianic, missionary functions. There, as here, the deliverance of the sufferer has a vital influence on the spiritual life, first of all of his own people, and then of all mankind. There, as here, the newly-acquired spiritual blessings are described under the figure of a feast. Is it so very bold to explain Ps. xxii. and the psalms like it as utterances of that ideal and yet most real personage, who in 2 Isaiah is the fruit, from one point of view, no doubt, of special revelation, but from another equally justified and perfectly consistent with the former, of an intense longing for the fulfilment of Israel's ideal? To assume that both the sacred poets and the poet-prophet are feeling their way (not, however, at random) to the presence of the Redeemer? That they have abandoned the hope of an earthly King of Israel, and are conscious, too, that even the noblest members of the nation are inadequate to the Messianic functions? And that hence they throw out in colossal outlines an indistinct because imaginatively expressed conception of One who shall perfectly fulfil these functions for and with his people?

[From Commentary on Isaiah.]

→GENERAL NOTES←

The Place of Biblical Theology.—Biblical Theology belongs to the department of Exegetical Theology as a higher exegesis completing the exegetical process, and presenting the essential material and principles of the other departments of theology.

The boundaries between Exegetical and Historical Theology are not so sharply defined as those between either of them and Systematic Theology. All Historical Theology has to deal with *sources*, and in this respect must consider them in their variety and unity as well as development; and hence many theologians combine Exegetical Theology and Historical Theology under one head—Historical Theology. It is important, however, to draw the distinction, for this reason. The *sources* of Biblical Theology are in different relation from the sources of a history of doctrine, inasmuch as they constitute a body of divine revelation, and in this respect to be kept distinct from all other *sources*, even cotemporary and of the same nation. They have an absolute authority which no other sources can have. The stress is to be laid less upon their historical development than upon them as an organic body of revelation, and this stress upon their importance as *sources* not only for historical development, but also for dogmatic reconstruction and practical application, requires that the special study of them should be exalted to a separate discipline and a distinct branch of theology.

Now in the department of Exegetical Theology, Biblical Theology occupies the highest place, the latest and crowning achievement. It is a higher exegesis completing the Exegetical Process. All other branches of Exegetical Theology are presupposed by it. The Biblical Literature must first be studied as sacred literature. All questions of date of writing, integrity, construction, style, and authorship must be determined by the principles of the Higher Criticism. Biblical Canonicity determines the extent and authority of the various writings that are to be