

The Wisdom Literature

Lesson #9

Messianic Psalms

Introduction

- Hebrew poets included psalmists who composed songs of Israel containing cries of adversity and tragedy, hymns of triumph and victory and confessions of sin and repentance. They sang praises to Jehovah, exalted the nation's history, invoked God's vengeance upon evildoers and called for the Lord's help in time of trouble.
- Beyond the lyrics, composition and musical performances, the psalmists received special insight into the nature, life and role of the coming Messiah. These poets were sometimes prophets who, being directed by the Spirit of God, looked to a golden age of Messianic rule (cf. Acts 1:16; 2:30).
- "Messiah" is Hebrew or Aramaic for "Christ" which itself is Greek for "anointed one." Some form of the word is used a number of times in the psalms to depict Israel's future leader. The psalmists, in their role as prophets, portray the coming Messiah as vividly as any of the Old Testament writers with the possible exception of Isaiah (cf. Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 23, 24, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 72, 87, 89, 102, 110, 118). They sing of His eternal existence, lineage and humanity, life of adversity, death and resurrection, coronation and rule at God's right hand.
- Jesus knew that every prediction in the psalms about Him and His kingdom would come true (Luke 24:44). In fact, very little is known of Jesus in the New Testament that was not first spoken by a psalmist.

Preexistence

- Two psalmists allude to the eternal existence and deity of the coming Messiah. David writes, "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand ..." (Psalm 110:1). In a confrontation with the Pharisees, Jesus, the Messiah Himself, appeals to this psalm to argue His eternal nature. He is more than a descendant of David because David in this psalm called Him "Lord." Jesus contended, "If David then call him Lord, how is he his son?" (Matthew 22:42-46).
- Long before He became David's son in the flesh, the Messiah as God was David's Lord. He is specifically identified as God by the sons of Korah who sing of His anointing by Jehovah: "Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of thy kingdom is a right sceptre" (Psalm 45:6; cf. Hebrews 1:8).

Incarnation

- The anointed God became flesh. The word "incarnation" is from ecclesiastical Latin and it means "made flesh." Jehovah who anointed and exalted the coming prince had made a covenant with David: "I have made a covenant with my chosen, I have sworn unto David my servant, Thy seed will I establish for ever, and build up thy throne to all generations" (Psalm 89:3-4; 132:11; Acts 2:30).
- "The Lord," "O God" -- the Messiah -- would also be the son of David; He would tabernacle in the flesh, be born of a woman and become a sharer of flesh and blood with the kingdom's citizens (John 1:14; Galatians 4:4; Hebrews 2:14). David's Lord was to become David's son, born of the tribe of Judah and the house of David. When anointing Jesus to be Messiah, Jehovah fulfilled His covenant with David to establish his seed and throne forever (Psalm 89:20, 29, 34-37; cf. Matthew 1:1-17; Luke 1:31-33).

Life

- The psalmists sing of various aspects of the life of the Messiah. He would exhibit great zeal in His work (Psalm 69:9; cf. John 2:17). His preaching would be in parable form (Psalm 78:2; cf. Matthew 13:35). He would also be praised in His work (Psalm 8:2; cf. Matthew 21:16).
- Unfortunately, that praise was short-lived. The psalmists also sing of a life of adversity. The nations would rage against Him, a description of the trials before Herod and Pilate in which the people clamor for His death (Psalm 2:1-3; cf. Acts 4:25-28).
- Even this tragedy is exceeded by the betrayal of a disciple -- one the Messiah had selected to be a fellow-servant, one He had drawn to His bosom and one who had reclined at His table.
 - Years before, one psalmist stated the betrayal in the words of the anointed Himself: "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Psalm 41:9).
 - Jesus declares the fulfillment of this at the "last supper" when He dips sop with Judas and the son of Iscariot turns from the table and hastens off to sell his Lord for thirty pieces of silver (John 13:18, 26-27).

Death

- The ultimate tragedy of life, portrayed by the psalmist, is the anguished cry of the Messiah: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" God's anointed sees Himself as a worm and no man; He is laughed to scorn as the people shoot out the lip and shake their heads; trouble is

near and He finds none to help (Psalm 22:1, 6, 7, 11; cf. Matthew 27:46).

- It is commonly believed that Jesus' statement indicates God abandoned or turned His back on His Son, because Jesus while on the cross, took on the sins of the whole world, and thereby became the greatest sinner the world has ever known.
 - It would seem to those who were onlookers of both the persecution of David and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, that God had abandoned David and Jesus because He allowed their enemies to carry out their evil schemes. However, the psalm declares that God does not turn away from those who praise and glorify Him (vss. 23-24).
 - The second line of Psalm 22:1 holds the clue to the interpretation. As God allowed David to suffer, so He allowed Jesus to be delivered up and suffer at the hands of lawless men (Acts 2:23).
 - It is not as though Jesus was asking the Father for an answer to the question, for Jesus knew everything (John 12:27; 13:3; 18:4).
 - The shout of Jesus on the cross was not a statement that the Father had forsaken Him, but rather a shout to get the attention of the great multitude to recall the prophecies unfolding right before their very eyes!
 - Jesus citing the opening words of Psalm 22 was equivalent to citing the entire passage as a reference made to Him, which was a common practice in ancient times.
- Delivered up to wicked men by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, the Messiah is brought "into the dust of death." He is compassed about by strong bulls who gape on him as a ravening lion; His life is poured out like water, His bones are out of joint, His heart melts within Him, His strength is dried up like a potsherd and His tongue cleaves to his jaws. His enemies have pierced His hands and His feet, parted His garments and cast lots for His vesture (Psalm 22:12-18; cf. Matthew 27:35; John 19:23-24). Furthermore, it was prophesied that He would be given vinegar to drink (Psalm 69:21; John 19:28-30) and that His bones would not be broken (Psalm 34:20; cf. John 19:36). In the end, He committed His spirit to God (Psalm 31:5; Luke 23:46).
- The Messiah envisions God always at His right hand; in Him He finds safety and rejoices that His soul is not left in Sheol and His flesh does not see corruption. Beyond the suffering and death, God's anointed lives, reigns, and intercedes for man.

Hope/Resurrection

- The psalmists saw the soul of the Messiah depart into the unseen realm of Sheol and His flesh descend to the grave. However, neither would linger among the dead (Psalm 16:10).

- The psalmists also saw the anointed one rejected by His peers as an unfit stone set at naught by the builders; yet a stone that became the head of the corner -- a foundation for God's spiritual house and a rock of offense that crushes to dust the disobedient (Psalm 118:22-23; cf. Matthew 21:42, 44; 1 Peter 2:4-7).
- When the nations with their rulers rage against the Messiah, crying out for His death, God holds them in derision. Despite the sentence of death and the execution of the anointed one, God sets Him on His holy hill of Zion (Psalm 2:1-6).
- The psalmists' hope finds fulfillment in the resurrection of God's holy one. The apostle Peter at Pentecost appeals to the sons of Korah who sang of the resurrection: "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Psalm 16:10; cf. Acts 2:27-31). The apostle Paul quotes the same psalm at Antioch of Pisidia to affirm the resurrection of Jesus, but also calls David to witness: "As it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee" (Psalm 2:7; cf. Acts 13:33-37).

Ascension/Reign

- Beyond the resurrection, Israel's singers envision the reign of the Messiah. Psalmists, however, see it not as a rule upon earth but at the right hand of God. Jehovah speaks to David's Lord, the coming Messiah and king, of His rule in heaven: "The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Psalm 110:1).
- Peter employs these words of David to describe the ascension of Jesus into the heavens to the right hand of Jehovah. There, the apostle concludes, He was made "both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:33-36). God, from His heavenly throne, sends forth the rod of His strength and the Lord rules in the midst of His enemies. There at God's right hand the anointed one strikes "through kings in the day of his wrath" (Psalm 110:5).
- The nations become the Messiah's inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth His possession (Psalm 68:18; cf. Ephesians 4:8-10). He rules with a rod of iron and breaks the nations and dashes them into pieces like a potter's vessel (Psalm 2:7-9). Heaven is the anointed's throne throughout the ages, a fulfillment of the promise and covenant with David that one of the fruit of his loins would sit on his throne forever (Psalm 89:3-4; 132:11).
- To this end the Messiah was born and raised from the dead. The Son of the Most High, it is proclaimed by Gabriel at His birth, shall receive the throne of His father David, shall reign over the house of Jacob forever and of His kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:31-33). This, God fulfilled, according to Peter, when He raised Him to His own right hand --

far above all principality, power, might and dominion (Acts 2:30-36; Ephesians 1:20-21).

Priest/Intercession

- David, Israel's "sweet psalmist" (2 Samuel 23:1), foresees, as does the prophet Zechariah, the King as priest on His throne: "The Lord hath sworn, and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4; cf. Zechariah 6:12-13).
- He is a priest who, first of all, had Himself to offer. When Jehovah rejected their sacrifices and no longer had any delight in whole burnt offerings, the Messiah volunteered: "Lo, I come ... I delight to do thy will, O my God" (Psalm 40:7-8). Jehovah prepared Him a body in which He was offered "once for all" for the sins of the world (Hebrews 10:5-10; 9:23-26).
- As a "priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek," His priesthood is "unchangeable" -- based on the "power of an endless life." Because of this, "he ever liveth to make intercession" for the saints (Hebrew 7:17, 24-25).

Conclusion

- Messianic psalms span the eternal ages -- viewing the anointed one as God who became man, as man who was tragically rejected and slain and as the Lord who was exalted to the heavens from whence He came.
- There as king and priest He consummates God's plan for the ages. What a story! What a Savior! How beautifully told is the story in the lyrics and compositions of the ancient singers in Israel.