

Psalm-Singers'
Conference.

Belfast, August, 1902.

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far greater variety of translations, varieties of metres, than any other Church that adheres to Psalm-singing, and the United Presbyterian Church of America is wise in its generation in that. We ought to make far more use in the Service of Praise of the variety of metres, even such as we have. That is my view; and I do think we oftentimes do an injustice to the Psalter by restricting ourselves in another way. Some men will not sing the 109th Psalm, they will not sing what are known as the "Imprecatory" Psalms. Do we know better than the Holy Spirit what we should sing? Whatever may be in accordance with the subject of the discourse to be preached, by all means sing the Psalms that are relative to the subject; and, whether men hear or forbear, rest assured the Holy Spirit knows best how to safeguard His Own Word, and how to send it home to the hearts and consciences of those who hear.

THE PSALMS IN THE JEWISH CHURCH.*

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It will not be denied by anyone who believes in the Divine inspiration of the Scriptures that the Book of Psalms was given to the Jewish Church to be sung in the public and solemn worship of God, so that we can limit our discussion to "*the actual use of the Psalms in the early Jewish Church.*"

Our subject is a subject of peculiar difficulty, since the Word of God is silent concerning the use of the Psalms under the Jewish dispensation, making merely the statement that they were sung, and since even Jewish tradition is very limited touching this important point. The tracts, *Tamid* and *Middoth*, give a little information, and scattered through the Talmud are brief notices which have been woven into longer accounts, more or less truthful, by Jewish and Christian scholars. (See a brief list of literature at the close.) We will try to give a plain, unvarnished account of the little we know of the actual use of the Psalms in the Jewish Church before and about the time of Christ.

It has been rightly supposed that the system of praise was really commenced in the wilderness soon after the Tabernacle was set up, for the 90th Psalm, addressed by Moses, the man of God, to the eternal Jehovah, Who so wondrously preserved

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and led the people in the wilderness, was undoubtedly sung in the solemn assemblies of the people of Israel, when those of the original congregation who had reached that limit of life to which they had been restricted, were cut off suddenly "as with a flood," by pestilence, by the sword, by the fire, by the yawning of earth to swallow them up, and their bones whitened the desert sand.

There are some other Psalms whose language points to the remotest time of Israel's existence, and which are not assigned to any sacred writer by name, and we hesitate not to accept the suggestion that these Psalms were used by God's people in His worship during the periods before the days of David. And further, it is very possible that the Canon of Holy Scripture does not contain the majority of the inspired Psalms used in the worship of the early days of the Jewish dispensation.

The Psalms of David, Asaph, and the Psalmists of the later times were composed primarily and specially for the service of the Temple, where the worship was liturgical in a certain sense, for certain Psalms were sung on certain days and occasions, while the majority of the Psalms were used *ad libitum*.

We find occasionally the phrase, "hymns of the Temple," employed by Jewish scholars, but there is no doubt that all "hymns of the Temple" were Psalms.

As we look over the Book of Psalms, we are struck with the appropriateness of certain Psalms to certain occasions and certain parts of the worship, and we may take as granted that these Psalms were used as stated songs, although the Talmud does not mention them. Thus there are Psalms appropriate to the entrance of the worshippers into the Temple; to the pictorial scenes of substitution, imputation, sacrifice, and intercession; to the faith, the joyous emotions, the hopes, the thanksgivings, the prayers, and the praises in which the service culminates; Psalms of didactic, historical, commemorative, and of predictive import; Psalms expressive of the experience of individual believers, of penitential confessions and deprecations, of personal afflictions, conflicts, and reliefs, of praises and thanksgiving; Psalms relating to national calamities and deliverances; and Psalms of prayer and thanksgiving by the Church.

The time allotted to this paper is too short to permit more than a brief mention of the Psalms which are said to have been used as stated songs on certain days and occasions.

The Psalms said to have been used at the daily sacrifice were the following:—On the first day of the week, Psalm 24 was sung, because on that day God made the world and possessed it as its Maker; on the second day of the week,

Psalm 48 was sung, because on that day the Lord divided the waters and reigned over them; on the third day, Psalm 82 was sung, because on that day the earth appeared, and being established by His wisdom, God placed it under His righteous government; on the fourth day, Psalm 94 was sung, because on that day God made the sun, moon, and stars, and will surely take vengeance on all who worship them; on the fifth day, Psalm 81 was sung, because of the variety of creatures made on that day to praise the name of God; on the sixth day, Psalm 93 was used, because on that day God finished His works and made man who can praise God; and on the seventh day, the Jewish Sabbath, Psalm 92 was sung, which is entitled, "A Song for the Sabbath Day," and Psalms 9, 104, and 118 are mentioned as additional songs for the Sabbath Day.

On the eve of the Passover, during the killing of the lamb, the Egyptian, or Lesser Hallel was sung, which comprised Psalms 113 to 118, and, according to the Talmud, recorded five things:—"the coming out of Egypt, the dividing of the sea, the giving of the law, the resurrection of the dead, and the lot of the Messiah." This Hallel was sung also on the Feast of Pentecost, and on each of the eight days of the Feasts of Tabernacles and of the Dedication of the Temple. It was also repeated during the Passover supper where Psalms 113 and 114 were sung before the drinking of the second cup, while Psalms 115, 116, 117, and 118 were sung over the fourth cup, and thus closed the supper. Wolff mentions a curious tradition that those could partake of a fifth cup who would sing the "Great Hallel" over it, which comprised Psalms 120 to 136.

During the eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles the Egyptian Hallel was used, as stated above, and special Psalms were sung at the drink-offering after the festive sacrifices. Thus, Psalm 105 was sung on the first day of the feast; Psalm 29 on the second; Psalm 50, 16-23 on the third; Psalm 94, 16-23 on the fourth; Psalm 94, 8-23 on the fifth; Psalm 81, 6-16 on the sixth; Psalm 82, 5-8 on the seventh day.

On the Feast of Trumpets, Psalm 81 was sung during the drink-offering, and Psalm 29 was sung at the evening sacrifice.

We cannot stop here to picture the scenes at the services of the Jewish Church with all their beauties and luxuries, but we must stop a moment to consider how the Psalms were sung in the worship of the Jewish Church. The Rabbis repeat again and again that the real service of praise in the Temple was only with the voice, and modern Jewish scholars have tried to bring to light again the plain and simple, yea, almost monotonous tunes used in the service of song.

The Psalms at the daily sacrifices were divided into three parts, and a considerable pause was made between the first and the second, and between the second and the third. The signal for commencing the song was given by priests sounding their trumpets.

The chief musician apparently set the Psalms to music and taught the performers, for in the titles prefixed to numerous Psalms terms are used to signify the air, whether grave, cheerful, or joyous; the variety of performance by all the voices and instruments, by choruses, single voices, responses, etc.

A considerable number of Psalms contain decisive internal evidence in their interrogatory and responsive structure, and in their changes of subject and person, that they were originally adapted to be sung in that manner. The nature and significance of the services of which they were sung as accompaniments required this method; and a like practice of responses and choruses prevailed prior to the erection of the Temple (Exodus 15; Judges 5).

The singing in the first Temple was congregational (1 Chron. 16, 36), while at the laying of the foundation of the Temple the singing seems to have been antiphonal, the two choirs afterwards singing in unison in the Temple itself. In the second Temple female singers were employed (Ezra 2, 65), whose place was taken by Levite boys in the Temple of Herod.

The service of song commenced when the daily drink-offering was poured out upon the foundation of the altar. The steps which led to the east gate of the Temple, at which the worshippers were to enter, were fifteen in number, and each was thirty or more feet in length. A division of vocal and instrumental musicians is supposed to have occupied the extreme right, and another division the extreme left of those steps, the king a position at the top, near the threshold of the gate, and the high priest with a corps of singers a position in front of the lower step, while the procession of worshippers passed up towards the gate. During the passage of the procession the songs of degrees were sung. At its close the singers around the high priest took their station around and near the altar; and those on the right and left wings took their stations on the right and left sides of the outer sanctuary.

It must have been a striking and impressive scene, as after the daily sacrifice the Levites and the people united in the song of praise, at the termination of which the worshippers descended into the city to engage in their daily task.

We must, however, not think that the use of the Psalms before the time of Christ was confined to public worship. Psalm 134 was used every night by the different divisions of

the watch in the Temple. One watch addressed the other, reminding them of their duty, and the second watch answered by a solemn blessing. The whole Psalm was sung aloud at stated intervals to notify the time of night.

In the days of Jehoshaphat the Psalms were sung in battle (2 Chron. 20, 21), and Psalms were always sung in triumphal marches or processions. Judas Maccabaeus "sang Psalms with a loud voice," as he led his soldiers against the army of Gorgias, the governor of Idumea.

The Psalms have thus "furnished the battle songs, the pilgrim marches, the penitential prayers, and the public praises" to the Jewish Church. And "in palace halls, by happy hearths, in squalid rooms, in prison cells, in crowded sanctuary, in lonely wilderness—everywhere they have uttered the song of triumph and the moan of contrition, the tearful complaints, and the wrestling, conquering prayer" of God's people in ancient times, as they are uttering now, and will continue to utter until the end of time.

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NOTE.—1, in Hebrew; 2, 3, 4, 5, 15, in Latin; 6 to 11 in German; 12, 13, 14, in English.