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LUTHER'S SUMMARIES OF THE PSALMS (1531)--A MODEL
FOR CONTEMPORARY PSALM INTERPRETATION

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology,
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by
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May 1991

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Advisor

cLL-P _____
Reader

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INTRODUCTION

Brevard Childs in his Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture¹ says:

With all due respect to Gunkel, the truly great expositors for probing to the theological heart of the Psalter remain Augustine, Kimchi, **Luther**, Calvin, the long-forgotten Puritans buried in Spurgeon's Treasury, the haunting sermons of Donne, and the learned and pious reflections of de Muis, Francke, and Geir.

I take these words as a challenge to Lutherans. Does Luther truly have something usable to speak to us about the Psalter? Specifically, can his hermeneutics (in the sense of his principles and approach for interpreting the psalms) help us learn not only about the theological heart of Luther, but about the theological heart of the Psalter?

Luther has left only one work in which he commented on all 150 psalms. The Summarien Uber die Psalmen of 1531 accompanied his extensive revision of the Psalter published that year and reflects his thinking after fifteen years of lecturing on, writing about, and translating the psalms. Some portions of this work--both suggestions for interpretation and details of translation--are untenable, or at least unfollowed. Many of his applications are dated, or at least unfashionable. The challenge for the contemporary Luther-minded interpreter of the psalms is to develop summaries and applications of

1(Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 523.

the psalms for our time, using the principles Luther laid down. My thesis is that Luther does provide a set of principles which can be utilized in a way which is both faithful to the text and usable today.

Luther uses a five-part approach to summarize the psalms. He divides them into psalms of prophecy, psalms of instruction, psalms of comfort, psalms of prayer, and psalms of thanksgiving. Chapter I of this paper will analyze this classification scheme. Specifically, it examines the criteria Luther uses to classify the individual psalms, and the conclusions he draws from the classification.

Chapter II will examine how Luther's hermeneutical principles are applied to the psalms in general. It will look at how Luther, as a sixteenth century Christian, found a contemporary meaning in the Old Testament psalms. How does Christ and Luther's Christian faith fit into all the psalms? How does Luther move from the meaning of the psalms--then, to the meaning of the psalms--now?

Chapter **III** examines the psalms of prophecy as a special case. What are Luther's criteria for this classification? What does Luther mean by a psalm praying "in the person of" Christ?

In conclusion, then, Chapter IV will ask: Can Luther serve as a model for contemporary exegesis? Specifically, how does Luther's five-part classification scheme compare with the contemporary interpreters of the Psalter? What are the limitations of his approach? What is the contemporary value of his approach? How can Luther help to lead us to "the theological heart of the Psalter"?

A translation of the Summarien Uber die Psalmen is included as an appendix to this paper.² This work serves as the basic document for our analysis and evaluation of Luther's principles for interpreting the psalms. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the history behind this document and the Psalter revision of 1531. In this regard, see Heinz Bluhm, Martin Luther, Creative Translator³ and J. Michael Reu, Luther's German Bible⁴. For an evaluation of Luther's translation that goes so far as to claim that Luther, in translating the Psalter, "went beyond himself . . . even at times surpass[ing] the original language . . . of the Psalms in clarity and power," see Bluhm's essay on "Luther's German Bible" in Seven-Headed Luther.⁵

²References in this paper to the Summaries found in the Appendix will be by psalm number alone (e.g., "the summary to Psalm 12," "Summ. 12," etc.).

³ St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1965) 117-124.

⁴ St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1984) 211-221.

⁵Peter Brooks, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) 190, 194.

CHAPTER I

LUTHER'S SUMMARIES OF THE PSALMS

The Five-part Approach

In 1531, when Luther presented his new translation of the Psalter for publication, he attached to it two brief works. In the first, the Defense of the Translation of the Psalms¹, he gave an answer to the critics of his 1524 Psalter. In this work, aimed at those who can follow an argument about Hebrew grammar and etymology, he gives a sometimes detailed, technical defense of the method and results of his labors in bringing the Hebrew Psalms into German. This is not only a writing aimed at Hebrew specialists; it is an assertion by Luther that he knows his Hebrew better, and knows the psalms better, than all of his critics.

Then, however, with an abrupt "This is enough on translation," Luther turns to the general reader. He presents a brief summary for each psalm, assigning each psalm to one (or more) of five categories: psalms of prophecy, instruction, comfort, prayer, and thanks. He admits that the psalms "may not be precisely and exactly divided into these classes." In his listing the classifications of the psalms, he

¹Martin Luther, "Defense of the Translation of the Psalms," Luther's Works, American Edition, vol. 35, Word and Sacrament I, trans. and ed. Helmut T. Lehmann (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1960) 205-223, hereafter cited as Amer. Ed.

Martin Luther, "Ursachen des Dolmetschens," D. Martin Luthers Werke, Kritische Gesamtausgabe, vol. 38, ed. Karl Drescher (Weimar: Berman Bohlaus Nachfolger, 1912) 1-17, hereafter cited as VA.

describes 23 psalms as belonging to more than one division. In fact, his comments indicate that he could have done more to indicate the complexity of the psalms, that ultimately psalms cannot be placed so firmly in one division that they exclude all elements of the other divisions. Nevertheless, despite the disclaimers, Luther offers his summaries and classifications as "a help, so that one might more easily understand the Psalter, become adapted to it, and also be able to learn it and keep it" (Intro. to Summaries).

The following table lists the classification of psalms in Luther's summaries:

THE PSALMS OF PROPHECY

Psalms 2, 8, 9*, 14*, 16, 19, 21, 22, 24, 29, 40*, 41*, 45, 53*, 55*, 59*, 61, 68, 69*, 71*, 72, 87, 89, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99*, 100, 109*, 110, 113, 117, 118*, 126*?, 150*

THE PSALMS OF INSTRUCTION

Psalms 4*, 14*, 15, 32, 36*, 49, 50, 51, 53*, 62, 73, 77, 78, 90*, 99*, 101, 119*, 127, 131, 133, 134, 150*

THE PSALMS OF COMFORT

Psalms 1, 4*, 9*, 27*, 30*, 31*, 33*, 34*, 36*, 37, 39, 52, 58, 75, 82, 84, 91, 92, 112, 119*, 121, 126*?, 128, 150*

THE PSALMS OF PRAYER

Psalms 3, 4*, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 20, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31*, 35, 38, 40*, 41*, 42, 43, 44, 54, 55*, 56, 57, 59*, 61, 63, 64, 69*, 70, 71*, 74, 79, 80, 81, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90*, 94, 102, 109*, 119*, 120, 123, 130, 132, 137, 138*, 140, 141, 142, 143

THE PSALMS OF THANKS

Psalms 9*, 18, 23, 27*, 30*, 31*, 33*, 34*, 46, 48, 60, 66, 76, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 111, 114, 115, 116, 118*, 119*, 122, 124, 125, 126*, 129, 135, 136, 138*, 139, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150*

The psalms with an asterisk Luther placed in several categories:
 Psalm 4 is a psalm of instruction, comfort, and prayer;
 Psalm 9 is a psalm of prophecy, comfort, and thanks;
 Psalms 14, 53, 99 are psalms of instruction and prophecy;
 Psalms 27 and 31 are psalms of comfort, prayer, and thanks;
 Psalms 30, 33, 34 are psalms of comfort and thanks;
 Psalm 36 is a psalm of comfort and instruction;

Psalms 40, 41, 55, 59, 69, 71, 109 are psalms of prophecy and prayer;
 Psalm 90 is a psalm of instruction and prayer;
 Psalm 118 is a psalm of prophecy and thanks;
 Psalm 119 is a psalm of instruction, comfort, prayer, and thanks;
 Psalm 126, Luther says, may be a psalm of prophecy and comfort, but he thinks it is a psalm of thanks;
 Psalm 138 is a psalm of thanks and prayer;
 Psalm 150 is a psalm of thanks, comfort, instruction, and prophecy.

The Psalms of Prophecy

First, some psalms **prophecy** [weissagen], speaking, for example, of Christ and the church, or of what will happen to the saints, etc. In this class belong all the psalms that contain promises and warnings--promises for the godly and warnings for the ungodly. (Intro. to Summaries)

Luther never calls a psalm "prophetic." He says instead that a psalm "is a prophecy"² or that it "prophesies."³ In the category of prophecies he includes:

Psalms 2, 8, 9*, 14*, 16, 19, 21, 22, 24, 29, 40*, 41*, 45, 53*, 55*, 59*, 67, 68, 69*, 71*, 72, 87, 89, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99*, 100, 109*, 110, 113, 117, 118*, 126*?, 150*

The psalms with an asterisk are those that Luther placed in several categories. Psalm 9 is also considered a psalm of thanks and comfort; Psalms 14, 53, 99 are also psalms of instruction; Psalms 40, 41, 55, 59, 69, 71, 109 are also psalms of prayer; Psalm 118 is also a psalm of thanks; Psalm 126, Luther says, may be a psalm of prophecy and comfort, but he thinks it is a psalm of thanks; Psalm

²Thus, Ps. 2 ist eine weissagung. YA 38, 18.

³rhus, Ps. 14 weissagt von Christus. VA 38, 22.

150 is--at once--a psalm of thanks and comfort and instruction and prophecy.

We will discuss the psalms of prophecy in greater detail in Chapter III. At this point we only observe that there seem to be several general criteria by which Luther classifies a psalm as a prophecy. First, he places into this category any psalm which is applied to Christ in the New Testament, as, for example, Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 45, 68, 95, 110. Luther does not often discuss the New Testament quote. Instead, he assumes the New Testament citation as the basis of his summary. He acknowledges the New Testament witness and then discusses the psalm on the basis of this, for him, authoritative interpretation.

Thus, in Summary 68, Luther never quotes Eph. 4:8-13 nor discusses its use of Ps. 68:19. He simply says,

The 68th Psalm is a beautiful and powerful prophecy of Christ, how he shall rise, ascend to heaven, give His Spirit, send His apostles, let the Gospel be preached * * * .

Just as Paul applied verse 19 to the sending of the apostles, so Luther applies all the psalm to the apostles, including all its words and images:

The psalm calls the apostles kings and lords of armies and leaders in battle since, with the Gospel, they do battle against death, sin, and the devil * * * . Likewise it calls them high fruitful mountains, God's heirs, God's chariots, with many hosts, etc. Again it calls them singers and choruses among the maidens, dancers and singers--because they joyfully praise, glorify and thank God.

Luther's summary shows that he did not consider the New Testament citation to be merely a verbal correspondence, with import only in the interpretation of Paul's argumentation in Ephesians 4. On the

contrary, Luther considered Paul a true witness to the intended meaning of Ps. 68:19, and he develops his summary of the entire psalm on that basis. In this way, Luther seeks to show how and for what purpose the psalm of prophecy does in fact prophesy.

A second criterion will also cause a psalm to be designated as a prophecy. If a psalm speaks of an eternal throne or a world-wide kingdom, Luther interprets this as a prophecy of Christ. His comment on Ps. 45:7-8 may serve as an example here. When the psalm says "God, your throne lasts forever and ever . . .," Luther no doubt connects these verses to their use in Heb. 1:8-9. Again, however, he does not comment on the New Testament citation. Instead he summarizes its import in brief sentence: "An eternal king must be God Himself." On this basis, he describes the king addressed throughout Psalm 45 as the "eternal king who rules in righteousness and takes sin away," namely, Christ.

In a similar manner, any psalm containing a promise of salvation or deliverance will be interpreted in terms of the salvation and deliverance promised in Christ. So, for example, Psalm 14. This psalm decries the foolishness, corruption, and abominable deeds of the sons of men and concluded with a prayer that deliverance or salvation would come for Israel from Zion. Luther interprets this (Summ. 14): "The psalm promises or prophesies also of the coming of Christ, when it speaks of the help from Zion. For the Gospel and the Spirit have come from Zion."

In Chapter III, we will discuss Luther's meaning when he describes a psalm as being spoken "in the person of Christ." At that

time, we will also ask whether, and in what sense, the prophetic psalms are a special case or a special class of psalms.

The Psalms of Instruction

Secondly, there are **psalms of instruction**, which teach us what we should do and what we should avoid, according to the law of God. Here belong all the psalms which condemn the doctrines of men and praise the word of God. (Intro. to Summaries)

In the category of psalms of instruction [Lehrpsalmen] Luther placed the following:

Psalms 4*, 14*, 15, 32, 36*, 49, 50, 51, 53*, 62, 73, 77, 78, 90*, 99*, 101, 119*, 127, 131, 133, 134, 150*

Psalm 4 is also a psalm of comfort and prayer; Psalms 14, 53, 99 are also prophecies; Psalm 36 is also a psalm of comfort. Psalms 90 is also a psalm of prayer; Psalm 119 is the great psalm of instruction, comfort, prayer, and thanks; Psalm 150 is a psalm of prophecy, instruction, comfort, and thanks.

Luther categorizes a psalm as a psalm of instruction, first, if it gives an exhortation to the Christian life or, as he says above, if it teaches us "what we should do and what we should avoid, according to the law of God." For example, Psalm 15, which says, "Who shall dwell on your holy hill? He who walks blamelessly and does what is right," Luther interprets as "a psalm of instruction, which teaches that the true understanding of the law, the truly **good** life, and true good works are the fruits of the Spirit and of faith."

Secondly, in this category Luther places the psalms which call on us to learn from the people who have gone before us--both bad and good examples. Here belong all the warnings which speak about false

confidence in men (Psalm 43), riches (Psalm 49), and human righteousness (Psalm 50). To counter these, Luther extols the true examples of forgiveness, grace, and reliance on God. The examples of Israel's history fit in this category, both as examples of God's grace and the wisdom of reliance on God (Psalm 77), as well as a warning not to follow in Israel's disobedient footsteps (Psalm 78).

Thirdly, two psalms which the church has traditionally classified as penitential psalms, Psalm 32 and Psalm 51, are classified by Luther as psalms of instruction--instruction in the total dependence of the sinner upon God and His grace. The other five penitential psalms are included among the psalms of prayer, as Luther focused upon their pleas for help and forgiveness. These two psalms are included as psalms of instruction because they do not simply plead for God's mercy. They declare it and rely on it as a certainty. As Luther says of Psalm 32:

In short, our righteousness is called (in plain English)⁴ the forgiveness of our sins. Or as it says here: "sins not counted," "sins covered," "sins not to be seen." Here stand the clear plain words: all the saints are sinners, and remain sinners. But for this reason they are holy--that God, out of His grace, neither sees nor counts these sins, but forgets, forgives and covers them.

This kind of Gospel declaration is for Luther a true psalm of instruction. Likewise, Luther sees instruction in David's plea for forgiveness in Psalm 51: "In it, David truly teaches us what sin is, where it comes from, what damage it does, and how one may be freed of

⁴That is, auf deutsch. YA 38, 28.

it." Instruction, then, despite Luther's own description, is not only the voice of the Law telling us what to do and what to avoid. Instruction is also the voice of the Gospel telling us where to place our trust, and assuring us of our forgiveness. Here, of course, instruction, prophecy, and comfort are closely intertwined.

The Psalms of Comfort

Thirdly, there are **psalms of comfort**, which strengthen and comfort the saints in their troubles and sorrows, but rebuke and terrify the tyrants. Here belong all the psalms which comfort, exhort, stimulate endurance, or rebuke the tyrants. (Intro. to Summaries)

Luther classified the following as psalms of comfort [Trost-psalmen]:

Psalms 1, 4*, 9*, 27*, 30*, 31*, 33*, 34*, 36*, 37, 39, 52, 58, 75, 82, 84, 91, 92, 112, 119*, 121, 126*?, 128, 150*

Psalms 4 is also a psalm of instruction and prayer; Psalm 9 is also a prophecy and a psalm of thanks; Psalms 27 and 31 are also psalms of prayer and thanks; Psalms 30, 33, 34 are also psalms of thanks; Psalm 36 is also a psalm of instruction; Psalm 119 a psalm of instruction, comfort, prayer, and thanks; Psalm 127 is either a psalm of comfort and a prophecy, or a psalm of thanks; and Psalm 150 is a psalm of prophecy, instruction, comfort, and thanks.

When Luther spoke of comfort, he placed it against the backdrop of the conflict of the ungodly against the righteous, the persecution of the faithful, the prosperity of the ungodly, and the resulting envy, doubt, and despair that can plague the heart of the downtrodden people of God. With this context, Luther had no problem finding that the psalms which speak of the downfall and judgment of the ungodly

were indeed psalms of comfort. Thus when Ps. 52:1, 5, says "Why do you boast, O mighty man, of mischief done against the godly? . . . God will break you down forever!" Luther summarizes:

The 52nd Psalm is a psalm of comfort. The title shows well enough of what it speaks, namely of Doeg who betrayed David and shed much innocent blood (I Sam 22). He was a traitor and bloodthirsty dog, who slandered those who hope in God's word, reviled God's servants, and incited kings and princes to shed innocent blood. Against these malevolent ones this psalm brings comfort. It announces to them their reward, that they shall be removed from body, goods, house, and land. But the godly shall remain and retain God's house and His word.

The downfall of the oppressor is a comfort to the lives of the oppressed. Likewise, the affliction in the heart of the godly oppressed is comforted by the promise that the self-secure oppressor is not secure at all. His evil will recoil on his own head and his goods go to another. He has no profit from what he has done. This is, for Luther, an appropriate comfort for the righteous.

Luther does not impassively analyze the question of whether God ought to judge the ungodly, or whether a Christian ought to pray for such judgment. He speaks as a participant in life, a partisan in the struggle which the psalms describe. As such, he hears, and is cheered by, the word of God that says that judgment will come, it will be right, it will bring the wrong to light, and evil will not be unpunished. In other places, Luther can speak the word of prayer and hope that the persecutor may repent, become one with the righteous and share their faith and life. So, for example, Summary 9 says that even "some of the persecutors convert and become Christians." But he does not speak this word at every time. In his mind, God's judgment on the ungodly is, without question, a comfort for the righteous.

In this matter, similar to his total acceptance of the New Testament witness and interpretation of the psalms, Luther again is totally accepting of the voice and content of the psalms before him. He does not question whether it would be right for the Old Testament saint to speak as he does. He speaks as he does, and the scriptures do not rebuke his speech. Luther likewise does not question whether Christians are allowed to speak as the psalmists. What they say, Luther calls on his readers to say. Psalms 75 is a psalm against the "boastful," "wicked," "insolent." For Luther, it is the Christians's psalm as well:

The 75th Psalm is a psalm of comfort against the stiff-necked, proud, godless teachers who are self-secure and presume on their office, as if they need fear nothing, neither threat nor punishment..... So also today our secure Junkers and the factious spirits sit as spiritual and worldly tyrants, thinking that God Himself can neither see nor overthrow them.

But this psalm says otherwise. It gives us the comfort, that we should look forward to the judgment, when they will be judged; and pass away. The earth will shake and tremble with all its inhabitants; nevertheless God will preserve the pillars, that is, the godly who bear and preserve this world Thus, God preserved Lot when He overthrew Sodom, and preserved the believing Jews with the apostles when He destroyed the Jewish nation. For He well knows how to deliver His own, when He destroys a land. (Emphasis added.)

For Lot, for the Christians of 70 A.D., and "so also today," the Lord knows well how to deliver His people.

The Old Testament psalmists are calling on God to be judge and executioner. They do not take that role themselves--unless they, like David, have that office to perform. How then, does Luther, as a Christian, pray a prayer of judgment? He does so as a Christian who sees himself involved in the very self-same conflict, with the same

enemies of God's word needing the same hand of God to stop them.

Mutatis mutandis, nothing really has changed.

The same kind of down-to-earth comfort is found in the psalms which "teach us and urge us to hope in God and endure hardship and every need with patience" and "to wait confidently for God who is the highest comfort" (Summ. 4), or the psalms which tell us there are "many and great benefits" to hearing and learning God's word (Summ. 1). In one sense, this could be the message of a psalm of instruction: "This is how you should live." But for Luther, the call to rely on the promise of God's blessing is, in essence, the promise of God's blessing. Thus, when Psalm 1 says that "the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked shall perish," this is nothing less than a message of commitment, blessing, and comfort from God.

Perhaps the most striking inclusion among the psalms of comfort is Psalm 119. Luther classifies this psalm as a psalm

containing prayers, comforts, instructions, and thanks in great number. It is however chiefly written to excite us about God's word. It praises God's word throughout, and warns us against both the false teachers and against boredom and contempt for the word. Therefore it is primarily to be counted among the psalms of comfort.

This classification sheds light on Luther's concept of comfort. He has in mind not an expression of sympathy or an attempt to assuage the pain of the afflicted. Instead, he sees comfort in the words of praise, warning, and exhortation to God's word, which Psalm 119 exemplifies. Comfort is thus the message of promise from God which establishes our heart on Him, places our confidence in Him, and encourages us to hear God's word as a message of promise and commit-

ment to us. From this comfort, comes the confidence to endure in affliction, the ability to withstand envy and doubt, and also "prayers, instructions, thanks, prophecies, worship of God, suffering, and all that pleases God and grieves the devil" (Summ. 119).

Using this definition of comfort, Luther naturally sees Psalm 121 as a psalm of comfort:

For although it appears as though He sleeps or slumbers, so that we are struck down by the sun by day and the moon at night, yet it is not so, though we may think and feel it. For God watches and keeps us secure, and does not let the sun strike us dead. This we will come to know for certain at last, though we can now only look forward to it.

Luther also sees a practical comfort for the difficulties of life in Psalm 128, "Blessed are all who fear the LORD . . . • Your wife will be like a fruitful vine . . . •• Your sons like olive shoots "

Marriage partners are given this great comfort: they should not look only at the trouble, work, discouragement, and discomfort, which they must feel and experience in marriage, but rather the gracious will of God toward them, that their station and life are a gracious creation of God and are blessed by Him. Therefore marriage is dear to Him and He gives it much more happiness and blessing than discomfort, where one only believes and adapts oneself within marriage and faithfully remain with it.

Comfort never trivializes or minimizes the hardship. Comfort is the message that promises God's blessing during, through, and past all hardship.

The Psalms of Prayer

Fourth, are the psalms of prayer, in which one calls on God, praying in all kinds of distress. In this class belong all the psalms which thus lament or mourn, and cry out against the foes. (Intro. to Summaries)

The psalms of prayer [Betpsalmen] make up Luther's largest category. In it he includes:

Psalms 3, 4*, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 20, 25, 26, 27*, 28, 31*, 35, 38, 40*, 41*, 42, 43, 44, 54, 55*, 56, 57, 59*, 61, 63, 64, 69*, 70, 71*, 74, 79, 80, 81, 83, 85, 86, 88, 90*, 94, 102, 109*, 119*, 120, 123, 130, 132, 137, 138*, 140, 141, 142, 143

Psalms 4 is also a psalm of comfort and instruction; Psalm 27 and 31 are also psalms of thanks and comfort; Psalms 40, 41, 55, 59, 69, 71, 109 are also psalms of prophecy; Psalm 90 is also a psalm of instruction; Again, Psalm 119 is a psalm of instruction, comfort, prayer, and thanks; Psalm 138 is also a psalm of thanks; and Psalm 150 is a psalm of prophecy, instruction, comfort, and thanks.

The psalms of prayer include all the laments **against** enemies, slanderers, false teachers, false saints, persecutors, and so forth. Luther uses the verb lament [klagen] to categorize Psalms 6, 7, 10, 11, 12, 17, 26, 35, 38, 40*, 41*, 42, 44, 56, 59*, 63, 69*, 88, 120. Included in this group are all the psalms in which the psalmist is confronted with his enemies so that he cries out, "Help, Lord!" "Lord, how many are my enemies!" "Lord, why do you hide yourself?" or "Listen to my cry!"

Luther often finds in these psalms that a psalm which begins as a lament is combined with a message of comfort. Although there are only three psalms (4, 27, 119) where he declares that the psalm is included in both categories, there are 12 others (7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 56, 63, 64, 71, 94, 130, 143) in which he finds aspects of comfort. In many of these, the comfort comes in the form of an assurance that the prayer against the enemy shall be granted. So in Summary 64,

David prays against his betrayers and slanderers who made their case with poisonous words and evil malignity in the worst way--as

Absalom, Ahithophel, and the like, and Doeg before, in the court of Saul. But he has this comfort, that their words would come down on themselves, and their tongues would bring down not David but themselves--as happened to Absalom, Ahithophel, and Doeg.

So also in Summary 94: The psalmist "takes comfort in his confidence that God's word and actions are reliable and God will not allow the seat of destruction [v. 20] to come upon them, but will repay them for their lies and murders." As in the psalms of comfort, these are very practical comforts: "the false teachers will be condemned and the righteous will remain" (Summ. 11). Luther explicitly notes the juxtaposition of prayers and comfort in nearly one-third of the psalms of prayer. By his own descriptions of the contents of the psalms, he could have done so even more often.

Also included among the psalms of prayer are most of the traditional penitential psalms (Psalms 6, 38, 102, 130, 143--all but 32 and 51). Here again, the lamentation which marks the psalm as a psalm of prayer gives over to confidence in the prayer answered, that is, confidence in God's grace and forgiveness. So in Summary 6:

It laments the great, yet quite hidden, suffering of the conscience when, on account of sins, one's faith and hope are tormented by the law and anger of God and driven to despair or erring faith. This suffering is called, elsewhere in the Psalter, "the bonds of death" (Ps. 18:5) and "the ropes of hell," or "the misery of death" and "the anguish of hell" (Ps. 116:3). But at the end he sees that his prayer was heard, and thus he may be a trustworthy example for those who find themselves in such affliction, so that they may not remain in it.

Or again, Summary 38:

. . . the psalmist laments over his sins, on account of which his conscience despairs and is greatly afflicted and can see nothing but God's arrows [v. 3], that is, His anger, threats, death, and hell But, for all that, he teaches us to hold fast and not despair. He teaches us to arm ourselves with prayer against their boasts, to lay claim to God's promise and take hold of it to the proper end, namely that we be godly and righteous before

God. Then the comfort of faith will flow again, etc. Likewise, we too should pray and not despair in any anxiety, although we are sinners and we feel sharply the burden and assault of our sins.

In Psalms 130 and 102, Luther goes so far as to identify the psalmist's comfort in the promise of forgiveness with the "kingdom of grace, promised in Christ." We will discuss this aspect of interpretation--the place of Christ in the psalms--in Chapter III.

Similar in content to the penitential psalms are Psalms 13, 42, and 43, which Luther summarizes as "the psalmist lament[ing] over his sorrows of heart, that God was angry with him and had afflicted him" (Summ. 43). Likewise, Luther describes Psalm 13:

The 13th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against sorrow or sadness of the spirit which comes at times from the devil himself, at times also from men who act against us with spite and evil tricks. As a result, we are cast down and grieve when we see such evil aligned against us. But prayer is stronger than all misfortune. This psalm gives us here an example, by which we certainly may be comforted and learn in every kind of calamity not to become anxious or downcast, nor bite or destroy ourself in the heart. Instead we learn to keep ourselves to prayer and cry to God of all of these things, knowing that we will be heard and finally be delivered, as St James 5:13 also says: "If anyone is troubled let him pray." This psalm is contained in the second commandment and the first and last petitions, that we may be delivered from evil.

In this summary, Luther describes the prayer against spiritual affliction in the same terms in which he describes prayer against the affliction of an enemy. They are one and the same. The external affliction is only a problem to the extent that it causes fear, sorrow, or grief within. See for example, Summary 10:

As it says in verse seven, ("his mouth is full of cursing, lies, and deception") he can do no more than curse, that is, excommunicate and condemn; lie, that is, bring about false doctrine and false worship; and deceive, that is, delude and make a fool of the world concerning its goods, honor, power, body, and soul.

But in the end, the psalm shows our comfort, that such abomination shall perish with the end of the world.

Here Luther acknowledges the mischief of the enemy, but denies that it can do any harm. What can do harm is the sting of guilt and sin in the conscience. To this affliction, outward persecution is only the outer shell. The true torture--and true comfort--is in the heart's relationship to God.

For to truly feel ones sins and despair over a guilty conscience is the torture over all torture. Moreover, outward persecutors add to this "comfort", pursuing men in their conscience and boasting of how God stands with them, and against the righteous. And since God here holds back His comfort, this terror in the heart must follow, that God is angry with them on account of their sins.

But, for all that, he teaches us to hold fast and not despair. He teaches us to arm ourselves with prayer against their boasts, to lay claim to God's promise and take hold of it to the proper end, namely that we be godly and righteous before God. Then the comfort of faith will flow again, etc. Likewise, we too should pray and not despair in any anxiety, although we are sinners and we feel sharply the burden and assault of our sins. (Summ. 38)

In this way a psalm of prayer and confession turns to a message of comfort and faith. But note here that Luther is finding a message of comfort against despair in a psalm which itself does not declare the comfort, but only asks for it. The Revised Standard Version translates Ps. 38:15-16, 21-22:

But for thee, O LORD, do I wait; it is thou, O LORD my God, who wilt answer. For I pray, "Only let them not rejoice over me, who boast against me when my foot slips!" . . . Do not forsake me, O LORD! O my God, be not far from me! Make haste to help me, O LORD, my salvation!

From this prayer Luther sees the psalmist teaching the Christian to pray, hold fast, not despair, and, above all, to lay claim to God's promise and take hold of it.

Included also among the psalms of prayer are two prayers specifically for governmental authorities.

The 20th Psalm is a psalm . . . (which] prays specifically for emperor, kings, princes, governors, and all those who sit in any seat of authority. The psalm prays that God would grant them grace to rule peacefully and well, having good fortune and victory over their enemies. (Summ. 20)

The 61st Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the enemy and especially for the king and those in authority, that they fear God, rule long and well, and that good government not be destroyed by enemy and war. (Summ. 61)

The Psalms of Thanks

Fifth, are the psalms of thanks, in which God is praised and glorified for all His blessings and help. Here belong all the psalms that praise God for His works. These are the psalms of the first rank and for their sake the Psalter was created; therefore it is called in Hebrew sefer tehillim, that is, a praisebook or book of thanksgiving. (Intro. to Summaries)

Among the psalms of thanks [Dankpsalmen] Luther includes:

Psalms 9*, 18, 23, 27*, 30*, 31*, 33*, 34*, 46, 48, 60, 66, 76, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 111, 114, 115, 116, 118*, 119*, 122, 124, 125, 126*, 129, 135, 136, 138*, 139, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150*

Psalm 9 is also a psalm of prophecy and comfort; Psalms 27 and 31 are also psalms of prayer and comfort; Psalms 30, 33, 34 are also psalms of comfort; Psalm 118 is also a prophecy; Psalm 119 is a psalm of instruction, comfort, prayer, and thanks; Psalm 126 is a psalm of prophecy and comfort, if it is not a psalm of thanks; Psalm 138 is also a psalm of prayer; Psalm 150 is a psalm of thanks, comfort, instruction, and prophecy.

The psalms of thanks include thanksgiving for deliverance from enemies (Psalm 18), for deliverance from spiritual afflictions (Psalm

30), for forgiveness (Psalm 103), for kings and all in authority (Psalm 144), and for various and general blessings (Psalm 23, 107, 139). Inasmuch as a declaration of thanks is also a declaration of dependence, Summary 130 can serve as an example of Luther's understanding of the psalms of thanks:

The 130th Psalm is a psalm of prayer which comes from the genuine Davidic devotion and understanding. It confesses that before God no one is righteous nor may he become righteous by his own work and righteousness, but rather, only through grace and forgiveness of sins, which God has promised. He relies on this promise and word and comforts himself. He exhorts all of Israel that they should do the same, and learn that with God is a throne of grace and redemption. Israel must through Him alone, and no way else, be freed of their sins, that is, "through forgiveness" (without which there is no grace) become righteous and blessed. Apart from this, he truly would be in the depths and would never stand before God.

Look! Here is a true Master and Doctor of the Holy Scriptures who has understood what this means: the seed of the woman shall tread on the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15) and through this seed all the nations of the world shall be blessed [Gen. 12:3; Gen. 22:18]. Therefore he places both a promise and a prophecy of Christ in this verse: "He will redeem Israel from all his sins." Upon this verse, and from it, comes the entire psalm.

We will discuss further, in the next chapter, the import of the final paragraph, connecting all of the psalm to Christ, the church, and the Christian. Let us suffice now with the comment that Luther sees thanks as more than a word of praise and admission of need, dependence, and reliance on God. Thanks for blessings received can also serve as an implied statement of confidence in the promise of blessings to come.

Psalms of thanks, therefore, can also serve as examples for life. In Psalm 18, David gives thanks for his deliverance from his enemies (which Luther names as Saul, Goliath and the philistines, Absalom, and other rebels). Luther notes, "Everyone needs to keep this psalm

as an example--to thank God for His help when God has delivered him out of his troubles" (Summ. 18). The examples of Israel's history are exhortations for Christians to recognize God's selfsame care for them.

The 66th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for the general blessing that God often delivers and protects His people out of the hand of the enemies, as He did at the Red Sea. The histories in the books of the Judges and Kings are full of these deliverances which He also does daily for us, delivering and keeping His own in the true faith against devil, spirit, sins, etc. (Summ. 66)

The 114th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, for the people of Israel to praise God at Passover for his wonderful works. For He had led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the dry wilderness, mountains, and the Jordan into the promised land. We sing this psalm daily to Christ to praise Him who has led us out of death and sin, through the wilderness of the flesh and the devil, into an eternal life, etc. (Summ. 114)

This final note indicates that for Luther, thanks for the deliverance of Israel at the exodus is a song that the Christian can sing to Christ. The greater fulfillment includes its forerunner.

In a similar way, Luther sees the psalms of thanks for the protection of Jerusalem as examples and models (at least) of present thanksgiving for Christ's protection of the church. Thus:

The 46th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, of the time when the people of Israel sang of the mighty deeds of God. He had protected and saved the city of Jerusalem, in which was His dwelling, against all the rage and the fury of all the kings and the heathen and preserved their peace against all warfare and weapons... We, on the other hand, sing this psalm to praise God for being with us. He miraculously preserves His word and Christendom against the gates of hell, against the rage of the devil, the factious spirits, the world, the flesh, sin, death, etc. (Summ. 46)

The 48th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, very much like the 46th Psalm. For it also praises God for the city of Jerusalem which was protected and defended by God against the kings and princes • • • We also sing this psalm for Christendom and the Gospel, that they will stand against the raging of the kings and princes,

who finally must withdraw in shame--and the word they still must let remain. (Summ. 48)

The 122nd Psalm is a psalm of thanks which gives thanks with joy for the word of God, which in a specific city, namely Jerusalem, was given through a specific people, namely the Levites and Kings, and received by specific hearers, namely the tribe of Israel. How much is it to be lamented that, seeking everywhere for God's word and being nowhere able to find it, the children of Israel wound their way to idols. And we Christians did the same, with our running to pilgrimages and winding our way to the cloister, etc. But the holy church is our Jerusalem, and Christ is our temple, city, altar, and mercy seat, to which, from which, and with which we seek and hear His word. (Summ. 122)

Note this last summary. Luther sees Psalm 122 as a specific psalm of a thanks for a specific city, people, and hearers--and also "our" psalm of thanks as well.

One final example of Luther's ability to adopt the psalmist's thanks as the Christian's thanks is Summary 23:

The 23rd Psalm is a psalm of thanks, in which a Christian heart[!] praises and thanks God for teaching him and keeping him on the right way, comforting and protecting him in every danger through His holy word. He compares himself to a sheep which a faithful shepherd leads well into fresh grass and cool water. In addition, he shows the table, the cup, and oil also as images from the Old Testament worship and calls it all God's word, as it is also called rod and staff, grass, water, and the way of righteousness.

The Classification System

Luther began his summaries with a qualification on the system of classification:

Now, one should understand that the psalms, with all their verses, may not be precisely and exactly divided into these classes. Thus at times one psalm might contain two, three, or even all five classifications and one psalm belong in all five divisions, with prophecy, instruction, comfort, prayer, and thanks lying next to one another. However, this is the intention, that one may understand how the Psalter carries these five parts. These classifications are a help, so that one might more easily understand the Psalter, become adapted to it, and also be able to learn and keep it.

In the discussion of the various categories, we have seen this combination of classes in the discussion of each of the categories. Prophecies bring comfort, instruction prophecies, prayer gives way to comfort. But in his concluding summary Luther shows how far he is from rigidly applying these categories:

The 150th Psalm is a psalm of thanks written first of all for the people of Israel to praise God. For them His sanctuary, the firmament of His might, that is, His dwelling place, heaven, and castle were in Jerusalem. Here also He showed His might with miracles and received the string music and the songs of the Jews, with which their praise and worship was accompanied. But for the Christian, preaching and the Gospel are our string music and songs.

Note that all psalms of thanks are nothing but promises for the poor troubled conscience, saying as much as: God is gracious and gladly forgives all sins and will give all comfort, so that one may find all blessings and comfort in Him. Therefore this is openly a psalm of thanks and at the same time secretly a psalm of comfort--yes, even a psalm of instruction and a prophecy. All in one, it proclaims God's grace and teaches us to trust and believe in Him. To this, may the same merciful God help us--our King and Lord, Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is praised forever. Amen.

According to Luther, a psalm of thanks is a promise of **blessings** to come. Otherwise it would be confined to the past, with no function as an example for the present and future. The on-going life of thanks is based on the confidence that the care which the Lord has bestowed in the past is a continuing blessing, a certainty for now and for the future. "Therefore [Psalm 150] is openly a psalm of thanks and at the same time secretly a psalm of comfort--yes even a psalm of instruction and a prophecy." With this sentence, Luther reunites the Psalter which he had divided into categories. Luther knows of only one relationship with the God of the Old and New Testaments--a relationship of faith and trust based on God's unmer-

ited grace and favor, shown and fulfilled for us in Jesus Christ. For Luther, then, to thank God is to praise and rely on the One who has also instructed him, comforted him, and prophesied/promised His salvation. Likewise, to call on God in distress is in itself a confession that God is a saving, promising, comforting God, to whom one will soon enough be giving thanks.

The classification system is an assistance, an aid to understanding what the psalmists are saying. It is not an ironclad division. By his introduction and conclusion to the summaries, Luther softens the potential rigidity of a classified list of psalms. When the summaries have done their task, and the reader understands what the psalmist was saying, then the classification can recede into the background. In the real life of the reader--as in the real life of the psalmist--comfort, instruction, prayer, praise, and promise cannot be isolated from each other.

The question remains, then: How can a New Testament Christian pick up and appropriate to himself the prayers of an Old Testament believer? What are the principles of interpretation and appropriation which guide this process? Can a present-day believer follow Luther's hermeneutical principles? On what basis, and with what justification, did Luther move from the meaning of the psalm--then, to the meaning of the psalm--now? In short, what did it mean for him, and what can it mean today, to say, "We also pray this psalm."

CHAPTER II

LUTHER'S HERMENEUTICS OF THE PSALMS

In this chapter, we will look first at the references to Christ in the psalms of each category, then we will examine Luther's description of the stance of the Christian in praying the psalms. In this description we hope to find an illustration of Luther's hermeneutical principles--the principles by which Luther approached, interpreted, and appropriated to himself the text. We will also examine Luther's contention that the psalms could be described as "flowing from," "belonging to," or "being in" one of the commandments, or one of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer. The psalms of prophecy will be considered separately, in Chapter III.

Christ in the Psalms

The Psalms of Instruction

Luther finds a witness to Christ in several of the psalms of instruction. The first among these mention God's help or salvation coming out of Zion. Psalms 53 and 14 are counted as both psalms of instruction and prophecies. They are considered to include Christ because of their mention of salvation in connection with Zion:

The psalm promises or prophesies also of the coming of Christ, when it speaks of the help from Zion. For the Gospel and the Spirit have come from Zion. (Summ. 14)

The 53rd Psalm is a psalm of instruction and a prophecy, like the 14th Psalm. Both have nearly the same verses and words. In brief, both of them rebuke the faithless work-saints who persecute the true doctrine and the true teachers. At the end [v. 7], they proclaim the Gospel and kingdom of Christ, who shall come out of Zion. (Summ. 53)

In his interpretation, Luther sees the "help coming out of Zion" as being more than any deliverance achieved before Christ. The fulfillment of these verses came in Christ. Therefore Christians can pray these words, relying on the same prophecy/promise as the Old Testament saints did--in Christ.

Similarly, in Summary 90, where the psalmist says "show us your works" (v. 16) and "establish the work of our hands" (v. 17), Luther says:

The psalm ends with the prayer that God would show us His work, namely, His deliverance from sin and death, that is, that He would send Christ. And he asks that, while we live here, God would establish our work, that is, that both spiritual and worldly authority may be and remain favorable.

Luther sees no greater establishment of God's work than the establishment of His work of deliverance in Christ.

In Psalm 131, although Luther follows a reading of the Hebrew of verse 2 that is counter to all modern translations,¹ his conclusion would work with both his text and the modern versions. Luther picks up the psalmist's image (v. 2) of the peaceful stillness between mother and infant as an image of God and sinner:

". . . Without the nipple of the promise and grace, I cry day and night and have no peace in my conscience." Therefore this is his conclusion: Let Israel and everyone trust and hope in God and depend only on His grace. Let no one take this nipple from you. I commend it to you, for the promised and coming Christ is in it. (Summ. 131)

¹See Summary 131.

The psalm speaks simply of peace and stillness. For Luther, that peace is no different from Christian consolation. For an Old Testament saint to quiet his heart by depending on God's grace was to do nothing different from a New Testament saint quieting his heart by depending on God's grace--in Christ.

The Psalms of Comfort

The summaries of the psalms of comfort do not explicitly name Christ, although there are allusions to His coming again in judgment as, for example, in Summary 75:

. . . this psalm . . . gives us the comfort, that we should look forward to the judgment, when they will be judged and pass away. The earth will shake and tremble with all its inhabitants; nevertheless God will preserve the pillars, that is, the godly who bear and preserve this world, as St. Paul (I Tim 3:15) calls the church a foundation and a pillar of truth. Thus, God preserved Lot when He overthrew Sodom, and preserved the believing Jews with the apostles when He destroyed the Jewish nation. For He well knows how to deliver His own, when He destroys a land.

There are also references to more gentle blessings, as in Summary 92:

The 92nd Psalm is a psalm of comfort which extols God's word as the most highly exalted and precious gift, against the false saints, whom it attacks. They certainly flower for a time, glorious and powerful, but finally they perish. The righteous, however, will remain forever. Although they come to an old age, they shall yet never be old, but they become young daily through God's word which always conveys fruit and new growth. But fools neither consider nor understand these things, as we also see today in our own time.

The Psalms of Prayer

The psalms of prayer, as we have mentioned above, contain many prayers that lead to a promise of comfort. Again, like the psalms of comfort, there is little explicit reference to Christ. Most of the

subject matter concerns prayers answered, personal deliverances, the protection of the city, and so forth. One exception to this is Summary 130, which was quoted in the last chapter. Here Luther interprets "He shall redeem Israel" as a statement about Christ, the ultimate Redeemer from sin.

Among the psalms of prayer are two in which Luther says, "Christ Himself prays." These are Summaries 40 and 41. Along with these are three psalms which Luther says are spoken "in the person of Christ" (Summ. 59, 69, 109). These psalms, as well as four others which pray "in the person of" all of Christendom, Christ and other great saints, and similar descriptions, (Summ. 71, 88, 102, 117) will be considered in the next chapter along with the psalms of prophecy.

The Psalms of Thanks

Among the many psalms of thanks are several which Luther specifically applies to Christ. Summary 145 says:

The 145th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for the kingdom of Christ which was to come. It strongly urges the high exalted work of praising God and glorifying His power and kingdom. For Christ's kingdom and power are hidden under the cross. If the cross were not extolled through preaching, teaching, and confession, who could have ever thought of it, to say nothing of knowing it? But such is His kingdom and power that He aided the fallen, called the needy to Himself, made sinners godly, and brought the dead to life. Yes, He is the one who gives food to all [v. 15-16], who hears the call of His saints, does what they desire, protects them, etc.

The mention, in verse 13, of an eternal kingdom is perhaps enough for Luther to consider the psalm to be speaking of Christ, but once that connection is made, other images and references to Christ are easy to find. "The LORD is faithful . . . gracious . . . upholds all who are falling down and raises up all who are bowed down." (v. 13-14, **RSV**).

Luther's interpretation was hardly a matter of his figuring out a psalm, puzzling out ways of applying the words to Christ. Luther had prayed the psalms constantly since the time he had become a monk. His praise for and love of the Psalter was boundless. So, in giving a Christ-centered interpretation, Luther was sharing his own thoughts, meditations, and prayers on the psalm.

To give thanks is not only psalmist's work, it is also a Christian thing to do. A Christian can certainly join in the psalmist's prayer, adding his own understanding, his own reasons for thanks. But Luther does not speak so cautiously. He never speaks of the psalms as distant prayers that he can use, too. For him, the Old Testament and New Testament saints are truly united. The New Testament Christian knows more clearly the salvation the Old Testament believer could only hope for, but when the psalmist and the Christian talk about salvation, forgiveness, and love, it is the same salvation, forgiveness, and love. Thus in Psalm 136 ("His steadfast love endures forever"):

The 136th Psalm is a psalm of thanks and is perhaps the text to show priests how they should sing and preach. Namely, they should sing and preach of God and His wonderful deeds, that He is gracious and merciful and a true Savior. Therefore in each verse he repeats the line, "His goodness endures forever," with which the psalm is nearly overwhelmed. Truly nothing but grace, not the works or doctrines of men, should ever be preached. For the works and words of men have done no wonders such as these. They are not deserving of this worship, but rather only the grace and pure goodness of Him, who gives all. Gift! Gift, he says! Gift free of charge! And Christ also stands hidden in the phrase. Such doctrine keeps in the people a pure faith and a right understanding of grace and the forgiveness of sins, against the factious and stiff-necked work-saints, etc.

The psalm is a psalm of thanks for Israel's history. It carries a message of gracious favor from God, a grace that endures forever.

"And Christ also stands hidden in that phrase." Luther does not say that Christ is there "for us," or that "we can see" Christ implied in the phrase. No, for Luther, if God is there in gracious favor, then Christ Himself is there.

The same connection can be seen in Psalm 103:

Psalm 103 is a psalm of thanks, beautifully and lovingly made, in which he thanks God for all His goodness, namely, forgiveness of sins, making a sound body and soul, giving us enough of all sorts of goods, making us joyful and confident, delivering us from enemies and distress. In short, he thanks God that He stays toward us as a gracious, compassionate and loving Father, though we are frail and unsteady creatures or creations. God does not deal with us according to our sins and deserts, but according to His gracious goodness in as much as we also accordingly acknowledge Him and keep His covenant [cf. v. 18]. That is, we believe in Him and gladly will be godly and neither arrogant nor stiff-necked in our holiness and righteousness (which is indeed a striving directly contrary to the covenant, especially the first commandment.)

This all comes to pass in Christ who for this reason was promised and now is come, whose kingdom reigns over all, etc. For at the end, where he calls on the angels, mighty ones, servants, hosts, to give Him praise and let His word be heard, I am of the opinion that the psalm is speaking of Christ and His apostles, gospel, and church--where such grace rules; for what we need, and what saves us must all come to pass in Christ and not outside of Him.

Notice, it is not that Luther "speaks of Christ or the church" in connection with this psalm. The psalm, Luther says, is speaking of Christ and the church. Present commentators would probably say the psalmist is speaking, but Luther is making no distinction between the two. The psalm, from verse 8 to 13, speaks of mercy, grace, steadfast love, forgiveness, pity, and removing our sins. These verses are for Luther an obvious statement about Christ.

Are these verses really a statement about Christ? This is the hermeneutical question of Christ in the psalter. How does one answer

a question of what a psalm "really" is about? For Luther, the witness of the rest of Scripture is clear, and corroborates what he sees in the words of the psalm. Ultimately, all compassion, grace, and forgiveness from God to us is compassion, grace, and forgiveness in Jesus Christ. There is no other. Even Old Testament grace and forgiveness are paid for, fulfilled, and brought together in Christ. And if ultimately there is only one forgiveness of sins, the forgiveness won by Christ on the cross--appropriated by saints before by faith and by the saints who follow after also by faith--then a psalm about forgiveness is a psalm about Jesus Christ. It is so, even though the psalmist could not have put it into his words. The conviction of Luther is that the connection of Christ and his church extends across time, ever since the first promise was given to Adam and Eve (cf. Summ. 130).

The Psalms for Christians

Luther not only speaks of Christ in the psalms. He often places the Christian into the Psalter. Ye have seen above his summary of Psalm 23, "in which a Christian heart praises and thanks God." Luther is not being cute, by calling David a Christian. He is **saying** what every Christian who prays this psalm says by his act of praying: "This psalm is about me." Certainly, to understand the words of the psalm, one needs to know about Old Testament history and life in Bible times: shepherding, the dryness of Judean hills, dangers of wild animals, anointed heads, middle eastern table fellowship, and the like. But the most important step hermeneutically is that a Christian can hear David talking about his Lord and

join his faith together with David's, saying, "Yes, that is my Lord."

Luther goes beyond the faith connection of the individual believer sitting on the hill with his God. He points out:

In addition, he shows the table, the cup, and oil also as images from the Old Testament worship and calls it all God's word, as it is also called rod and staff, grass, water, and the way of righteousness.

The table, cup, and oil are also the trappings of worship. To be the Lord's sheep is to worship the Shepherd who leads and guides, protects and feeds His flock by His word. No violence has been done to the sense of the psalm by Luther connecting it to a worship setting. It has not lost its power by coming indoors. Rather, what Luther has pointed out is that David is expanding on the blessings he has received from worship and the word, comparing it to the happiness and protection of a well-cared-for sheep. Truly, this is the prayer of a "Christian heart," because everything that the psalm says concerns the relationship of forgiveness and faith, which exists only in and through Jesus Christ.

Thus Luther allows no separation between David and the "Christian heart"; between the psalms--then, and the psalms--now. He sees no consequence in the Old Testament/New Testament differentiation. What they spoke of and waited for, the Christian has seen in Jesus Christ. Luther operates with the cheerful confidence that what the psalmists were talking about, really and ultimately, was Jesus Christ, and that the chronological direction of the faith--looking forward to the fulfillment, looking back at the completion--is really and ultimately immaterial. Therefore, Luther repeatedly appropriates the psalms for

Christian use. The psalmist prayed against Philistines and Moabites, the Christian prays against his enemies. Not only does he offer this as a proper use of the psalms. He takes David's Psalm 18 against his enemies and renames it with our enemies:

Consequently, everyone needs to keep this psalm as an example--to thank God for His help, when God has delivered him out of his troubles. Whoever wants to explain this psalm spiritually may make out of David, a Christian; Saul, the Jews; the heathen, the tyrants; Absalom, the heretics; and the disobedient, the false Christians--from all of which, Christ and all that are His will finally be delivered.

This comes perhaps into the area of application, with Luther giving us an analogy for his own time. It sounds as if Luther is speaking of the psalm in terms very much like allegory, except that he states this interpretation under a "may" rubric. He says that the psalm is an "example" and his "spiritual" interpretation, then, is one way that someone may want to apply it. Although application goes beyond exegesis proper, the interpretation of the text itself, it is always in order in the Christian life. The Christian does need to hear that though the names change, nothing else really changes.

Psalms, Commandments, and the Our Father

This is the aspect of the Summaries that first attracted my attention. Luther begins by assigning each psalm to one or more of the commandments and to one or more petitions of the Lord's Prayer. In practice, he assigned everything to the first table of the Law, and most psalms to the first three petitions. Apparently, having one God, honoring His name and His word, and serving His name, kingdom,

and will covers nearly everything for Luther. Two psalms are connected to the seventh petition, to be delivered from evil; surprisingly, only one psalm is assigned to the fourth petition, for daily bread.

Luther says that the psalms "belong to," "flow from," or even "are in" these petitions and commands. What he apparently means is that the first table of the law and the opening petitions of the Our Father dedicate ourselves to, and indicate our reliance on God. He saw that the repetition of the same numbers was beginning to be boring, and quit after Psalm 31, with this comment:

And here we should leave off pointing out in which commandment and which petition each individual psalm belongs. In the preceding, we have examples enough from which it may be easily determined where each of the following psalms belong. Psalms of prayer belong in the second commandment and the first petition, for they praise God's name and call on Him. Psalms of instruction, psalms of comfort, and psalms of thanks all belong in the third commandment as well as the second and in the first and second petitions. For they hallow the true sabbath with true works and with true worship. And many psalms often belong in all three commandments and petitions.

We have pointed these out so that we might learn well to use and understand the commands of God and the Our Father. We see how the dear saints and prophets spoke of and devoted themselves so abundantly and in such diverse ways to the first three commandments and petitions. They always treated them anew and afresh, yet without having something new to teach nor coming out with something beyond the Tables of Moses and the Our Father.

CHAPTER III
THE PSALMS OF PROPHECY

As we noted in Chapter One, most psalms used by the New Testament writers to refer to Christ are assigned to the prophetic psalms. A few psalms will be noted later in this chapter, which are quoted in regard to Christ and are classified by Luther as psalms of prayer spoken by Christ, or in the person of Christ. In every instance, however, where the New Testament makes reference to a psalm as being of Christ, Luther uses that identification as the foundation of his interpretation. Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 45, 68, 95, and 110 are all interpreted as a prophecy of Christ.

To analyze one example, Psalm 95 (the "Venite") is an invitation to praise the LORD, "the Rock of our salvation," who "is our God," and we "are the people of His pasture." Luther looks at the witness of Hebrews 3 and 4 regarding this psalm and declares:

The 95th Psalm is a prophecy of Christ which the letter to the Hebrews extensively treats as a prophecy of the time of the New Testament and of the voice of the Gospel. In short, it teaches and allures us to Christ and to the word of God as to the true worship. He warns us by the examples of the faithless fathers in the wilderness, who also did not come into the promised land on account of their unbelief and contempt for God.

The letter to the Hebrews describes Christ and the work of the Gospel as the way to enter the rest which Moses and Joshua could not provide. But Luther, in addition to reflecting the New Testament

understanding, also shows that he is not merely making a formal verse to verse application:

You must however apply the entire psalm to Christ: He is Himself the God whom we are exhorted to worship. He has made us and is our shepherd, and we are His sheep. He is the one who tested the unbelieving fathers, as Paul in 1 Cor 10:9 also states. From henceforth, He will receive no Mosaic worship, but instead faith, joyful preaching, praise, and thanksgiving.

Luther applies the entire psalm to Christ. That is, in one sense, easily defensible; anytime the LORD is mentioned, Christ and the Holy Spirit are included, as well as the Father. Any praise to "the LORD" is also praise to Christ. But Luther is reaching farther than this. He sees the entire psalm as a description of Christ and of the Christian's relationship with Him. Luther does not have an Old Testament image of God that differs in any essential way from the revelation of God in the New Testament by Jesus Christ. The God whom Jesus revealed, in His very person, is the true God. Therefore Luther can bring all that he knows about and through Jesus Christ and include it in his devotion to the rightful object of this psalm: Christ, "the Rock of our salvation," our "Sabbath rest."

Luther's use of the psalms is truly Christo-centric. Christ is present and central in all references to God. Christ is seen as being in every thing that God does to touch mankind. Luther will see that Christ is highlighted as the center figure in Psalm 24 ("Lift up your heads, O gates . . . "). Who is the king of glory? Certainly one could answer: the Triune God, Yahweh Sabaoth, is the king of glory. Luther, however, says it is Christ, the King over all the world.

The 24th Psalm is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ proclaimed in all the world. It calls on the "doors" of the world, that is, the kings and princes, to make way for the kingdom of Christ. For they are those who for the most part rage against Him (Psalm 2) and say, "Who is this king of glory?" as if they were to say "This beggar! Yes, this heretic! This criminal! Shall he be a king and shall we yield and submit to him? We shall not! etc." Moreover, in this way the psalm shows that God's word must be condemned and persecuted. (Summ. 24)

Since it is only through Jesus Christ that one can approach God's throne of grace, it is appropriate that Jesus be specifically named. He is at the center of everything. But Luther can say more still. Not only is Christ the king over all, He is the Rock that brings water, the Stone cut from the mountain that fills the whole world.

Therefore, Luther applies Psalm 19, which speaks of the heavens showing the glory of God in all the world, to Christ.

The 19th Psalm is a prophecy. It speaks of how the Gospel would spread to all the world as far as the heavens extend. Each day and night would spread it, and that not only in Hebrew but in all languages. Just as the sun (which he uses for an example) shines and gives warmth everywhere, so also will the new law of the Gospel give light, teach all kinds of men, comfort, purify, etc. (Summ. 19)

Just as Luther assigns all psalms to Christ which speak of an eternal kingdom, a worldwide realm, or a Redeemer or Savior, so also he highlights all the psalms which speak of a promise or the Gospel going to all the world, and applies them to Christ. See Summaries 19 and 68 above. Summary 8 says:

Psalm Eight is a prophecy of Christ, His sufferings, resurrection, and kingly rule over all creatures. This kingdom shall be established by the voice of the voiceless, that is, it will be established not by sword or armor but by word and faith alone.

Psalm Nine is also a prophecy of the youth, that is, of the young children, and of the people of Christ, which is the holy Christian church. These must suffer, following the example of Christ, and their blood will continually be shed. The psalm

however gives this prophecy thankfully and comfortingly, so that it might well be called a psalm of thanks and comfort. The Christian and especially the holy martyrs here thank God and are comforted by the fact that God never leaves them. No, the more they are persecuted, the more He multiplies them, as some of the persecutors convert and become Christians and the others perish.

The 29th Psalm is a prophecy of the Gospel, how it shall resound with power in all the world and overthrow the wisdom and renown of all kings, princes, lords, and peoples, and Christ alone shall be the only king. He must be served and glorified with true wisdom and holiness.

The 87th Psalm is a prophecy of the holy Christian church, that it shall be a city as wide as the earth is, and in it shall be born Ethiopians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Philistines, residents of Tyre and peoples of other lands and tongues. And this shall all happen through the Gospel which shall preach marvelous things of God, namely, the knowledge of God, that is, how one may come to God, be freed from sin, and be saved from death, namely through Christ, etc. And the worship of God in this city shall also be singing and dancing, that is, they will proclaim, praise, and thank God's grace with joy. In that city, no Moses shall plague and torment us with his law.

Luther interprets the prophetic message of the psalms as a mission message. Christ is the center of all of the dealings of God with men, and He is a center full of grace and forgiveness, sending His Gospel message to all who will hear.

Prayers "in the Person of" Christ

Summaries 40 and 41 say that Christ Himself prophesies and laments:

The 40th Psalm is a beautiful psalm of prayer in which Christ Himself laments His sufferings and calls for rescue from death. It clearly prophesies that He alone does God's will and fulfills the law and that this is written about Him in the book of Moses [v. 8]. He dissolves and abolishes the old law with its sacrifices and its holiness by which God's will was not fulfilled.

The 41st Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which Christ Himself prophesies and laments over His betrayer, Judas, together with his comrades, by whom He would be crucified. He prays that He would be raised up from death and that He might be elevated to

God's presence at His right hand. But in verse 4 He offers comfort for the multitudes, in that He makes of Himself a sinner, though truly He was without any sin. Thus He stands and declares Himself to be in our place, in our person, and He carries our sins as if they were His own, as if He had committed them Himself.

Luther has accepted the New Testament use of the verses of these psalms which refer to Christ and His betrayal and death. He does not, however, call these "prophecies," but "psalms of prayer in which Christ prophesies." The aspect of prayer is highlighted as the psalmist cries for protection from death and from betrayal.

Psalms 59, 69, and 109 are psalms of prayer "spoken in the person of Christ." Luther does not explain his use of this expression. But like the two psalms prayed "in the person of Christ and of His saints," these are prayers spoken out of tremendous suffering and anguish.

The 59th Psalm is a psalm of prayer and can very well be spoken in the person of Christ, who lamented over the Jews. He prophesied that they would not be annihilated, but dispersed into all the world where they teach nothing but curses and lies, as they up to this time had always done.

The 69th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, in the person of Christ as He spoke on the cross in His suffering. In verse 6-7, He confesses in our place, and laments for His crucifiers and slanderers who in His great thirst, gave Him gall and vinegar to drink (v. 21). (So clearly and openly He speaks of His suffering to come.) Then He prophesies of the horrible delusion, hardness of heart, and ultimate destruction of the Jews, which has all come about; as we can still see and sorrow over.

The 109th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, prayed in the person of Christ against Judas, His betrayer and against the Jews, His crucifiers. It vehemently cries against them and prophesies of them that they would perish and hardened in God's anger would be horribly destroyed, as we see it all fulfilled before our eyes.

The expression "Spoken in the person of Christ" was perhaps Luther's way of designating a psalm which speaks not of Christ's kingdom,

Gospel, church, glory, and salvation, but which instead laments and prophesies against the Jews, while crying to God for deliverance from the enemies. Luther sees a prophetic significance to the judgment on the betrayer and on the slanderers. (Indeed, Ps.69:22 speaks of gall in the food and vinegar to drink and Ps. 109:9 is quoted to refer to Judas.) Psalm 31 is the only psalm of this group which is a combination of categories:

The 31st Psalm is a general psalm of thanks, a psalm of prayer, and a psalm of comfort, all at the same time. It is spoken in the person of Christ and of His saints, how, on account of the word of God they are plagued their whole life long-- inwardly, with fears and troubles; outwardly with persecutions, slander, and contempt. And yet, they are comforted and delivered by God out of all of them. This psalm belongs in the second and third commandments and in the first and second petitions.

Among the prophecies of Christ, Luther summarizes several in terms similar to this:

The 16th Psalm is a prophecy of the suffering and resurrection of Christ, which the apostles themselves powerfully indicate (Acts 2:25 and 13:35). It clearly gives witness that Christ has discarded the old law with its sacrifices and worship as an idolatry, etc., and has chosen other saints and another people to be His heirs.

The sentence about discarding the old law seems to be in direct opposition to the general principle that there is New Testament/Old Testament unity in Christ. He does not, in fact, destroy the old law in the sense of rejecting it or replacing it, so much as He has fulfilled it. The fulfillment will, however, leave behind those who do not accept it. In their place, new people and proper worshippers shall enter with joyful and worshipful hearts.

The 67th Psalm is a prophecy of Christ, how He shall be king the whole world over and rule the people rightly, that is, rule them with the Gospel, that they may be freed from sin to live for Him in righteousness and thank Him with joy. As we have

often stated, this is the new and proper worship of God. For he does not say that the Gentiles shall circumcise themselves and run to Jerusalem, but rather that they will remain Gentiles and nevertheless give thanks to God, be joyful, and fear Him, that is, worship Him.

The 87th Psalm is a prophecy of the holy Christian church, that it shall be a city as wide as the earth is, and in it shall be born Ethiopians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Philistines, residents of Tyre and peoples of other lands and tongues. And this shall all happen through the Gospel, which shall preach marvelous things of God, namely, the knowledge of God, that is, how one may come to God, be freed from sin, and be saved from death, namely through Christ, etc. And the worship of God in this city shall also be singing and dancing, that is, they will proclaim, praise, and thank God's grace with joy. In that city, no Moses shall plague and torment us with his law.

Are the Psalms of Prophecy a Special Case?

Luther selected as psalms of prophecy most, but not all, of the psalms referred to in the New Testament, or the psalms which describe a kingdom impossible to rule with human power. In these psalms, Luther saw Christ's work, death, resurrection, church, apostles, mission, and Gospel clearly portrayed. From these psalms one could describe Jesus' betrayal, crucifixion, resurrection, and His mission to the apostles. Luther knows these concepts so well that, as he looks at the verses which specifically refer to Christ, he can see around them other verses which speak of grace and forgiveness in ways that bring Christ to mind.

Yet, one would hesitate to call the psalms of prophecy a special case. To do so would be to overlook the witness to Christ in the other categories. There are psalms of thanks, comfort, instruction, and prayer which also proclaim Christ as well.

So what we learn from the prophetic psalms is the same thing we have learned from watching Luther's approach to all the psalms:

- Luther's total acceptance of the New Testament witnesses.
- His total acceptance of the material before him, without complaint or accusation.

t His identity of the Old Testament faith in the promise **as being** essentially the same as the New Testament faith in the fulfillment.

- The centrality of Jesus Christ in everything.

CHAPTER IV

CAN LUTHER SERVE AS A TYENTIETH CENTURY MODEL?

Luther and the Contemporary Psalm Interpreters

There are of course some differences in how Luther translated the psalms and the modern interpreters of the psalms. By and large, however, the major differences appear in the area of conflicting hermeneutics. Luther's principles, summarized at the end of the preceding chapter, are far more wedded to the New Testament and to Jesus Christ than most contemporary commentators will allow.

The pioneering work in psalm study in the early part of this century was the work of Hermann Gunkel, who, in the process of creating a history of Israelite literature, identified the various forms of the psalms as he saw them. He subdivided the psalms into hymns, communal laments, thanksgiving songs of the individual, spiritual laments of the individual [psalms of innocence, penitential psalms] and mixtures of the other forms. His distance from Luther may be gauged by the observation that in the reprint of his article on the psalms in the Fortress Facet edition, the name of Jesus Christ is not mentioned.¹

¹The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967) 1-39.

Claus Vestermann has done a masterful job in placing his research into the accessible form of The Living Psalms,² yet even here the place of Jesus Christ is relegated to the very end, along with a declaration that the petitions against enemies are out of the question for Christians. Psalm 22 is interpreted with no mention of Jesus Christ, though the final chapter allows that the New Testament writers used Psalm 22 to interpret Christ's Passion.³

Hans-Joachim Kraus has placed a wealth of information in his three books on the psalms.⁴ His section on the "Purpose and Thrust" of each psalm helps to win the psalm-study back from the arid study of forms for forms' sake. He approvingly quotes Martim Noth: "There is great danger now that our interest no longer turns toward 'forms' but toward 'formulas'--in other words, that 'form criticism' becomes 'formula criticism' and that, adopting the tacit presupposition that a 'formula' once coined always stays the same, 'formula criticism' becomes 'formula uncriticism.'"⁵

Kraus is operating on a much more Christocentric plane--at least allowing for a Christocentric Christian application and use of the psalm--than many modern interpreters. He says, for example, (with Gerhard von Rad) that Psalm 2 "depict[s] the kingdom and office of the anointed one according to his--now hidden--divine doxa." He

²(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).

³Ibid., 79-91, 297-300.

⁴Psalms 1-59 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988).

Psalms 60-150 (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989).

Theology of the Psalms (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986).

⁵Psalms 1-59, p. 41.

gives the New Testament writers the credit that ultimately they had applied a thought which was there in the psalm. Still, he is speaking in terms of a later application of an original meaning, rather than the original meaning itself.

Different Questions?

The difference between Luther and an interpreter like Kraus is that Kraus will ask questions about a historical reconstruction of who first said the psalm, and work out a meaning that fits for that pre-Christian context, then turn to relate the meaning outside the Christian faith to the meaning for Christians.

Luther asks first and always: Where does Jesus Christ and the Christian faith fit in here? By his reading and understanding of the Christian faith, there is no essential difference between the worshippers who first hear the psalms and the Christian who picks them up today. The Christian faith is, among other things, the faith that Jesus Christ, the Son of David and Son of Abraham, was the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies, hopes, and promises. And if Jesus is indeed the promised Messiah that Moses and the Psalms and the Prophets spoke about, then not only Luther but also the present day interpreter should be able (and should be free) to find where Christ fits--as the New Testament Scriptures say He does--in the original psalms.

The different questions addressed by Luther on the one hand and Gunkel and his followers on the other brings into sharp focus the primary question of our study of Luther's Summaries: Can Luther's hermeneutics--his approach to interpretation and his principles of

interpretation--serve as a basis and a model for a faithful contemporary exegete? A popular work such as the Summaries is admirably suited for such a question since it does deal in broad strokes, sweeping conclusions. A contemporary Lutheran interpreter need not tie himself to the details of Luther's exegesis in order to examine, evaluate and adopt--or reject--his hermeneutical principles.

The contributions of twentieth century psalm study have come in the area of the definitions of forms (applied sometimes more-, sometimes less-, rigidly) placed into a reconstructed historical context. The adherents of the Gunkel-Iestermann-Kraus line of analysis have their eyes firmly fixed on the situation in the past, in Israel's history before Christ. It is in this historical context that they seek to determine the meaning of the psalms. That certain interpreters have based their reconstruction of the original Sitz im Leben on a rigid system with little documentary foundation does not take away the value of labor that faithfully and tenaciously asks: What did the psalmists actually say? When did they say it? And what did they mean?

The Limitations of Luther's Approach

The main limitation on the approach of Luther is specifically in the area of the questions of history. Luther simply does not raise the questions which our century has been taught to raise. Although, with Brevard Childs, one may agree that Luther has a better insight into the theology of the psalms, it would be foolish to ignore the relevance--at least--of the historical questions. At the very least, to approach the psalms as if they had no historical background to

examine, would be to lift them out of the life and faith of the real historical people who prayed them at a specific time in the history of Israel.

The historical context the interpreter must learn to maintain, however, is not only the reconstructed temple worship. One cannot ignore the centrality of the temple worship in Israel's life, but worship must be placed firmly in the life and history of Israel as the covenant people of God. It is true, to understand the psalms one must understand lament and praise, but the interpreter of the psalms also needs to understand the covenant, the exodus, Sinai, the Torah, the promise to Abraham, the promise to David, and Israel's faith in a God who was with them, for them, and whose *YHWH* endures forever.

Which is to say that if Luther's absence of historical analysis is a weakness, it is a weakness that cannot be corrected by a swing to an a-theological history. Israel's history is a history of a people of faith, even if the faithful were at times only a remnant among the larger people. Israel's psalms likewise are the cries and songs of a people of faith. One must therefore see them as real people in a real situation, but must, above all, see their faith. It is as a window on the faith of Israel that Luther saw the greatest value in the psalms:

••• the Psalter has this noble virtue and quality. Other books make much ado about the works of the saints, but say very little about their words. The Psalter is a gem in this respect•••• it relates not only the works of the saints, but also their words, how they spoke with God and prayed, and still speak and pray. Compared to the Psalter, the other legends and examples present to us nothing but mere silent saints; the Psalter however pictures for us real, living, active saints•••

Moreover, the Psalter does more than this. It presents to us not the simple, ordinary speech of the saints, but the best of their language, that which they talked with God himself in great earnestness and on the most important matters. Thus the Psalter lays before us not only their words instead of their deeds, but their very hearts and the inmost treasure of their souls, so that we can look down to the foundation and source of their words and deeds.

The second limitation of Luther's approach, of course, is that he lived in the sixteenth century. In the last 450 years, because of discoveries in archaeology, advances in linguistic studies, the Qumran witnesses, the greater knowledge of cognate languages, and so forth, we can have a far more detailed understanding of the Hebrew language and the Old Testament text than he enjoyed. A modern exegete has tools that Luther could never have dreamed of. At several points in the appendix (Summaries 9, 42, 93, 131) we have pointed out where Luther's translation is at variance with our modern understanding of the text and its meaning. No doubt, a detailed analysis of the whole 1531 Psalter would reveal more instances of this variance. At these places one of course must be prepared to depart from Luther's translation and detailed interpretation, in order to be true today to his principles of interpretation. Luther cannot be the authority for a twentieth century exegete in matters of the history of the text and its detailed interpretation. The contemporary respect for Luther must rather be in the area of hermeneutical principles and the approach to interpretation. Luther, who has had so much to teach us about Christ and the Gospel, can be a guide to finding Christ and the Gospel in the Psalter.

611Prefaces to the Old Testament," (1528/1545), Amer. Ed. 35, 254-255.

The Value of Luther's Approach to the Psalms

The value of Luther's hermeneutics, the place where his approach can make the greatest contribution to modern study, is in his conviction of the united Christocentricity of all of the Scriptures. Luther came to the Old Testament as a person who took the New Testament seriously. He saw that the New Testament apostles used the Old Testament--in this case, the Psalter--as a witness to Jesus Christ and a witness to their Christian faith. So for Luther, his acceptance of the apostles' witness to Christ then became a foundation stone of his understanding of the psalms. The apostles, in giving witness to Christ as their Savior, found the evidence, expression, and confirmation of their witness in the psalms, so that Luther learned from them to apply to Christ everything which was eternal, universal, or redemptive. Ultimately, for Luther (who knew that all life is connected to a God who is an eternal, omnipresent Redeemer), this meant that all prayers and laments, thanksgivings and praises, comforts and instructions are prayers and psalms which he could pray--in Jesus Christ. No one can come to the Father, except through Christ--even when coming by way of the psalms. Which is to say, the exegete who takes the New Testament seriously cannot posit a meaning and use of the psalms which eliminates or overlooks Jesus Christ. If the New Testament witness is correct, then the psalmists' way to God was itself a way through Jesus Christ, whom the psalms proclaim.

In Jesus Christ, then, the temple setting of the psalms as the worship book of Israel is fulfilled, and extended also to the

Christian. When Luther talks about praise and prayer [lament and thanksgiving] as the hallmarks of true worship, it is not because he overlooked the sacrifices and the priesthood, but because he saw the sacrifices, priesthood, and temple brought to fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The Christian also comes to God with praise and prayer, not because he has overthrown sacrifice and priesthood. He comes in the name of Jesus, the Lamb, the High Priest, the Temple. When Luther seems to speak allegorically--speaking of a geistlich understanding, where Christ is the temple, the Church is Jerusalem, and so forth, he is following the New Testament in appropriating all of Christ as a fulfillment of the Old Testament. Christ is not a fulfillment that nullifies what has gone before, but a fulfillment which takes the Old Testament faith, worship, hopes, and prayers into Himself as the great Temple, Priest, and Lamb.

In practice, then, the Christian can learn from Luther to look at an Old Testament psalm, recognize its distance from the present time in language, imagery, and experience, yet still receive it as a Christian's psalm, appropriate to our era, because both the Christian and the psalmists are one--in Jesus Christ. This unity can be seen in all the categories we have discussed before.

The psalmists prophesied of the coming Christ, His kingdom, His judgment, His grace and forgiveness. The Christian can receive those psalms as testimonies to the Christ who has come. He need not discard a single statement--whether explicit or implied--but can instead apply them all to Jesus Christ and therefore to himself in Jesus Christ.

The psalmists spoke of how to live and God's blessings on those who keep his instruction. The Christian too can be excited into action and warned against temptation, by the blessings and warnings, examples and history of the people of Israel. No one alive today was there at the exodus, but the God who was is still Immanuel, God-with-us. The Christian can learn his own history from Israel's history and learn above all to rely on God who is alone the Christian's strength and shield and salvation. Ultimately, the only strength, shield, and salvation are found in Jesus Christ. He is the same God, establishing once, for all time, the salvation and deliverance which He had done once, for one time, at the Red Sea.

The 114th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, for the people of Israel to praise God at Passover for His wonderful works. For He had led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the dry wilderness, mountains, and the Jordan, into the promised land. We sing this psalm daily to Christ to praise Him who has led us out of death and sin, through the wilderness of the flesh and the devil, into an eternal life, etc. (Summ. 114)

The pre-psalmist history of Israel, the faith and hope of the psalmist, and the Christian's faith and hope are all united, not in imagination, but in a Christological fulfillment. Just as the New Testament witnesses found baptismal meaning in the crossing of the Red Sea, so also the New Testament Christian, with Luther, can do the same with the exodus psalms.

When the psalmist comforts the afflicted with the eschatological assurance that the last word has not been spoken, that there will be a final revealing of the children of God, and a final judgment on those who reject Him, the Christian too can take comfort. The Christian can be comforted even more than the psalmist, for he has

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seen the Lord's salvation accomplished; he has heard the Lord's own description of the final judgment; and he can see in Christ's resurrection the guarantee that not only is this life not the last word, but there is no sting or victory for death at all. From Luther, the Christian can learn not to take vengeance into his own hands, or envy or bitterness into his heart. From Luther's handling of the psalms of judgment and prayers for deliverance, the reader of the Psalter learns to let Christ have the last word. If that is a final word of grace and renewal for the enemies, then that is best. If, however, the enemy of God and men is judged, as an enemy, then God's judgment is right and unassailable. No one dare place himself in the psalms as judge and executioner. The psalmists did not, nor did Luther. Instead one can place all things into God's hands for good, asking Him to put an end and a limit to all the raging of evil. The psalms assure the Christian, what Christ guarantees (and Luther summarizes), that the believer is promised a deliverance which will far outweigh all affliction. In making this application to Christ, the present day interpreter is by no means bringing up the psalms to a higher level than the Old Testament psalmists could attain. Instead, one is accepting these words as the cries of a faithful people facing great opposition. If, in ease and contentment, one cannot imagine appropriating words of comfort which include the breaking down of the opposition, then it may be that the fault lies in the ease and contentment rather than in the words of the psalms. Luther's message and example (summarizing what he had heard the psalms saying) is that it is possible for a Christian to pray these

words of judgment, anger, and accusation. Moreover, it is possible for us to pray these words not with hatred, bitterness, and violence, but with a proper rejection of the wrong and a faithful reliance on the Redeemer and Judge who is coming. In the same way, Christ our Lord rejected the rule of evil and will come again to show us what a righteous judgment really is. This the psalmists declare as a proper comfort.

In the psalms of prayer and thanksgiving, the Christian can join the psalmists on an easy-to-find common ground. They had requests to God; the Christian has request to God. They asked for blessings and protection; the Christian does as well. These are not lower-level pre-Christian cravings. The Christian is united with the psalmists in one united faith in Christ--promised and fulfilled. Any Christian can join in these prayers. A Christ-centered hermeneutic finds in the psalms of prayer requests which, though physical and this-worldly, were nonetheless worthy of the throne room of heaven. Luther recognized that the psalmist was not a crass materialist, asking God for daily bread and blessings, thanking God for the same, and having no other use for God. The psalmist asked for blessing and gave thanks for blessings as a member of the covenant people of God, relying on God's grace, trusting His promises, worshipping in His temple, receiving God's forgiveness. All of these--covenant, grace, promise, temple and worship, forgiveness and sacrifices--found their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. On that foundation, the Christian can receive and proclaim these psalms as unabashedly Christian prayers

and songs. Luther teaches in no uncertain terms that the psalms point to Christ, as Christ himself said (Luke 24:44).

"The Theological Heart of the Psalter"

A Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary student has written a dissertation, known to this author only by its title: Theological Interpretation of the Book of Psalms: A Model Developed from the Work of the Puritan, Francis Roberts, and Modern Exegesis.⁷ What he claimed to have done with a puritan expositor of the psalms is what Childs challenged his readers to do with all the classic expositors of the psalms, and this paper endeavored to develop from Luther: a hermeneutical model, current with modern exegesis, faithful to the scriptural texts, and in touch with the theological heart of the Psalter. To be theological, it must be Christocentric and Christological. I believe that Luther's principles of interpretation offer us a model and a basis for a contemporary interpretation of the psalms, both as a foundation for scholarly work and a foundation for an exposition of the psalms for all Christians. Luther's principles may be summarized under two categories.

First, Luther Receives the Scriptural Evidence--
All of it-- As Authentic

Luther's doctrine of Scripture, his acceptance of the Scriptures as the divine word of truth, is not under contention in the Summaries. He show us his attitude toward Scripture by how he works

⁷By v. H. Smith, 1988. Cf. Elenchus Bibliographicus Biblicus 1990.

with it in practice. Luther receives the word of Scripture as the authoritative guide to the interpretation of the psalms, in three ways.

1. He accepts the New Testament interpretation of the psalms. Where the Lord or His apostles have spoken about a text, their interpretation is the interpretation Luther follows. Sometimes he mirrors their interpretation without comment. At other times he expands the application to cover the whole psalm rather than only the verse(s) stated.

2. Luther does not explain away the language of eternal thrones, worldwide kingdoms, God shining in all of the earth, and the like. He does not reach for explanations about exalted language or hyperbole. Instead, he receives the words at face value, and looks for that interpretation which will allow the words to stand as they are, meaning what they say.

3. Luther never criticizes or dismisses the psalmists as if the New Testament had told us that their faith was lacking, misguided, or in need of correction. Instead, Luther follows the New Testament apostles in accepting the writings of the psalmists as inspired witnesses to the same faith which the New Testament Christians have seen revealed in its full power, clarity, and fulfillment. In the same way, Luther does not criticize or explain away the psalmist's emotions and language. He accepts them and interprets them as righteous desires, placed into the hands of God, with which any Christian may unite. There are dangers for the Christian in the emotions expressed, but the dangers--bitterness, hatred, vindic-

tiveness (cf. the prophet Jonah)--were dangers to the psalmist as well. The spiritual dangers inherent in worldly conflict are resolved by placing the whole matter into the hands of God, relying on His mercy and religious judgment.

Second, He Interprets it all as Relating to Christ

All three of the points in the section above point to Christ as the necessary center and content of the psalms. The New Testament witnesses realize that David said Psalm 16, but also realize that, ultimately, more than David is being spoken of. Therefore, following the psalm text and the New Testament witness, Luther can interpret the psalm as a comforting message of Christ and His resurrection victory. The New Testament writers, combined with a text that claims more than David can fulfill, not only permit one to see Christ in this psalm, they require it. True, David spoke this psalm, but he said it in words which were impossible to back up in their sense as they stand. Only Jesus Christ can be the fulfillment of this psalm and others like it. Resurrection, eternity, universality, forgiveness, even grace and blessing--each ultimately has its home and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. To be faithful to the witness of the New Testament and to the witness of the psalms themselves, is to find Christ throughout the psalter--filling up its comforts and promises with His life, inviting to Himself the prayers and worship the psalms speak about. In the same way, the psalms which require forgiveness, holiness, and righteousness to pray are prayers that no one can rightly pray unless covered by grace and forgiveness; but grace and forgiveness are ultimately words of Jesus Christ.

APPENDIX

The following appendix is a translation of Martin Luther's Summarien Uber die Psalmen, published in 1531. This work accompanied a major revision of the Psalter of 1524¹ and was connected to his Defense of the Translation of the Psalms.² The Summaries have been translated from the Veimar Edition, 38.³ The St. Louis Edition of Luther's Works⁴ and the three volumes of Luthers Psalmen-Auslegung⁵ were also consulted for examples of modern spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure.

Words or scripture references in parentheses are contained in the Veimar Edition text or margin. Words or references in brackets have been added. All references to the Luther psalm text are to the 1531 translation. Verse references are to the numbering of the Hebrew Bible, which corresponds to the numbers of Luther's **Bible**.

¹ For the text of the 1524 edition of the Psalter, the corrections made in editions from 1524-1528, and the text of the 1531 edition, see VA, Deutsche Bible 10/1, 106-590.

²Amer. Ed. 35, 205-223.

3vA 38, 17-69.

⁴Martin Luther, D. Martin Luthers Samtliche Schriften, vol. 4, ed. J. G. Valch (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1880-1910) 138-199. Hereafter St.L.Ed.

⁵E. Muhlhaupt, ed. D. Martin Luthers Psalmen-Auslegung I-III (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht), 1959, 1962, 1965.

LUTHER'S SUMMARIES OF THE PSALMS (1531)

This is enough on translation.⁶ We will now take up the Psalter and its summaries, to show as simply and briefly as we can what each psalm intends and does. And we note that the entire Psalter may be treated in a fivefold fashion, for we may divide it into five divisions.

First, some psalms **prophecy**, speaking, for example, of Christ and the church, or of what will happen to the saints, etc. In this class belong all the psalms that contain promises and warnings--promises for the godly and warnings for the ungodly.

Secondly, there are **psalms of instruction**, which teach us what we should do and what we should avoid, according to the law of God. Here belong all the psalms which condemn the doctrines of men and praise the word of God.

Thirdly, there are **psalms of comfort**, which strengthen and comfort the saints in their troubles and sorrows, but rebuke and terrify the tyrants. Here belong all the psalms which comfort, exhort, stimulate endurance, or rebuke the tyrants.

⁶with this sentence, Luther interrupts his Defense of the Translation of the Psalms and begins the summaries. See the context and concluding statement in Amer. Ed. 35, 223.

Fourth, are the **psalms of prayer**, in which one calls on God, praying in all kinds of distress. In this class belong all the psalms which thus lament or mourn, and cry out against the foes.

Fifth, are the **psalms of thanks**, in which God is praised and glorified for all His blessings and help. Here belong all the psalms that praise God for His works. These are the psalms of the first rank and for their sake the Psalter was created; therefore it is called in Hebrew sefer tehillim, that is, a praisebook or book of thanksgiving.

Now, one should understand that the psalms, with all their verses, may not be precisely and exactly divided into these classes. Thus at times one psalm might contain two, three, or even all five classifications and one psalm belong in all five divisions, with prophecy, instruction, comfort, prayer, and thanks lying next to one another. However, this is the intention, that one may understand how the Psalter carries these five parts. These classifications are a help, so that one might more easily understand the Psalter, become adapted to it, and also be able to learn and keep it.

Psalm One is a psalm of comfort which admonishes us to gladly hear and learn God's word. It brings us the comfort that, in so doing, we will have many and great benefits, namely, that all our words and works will prosper despite all enemies, just as a palm tree by the water grows green and brings fruit despite all heat and cold and the like. The doctrines of men do not have these benefits, but, as the wind blows the chaff away, so they also pass away. For (he

says) God is pleased by those who study His word, but the others He allows to perish. This psalm flows from the third commandment; indeed, it is a part of that commandment, for the command to honor the Sabbath is itself the command to hear and learn God's word. The second and third petitions of the Our Father also pray for the same word, for in these we pray for God's kingdom and His will, both of which are conveyed by His word.

Psalm Two is a prophecy of Christ, how He would suffer and through His suffering become King and Lord of the whole world. Within this psalm stands a warning against the world's kings and lords: if, instead of honoring and serving this **king**, they seek to persecute and blot Him out, they shall perish. This psalm also contains a promise that those who believe in Him will be blessed. This psalm flows from the first commandment, in which God promises to be our God, who will help us in every trouble and will work all good to us--just as He has, through Christ, delivered us from sin, death, and hell and brought us to eternal life. This blessing is what we pray for in the second petition of the Our Father: that His kingdom come.

Psalm Three is a psalm of prayer, in which we follow the example of David. He prayed this prayer in his distress when he was expelled by his son Absalom, and his prayer was granted to him. At the end, David glorified God for being a true helper and keeper for all of His people, who call on Him in all distress. This psalm belongs to the

first commandment, that God will be our God and our help. The psalm is in the seventh petition of the Our Father, in which we pray to be delivered from all evil.

Psalm Four is a psalm of comfort, which is at the same time a psalm of prayer and instruction. It teaches us to trust in God when things go wrong and rebukes the ungodly, who concern themselves over vain gods and fleshly comfort and yet will not bear to wait confidently for God, who is the highest comfort. Although He does wonderful things among His saints, He formerly abandoned them and thereby tried their faith and patience. But the ungodly want to have full and secure belly. If anyone talks to them about faith and patience, they mock and despise him and say, "Shall we tell this fool what is good? Yes, be patient until a roast chicken flies into your mouth. Trust in that and starve!" This psalm also belongs to the first commandment, for it teaches and urges us to hope in God and endure hardship and every need with patience, and it rebukes the faithless and impatient. The psalm is included in the third and seventh petitions, in which we pray that God's will be done and that we be delivered from evil. It can also be in the fourth petition, when we ask for our daily bread, that is, for peace and all the necessities of life, against all need on earth.

Psalm Five is a psalm of prayer against the false teachers and the factious spirits. It harshly condemns both their glistening teaching and their works, **by** which--under the name of God--they do

great harm to the pure word of God and the true worship of God. The psalm prays for the righteous⁷, that is, for the pure word of God and the pure worship of God. In the last verse it promises that such a prayer will be heard and the factious spirits will be condemned. This psalm belongs to the second and third commandments, in which we are commanded to keep both God's name and God's word holy. It belongs to the first and second petitions of the Our Father, in which we pray that God's name, honor, and kingdom will be advanced.

Psalm Six is a psalm of prayer. It laments the great, yet quite hidden, suffering of the conscience when, on account of sins, one's faith and hope are tormented by the law and anger of God and driven to despair or erring faith. This suffering is called, elsewhere in the Psalter, "the bonds of death" (Ps. 18:5) and "the ropes of hell," or "the misery of death" and "the anguish of hell" (Ps. 116:3). But at the end he sees that his prayer was heard, and thus he may be a trustworthy example for those who find themselves in such affliction, so that they may not remain in it. The psalmist rebukes the workers of evil, that is, the false saints who generally hate and persecute these distressed folk. Because their comfort is in their own holiness, they are utter enemies of the true faith. This psalm belongs to the first and second commandments because it commends the struggle of those who believe in God and pray against sin and death. It is in the first petition of the Our Father, as are all other

⁷VA frumen, St.L.Ed. Frommen.

psalms of prayer, because its prayer is that God's name be called upon and blessed.

Psalm Seven is also a psalm of prayer. It laments over slanderers who accuse the saints and their teachings of being riotous, opposed to the authorities, and disturbing the peace. In this way Shimei the Jeminite (2 Sam. 16:5-14)⁸ slandered the pious David as if David had stolen King Saul's kingdom. In this way the Jews also accused Christ before Pilate and even now the slanderers defame the Gospel. David here fights against such affliction with prayer and cries to God of his innocence. By his own example, he shows us how such a prayer was granted, so that we might have comfort. The psalm also threatens the slanderers and the oppressors and holds before them the example of Absalom, who perished before he accomplished the evil he intended and had begun to do [cf. v. 15-17). The psalm belongs, like the preceding psalm, in the second commandment and the first petition.

Psalm Eight is a prophecy of Christ, His sufferings, resurrection, and kingly rule over all creatures. This kingdom shall be established by the voice of the voiceless, that is, it will be established not by sword or armor but by word and faith alone. This psalm belongs in the first commandment, that God will be our God, and the second petition, as was stated in Psalm Two above.

⁸ cf. Ps. 7:1, "Cush the Benjaminite."

Psalm Nine is also a prophecy of the youth,⁹ that is, of the young children, and of the people of Christ, which is the holy Christian church. These must suffer, following the example of Christ, and their blood will continually be shed. The psalm however gives this prophecy thankfully and comfortingly, so that it might well be called a psalm of thanks and comfort. The Christian and especially the holy martyrs here thank God and are comforted by the fact that God never leaves them. No, the more they are persecuted, the more He multiplies them, as some of the persecutors convert and become Christians and the others perish. This psalm belongs -in the first commandment and in the second petition, as was stated in the preceding psalm.

Psalm Ten is a psalm of prayer. It laments over that archenemy of the kingdom of Christ, the antichrist, who terrifies Christendom with both force and cunning for the sake of his greed and his magnificence. He directs both the sword of worldly tyranny over the body and the net of false teaching over the soul. As it says in verse seven, ("his mouth is full of cursing, lies, and deception") he

⁹Luther translates the superscription with von der schonen iugent, "of the beautiful [Delitzsch suggests "lily-white] young people." To get this, he reads /P-IJH H ftt .n. . h) as J ? JTI is :i-;t "to the white/lily-white/beautiful young girls/youth." No one follows Luther on this. LXX and the Vg/Lxx do follow an apparent .n. lj. l. 9;L reading, "For the 'hidden things of the son.'" The VgiHeb however has the reading supported by BDB, NIV, NKJV: "For 'the death of the son.'" K-B on the other hand proceeds with caution, followed by REB and NRSV: I::i.JII'lis an "unexplained technical term"; REB, "set to 'Muth Labban'"; NRSV, "according to 'Muth-labban.'" Either way, modern versions and commentators interpret the phrase not as a description of the content of the psalm, but as a musical term or title.

can do no more than curse, that is, excommunicate and condemn; lie, that is, bring about false doctrine and false worship; and deceive, that is, delude and make a fool of the world concerning its goods, honor, power, body, and soul. But in the end, the psalm shows our comfort, that such abomination shall perish with the end of the world. The psalm belongs in the second commandment and in the first petition, as all psalms of prayer.

The 11th Psalm is a psalm of prayer. It laments over the heretics and false interpreters of the scriptures who lead the people away from the true ground of faith and bring them to their mountains, that is, their great high holiness of works. To that end, they mock the true teacher and say, "What shall the righteous do?" But the psalm ends with this comfort, that God will certainly see this, so that the false teachers will be condemned, and the righteous will remain. And that in this way, this prayer will be heard as an example for us. This psalm belongs in the second commandment and the first petition, as all psalms of prayer.

The 12th Psalm is a psalm of prayer. It laments over the teachers of men who are always inventing new little discoveries and filling up God's kingdom everywhere with these new services to God, as the last verse laments. For where the teachings of men once go in, there is no stop or end to them, but they increase more and more. They load down the poor conscience beyond all limit and work so that little true holiness may remain. Against all this, the psalm

comforts us that God will awaken His salvation, that is, His word which confidently storms against this work of straw, the doctrines of men. He will free the imprisoned conscience. This does not happen however without cross and agony. As silver is purified in the fire, so they also must suffer in the meantime, and by this means become ever more pure and perceive the truth so much more clearly. It belongs in the second and third commandments and the first and second petition.

The 13th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against sorrow or sadness of the spirit which comes at times from the devil himself, at times also from men who act against us with spite and evil tricks. As a result, we are cast down and grieve when we see such evil aligned against us. But prayer is stronger than all misfortune. This psalm gives us here an example, by which we certainly may be comforted and learn in every kind of calamity not to become anxious or downcast, nor bite or destroy ourselves in the heart. Instead we learn to keep ourselves to prayer and cry to God of all of these things, knowing that we will be heard and finally be delivered, as St James 5:13 also says: "If anyone is troubled let him pray." This psalm belongs in the second commandment and the first and last petitions, that we may be delivered from evil.

The 14th Psalm is a prophecy and a psalm of instruction which teaches us that the doctrine and life of all men without faith is nothing but an abomination before God. Their best worship of God is

only belly worship by which they fatten themselves by devouring the goods of the people. They do not know or understand anything of the true worship of God, although they teach and praise the law of God. Moreover, they profane and blaspheme God's word, whenever it at all rebukes them and they will hear nothing about trust or faith in God.

These men must also be resisted by prayer, which shall be heard, as the last verse says, and the Gospel of Christ shall come. Thus this psalm reproves especially the Jews before the birth of Christ who tormented the people with the law. The psalm promises or prophesies also of the coming of Christ, when it speaks of the help from Zion. For the Gospel and the Spirit have come from Zion. This psalm belongs to the first and third commandments because it praises God's word and promises Christ and also reproves the hypocrites and devouring teachers or belly-teachers. It is in the first and second petitions, in which we pray for His name and His kingdom.

The 15th Psalm is a psalm of instruction which teaches that the true understanding of the law, the truly good life, and true good works are the fruits of the Spirit and of faith, that is: to live blameless before God through true faith; to do right to the neighbor; and to turn away from the evil ways and from the hypocrisy of the ungodly, by which they serve God with fraudulent works and omit the true works. This psalm belongs to the third commandment, concerning the Sabbath, in which we are to hear and learn God's word, and it is in the third petition.

The 16th Psalm is a prophecy of the suffering and resurrection of Christ, which the apostles themselves powerfully indicate (Acts 2:25 and 13:35). It clearly gives witness that Christ has discarded the old law with its sacrifices and worship as an idolatry, etc., and has chosen other saints and another people to be His heirs. It belongs to the first, second, and third commandments, for it announces the new praise, work, word, and worship that would come into the world in Christ, after the old worship. It is in the first and second petitions, etc.

The 17th Psalm is a psalm of prayer. It laments over the false teachers and the refined saints who, by the doctrines and works of men, lead people away from God's word. They persecute the true teacher and hate the cross of Christ. With their doctrines and works, they seek only how they might have good things, praise, and freedom here on earth and how they might not have to suffer want. It belongs to the second and third commandments and in the first petition, that God's word and name may be sanctified.

The 18th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which, as the title declares, David thanks God that He has delivered him from all his enemies. I divide it into four sections, after his four enemies, namely, Saul, the heathen, Absalom, and the rebels. First, in the first six verses, he tells how they were in such woe in their distresses and that God has helped them out of them. Then, in the 7th verse, he gives the example (following the prediction of the

prophets) how God takes care to help, as He had done in Egypt, etc. Then, in the 16th verse, he regards the first foe, namely Saul, who did David great harm on account of God's word that he was to become king. In the 26th verse he praises God who had held back the next enemies, that is, the arrogant Goliath, the Philistines, Amelek and the other heathen. In the 34th verse, he refers to the third enemy, his son Absalom with his followers. Lastly, in the 42nd verse he thanks God for His help against the disobedient and the rebels, such as Seba and most of Israel were. He had so many enemies and hostile subjects, that even the heathen foreigners (as he says here) were more obedient than his own people.

Consequently, everyone needs to keep this psalm as an example--to thank God for His help, when God has delivered him out of his troubles. Whoever wants to explain this psalm spiritually¹⁰ may make out of David, a Christian; Saul, the Jews; the heathen, the tyrants; Absalom, the heretics; and the disobedient, the false Christians--from all of which, Christ and all that are His will finally be delivered. It belongs in the second commandment and in the first petition, because it thanks God and praises His holy name.

The 19th Psalm is a prophecy. It speaks of how the Gospel would spread to all the world as far as the heavens extend. Each day and night would spread it, and that not only in Hebrew but in all languages. Just as the sun (which he uses for an example) shines and gives warmth everywhere, so also will the new law of the Gospel give

¹⁰ gei'stlich

light, teach all kinds of men, comfort, purify, etc. In this way the old law is removed, which is not so pure, bright, lovely, imperishable, etc. This psalm belongs in the third commandment, for that sabbath is properly kept in which God's word is taught and believed.

The 20th Psalm is a psalm of prayer. It prays specifically for emperor, kings, princes, governors, and all those who sit in any seat of authority. The psalm prays that God would grant them grace to rule peacefully and well, having good fortune and victory over their enemies. For wherever good earthly order obtains by the reason and power of governor and princes, people will not so earnestly and heartily pray for them. So that people might pray for them, the psalm declares that only the greatest fool, totally blind, would presume to rule land and people out of his own head. This psalm belongs in the second commandment, as do all the psalms of prayer, in which one calls on God's name. It is in the third petition, that God's will and not the devil's might be done.

The 21st Psalm is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ, the kingdom which is and remains eternally and spiritually before God. At the same time, it also announces that the Jewish kingdom shall be destroyed, because they stood against this will of God and crucified the King. Accordingly, their shoulders are now burdened with constant pains from which they gain nothing. This psalm belongs in the first commandment and the second petition, for it announces a new worship and kingdom.

The 22nd Psalm is a prophecy of the suffering and resurrection of Christ and of the Gospel, which the entire world shall hear and receive. Beyond all other texts, it clearly shows Christ's torment on the cross, how He was pierced hand and foot, and His limbs stretched out, so that one could have counted His bones. Nowhere in the other prophets can one find so clear a description. It is indeed one of the chief psalms. It belongs in the first commandment, for it promises a new worship of God. It is in the first and second petitions.

The 23rd Psalm is a psalm of thanks, in which a Christian heart praises and thanks God for teaching him and keeping him on the right way, comforting and protecting him in every danger through His holy word. He compares himself to a sheep which a faithful shepherd leads well into fresh grass and cool water. In addition, he shows the table, the cup, and oil also as images from the Old Testament worship and calls it all God's word, as it is also called rod and staff, grass, water, and the way of righteousness. This psalm belongs in the third commandment and in the second petition.

The 24th Psalm is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ proclaimed in all the world. It calls on the "doors" of the world, that is, the kings and princes, to make way for the kingdom of Christ. For they are those who for the most part rage against Him (Psalm 2) and say, "Who is this king of glory?" as if they were to say "This beggar!

Yes, this heretic! This criminal! Shall he be a king and shall we yield and submit to him? We shall not! etc." Moreover, in this way the psalm shows that God's word must be condemned and persecuted. This psalm belongs in the first commandment and in both the third commandment and the third petition.

The 25th Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which the righteous pray that God will make them godly, forgive their sins, guard them from sin and shame, and finally deliver them from all enemies and all evil. Along with this it mocks the false, self-centered spirits and teachers. It belongs to the second commandment and the second petition.

The 26th Psalm is a psalm of prayer which laments the false saints who want to be godly through the works of the law and who condemn the saints who are godly only through God's goodness and grace. It accuses the false saints for willingly accepting bribes [v. 10]. For such saints are certainly pure servants of greed, whose God is their stomach, as St. Paul says (Phil 3:19). But with all their spiritual hypocrisy and their worldly glory, they are destructive saints. Therefore, it is good to pray that they may not deceive us. This psalm belongs in the third commandment and in the first and second petitions, for it speaks of the worship of God and of His kingdom.

The 27th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, yet it also prays much and gives us comfort against the false teachers, who give a false witness, blaspheming without any hesitation. For only entirely foolhardy saints give a witness, bold and impudent, before God--from whom they have no command! It is as we see daily; the more foolish and unlearned the people are, the more bold and audacious they are to preach and to teach the whole world. No one knows anything; they alone know all. They prepare themselves well to make war and revolt against the true saints and God-fearers. This psalm belongs in the second and first commandments and in the first and second petitions.

The 28th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, which David prayed in his time against Saul and similar enemies. He prayed especially against this evil, that they spoke well to him and acted friendly at times, and yet attempted to kill him--as afterward Absalom also attempted. Joab acted the same against Amasa and Abner, so that David was concerned lest God hold him accountable for this, and therefore he prayed that he might not be carried off with the godless. We can pray this psalm against the tyrants and against the factious spirits. For the tyrants portray themselves as friendly and yet in daily machinations they seek ways to kill and destroy. The factious spirits praise God's glory, word, and worship in highest measure; they want to help all the world and are extraordinarily humble; yet, for all of that, they seek the corruption of souls and are, under sheep's clothing, ravaging wolves. This psalm belongs in the third and second commandments and the first and second petitions.

The 29th Psalm is a prophecy of the Gospel, how it shall resound with power in all the world and overthrow the wisdom and renown of all kings, princes, lords, and peoples, and Christ alone shall be the only king. He must be served and glorified with true wisdom and holiness. Therefore He established the flood--Baptism--in which the old Adam is drowned and the new man arises. He gives the name of deserts, forests, and deer, [v. 8-9] to the lands of the earth which were under Jew or heathen and which have been opened and converted to the Gospel. This psalm belongs in the third commandment and in the second petition.

The 30th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which the psalmist gives thanks that God has redeemed him from the high spiritual afflictions of the devil, which are sadness, depression, terror, despair, doubt, the perils of death, and similar poisonous, fiery darts of the devil. Nevertheless, at the same time he has the comfort, that God is only angry for the blink of an eye and does not desire nor will our death or distress, but desires rather to see us live and be joyful. This psalm belongs in the second commandment and in the first petition.

The 31st Psalm is a general psalm of thanks, a psalm of prayer, and a psalm of comfort, all at the same time. It is spoken in the person of Christ and of His saints, how, on account of the word of God they are plagued their whole life long--inwardly, with fears and troubles; outwardly with persecutions, slander, and contempt. And

yet, they are comforted and delivered by God out of all of them. This psalm belongs in the second and third commandments and in the first and second petitions.

And here we should leave off pointing out in which commandment and which petition each individual psalm belongs. In the preceding, we have examples enough from which it may be easily determined where each of the following psalms belong. Psalms of prayer belong in the second commandment and the first petition, for they praise God's name and call on Him. Psalms of instruction, psalms of comfort, and psalms of thanks all belong in the third commandment as well as the second and in the first and second petitions. For they hallow the true sabbath with true works and with true worship. And many psalms often belong in all three commandments and petitions.

We have pointed these out so that we might learn well to use and understand the commands of God and the Our Father. We see how the dear saints and prophets spoke of and devoted themselves so abundantly and in such diverse ways to the first three commandments and petitions. They always treated them anew and afresh, yet without having something new to teach nor coming out with something beyond the tables of Moses and the Our Father.

From this we may understand that all the Scriptures and the holy lives of the prophets proceeded from the commands of God. The prophets lived in these commands and, unlike the false spirits and teachers of human doctrine, they brought out no new teaching at all. Against the new teachings they cry and struggle the hardest, .so that

by the command and the word of God the people might be kept clear and pure, and so that false teachings and any other errors might always be prevented.

The 32nd Psalm is an exemplary psalm of instruction, which teaches us what sin is, how one might be freed from it and be righteous before God. For reason does not know what sins are and tries to make satisfaction for them with works. But here it says that even all the saints are sinners and can become holy or blessed in no other way than that they confess themselves as sinners before God and know that they become regarded as righteous only from the grace of God, without service or work.

In short, our righteousness is called (in plain English)¹¹ the forgiveness of our sins. Or, as it says here: "sins not counted," "sins covered," "sins not to be seen." Here stand the clear plain words: all the saints are sinners, and remain sinners. But for this reason they are holy--that God, out of His grace, neither sees nor counts these sins, but forgets, forgives, and covers them. Thus there is no distinction between the saints and the non-saints. They are all alike sinners and all sin daily, only that the sins of the holy are not counted, but covered; and the sins of the unholy are not covered, but counted. One wound has a healing dressing on it and is bandaged; the other wound is open and unbandaged. Nevertheless, both of them are truly wounded, truly sinners, concerning which we in our books in other places have abundantly borne witness.

¹¹That is, auf deutsch.

The 33rd Psalm is a psalm of thanks, in which God is thanked in general for His blessings, for helping His faithful ones in all kinds of distress and not letting them perish. For He can help, since He made all things and even yet creates all things with one word, so that nothing is impossible with Him. He is also so good and true that He will help and willingly helps, as He has promised in the first commandment: "I will be your God," that is, I will be your comfort, help, salvation, life, and all good things and I will stand against all that would do you harm. That's what it means to "be God."

But the psalmist particularly thanks and praises this mighty blessing of God, that He guides the whole world, even the hearts, thoughts, intentions, anger, and fury of the kings and princes, etc., not as they will, but as He wills. And He finally frustrates also all their intentions, so that they accomplish nothing as they really want. And what they intend to do against the righteous He immediately turns aside and overthrows. This is the particular joy and comfort of His saints against the arrogant and overweening insolence, the thrashing and threats of the raging nobles and the ruthless tyrants, who suppose that they can with threats devour all the saints of God and hurl God Himself down from heaven. But before they have half begun, they lie in the dust. Consider the people of Sodom against Lot, Sennacharib the King, and our tyrants today--how totally countless intentions have been dashed up till now.

The 34th Psalm is a psalm of thanks. It is of much the same character as the next and it brings to us (as the title and verse 6 tell us) the history of David as an example for all the righteous so that we might learn from him how God never despises the cries of His saints. Moreover it teaches us to fear God and no one else; further, to be on our guard against false teachers, against curses, grumblings, and slander. Rather, we should have patience, bless enemies rather than curse them, wish them all good and do good to them rather than evil and so (as much as in us lies) to live at peace with all people, whether they are evil or godly. For it is certain (he says) that the righteous must suffer many things which do not afflict the others. If you will be righteous, you must take up your cross and suffer. This is how it must be.

On the other hand, it is certain that the Lord will so truly help us out of all these afflictions that none of the least of your bones will be taken away or missing. Yes, even the hairs of the head are numbered (Matt. 10:30). Although the bones of the saints in their martyrdom were often broken, some of them burnt to ashes, and many more decaying in their graves, etc., they will yet return and not remain broken or be called broken. Rather, for a time they will be broken, but afterwards they will all again be whole and healthy, as they formerly were.

Notice that this is the first psalm which speaks about angels (v. 8), how they attend to the righteous and wait on us. They are not simply by us, or around us. They are like an army--armed soldiers encamped around us, pitching their tents, keeping watch, and

fighting for us against the devil and all his members. This is a great and excellent comfort for all who believe, as the prophet Elisha, following this verse, made clear with his clear and correct example (2 Kings 6:17). But this verse is taken from Genesis 32:1-2, where the Angel encounters the patriarch Jacob, because of which he called that city "army" or "camp." For they were his troops and camped around him as a protection, as the psalm here states.

The 35th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, in which David laments against and on account of the shameful people who "deserve the palace of the Grey Friar,"¹² namely, the hypocrites who for the sake of their enjoyment and profit put up a pretense and say what the rulers would gladly hear. They defame the innocent, embitter the rulers, and incite them to violence. They devour the truth and cause great heartache. This happened to David, under Saul, his king, when those whom he had treated well often afflicted him, out of their own malice, as he here shows [v. 11-16].

We must take this as an example for our own time, when--both in sermons in books, by the princes and in every place--our Gospel is so shamefully defamed with great lies beyond measure. And this is done, for the most part, by those whom we have served with all due honor and respect. Thus, they ascend and are praised, while we are overthrown and descend to the ground. This shameful, thankless, evil faith is the abominable belly with its servants.

¹²That is, deserve to be reduced to begging.

In short, it happens (as Christ said to His betrayer) that "He who eats my bread, betrays me with his feet"--and does so for thirty pieces of silver. Such are the hypocrites, who for the sake of food will devour the righteous, as David here cries.

The 36th Psalm is a psalm of instruction. It warns us and teaches us that we should be on guard against the false teachers, heretics, and fanatical spirits. At the end [v. 12-13], the psalmist prays for these things. In the middle of the psalm [v. 6-10], he gives us comfort as well, that despite everything, God's word and kingdom will not be overthrown by means of their rabble. Instead it will stand in all the world like a mountain which the Lord Himself establishes and like the deepest abyss which can be scooped out [v. 7]. The living and comforting word shall thus remain in the house of God.

He portrays this masterfully saying: They are an evil venomous people who, in the first place, receive God's word with total scorn and have no reverence for God at all [v. 2]. They are proud, impudent, and self-secure, teaching whatever they please. Secondly, they do not praise or honor God, but themselves, while they slander all other teachers and bitterly revile them [v. 3]. In this they are masters, adorning themselves alone. Nowhere else is there any Spirit, any God, any church. Thirdly, their doctrine is noxious, nothing but lies with which they contend against the faith and doctrine of grace [v. 4]. They deceive the people with their false brilliance and their lies. In the fourth place, they are rigid and

stiff-necked, tolerating neither instruction nor admonishment [v. SJ. Their head is harder than any anvil. Yes, when they see that someone reproves them rather than praising them, they burn and rage as the devil himself. In the fifth place, they continually push on and increase, expanding their domain, as St. Paul says (2 Tim. 2:17), "like a cancer." For they promote their doctrine ten times more strongly and more diligently than the true teachers do, as if they would overturn everything in one day. There is no day off or holiday with them.

The 37th Psalm is a psalm of comfort which teaches and exhorts us to have patience in the world and warns us, likewise, against envy. For it is especially vexing and painful to the weak in faith when things go so well for the godless and all things stand opposed to the God-fearing. It is a great spiritual virtue when--seeing the great misdeeds of the peasants, the townspeople, the nobility, the princes, and everyone who has any power--one yet exerts himself not to blaspheme and in his heart wish this and that curse on them. Moreover, he must still suffer and see that all things go well for them and they remain unpunished. Indeed, they are praised and honored, while the God-fearing are miserable, despised, hated, begrudged, obstructed, vexed and persecuted.

The message is: Here learn to have endurance. Take your heart to God and do not let yourself be vexed, do not become envious, or curse, or wish evil to fall, or murmur, or look at them with hatred. Let these all go. Commend them to God, who will handle all these

things well. Thus, the psalm teaches and comforts in a variety of ways, with abundant promises, with examples, with warnings. For it is a great and difficult art, to manifest such patient longsuffering, when reason and all the heathen count envy as virtue. For it appears as though it were just and fair to envy and begrudge the ungodly for their wantonness, their good fortune, and their riches.

The 38th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, in which the psalmist laments over his sins, on account of which his conscience despairs and is greatly afflicted and can see nothing but God's arrows [v. 3], that is, His anger, threats, death, and hell. These sorrows consume marrow and bone, strength and fluids. They disfigure the appearance and the complexion, and alter ones total understanding and demeanor. For to truly feel ones sins and despair over a guilty conscience is the torture over all torture. Moreover, outward persecutors add to this "comfort", pursuing men in their conscience and boasting of how God stands with them, and against the righteous. And since God here holds back His comfort, this terror in the heart must follow, that God is angry with them on account of their sins.

But, for all that, he teaches us to hold fast and not despair. He teaches us to arm ourselves with prayer against their boasts, to lay claim to God's promise and take hold of it to the proper end, namely that we be godly and righteous before God. Then the comfort of faith will flow again, etc. Likewise, we too should pray and not despair in any anxiety, although we are sinners and we feel sharply the burden and assault of our sins.

The 39th Psalm is a psalm of comfort. The psalmist prays, as in the preceding psalm, that God not let him murmur or become impatient because the godless live securely and accumulate goods as if they would never die, while the godly are constantly plagued and punished on account of their sins. He desires rather that God would grant him to think of how life is too short and uncertain to join up with the godless before death in self-assured and careless greed and vain display.

For it is a great vexation, which troubles many hearts, that the evil live so confidently in riotous living, but the godly must be troubled and in misery. But, in the end, we find that the best of all is still to have the forgiveness of sins and a gracious God who will help us out of any misery, as the psalm here says and prays:

The 40th Psalm is a beautiful psalm of prayer in which Christ Himself laments His sufferings and calls for rescue from death. It clearly prophesies that He alone does God's will and fulfills the law and that this is written about Him in the book of Moses [v. 8]. He dissolves and abolishes the old law with its sacrifices and its holiness by which God's will was not fulfilled. All these things must be done for us by Himself alone, not by our work or sacrifices. He therefore promises and establishes the New Testament in which the justification of the believers will be preached in the great congregation, that is, in the entire world, and not the justification by sacrifices or our works. For works and sacrifices (as he says in

verse 5), make only arrogant and false saints whose hope lies not in God, nor in His grace, but in their lies and false holiness.

The 41st Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which Christ Himself prophesies and laments over His betrayer, Judas, together with his comrades, by whom He would be crucified. He prays that He would be raised up from death and that He might be elevated to God's presence at His right hand. But in verse 4 He offers comfort for the multitudes, in that He makes of Himself a sinner, though truly He was without any sin. Thus He stands and declares Himself to be in our place, in our person, and He carries our sins as if they were His own, as if He had committed them Himself.

However, in the beginning of the psalm, He declares a blessing for those who show regard for those in misery, that is, those who do not become offended at the miserable crucified sinner Jesus Christ but hold fast to Him. For it is very offensive to believe that such a poor condemned sinner should be raised so high that He may sit at the right hand of God. Therefore Judaism has been so scandalized that they still remain divided and scattered (or, as verse 11 says, they are repaid by Him).

The 42nd Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which the psalmist laments over his sorrows of heart, that God was angry with him and had afflicted him. Because of these he must be mocked by the godless, who say, "where is your God now?" For the godless cannot restrain themselves; when they see that all things go ill with the godly, they

must whistle, laugh, and wink: "Ah, how rightly this comes to pass!" So they say, "This is what happens to the heretics." When someone else is troubled, they know nothing else than that it is a sure sign of God's anger. But when they are troubled, then they must be called a sufferer for God's sake and they must be God's holy martyrs. These wrongheaded, blind, and poisonous guides-for-the-blind will not understand that God flogs His own people, yet comforts them again and does not desert them. The psalmist on the other hand desires to come to God's house and be comforted by the face of God.¹³ That is, he wants to truly hear God's word, which comforts him. For God's house is that place where God's word is, and His face is His presence through which He gives us His understanding and through which His word reveals His grace. Elsewhere in the Scripture (Jer.2:27) it says, "Turn not Your back, but Your face toward us."

The 43rd Psalm is similar to the preceding psalm and has nearly the same words in it. For he desires also by light and truth [v. 3]

¹³ v.6: Vas betrÜbestu dich meine seele, und bist so unrÜqig inn mir? Harre auff Gott, Denn ich werde im noch danken, das er mir hilfft mit **seinem angesicht**.

The 1531 Psalter had a marginal note: [the Lord's angesicht] "is His recognition and presence [erkenntnis und gegentwertigkeit] through word and faith." This is the understanding reflected in the summary above.

CF. NKJV: "I shall yet praise Him for the Help of His countenance."

NIV: "I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God."

Kraus: "I will still thank him, 'the help of my countenance and my God.'"

Die Bibel (1985): "Ich werde ihm noch Danken, dass er meines Angesichts Hilfe und mein Gott ist."

to come to God's house, that is, to be comforted in his misery by God's Yord.

The 44th Psalm is a general psalm of prayer in which all the saints, especially the New Testament saints, lament how they are persecuted by the heathen and tyrants and would be slaughtered--and God has given them over to this, as if He had abandoned them. Formerly however He had helped them with great wonders, and no harm came t'o them from persecutions. Yes, they are even persecuted for their benefit, that is, for God's sake, as if they had done all evil. In summary, this is the sighing of the Spirit against the flesh, which murmurs against God, that it should be adjudged unrighteous and governed in such a bad way (according to reason) that the godly, who ought to be helped, are allowed to suffer and the evil, who ought to be punished, are elevated, etc.

The 45th Psalm is a prophecy of the Gospel and the kingdom of Christ, adorned with magnificent, splendid, and powerful words. For it portrays Christ as a king--with all kingly splendor, very handsome, well spoken, well adorned, well armored, successful in war, righteous, gentle, gracious, having likewise a fine castle, a grand host of ladies-in-waiting, a beautiful queen and children forever. This all is nothing else than a spiritual picture of the Gospel of Christ, His Spirit, grace, church, and eternal life, of war against sin, death, law, devil, flesh, world, and all evil, etc.

The psalm also clearly proclaims how the Old Testament shall come to an end. For it calls on the daughters to forget their father's house and people (that is, the synagogue) and call on this king as the one God, of which there is no other God. It gives Him also the honor of the first commandment, namely prayer, and in verse 7-8 it names Him clearly as the true God, acknowledging Him to the eternal king who rules in righteousness and takes sin away. An eternal king must be God Himself. This is however not the time to speak further of these things.

The 46th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, of the time when the people of Israel sang of the mighty deeds of God. He had protected and saved the city of Jerusalem, in which was His dwelling, against all the rage and the fury of all the kings and the heathen and preserved their peace against all warfare and weapons. And, in the manner of the Scriptures, the Psalm calls the character of the city a "little spring of water,"¹⁴ that is, a little stream which shall not run dry, as opposed to the great rivers, seas, and oceans of the heathen--their great kingdoms, principalities, and domains--which must dry up and disappear.

We, on the other hand, sing this psalm to praise God for being with us. He miraculously preserves His word and Christendom against the gates of hell, against the rage of the devil, the factious spirits, the world, the flesh, sin, death, etc. Our little spring of

¹⁴vA ein Brilnlin, St. L. Ed. ein Brilnlein

water also is a living fountain, while their puddles, pools, and ponds become foul, malodorous and dry.

The 47th Psalm is a prophecy of Christ, how He shall rise up and become king over all the world, without a battle, simply through shouts, songs, and trumpet calls, that is, through the joyful preaching of the Gospel, just as the walls of Jericho fell by trumpet blasts and shouts, without any weapons at all.

The 48th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, very much like the 46th Psalm. For it also praises God for the city of Jerusalem which was protected and defended by God against the kings and princes. They had to retreat in shame and let the temple stand, along with the worship of God and His word (or rule). With this (as verse 8 sings) God has kept His promise, namely, that in accordance with the first commandment, He would be their God. For the Psalm says, as we have heard and believed, so we see and experience in the city with action, etc.

We also sing this psalm for Christendom and the Gospel, that they will stand against the raging of the kings and princes, who finally must withdraw in shame--and the word they still must let remain.

The 49th Psalm is a psalm of instruction against the great god of the world, Mammon by name. It rebukes as great fools those who trust in his rule and do not see that he cannot deliver them--or himself--from death. Therefore it is truly better to rely on God who delivers

from death and gives eternal life, while they must perish like the beasts and leave all their goods behind, not knowing who will obtain it all.

The 50th Psalm is a psalm of instruction and proclaims the true worship of God and the true sacrifice against the false saints, who esteem their own sacrifices and worship so precious that God must surely be thankful and be indebted to them. God however reverses this. He intends that His goodness and help be highly esteemed, so that we would be thankful and be indebted to Him. And here mark well that the psalm closes with clear words, teaching us that to call upon God in distress and thank Him is the true worship, the most pleasing offering, and the right way to salvation, as the last verse says. Likewise, that it commands that vows be fulfilled (v. 14) does not mean the absurd self-chosen vows, but those which are commanded in the ten commandments, especially in the first and second, that we praise God, that we trust in Him, call on Him, praise and thank Him as our only God, etc. Of this, the raving saints and the hypocrites know nothing.

The 51st Psalm is one of the foremost of the psalms of instruction. In it David truly teaches us what sin is, where it comes from, what damage it does, and how one may be freed of it. For in this Psalm, it is so clearly presented, as nowhere else, that sin is an inheritance, born in us, and that no works can help us against it, only God's grace and forgiveness. Through His Spirit, He must create

us new again, as a new being and a new creature. Otherwise, sin is so mighty that (as he says) it crushes the bones also, with terrors and despair, until His grace comes to our comfort. Afterwards when we by grace and the Spirit are again become new, then one can rightly learn praise, thank, praise--yes even suffer and bear the cross. All of this he calls the true sacrifice and worship, and he rejects all other sacrifices, which the raving saints bring. He prays at the end that God might build up and preserve the city of Jerusalem to such sacrifices and worship.

The 52nd Psalm is a psalm of comfort. The title shows well enough of what it speaks, namely of Doeg who betrayed David and shed much innocent blood (I Sam 22). He was a traitor and bloodthirsty dog, who slandered those who hope in God's word, reviled God's servants, and incited kings and princes to shed innocent blood. Against these malevolent ones this psalm brings comfort. It announces to them their reward, that they shall be removed from body, goods, house, and land. But the godly shall remain and retain God's house and His Yord.

The 53rd Psalm is a psalm of instruction and a prophecy, like the 14th Psalm. Both have nearly the same verses and words. In brief, both of them rebuke the faithless work-saints who persecute the true doctrine and the true teachers. At the end [v. 7], they proclaim the Gospel and kingdom of Christ, who shall come out of Zion.

The 54th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the persecutors who seek the life of the godly on account of the word of God, as Saul and those in Ziph attempted to kill David on account of the word of God through which he had been called and consecrated to be king. He prays for help from his enemies and vengeance upon them.

The 55th Psalm is a psalm of prayer. Although it might have been spoken in the person of Christ against His betrayer Judas (in verse 13-14) yet I let it remain a general prayer against the crafts of the Italians,¹⁵ those vile alleycats who lick in front and scratch in back. In appearance, they are such true friends, fathers, brothers, and sisters, so full of love and life, compared to us, that their mouth is smoother than butter and oil. But behind the scene is nothing but murder, sword, warfare, and the destruction of all, as he says here [v. 22]. That is, as he bemoans in v. 13ff., they can go with us to the table, to church, in house, on the street and be the best of companions. Therefore he also curses them [v. 16], that the devil or death and hell may carry them away, for they create a great heartache and affliction for the people. This curse however is a prophecy--thus it will certainly be with them, for they could say no better. Or rather (as verse 19 [20b.] says), "they would do no other" and feared God not at all.

¹⁵i.e., the papal party

The 56th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, in which David laments over Saul and his men, who forced him to flee from them, out of the land, to the Philistines. They pressed him so hard that he had nowhere he could safely go. But he had this comfort, that he had God's word and the promise and right of the kingship, though they daily assailed it and opposed or even denied it, saying that he shall never be king, but rather Saul and his heirs.

We must pray this psalm against our tyrants who ceaselessly persecute God's word and us and allow no place for peace. But we also have this comfort, that we have God's word for us, though they daily oppose, assail, and speak against that word, saying that we are heretics and they alone are the true church.

The 57th Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which David once again complains about Saul and his servants--away from whom he crawled into the cave. It has the same meaning as the preceding psalm. Therefore we should make use of it also against the tyrants and their venomous counselors and slanderers, who twist God's word to us. They have the fangs and tongue for such work, which are--as David says--spears, arrows, and sharp swords. But thanks be to God, who does not desert us, but hurls them into the pit which they have prepared for us. Their plots finally come down on their own heads.

The 58th Psalm is a psalm of comfort against the stiff-necked teacher who stubbornly carries through with his error, stops up his ears, and does not let himself know anything, but in addition,

threatens to devour the godly. The psalmist comforts himself, using five comparisons, that they will not carry out their intentions--Yes, they will not accomplish half of them: 1) There comes at times a great flood with a terrible roar, as if it would carry away everything, but it flows away and does nothing. 2) A crossbow may be a severe threat, but when arrow, string, and bow are broken, it does nothing. 3) A ship slug stretches out its antennae, but before it moves it is dried up or melted away. 4) A stillborn child enlarges the mother's womb, as if it will come as a baby, but dies before it sees the light. 5) A thornbush may strike out with many spikes and threaten with pricks and scratches, but before it becomes fully developed and hard, a raging hatchet descends on it and bids the thorns to creep into the oven and become ashes. Though all of these intended to be great and proceed with success, nevertheless nothing shall come from them.

The 59th Psalm is a psalm of prayer and can very well be spoken in the person of Christ, who lamented over the Jews. He prophesied that they would not be annihilated, but dispersed into all the world where they teach nothing but curses and lies, as they up to this time had always done. All their teachings stand arrayed against Christ, to condemn and disavow Him. Thereby they have their reward: they come into the city at evening like hungry dogs and yet find nothing. That is, from the time of the apostles to the end of the world they are pursued by the Gentiles from one land to another--searching, desirous and hungry, for a place where they can again raise up a

kingdom or a domain, but it will not happen. They remain hungry dogs and chase around until, left without anything to eat and without a kingdom, they are burned and cast off to hell.

The psalm however can also be understood from the history of David against his "Saulites," who are finally without a kingdom also and must wander around like hungry dogs until they were totally destroyed. For Saul's family never again came to the kingship, although they strived for it with eagerness and effort.

The 60th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which David thanks God that He has given him an excellent kingdom in which God's word was taught and there was good orderly government, which truly is a precious jewel. Before David, in the time of Saul, the government was disunited and chaotic, as the first three verses declare. The Philistines plagued them sorely, so that they did not take much care even for the ark of God (I Chron. 13[:3]). Also evil things prospered, along with much unrighteousness. So it must be, where God is not at home. David's example also points out well that Saul had evil rogues in place in his court.

Yet (he says), God kept a sign in place for His own [v. 6], so that they might rise up and praise Him. Through it they could be sure and secure in His grace. This sign was the tent of Moses and the Ark of the Covenant with the seat of grace, which ark He also brought out of the land of the Philistines with great wonders, etc. Before the Ark they prayed and called on God and were accordingly delivered from their distress.

Thereafter, David lists his land and people, beginning with the holy places and God's word, then Shechem, Succoth, Gilead, Manasseh, Ephraim, Judah, Moab, Edom, Philistia. Finally, he gives a confession concerning these things: to have a fortified city, that is, good peaceful government; to have victory over Edom, that is, to prevail over people and land and in the middle of battle--these are not man's doings, but God must give them. Why he names no more lands or tribes than the nine he names, belongs in a commentary rather than this summary.

We can say this psalm in praise of God, that He has extended His church into the wide world and into many parishes and seminaries, where each one may have the word of God and all have their various gifts.

The 61st Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the enemy and especially for the king and those in authority, that they fear God, rule long and well, and that good government not be destroyed by enemy and war. For, as Solomon said, [cf. Prov 28:2]: Because of the land's sin, many and various princes perish. But where there are many rulers, they seldom go wrong. What one constructs, another breaks up. As the saying goes, "New king, new law." And yet continuous changing of the government is always dangerous and harmful; but well for the land where they long continue an old, good system of government.

The 62nd Psalm is a psalm of instruction concerning the false confidence in men and the true confidence in God. There are many who, having the favor of a prince or a noble, or the good will of the rich and powerful, think that they need nothing more, and then do much harm. Particularly, where they see a tottering wall (v. 4), that is, when they notice that someone is not well looked upon in the palace, or else is in need and is persecuted by another so that he cannot defend himself, then they all become knights and they thoroughly flatter and play up to the great nobles. They do not see how entirely vain is such trust in men and also do not believe, until it happens, how thoroughly it goes wrong. Therefore, it is said, trust God and do wrong to no one that stands before God or man.

The 63rd Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which David, when he had to flee into the wilderness from Saul, desired to be in the holy place and hear God's word. He laments over the "Saulites" who seek his life so that he cannot come there and thus must be deprived of the word of God. But he meditates, nevertheless, on the promise and God's choice of him to be king and he comforts himself with these in the meantime.

Now however people can pray this psalm who willingly hold onto God's word under the tyrants and yet must be deprived of that word. They must consider themselves still as God's children and heirs, since they have faith and love in His word, until their "Saul" finds his end.

The 64th Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which David prays against his betrayers and slanderers who made their case with poisonous words and evil malignity in the worst way--as Absalom, Ahithophel, and the like, and Doeg before, in the court of Saul. But he has this comfort, that their words would come down on themselves, and their tongues would bring down not David but themselves--as happened to Absalom, Ahithophel, and Doeg.

In like manner, we also pray against our betrayers among the courts of the princes, bishops, and kings, who today undertake various malignities, machinations, and tricks. It shall also however--as it has already often has been--come on themselves, so that one will say, "God has repaid them."

The 65th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which he praises God that He gives His word and worship, and temporal peace as well. He regulates the fury of the enemy and the wars in the land which break out and storm like the sea and blesses the field, so that everything turns out well, produces well, grows well. Oh, how rare this praise is among the rabble, who abuse the word of peace and prosperous times and live a totally destructive life, as Sodom and Gomorrah did. It will go with them at the end as with Sodom and Gomorrah.

The 66th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for the general blessing that God often delivers and protects His people out of the hand of the enemies, as He did at the Red Sea. The histories in the books of the Judges and Kings are full of these deliverances which He also does

daily for us, delivering and keeping His own in the true faith against devil, spirit, sins, etc.

The 67th Psalm is a prophecy of Christ, how He shall be king the whole world over and rule the people rightly, that is, rule them with the Gospel, that they may be freed from sin to live for Him in righteousness and thank Him with joy. As we have often stated, this is the new and proper worship of God. For he does not say that the Gentiles shall circumcise themselves and run to Jerusalem, but rather that they will remain Gentiles and nevertheless give thanks to God, be joyful, and fear Him, that is, worship Him.

The 68th Psalm is a beautiful and powerful prophecy of Christ, how He shall rise, ascend to heaven, give His Spirit, send His apostles, let the Gospel be preached, rescue poor sinners from death, comfort the sorrowful, destroy the Jewish kingdom and priesthood and scatter them, and establish a new kingdom in which He will daily be praised and preached, and not the law of Moses, etc. The psalm calls the apostles kings and lords of armies and leaders in battle since, with the Gospel, they do battle against death, sin, and the devil, against the wisdom and holiness of the world. Likewise, it calls them high fruitful mountains, God's heirs, God's chariots, with many hosts, etc. Again, it also calls them singers and choruses among the maidens, dancers, and singers--because they joyfully praise, glorify, and thank God. Thus he sings his song of joy over the holy kingdom of grace and life. He prays at the end that God keep His kingdom,

bless it, and establish it to eternity. He is completely and joyfully stirred in spirit, that he has written this beautiful and rich psalm.

The 69th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, in the person of Christ as He¹⁶ spoke on the cross in His suffering. In verse 6-7, He confesses in our place, and laments for His crucifiers and slanderers who in His great thirst, gave Him gall and vinegar to drink [v. 21]. (So clearly and openly He speaks of His suffering to come.) Then He prophesies of the horrible delusion, hardness of heart, and ultimate destruction of the Jews, which has all come about, as we can still see and sorrow over.

Finally, He announces also the new worship. He says: "I will praise God and glorify Him with thanksgiving." This worship shall put an end to the old, for it pleases God better than all bulls and the best offerings one can provide, as the psalm here says.

The 70th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the persecutors and enemies of the godly. With fist and deed (he says), with counsel and wishes in the heart, with word and cry--that is, with earnestness and all diligence--they seek to take the life of the godly, etc., because of God's word.

¹⁶vA conjecture, "as if he"

The 71st Psalm is (by my understanding) a psalm of prayer spoken from beginning to end in the person of all Christendom against all enemies and affliction. It prays especially for the time of old age, when one becomes feeble and grey. That is, it prays for the last Christians, for whom the times are dangerous, and faith--together with the Gospel--shall become cast down. In the same way, Daniel also proclaimed that the truth would be cast down and unrighteousness shall conquer, which has truly happened to us under Mohammed and the Pope. Therefore (in verse 15, 16, 17), he praises God's righteousness alone, which he has learned from God since his youth, or since the beginning. May this be a comforting prophecy for us, that God's word must return before the end of the world. With this word (he says [v. 20]), God will call for us from deep out of the earth and mightily comfort us. From this basis comes also the general statements concerning Christ: that Elijah and Enoch shall come, the lies of the antichrist shall be exposed, and all shall again be set right.

The 72nd Psalm is a prophecy, exceedingly magnificent and beautiful, of Christ and His rule in the whole world, in which neither sin nor the evil conscience shall flower and reign (as under the law) but only righteousness, freedom, and joy of conscience. However, this is not without cross. On account of the cross, their blood shall be shed, which blood however is counted as very precious to God. And the psalm also announces the new worship, in verse 15, which is to call on God and to thank Him. He tells us to pray to God daily and daily praise Him. This is our daily offering under all the

Gentiles. Here we hear nothing of circumcision, nor yet that the kings and Gentiles should receive the law of Moses, but rather that they remain kings and Gentiles and receive this king as truly God by nature, call on Him, and glorify Him. For to call on God in distress and thank Him for His help is the worship which alone pleases Him, who is alone our helper in need and our Savior. Without Him all else is no help at all.

The 73rd Psalm is a psalm of instruction against the great vexation that the godless are rich and everything goes well for them. They ridicule the poor and afflicted saints as if God neither knew nor regarded them, but that only they and their holy works and what they taught and said were the precious thing and totally heavenly godly wisdom and holiness. This causes much pain, so that the psalmist says, "I must be a fool before You" [v. 22], that is, be called a godless heretic and despiser of God. Then, he says, Stop! Go into the sanctuary and hear what God's word says of them. Look at the former examples in the histories and you will find that they all at once come to nothing, for there is no ground or foundation under them, but only slippery footing, etc.

The 74th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the enemies who had laid waste Jerusalem, the temple, and all the schools of God in the land, together with the cities. Moreover, they slandered God, that He could not help His people. It appears however as if it were a prayer against the destruction still to come, that is, of the Chaldeans and

thereafter by Antiochus Epiphanus. For only in these two instances were the temple in Jerusalem and the land destroyed. Following them, we pray this psalm against Mohammed and our Antiochus, who devastate Christendom, tear up God's word, sacrament, and all of God's ordinances, and thus clearly preach abomination and slander and continue everywhere.

The 75th Psalm is a psalm of comfort against the stiff-necked, proud, godless teachers who are self-secure and presume on their office, as if they need fear nothing, neither threat nor punishment. As Psalm 73 above has written: Who shall be our teacher? We are the teachers! We sit in the office, we have the power, and all must obey us or be excommunicated heretics, etc. So also today our secure Junkers and the factious spirits sit as spiritual and worldly tyrants, thinking that God Himself can neither see nor overthrow them.

But this psalm says otherwise. It gives us the comfort, that we should look forward to the judgment, when they will be judged and pass away. The earth will shake and tremble with all its inhabitants; nevertheless God will preserve the pillars, that is, the godly who bear and preserve this world, as St. Paul (I Tim 3:15) calls the church a foundation and a pillar of truth. Thus, God preserved Lot when He overthrew Sodom, and preserved the believing Jews with the apostles when He destroyed the Jewish nation. For He well knows how to deliver His own, when He destroys a land.

The 76th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, similar to the 46th Psalm. For it gives thanks that God has His dwelling, word, and worship in Jerusalem and so magnificently Himself protects His people against the kings and the rage of warriors such as Sennacherib, by which they would be devoured. For He knew how to take courage away from princes and make them discouraged.

In the same way He fights against our enemies. Be they as strong and as evil as they, it is hard for them to defend themselves against Him who takes away at once their heart and courage. Even the devil must flee when his courage fails him. What then can men do? Such a warrior-God must be praised, who deals thus with the noise of kings. He can save His own, without a sword, by fright and fear alone.

The 77th Psalm is a psalm of instruction. The psalmist uses himself as an example how one might find comfort when affliction comes and the conscience is troubled as if God is angry with it. He says in verse 4 that he was so troubled that he could not have any sleep or even speak. He relates the same oppressive thoughts in verse 9, 10, and 11. But the comfort follows, that one may fight off such thoughts, with which he himself futilely suffered, and grasp with his heart instead the thought of the mighty works of God in the histories of old. Here we find that God's work was to help the miserable, the troubled, and the abandoned, and to throw down the self-secure, proud scoffer; for example, when He delivered the children of Israel from Egypt.

For this reason His paths are called hidden, that He is there to help when one thinks that he is totally abandoned. We should learn this well. God intends by this psalm to show us and teach us His manner of helping, namely that we are never abandoned by God when things go ill. Instead we should wait upon His help at that time with the greatest confidence, and not believe our thoughts.

The 78th Psalm is a psalm of instruction. Using the example and history of the entire people of Israel from the beginning until David, it teaches us to trust and to believe in God and it warns us against mistrust and faithlessness. It declares the punishment which follows faithlessness and the grace which comes with trust.

The 79th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the destruction to come, which was accomplished by the Chaldeans and by Antiochus Epiphanus. It is like the 78th Psalm, so the same summary applies. Isaiah 63 also prays concerning this coming destruction.

The 80th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the constant enemies, the neighboring peoples, the Philistines, Syrians, Moabites, Edomites, etc., who surrounded the people of Israel, pestering and attacking them. So also we pray against our enemies and neighbors, the factious spirits and the spiritual "fathers" and orders, and have prayed in times past against the heretics of the church.

The 81st Psalm is a psalm of prayer and a song which was sung and preached in the harvest season at the festival of tabernacles so that the people would be recalled to the first commandment, that they should have only one God--He who had brought them out of the land of Egypt--and should praise and call on no other. But they did not keep this command, but instead their mouth and instruction were full of idolatry, whereas their mouth should have been full of the true God and should have always spoken of Him alone. This psalm teaches us to believe in Christ and cling to Him alone, and never commend any work as righteous before God. We also should have our mouth full of Christ, yet we also do not do this. Each one follows his own self-conceit and idol.

The 82nd Psalm is a psalm of comfort against the tyrants who oppress those in misery. But this psalm has already had its interpretation, which has long been published.¹⁷

The 83rd Psalm is a psalm of prayer. It is much the same as Psalm 80, which clearly spells out the names of the Gentile nations, therefore the same summary applies.

The 84th Psalm is a psalm of comfort. It praises God's word highly over all things and exhorts us to gladly give up all good things--glory, power, joy, and whatever we desire--that we may hold onto God's word. And should we be like the doorkeeper, that is, the

¹⁷see "Commentary on Psalm 82," (1530), in Amer. Ed. 13, 38-72.

least of those in the temple, this would still be far better than to sit in all the castles of the godless. For God's word (the psalmist says) gives victory, salvation, grace, glory, and all good things. Oh, how blessed are those who believe this and then keep it! But where are they? Even if one were slandered and despised, there he would find the whole world to be full and prepared for him.

The 85th Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which the psalmist pleads against God's wrath and seeks His grace. The wrath (in my opinion) consists in this, that they have a lack of God's word and true preaching and also a lack of good government, peace, and godly authority, and finally a lack of fruitful times and good harvest. These afflictions hang together, one with the other. Therefore he prays that God would speak against them, so that His people will not fall into folly, blaspheme in impatience, nor seek other gods; so that peace, unity, truth, and love might wash over His people and the land be fruitful; so that they can live a proper and honorable life in a God-pleasing way in peace and quietness, as St. Paul (I Tim. 2:2) also teaches us to pray.

The 86th Psalm is a psalm of prayer. The title itself calls it "a prayer of David." It is easy and clear to understand. In his distress, David calls on His God, against his enemies, who seek to put him to death, whether that be Saul, Absalom, or whoever it may be. But notice how richly and masterfully he praises God for His goodness, faithfulness, and power, so that he may truly excite his

own faith and bring warmth to his prayer. So should we do also. The sign which he desires is that God would finally help him, so that it must be said: God has helped him, and well approved his case, against the rage of his enemies, who have violated God's rule, etc.

The 87th Psalm is a prophecy of the holy Christian church, that it shall be a city as wide as the earth is, and in it shall be born Ethiopians, Egyptians, Babylonians, Philistines, residents of Tyre and peoples of other lands and tongues. And this shall all happen through the Gospel, which shall preach marvelous things of God, namely, the knowledge of God, that is, how one may come to God, be freed from sin, and be saved from death, namely through Christ, etc. And the worship of God in this city shall also be singing and dancing, that is, they will proclaim, praise, and thank God's grace with joy. In that city, no Moses shall plague and torment us with his law.

The 88th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, which prays in the person of Christ and all other great saints, lamenting the high spiritual suffering which is above all suffering, namely, the terror of God. This he calls death, the grave, and hell, as it truly is, causing miserable and pitiful conditions. St. Paul called it "the messenger of Satan" (2 Cor, 12:7) which beat on him with his fists, and "a thorn in his body" with which he was pierced (as in Greece they speared an evildoer). In like manner, the heathen slander our Lord and call Him the "pierced one," while the Jews call Him "the one who

was hung." It is the inheritance of Christ and His people to receive this ridicule and to suffer in the world, as this psalm also says that their friends and relatives, who should cry for them and suffer with them, are instead far from them.

The 89th Psalm is a prophecy of Christ and His kingdom. The psalmist calls it a heavenly kingdom (as Christ Himself does in the Gospel) and takes up the prophecy given to David of Christ, and emphasizes it with an abundant spirit. Particularly he emphasizes that this kingdom shall never, for the sake of any sin, come to an end or be left behind. Thus, accordingly, our salvation shall not be based on our goodness. Even the promised kingdom of the Jews and all other earthly kingdoms last no longer or stretch no farther than they are good.

But in verse 38, he begins to prophesy how such a precious and fruitful kingdom would be trampled, torn, and subverted by the Antichrist, so that it appears as though God has forgotten His former abundant promises and is doing the opposite of His own Words. But this all is announced beforehand, to be a comfort to us in these last days. Therefore we should not despair, though it seems to us that there is no Christendom any more on earth. When one looks at the regimes of Mohammed or the Papacy, there appears no light of the church anymore under them, and yet it must remain under them both, however distressed, broken, and persecuted.

The 90th Psalm is a psalm of instruction, in which Moses teaches the origin of death, namely sin, which, though known only by God and hidden from the world, is yet inborn in all from Adam to us. It shows how life here is not only short, but also miserable, so that it may well be called a daily death. Nevertheless, he says that such a life is good, so that through it we would be driven to seek God's grace and help to deliver us from it all. For those who never think of death and feel no misery remain senseless fools caring nothing for God's grace or help. The psalm ends with the prayer that God would show us His work, namely, His deliverance from sin and death, that is, that He would send Christ. And he asks that, while we live here, God would establish our work, that is, that both spiritual and worldly authority may be and remain favorable. A short, fine, rich, and full little prayer.

The 91st Psalm is a psalm of comfort which exhorts us to trust in God in all distress and affliction. It is full of abundant promises flowing from and spun from the first commandment. It is the second psalm in which the dear angels are proclaimed to be our guards and protectors [cf. Psalm 34] which is comforting and good to remember. I have given my thoughts above¹⁸ on the four afflictions mentioned in verse 5-6.

¹⁸ In The Defense of the Translation of the Psalms, which accompanied this work. VA 38, 13-14. Amer. Ed. 35, 216-219.

priests and prophets. He calls them fools among the people [v. 8] that is, those who teach and rule the people foolishly and badly. These are the ones who kill and persecute all the godly prophets and their disciples. As the psalmist says, they depend on God. He has given them the power, and has stood by them and has neither paid attention to nor considered those whom they slaughtered as condemned heretics and rebels against all of both [worldly and spiritual] authority. Against these authorities the psalmist prays, desiring help and support. Although he finds none, he takes comfort in his confidence that God's word and actions are reliable and God will not allow the seat of destruction [v. 20] to come upon them, but will repay them for their lies and murders. Amen.

The 95th Psalm is a prophecy of Christ which the letter to the Hebrews extensively treats as a prophecy of the time of the New Testament and of the voice of the Gospel. In short, it teaches and allures us to Christ and to the word of God as to the true worship. He warns us by the examples of the faithless fathers in the wilderness, who also did not come into the promised land on account of their unbelief and contempt for God.

You must however apply the entire psalm to Christ: He is Himself the God whom we are exhorted to worship. He has made us and is our shepherd, and we are His sheep. He is the one who tested the unbelieving fathers, as Paul in 1 Cor 10:9 also states. From henceforth, He will receive no Mosaic worship, but instead faith, joyful preaching, praise, and thanksgiving.

The 96th Psalm is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ in all the world, in which should be nothing but joy and praise. The text is, truly, itself clear enough. In it all the nations, lands, people, forests, seas, trees, are inclined in worship. They should therefore praise and thank Him for this reason, that He judges and rules with righteousness and truth. That is, He delivers from sin and all that sin brings with it, such as death, hell, the power of the devil, and all that is evil. This is the new song of the new kingdom, from new creatures, from new men, not born of the law nor works but born of God and Spirit. These are nothing less than miracles, done in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

The 97th Psalm is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ, just as the preceding psalm was. And the significance is always this, that He rules and maintains this kingdom through the Gospel, through which He thunders and lightnings and burns His enemies and melts the mountains, etc. That is, He brings low all holiness, wisdom, power, and whatever is great, so that they might be holy, wise, great, and powerful through Him alone, and not otherwise. Along with these enemies and mountains, the Jewish kingdom and worship perish also, as well as all which is not Christ. For He alone shall be, and all others not, as the stone in Daniel (2:34) cut from the mountain, fills the whole world and scatters everything else and makes them to nothing. And He will become the mountain of the world, etc.

The 98th Psalm, like the preceding psalm, is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ, which extends into all the world. It also calls us to be joyful and praise God for His salvation, that is, preach and give thanks for the redemption given us through Christ. Here then is worship--not offerings given in Jerusalem, but preaching and thanksgiving that He is king in righteousness over all the world, that is, that He has redeemed us from sin and death by Himself alone, without our merits, etc.

The 99th psalm is a psalm of instruction which exhorts the people of Israel to praise their God in Zion. However, as a result, the heathen rage that they should be a special people of God before all others. They must suffer much on that account. The psalmist praises Moses, Aaron, and Samuel, who were the chief among the people of Israel. However (as the words declare) he also teaches the people of Israel themselves, that they should know that true worship consists not in the sacrifice of many cattle, but rather in knowing God's wonders and giving Him thanks, etc., that He made them godly and redeems them from sin (as verse 4 states). This psalm is also a prophecy of Christ, who rules the true Zion in all the world [v. 2] and has established His throne of grace and His footstool in heaven [v. 3], on account of which all the world is angry, raving and foolish, and persecutes and kills the Christians.

The 100th Psalm is a prophecy of Christ. It calls on all the world to be joyful, praise, and give thanks, that is, to worship God

and come to His throne and His courts, call on Him with all confidence, etc. For His grace is an eternal kingdom, which truly remains forever and ever.

The 101st Psalm is a psalm of instruction in which David uses himself as an example of how to have godly helpers and not tolerate evil servants. He accordingly lists the various lusts and vices of an evil worker, which belongs in a longer commentary to explain.²⁰ This he calls "singing of grace and justice" [v. 1], that is, singing of how God is gracious to the godly and punishes the wicked and how every worker should be doing good and shunning evil. How it shall go with them on these accounts is well depicted in Absalom, Ahithophel, Joab, etc. For whoever wants to make and keep the people godly, must be burdened with all hatred and envy. Therefore may he well sing to God and give Him thanks who has given such grace and justice to him. For where God does not give this, such a song would remain unsung. In its place only cursing and scolding would remain in the house and the only hope be hanging and beheadings, etc.

The 102nd Psalm is a psalm of prayer. In it the dear fathers of old, weary of laws, of sin, and of death, wholeheartedly yearn for and call for the kingdom of grace, promised in Christ. They ask that God yet again build up Zion and set in place her stones and dust; that He would yet again enter in and let His glory be seen in all kingdoms; that He would rescue His captives from sin and death, so

²⁰see "Commentary on Psalm 101," (1534), Amer. Ed. 13, 143-225.

that they may come together and thank Him--that is, that they may worship Him in the true Zion--and the Old Testament come to an end.

For without Christ there is indeed nothing but "strength, broken in mid course" and shortened days, (v. 24) that is, a miserable, short, wretched life from which the pray-er may gladly be removed. But in His kingdom is eternal life, and His time has no end. He is the one who was before heaven and earth, and made them, and will again change and renew them. Therefore He is outside of and over all time. His year has no end and there is no dying there. This kingdom (he says) we will gladly receive. May such a kingdom, Your kingdom, come! Amen.

Psalm 103 is a psalm of thanks, beautifully and lovingly made, in which he thanks God for all His goodness, namely, forgiveness of sins, making a sound body and soul, giving us enough of all sorts of goods, making us joyful and confident, delivering us from enemies and distress. In short, he thanks God that He stays toward us as a gracious, compassionate and loving Father, though we are frail and unsteady creatures or creations. God does not deal with us according to our sins and deserts, but according to His gracious goodness in as much as we also accordingly acknowledge Him and keep His covenant [cf. v. 18]. That is, we believe in Him and gladly will be godly and neither arrogant nor stiff-necked in our holiness and righteousness (which is indeed a striving directly contrary to the covenant, especially the first commandment.)

This all comes to pass in Christ who for this reason was promised and now is come, whose kingdom reigns over all, etc. For at the end, where he calls on the angels, mighty ones, servants, hosts, to give Him praise and let His word be heard, I am of the opinion that the psalm is speaking of Christ and His apostles, gospel, and church--where such grace rules; for what we need, and what saves us must all come to pass in Christ and not outside of Him.

The 104th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for all the works which God had accomplished in heaven and on earth, beyond those done for men. He has surely ordered all things, according to a wise plan, to produce works, fruits and crops. The psalmist recounts these one after the other: the heavens--full of light and without posts or rafters--placed as an outstretched tapestry; the clouds--an arch without foundation or pillar; the wind flying without wings; the angels going and coming, appearing like a wind or a flame, etc.

Thus sings the psalmist. He finds his desires and joy in the creations of God, which are so wonderfully made and so beautifully ordered together. But who pays attention to this, or sees that this is so? Only faith and the Spirit.

The 105th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which the people of Israel give thanks for all the miracles of old which God had done from Abraham on, until they were brought into the land of Canaan. He then recounts them all on after another. He concludes with Moses (Deut. 19:9), noting that God had not done such wonders on account of

their goodness or merit, but for the sake of His covenant and promises which He had spoken to Abraham [v. 42]. How pious they really were and what they truly deserved is shown in the following psalm.

The 106th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, in which the psalmist acknowledges all the sins which the people of Israel had committed against God, by which they had made themselves unworthy of all His grace and blessings. Therefore it says constantly that God has done all these things for His name's sake, and for the remembrance of His covenant, etc. Moses also says this (Deut 9:6), therefore they cannot glory in themselves, except in His grace alone--as we also can have no other glory.

The 107th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for all the various helps which God shows to all men in this distress, whether they are Gentile or Jew. This help the heathen have sought by various idols and we Christians and Turks have sought by various saints up until now (and to a great extent still do): "St. Leonhard has released the prisoners. St. Bastian delivers from pestilence. St. George protects in battle. St. Erasmus makes one rich, and St. Christopher has become the God of sea and water." We have thus divided all of God's help among the saints, as the heathen among their idols and have stolen and robbed from God--to whom alone this psalm is dedicated and whom alone the psalm calls on us to thank.

The 108th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, with words almost like Psalm 60, in which the psalmist gives thanks for His kingdom, etc. Already in versel, the psalm exalts the kingdom of Christ and prays that God will establish His kingdom in all the world and accordingly bring David's kingdom to its proper, final, full station. For David had only a slight, partial piece [compared to the whole world] of that which was promised to come to him. As Isaiah 9:7 also says, He will reign on the throne of David, and over His kingdom" etc.

The 109th Psalm is a psalm of prayer, prayed in the person of Christ against Judas, His betrayer and against the Jews, His crucifiers. It vehemently cries against them and prophesies of them that they would perish and hardened in God's anger would be horribly destroyed, as we see it all fulfilled before our eyes.

The 110th Psalm is a prophecy of Christ, how He shall be an eternal king and priest, indeed true God, sitting at the right hand of God, and how He would be glorified and recognized. In the entire scripture, there is nothing like this psalm. It would be fair to acknowledge it as the chief confirmation of the Christian faith. For nowhere else is Christ prophesied with such clear plain words as a priest and an eternal priest. It is prophesied as well that the priesthood of Aaron would be abolished. This psalm is yet again and more splendidly extolled in the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is indeed a shame that such a psalm is not more richly extolled by Christians.

The 111th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for the people of Israel to sing at the Passover, concerning the Passover Lamb. In this psalm, they learn to praise God and give thanks in a fine, short song for all His miracles, especially for the spiritual authority, priesthood, passover, law, God's word, freedom, justice, the land, God's help, and other blessings. In our commentary,²¹ we have spoken of these things in detail.

The 112th Psalm is a psalm of comfort in which the pious, who fear God, are praised for their good life and are promised eternal comfort against all trouble. They are especially commended to a sincere confidence and trust in God's grace, so that they may be undismayed and undaunted (which is the real, true faith) until they see the destruction of the godless and their foes.

The 113th Psalm is a prophecy of the kingdom of Christ which from the rising of the sun to its setting shall extend over all the nations. It calls them to praise God and proclaim His grace. For He is a God of the poor and the troubled, a delightful God and worthy of our grace, who sits on high and loves and exalts the humble. For this is Christ's office and work in His kingdom: to humble the exalted, to make foolish the wise, to damn the holy, to wither the fruitful, and on the other hand to exalt the humble, to make holy the sinner, and make the barren into a joyful mother of children.

²¹ See "Commentary on Psalm 111," (1530), Amer. Ed. 13, 349-389.

The 114th Psalm is a psalm of thanks, for the people of Israel to praise God at Passover for His wonderful works. For He had led them out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, through the dry wilderness, mountains, and the Jordan, into the promised land. We sing this psalm daily to Christ to praise Him who has led us out of death and sin, through the wilderness of the flesh and the devil, into an eternal life, etc.

The 115th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which God is praised that He is the true helping God. All other gods are vain idols which cannot help us. Therefore we pray in verse one, "Not to us, O Lord . . . ," that is, do not look at how religious and respectable we are, lest You no longer help us, and we become like the heathen, a people without God, or again, as those who have a helpless god, as they accuse us. But rather look to Your glory and to Your name, that You are called and reputed to be a true living God, abundant in help. For Your name's sake come with us, not for our name's sake--that we are called God's servants, workers, singers, fast-ers, and well doers--for such names the heathen also can have and are of no help.

The 116th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which the psalmist is joyful and gives thanks that God has heard his prayer and has rescued him from the distress of death and the anguish of hell. Like several other psalms above, it speaks of the deep spiritual affliction, of which few people know.

He also laments in this psalm, how it goes so badly, because he confesses his faith and the truth of God and calls all human holiness, virtue, and confidence as falsehood and emptiness.²² This the world will not and cannot hear nor tolerate. Thus it comes that the godly must suffer, tremble, and fear all kinds of misfortune.

But in all this he is comforted by this, that God's word is true and will only motivate us the more: "They give me to drink from the cup of their wrath. All right, then I will take the cup of grace and salvation and drink myself spiritually drunk and (through preaching) pour out from this cup on those who will drink with me and who draw their grace from the word." This is our cup, and with this cup we will worship God and praise His name. We will fulfill our vows, namely the first commandment, that we receive Him as the one God and praise Him as the only God worthy to preach and to be called upon. You find here also that giving thanks, preaching, and confessing God's name before all people is the true worship of God, etc.

The 117th Psalm is a prophecy of Christ, that all the world should praise Him and worship Him in His kingdom. In this kingdom, nothing reigns but grace and truth, that is, the forgiveness of sins, eternal life and all joy and comfort over sin, death, and all evil. This psalm is abundantly enough explained in our commentary.²³

²²nichts

²³see "Commentary on Psalm 117," (1530), Amer. Ed. 13, 1-40. "Abundantly enough explained" may be mild humor on the phenomenon of a 40-page commentary for a two-verse psalm.

The 118th Psalm is a psalm of thanks and my dearest, most beloved Confitemini.²⁴ Its summary each one may read in the commentary on it. It gives thanks and also prophecies of the Christian and of Christ, the rejected cornerstone, etc.

The 119th Psalm is a long psalm, containing prayers, comforts, instructions, and thanks in great number. It is however chiefly written to excite us about God's word. It praises God's word throughout, and warns us against both the false teachers and **against** boredom and contempt for the word. Therefore it is primarily to be counted among the psalms of comfort. It also concerns itself primarily with this: that one has God's word purely and hears it gladly. From this concern, then, come powerful prayers, instructions, thanks, prophecies, worship of God, suffering, and all that pleases God and grieves the devil. But where one despises the word and is satiated by it, there all these cease. For where the word is not purely taught, there is truly an abundance of prayers, instructions, comforts, worship, suffering and prophecies--but totally false and condemned! For it is then all service to the devil, who is thus impure with all his heretics.

²⁴"Thank the Lord," from the Latin first line of the Psalm, a favorite psalm of Luther. He took the time to write a Commentary on Psalm 118, (Amer. Ed. 14, 41-106), in June of 1530, while the Augsburg Confession was being prepared and presented.

The 120th Psalm is a psalm of prayer. It laments and cries out against the false teachers who commit murderous crimes, whose false teachings penetrate like a sharp arrow, powerfully shot. They spread themselves out like fire in a juniper bush, which burns easily and well, for it is fat and thick and susceptible to fire. In the same way, the people are much, much more susceptible to false teachings (which harmonize well with reason) than to the true, as St. Paul (2 Tim 4:3) also says about the itching ears, etc.

"Mesech" are the people to the north of Jerusalem, where today the Tatars [Turks] live. "Kedar" are the Arabs to the east, meaning all neighbors and false teachers, as today, the Turk is Mesech (for he comes from the Tatars) and the Mohammedans or Saracens are Kedar (for they come from Arabia) and with their Koran they have suppressed the Gospel and their doctrine burns, devours, and spreads, etc. widely on all sides.

The 121st Psalm is a psalm of comfort, in which the psalmist comforts us by his example, so that we may remain strong in faith and wait for God's help and protection. For although it appears as though He sleeps or slumbers, so that we are struck down by the sun by day and the moon at night, yet it is not so, though we may think and feel it. For God watches and keeps us secure, and does not let the sun strike us dead. This we will come to know for certain at last, though we can now only look forward to it.

The 122nd Psalm is a psalm of thanks which gives thanks with joy for the word of God, which in a specific city, namely Jerusalem, was given through a specific people, namely the Levites and Kings, and received by specific hearers, namely the tribe of Israel. How much is it to be lamented that, seeking everywhere for God's word and being nowhere able to find it, the children of Israel wound their way to idols. And we Christians did the same, with our running to pilgrimages and winding our way to the cloister, etc. But the holy church is our Jerusalem, and Christ is our temple, city, altar, and mercy seat, to which, from which, and with which we seek and hear His Word.

The 123rd Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the arrogant and the proud who despise and scorn God's word and His little ones. Not only the heathen consider the God and worship of the children of Israel as a work of foolishness, yes, even error and sedition. Even among the Israelites themselves--the worshippers of idols and false gods, as well as false teachers with their multitudes, arrogantly and securely despised and scorned the little land and the true teaching, as Psalm 12 and Psalm 14 above also lament.

So also today, our Junkers and factious spirits--who are as holy as the Gospel itself--in an entirely Junkerish and pious manner despise the poor preacher and the faithful worshipper of Christ, and tread them underfoot. To say nothing of what our heathen, the spiritual lords, do as well as their multitudes. We must therefore

be covered everywhere with contempt. But God is, and will be, gracious. Amen.

The 124th Psalm is a psalm of thanks which thanks God that He protects His poor little band from the ruthless tyrants. He rescues them from the snares of the poisonous slanderer. These are as many and great as a great deep water and flood against the little band. But though their teeth be ever so malevolent and angry, God is yet greater and knocks their teeth out and breaks the snares and rescues His own from them, as we still daily ourself experience.

The 125th Psalm is a psalm of thanks. It gives thanks that God will not forever tolerate the power of the ungodly teacher and officials over those who truly believe, teach, and hope in Him. Therefore they need not be weary and for that reason fall away from the word, but He would give all blessings to those who hope in Him.

The faithless however with their crooked ways--the master as well as the student--God will at once cut them off and throw them out. This we have seen and experienced also in our own time several examples among the factious spirits.

The 126th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for the deliverance from the captivity in Babylon. Whether it is made following that captivity or prior to it (as a prophecy for the comfort and hope for the coming deliverance, so that they may not despair) is of no concern.

At the end the psalmist concludes that it happens, and must always happen to the saints that they suffer first before they can rejoice. Similarly, the world must first rejoice before they get their suffering.

Therefore the saints must sow with tears to reap afterward with joy. But (he says) such seed is excellent and precious seed, to bring forth such a fruit. But before weeping, one cannot see that it is so precious and worthy before God. But God loves His saints so much that He regards even their death (which is truly the most abominable, accursed seed of the world) as more precious than all of the world's treasures and goods.

The 127th Psalm is a psalm of instruction. It teaches us that worldly authority and household order are nothing less than God's gifts and rest only in His hand. For where He does not give peace and good government, there no wisdom, order, exertion nor armor can hold onto peace. Where He does not give good fortune, with wife, children, and workers, there all care and work will be for nothing. A wider explanation may be found in my commentary,²⁵ in which the psalm is well brought to light.

The 128th Psalm is a psalm of comfort, in which the estate of marriage is splendidly praised. Marriage partners are given this great comfort: they should not look only at the trouble, work,

²⁵commentary on Psalm 127," (1524), VA 15, 348-379. Amer. Ed. 45, 317-337.

discouragement, and discomfort, which they must feel and experience in marriage, but rather the gracious will of God toward them, that their station and life are a gracious creation of God and are blessed by Him. Therefore marriage is dear to Him and He gives it much more happiness and blessing than discomfort, where one only believes and adapts oneself within marriage and faithfully remain with it. Therefore in the beginning and middle of the Psalm it says, "Those who fear the Lord •••• " When the godless go astray, on the other hand, it is no surprise.

The 129th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which the people of Israel give thanks for the many deliverances which God has often done for them since the beginning. The book of Judges and of Kings show how often they were oppressed by the heathen. They oppressed them severely for a long time and thus plowed long furrows on their back [v. 3] and in the yoke and bonds burdened them overmuch until God raised up a deliverer for them and he freed them from their plows, yokes, and ropes. At the end he wishes for Israel (that is, prophecies of them) that all their enemies would be dried up and withered, which then was done. For all those peoples are gone, Israel alone remains. Thus all the heathen and enemies of Christ are like the grass on the roof that sprouts and grows as though it will produce much. But it withers before it is fully developed. It brings no fruit and there is no blessing in it. So also the heathen, heretics, and other enemies when they rage and storm ultimately vanish,

leaving neither seed nor mark behind them. The Christians however remain forever and ever.

The 130th Psalm is a psalm of prayer which comes from the genuine Davidic devotion and understanding. It confesses that before God no one is righteous nor may he become righteous by his own work and righteousness, but rather, only through grace and forgiveness of sins, which God has promised. He relies on this promise and word and comforts himself. He exhorts all of Israel that they should do the same, and learn that with God is a throne of grace and redemption. Israel must through Him alone, and no way else, be freed of their sins, that is, "through forgiveness" (without which there is no grace) become righteous and blessed. Apart from this, he truly would be in the depths and would never stand before God.

Look! Here is a true Master and Doctor of the Holy Scriptures who has understood what this means: the seed of the woman shall tread on the head of the serpent (Gen. 3:15) and through this seed all the nations of the world shall be blessed [Gen. 12:3; Gen. 22:18]. Therefore he places both a promise and a prophecy of Christ in this verse: "He will redeem Israel from all his sins." Upon this verse, and from it, comes the entire Psalm.

The 131st Psalm is a psalm of instruction. It speaks against the proud, stiff-necked saints who comfort themselves by placing confidence in their great services of worship and their great holiness,

and not in the forgiveness of which the preceding psalm speaks. In contrast to the proud saints, the psalmist says,

"I cannot travel so high and boast of my holiness as these people do, who rely on themselves. For whenever I have wanted to do so, not grounding and stilling my heart on God's grace (which is what it means to "be still"), I become like a "weaned child" [v. 2]. Without the nipple of the promise and grace, I cry day and night and have no peace in my conscience."

Therefore this is his conclusion: Let Israel and everyone trust and hope in God and depend only on His grace. Let no one take this nipple from you. I commend it to you, for the promised and coming Christ is in it.²⁶

The 132nd Psalm is a psalm of prayer in which Solomon, or the people of Israel, pray for the preservation of the priesthood and the kingdom. That is, they pray for the spiritual and worldly authorities, for God's word and temporal peace. For where these both stand well, things go well. He sings on in verse 11 to tell how such a prayer is not only heard but that God has already also promised with an oath to preserve kingdom and priesthood in Jerusalem and to dwell there Himself. He will give all blessing and grace Himself and bring their enemies down to disgrace, so long as they also keep His

²⁶ Luther's translation follows LXX and Vg., translating **י** -PJ! as a negative: "When/if I do not still my heart . . ." Be thus sees the "weaned child" as a deprived child, with reason to complain. Modern translations follow BOB in interpreting **י** **ל**-D} as a strong affirmation.

commandments and be obedient to Him [cf. v. 12). Why however in verse 6, he calls the place of God's dwelling "Ephrata" and the "Plain of woodland"²⁷ is too long to comment on here and belongs in a commentary.

The 133rd Psalm is a psalm of instruction that (both in the spiritual and worldly stations) we should live together harmoniously as friends, having one teacher, one authority, and that each should carry the help of the other. He gives two comparisons: first, of the anointing oil, which flows from Aaron's head over his beard and robes; second, of the dew which falls from Mt. Hermon onto Mt. Zion. Where things happen in this way, there God gladly dwells with all His grace, blessing, and life. But where disunity and faction prevail, there the devil dwells, and death, and all misfortune.

The 134th Psalm is a psalm of instruction. It teaches and admonishes the priests and spiritual ones of their office. They should indeed worship God faithfully and diligently, day and night praising God, preaching, and occupying themselves with His word. As St. Paul also says to Timothy (**2** Tim. 4:2f) they should continue faithful in their office. They should not concern themselves that men despise the word and turn themselves from it to fables, etc. For where one discards God's word, there both spiritual and worldly

²⁷Feld des Valdes

will fall as well--at the least, fall into error, and abandoned by God, fall into the devil's power.

However, where one continues with preaching, there He who made heaven and earth is always present to bless. For the sake of the word, He helps and gives all blessings even to the unworthy and the unthankful. Let this psalm be sung by you pastors, preachers, bishops, and whoever sits in a spiritual office.

The 135th Psalm is a psalm of thanks. It calls the priests to give thanks, preach and praise God for His wonders, shown to the people in Egypt and Canaan, so that they may never forget God and seek idols or other gods. This happens, and must happen, when one does not occupy oneself with--and diligently hold to--preaching and the praise of God, as it says in the next psalm. But when He judges His people, that is, preaches, and teaches, and disciplines them, there He is certainly gracious to His servants. But where His word is silenced and He does not judge or teach, there must truly be great anger and no grace. Therefore think, you servants in the house of the Lord, and preach diligently of God and His works, etc.

The 136th Psalm is a psalm of thanks and is perhaps the text to show priests how they should sing and preach. Namely, they should sing and preach of God and His wonderful deeds, that He is gracious and merciful and a true Savior. Therefore in each verse he repeats the line, "His goodness endures forever," with which the psalm is nearly overwhelmed. Truly nothing but grace, not the works or

doctrines of men, should ever be preached. For the works and words of men have done no wonders such as these. They are not deserving of this worship, but rather only the grace and pure goodness of Him, who gives all. Gift! Gift, he says! Gift free of charge! And Christ also stands hidden in the phrase. Such doctrine keeps in the people a pure faith and a right understanding of grace and the forgiveness of sins, against the factious and stiff-necked work-saints, etc.

The 137th Psalm is a psalm of prayer in the person of captives in Babylon. It is a prayer for Jerusalem, that is, for God's word and spiritual rule which lay completely destroyed; for thus it was assumed (with great reason) especially by those who fear God, as this psalm shows. Although Babylon and Edom greatly rejoiced at this destruction and mocked at those who lamented it, yet they should not thereby escape, unrepentant and blameless, but rather shall be torn to pieces in return. Their children also shall be dashed on the rocks and they shall have no descendants. This indeed happened to Babylon and shall also happen to our Edomites and Babylonians, who today rejoice, mocking both the poor church, torn to pieces, and the destruction of God's word and worship. But, for all that, Israel and God's word shall remain forever and ever.

The 138th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in general for a variety of deliverances from the enemies. The psalmist wishes that Christ's kingdom would come and kings would receive His word and doctrine and **give** thanks for it and worship Him aright. These must learn that

Christ's kingdom exists, that it sits on high, and that He helps the lowly who are stuck in woe and fear, and comforts and rescues sinners and the miserable. It closes with the prayer that God would not abandon His kingdom and work thus begun, but bring them to fulfillment in eternity.

The 139th Psalm is a psalm of thanks in which he praises God that He has provided for them so wonderfully and still reigns in all of His works, words, thanks. Whether the psalmist stands, walks, sleeps, or wakes--yes, even in his mother's womb, before he was made, God had been with him as he was being formed and will be with him as long as he lives.

It is as if he should say: every ability or power in man--how he lives, what he does, speaks, think, wherever and whenever, from where and to where he should go--it is all clearly nothing but God's work and art. What then do the abominable ungodly do, who do not believe this, but want to make themselves pious through their vexatious work? They want to have done what they do and then want to receive worship, honor, and glory from God on account of it. But they do not create so much as one word by themselves, indeed cannot create one thought by their own power. Moreover, they do not understand what they do, how they are created, how they live, speak, and think. Since then all that we are and do are God's work and power, how can men consider it to be their own most noble work to make themselves godly, praise their free will, and deliver themselves from sin and death, etc.? Such people cannot rightly speak about God

and His work. Protect us from this, O God and bless my heart, so that I may remain in the true way which stands forever, etc.

The 140th Psalm is a psalm of prayer against the proud, wicked, saints who place many traps and annoyances in the right way, against God's word. They also threaten and rage powerfully against all those who do not praise and follow their errors. The psalm prays that their plans may not succeed, but rather may fall on their own head. It will happen to them as to Pharaoh in the Red Sea, that storm may hurl them into the sea and they may be drowned. Thus may such evil mouths be silenced and the believers remain before God forever.

The 141st Psalm is a psalm of prayer. He prays that he may be preserved from the ungodly teachers who appear to be friendly and speak with smooth word, when threats do not work. It is better for me (he says) that righteous teachers rebuke me and condemn my righteousness, than that the godless praise me.

And if, in the meantime, evil comes upon me, and I suffer cross and death and I must be uprooted and torn apart, still it is better that I trust in the Lord. For their hypocrisy will finally break their neck on a rock, that is, be suddenly overthrown, and come to an evil end. Then they will see how bitter is their sweet teaching, and how precious is my sour doctrine. Their own doctrine, in which they are caught as in a net, will bring them down, while I pass by in safety [v. 10].

The 142nd Psalm is a psalm of prayer, as of one imprisoned under the false teachers who forcefully push them away from the true faith and life. For among the people of Israel it was a constant, commonplace occurrence, that the true prophets were persecuted and condemned for the sake of the true worship and word of God. Of this all their histories show and Christ and St. Stephen also bear witness (Matt. 5:12; 23:34; Acts 7:52). Therefore it is no wonder that so many psalms are written against the false prophets and teachers, since it so commonly happened. It has happened in the church also since the beginning and always happens, so that one may well indeed pray to God, that He would deliver us from false teachers and from error. The history of the time of Elijah, King Ahab, and Jezebel serves as an example for these psalms, that all prophets must hide themselves, crawl away. Also in the time of Arius all orthodox bishops had to flee into exile. For the devil will not tolerate God's word and His servants.

The 143rd Psalm is a psalm of prayer. The psalmist prays for grace and forgiveness of sins, in the terror of his conscience. He is nearly pressed to despair by the enemies of faith, that is, the promoters of the law. These especially plague the distressed and timid conscience and drive it into darkness [v. 3], that is, into despair and death with heavy burdens and unbearable doctrine of works, which they do not so much as touch with one of their fingers, as Christ says, (Matt. 23:1).

But here the psalm shows that grace must provide deliverance, not the judgment before which no man alive can stand. Of this all the ancient histories and works of the Lord also give witness. For all of the holy patriarchs of old placed their hope on God's love and grace and not on the judgment. As St. Peter also says (Acts 15:10), "Neither we nor our fathers could bear such a yoke, but rather we hope to be saved through the grace of Christ, just as they were."

I consider their works and examples of old (he says here) and I am comforted, for they were comforted and delivered from sin purely by grace, just as I am. (Even Abraham himself was called from out of idolatry (Josh. 24:2)). No praise of the righteousness or holiness of men has any value here at all, no matter how much the false prophets worry us.

The 144th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for kings and those in authority. David, a king who must wage war and rule, gives thanks to God with this psalm. He confesses that victory, good fortune, and success--whether in conflict or in government--are the gift of God and do not come from human power and ability. Little does human wisdom know how to keep subjects under authority and to rule land and people well. For how should he be capable of these great things when he is nothing and passes away like a shadow?²⁸

Instead, the Lord does this. He sends forth lightning [v. 6]-- sending discouraged and frightened hearts to the army and humble

²⁸ c^f. v.4 gleich wie nichts, Heb.nr:J:i .li17 The "vanity" of Eccl. 1:2 is, in German, Nichtigkeit.

hearts among the people. Where He thus touches the mountains and the multitudes,²⁹ so that they must be in fear before Him, there it is good to fight and rule, for there victory and good fortune follow--as well as this fear. Yet how can one, being only a man, bring about this fear?

Then he prays against his own people and rebukes their foolishness. For the people of Israel, having the renown of being the people of God, were beyond all measure proud, stiff-necked, disobedient, rebellious, covetous, jealous and faithless, as indeed they showed by their opposition to Moses, David, and other kings. And although they saw that David fought and ruled with miraculous wonders, as did Moses, yet they were no better and did not inquire about God or faith in God.

"What God? What faith? As long as we have beautiful children, houses, cattle, many possessions, and enjoyable days, we are a blessed people. And, in addition, we have prophets enough, who teach us that God's people are those for whom things go well. Those for whom things go badly are not of God." Whereas in fact things go badly for all the saints--for the reason that they trust in God.

You have now rescued me, [David says], from the murderous sword of Goliath. You have given me victory over other kings. Therefore preserve me also from this ungodly, evil, false people, who listen to neither God nor man. They are peasants and brutes, yes, truly swine, who seek for nothing but their own belly. It is harder and more dangerous to rule over them than to continually be at war.

²⁹gro Haufen. VA conjecture gro Hansen, i.e., "big men," leaders.

He calls them foreign children [v. 11],³⁰ for they want to be the foremost children of God, and yet they are foreigners, strangers, and worse than heathen. They are bastard children, who praise God with their mouths while their heart is far from Him, etc.

The 145th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for the kingdom of Christ which was to come. It strongly urges the high exalted work of praising God and glorifying His power and kingdom. For Christ's kingdom and power are hidden under the cross. If the cross were not extolled through preaching, teaching, and confession, who could have ever thought of it, to say nothing of knowing it? But such is His kingdom and power that He aided the fallen, called the needy to Himself, made sinners godly, and brought the dead to life. Yes, He is the one who gives food to all [v. 15-16], who hears the call of His saints, does what they desire, protects them, etc.

The 146th Psalm is a psalm of thanks. It teaches at the same time that one should trust in God and not in princes or men, as the abominable world, flesh, and blood do. For God is the only one who can truly help in all kinds of need and He helps so that it can really be called being helped. Human help is so uncertain, and does not last. For man himself does not know the length of his life.

The 147th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for various kindnesses and mighty works of God--first, toward Israel and Jerusalem, then to all

30 frembder kinder, Heb. 1. JJ-^a JJ,

who thirst. Be gives rain and water to all creatures and does not let the least little bird go hungry, even the most useless raven. How much more, then, shall Be care for men, especially those who trust in His goodness and not in men or horses. But above all, to Jerusalem, where His word and His dwelling are, He gives peace, grain and all they need. For Jerusalem and Israel have the advantage that they have God's word and worship before all the nations; therefore He has done more miracles for them. He will also be much more recognized there, in the daily wonders such as rain, snow, ice, etc., than by the faithless who do not have God's word, or do not heed it. These people cannot see any work or wonder of God, though they enjoy them daily with their five senses, root in them, and devour them like swine. For they did not know God, because they do not hear or pay attention to His Word.

The 148th Psalm is a psalm of thanks which excites and exhorts all creatures in heaven and earth to praise God--especially His saints, the children of Israel, who worship Him, that is, have His word and worship. And note that this psalm confirms all the stations of life--kings, judges, old, young--all are created by God and are good and honorable. For if the office of king or of judge were evil and not God-given, one could not, in such an office, praise God. But where there are kings and judges, there will also be subjects, servants, hangmen, soldiers, laborers, farmers, townspeople, etc. Where there are young and old, there will be married people, children and household servants. All are honorable and good and show that

their Creator is good. Rightfully all of creation should be nothing but a tongue, always praising this great goodness of God. If you want to know how good a thing is, then take whatever you will and say: "If there were no fire. . . ," or again, "If there were no sun . . . ," "If there were no hangman . . . ," "If there were no woman . . . ," etc. Then you will see why one should thank God.

The 149th Psalm is a psalm of thanks for the blessing that God is gracious and merciful to His people and that they know that they have a gracious God and that they rightly should rejoice. They have this blessing or grace--which is rightly called the forgiveness of sins--that God will not avenge how evil and sinful they are. Therefore this psalm in reality belongs in the New Testament. It calls itself a new song to sing to the king of Zion, whom they should praise on their couches [v. SJ, that is, in the church where they come together. (Similarly, Isaiah called the churches and altars, in which Israel committed fornication--that is, idolatry--couches or beds.)

Again it is of the New Testament that they should have a sharp sword in hand to punish the heathen, to throw the kings in stocks and dungeons and to take vengeance, as it is written. Now, this sounds Jewish, or even more, Mohammedan or Turkish. But this however is the vengeance which is spoken of in the Scriptures, that Abraham's seed should strike down idolatry in all the world through the Gospel, the

spiritual sword, taking prisoner all the holiness of the kings and the wise and subject them to Christ as Paul says in [2 Cor 10:31]

The 150th Psalm is a psalm of thanks written first of all for the people of Israel to praise God. For them His sanctuary, the firmament of His might, that is, His dwelling place, heaven, and castle were in Jerusalem. Here also He showed His might with miracles and received the string music and the songs of the Jews, with which their praise and worship was accompanied. But for the Christian, preaching and the Gospel are our string music and songs.

Note that all psalms of thanks are nothing but promises for the poor troubled conscience, saying as much as: God is gracious and gladly forgives all sins and will give all comfort, so that one may find all blessings and comfort in Him. Therefore this is openly a psalm of thanks and at the same time secretly a psalm of comfort--yes, even a psalm of instruction and a prophecy. All in one, it proclaims God's grace and teaches us to trust and believe in Him. To this, may the same merciful God help us--our King and Lord, Jesus Christ, who with the Father and the Holy Spirit is praised forever. Amen. :

If anyone is pleased with my poor assistance by these summaries, I ask that he not insert them into the Psalter between the psalms. For I prefer to see the text stand alone by itself, unmixed with

^{31vA} text, "I Cor X." VA margin, "I Cor 10:28."

anything else. Some of these summaries are really a brief commentary, and it would not be proper if, placed in the middle of the text, these summaries would loom larger than the psalms themselves." With this, may God bless you, Amen.

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