

In the Beginning

Psalms 1-2

*"Forgetting those things that are behind, I reach forward
unto those things that are before" (Phil. 3:13).*

Today we stand at a new beginning—the beginning of a new year. In our readings we begin Genesis: *"In the beginning God created."* We begin Psalms: *"Blessed is the man . . ."* We begin the Gospel record: *"The book of the generations of Jesus Christ"*—Savior of the world.

There is great power in a new beginning. It is a time for self-examination and renewed determination and dedication.

In the wisdom and love of God, our lives are divided up into little periods of activity and consciousness, separated by periods of rest and sleep. Each new day is a new beginning. If we are sincerely trying to serve God, we can each day, with complete confidence, forget the failures of the past, as long as we rise up and try again.

God assures us through the prophet Ezekiel (18:22) that all past failures will be forgotten if at last we overcome. We must daily begin again. We must greet each day with renewed faith and hope, thanking God for each new day's beginning as it comes, doing our best for that one day while we have it, and closing the account as each day ends, to arise once more and begin again.

And now another full year of days has ended and been laid away, and we start a fresh new chapter in our lives.

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Genesis 1 is a foundation, and a fortress. It is simple and satisfying, dignified and devout. It tells us of the creation of the present dispensation of things on earth in six days, about six thousand years ago. It is in direct contradiction to the speculation of "Evolution," and attempts to harmonize these two opposites have brought shipwreck to the churches of the world.

This is the frontier on which the Truth is being most seriously attacked today, both within and without. The ultimate purpose and end of the modern superstition of "Evolution" is to eliminate God and escape the authority of His Word.

And we see before us today the unbelievable sight of the churches of Christendom, corrupted by Evolution, seriously debating whether there is a God at all. What will the next generation see?

Let US hold fast to simple Bible Truth! Let us get the true BIBLE picture of man—the pitiful limits of his intellectual capacity and judgment. The mind of the flesh is folly, ignorance, change and confusion.

To be fearfully stampeded into going partway to accommodate the speculation of the fleshly mind is fatal. This chapter is our rock foundation. Hold its simple record, and we are safe. Evolution cannot get a foothold. This is the revelation of God.

But begin to twist it to fit man's speculations—and we are lost. There is nowhere to stop, as we see by the current speculations of some calling themselves Christadelphians, that Adam could not have been a special creation from the dust, as the Bible says, but must have evolved from a millions-of-years-old race of creatures.

And truly, this is the only reasonable and logical and inevitable conclusion once we let Evolution get its foot in the door.

There is nowhere to stop. We must at last go all the way down the slippery slope from the light of divine revelation to the darkness of fleshly speculation, as many are finding to their sorrow and dismay.

Some are toying with Evolution, trying to go to the brink, then stop and switch back to divine creation for Adam. But it cannot be done. Once the fatal course of accepting a little bit of Evolution is started, there is no logical end except complete abandonment of the Word of God and at last of God Himself. The churches of the world are very close to this now.

Let us thank God fervently and continuously for this first chapter of Genesis which is under great attack today by its reputed "friends." Let us accept it in childlike faith as our true brethren have in the past.

Let us not be swayed for a moment by the dark speculations of men, who know—and can know—NOTHING of the past; who cannot even run their own lives with wisdom; who in blind and proud folly choose the paths of death.

"The fear of God is the BEGINNING of wisdom." Anything short of this, however seeming wise, is darkness and folly, ending in death.

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The Hebrew name for the Psalms is *Tehillim*—"Praise" or "Songs of Praise." The word "psalm" is from the Greek, meaning "A song sung to a harp," from the verb "To play on a stringed instrument."

The Psalms are divided into five books, like the books of Moses. This division is of great antiquity. The last psalms of each book are 41, 72, 89, 106 and 150, and each book ends with the words (or something similar):

"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen."

The final psalm is a fuller expression of this same praise.

Of the one hundred fifty psalms, seventy-three—about one half—are attributed in the heading directly to David, and about twenty-five more to men associated with him—Asaph and the sons of Korah. These latter could well be psalms of David for these singers to use, making about one hundred as attributed to David. (That is, the word translated "of" as, "A psalm OF Asaph," does not necessarily mean "by," but can mean "for.")

A very few are attributed to others—one to Moses, two to Solomon, etc., and about fifty are anonymous. These headings of the psalms are very ancient and are considered generally authentic, though not part of the inspired Scriptures.

The total number of direct quotations from the Old Testament in the New is 238. Of these, one half, 116, are from the Psalms. We see, therefore, the great doctrinal importance of the Psalms.

Christ and the apostles, when speaking of the Psalms, refer them to David, and quote them as wholly inspired Scripture. They unhesitatingly base fundamental arguments on *single* words or even *parts* of words.

Jesus so used Psa. 82:6, "*I have said, Ye are gods,*" and Psa. 110:1, "*The Lord said unto my lord.*"

Paul, Psa. 110:4, "*Sworn with an oath,*" and "*A priest after the order of Melchizedec.*"

Peter, Psa. 16:10, "*Neither suffer Thine holy One to see corruption.*"

There are nine direct quotations from the Psalms in the first two chapters of Hebrews, and many more throughout the rest of the book, proving doctrinal points.

Let us keep these passages clearly in mind when any try to blur the edges of infallible inspiration, or to downgrade the Old Testament.

We must fully recognize the direct divine element throughout the Psalms—the INSPIRED element, and purpose: to foreshadow Christ and reveal the godly mind.

Passages which on the face of them appear to apply to David's own circumstances are quoted in the New Testament as specific, inspired prophecies concerning Judas and Christ.

The prophetic, Messianic interpretation of the Psalms was received by the Jews long before the time of Christ. The nation looked forward to a Son of David, who would be King of Israel and who would fulfil all the glorious things foretold, all the many detailed prophecies.

This is without parallel or precedent in any other religion or national history, and infinitely strengthens the evidence of divine inspiration.

Christ and the apostles confirm this expectation, and explain what was always a mystery to the Jews: the combination in one Messiah of a smitten sufferer and a triumphant conqueror.

Seven Psalms are strikingly and outstandingly prophetic of Christ, and they give the key to the others. They are: 2, 18, 22, 45, 72, 89 and 110.

Concerning 110, Jesus specifically says that (1) David wrote it by inspiration and (2) David is not the person addressed in it—that it applies to the promised Messiah.

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The Psalms manifest an intense zeal against all forms of sin and wickedness, and all who choose such ways. This annoys moderns who in their supposed superior understanding and "compassion" prefer to pour a murky haze of what they call "love" over all distinctions of right and wrong.

But true godliness will stand with the Psalms: eager to help, eager to show compassion, but rigid and uncompromising and clearly outspoken against any ungodliness, anywhere, any time; and looking forward in eager and unashamed anticipation to the universal vindication and triumph of righteousness and holiness, and the unsparing crushing and annihilating of all who ~~deliberately~~ choose the God-defying ways of wickedness.

David showed great personal restraint in dealing with his personal enemies, under extreme provocation; but he recognized that *if good is going to triumph over evil, those who choose evil MUST be destroyed.*

Any sin, from smallest to greatest, when intelligently viewed, is seen to be rebellion against God, against goodness, against reality, against the divine purpose of ultimate joy and perfection and beauty for all. And though God is very long-suffering, all such must at last be called to account, and rigidly annihilated from God's glorified earth.

The mind of Christ hates sin with implacable hatred, as the enemy of God, the destroyer of all good for man, loathsome bringer of sorrow and death.

David, the "man after God's Own heart," hated sin (though truly on one occasion he sinned grievously). Psalm 51 portrays an utter abasement and remorse unparalleled in all Scripture. We should never think of David's great sin without connecting it with this Psalm –

"Have mercy on me, O God . . . blot out my transgressions.

"Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

"For I acknowledge my transgression, and my sin is ever before me.

"Against Thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in Thy sight.

"Purge me with hyssop . . . wash me . . .

"Hide Thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.

"Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation . . . Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O God of my salvation!"

This is important in order to get the basic picture of the Psalms and David's special fitness to be the Spirit's instrument in recording the mind of Christ and of the ideal godly man. Paul said –

"Jesus Christ died to save sinners, of whom I am chief" (1Tim. 1:15).

He had done more harm to God's people and offered more obstruction to God's purpose than any man then living.

But, likewise, he was more intensely devoted, and suffered more, and labored more, for the sake of Christ and the Truth, than any man then living.

So David. His sin was terrible, both of itself – and infinitely more so because of his position of favor and prominence in God's purpose, and the harm it did to the cause of righteousness, and the glory of God among men.

Like Adam's sin, David's brought a long and bitter train of sorrow, strife and evil, and gave an occasion to blaspheme God that sinners still joyfully avail themselves of.

In the lives of David and of Paul we can find great lessons and great comfort. No failure is final if we will only continually rise and try again. Paul said –

"Forgetting those things that are behind, I reach forward unto those things that are before" (Phil. 3:13).

Today, as the New Year begins, is an especially fitting time to remind ourselves of this inspiring and comforting principle of Truth.

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The supreme object of the Psalms is to declare the glory of God. This is not just an abstract or merely academic consideration, as far as man's welfare is concerned.

It is of primary *practical* importance for man's *health and happiness* to recognize and declare the glory of God as the central fact of reality and eternity. It is satisfying, purifying and ennobling. It is peace and joy-producing.

It is absolutely NECESSARY that we have this joyful frame of mind – continual praise to the glory of God. This is a vital first principle of the Truth, and without it we do not have the Truth. It is the first and *greatest commandment* –

"Thou shalt love – worship, praise, adore, glorify – the Lord thy God with ALL thy heart, soul, strength and mind" (Mk. 12:30).

The Psalms embody worship, song, prayer, meditation. They emphasize the great importance of singing – of the spirit of singing. Paul expresses it best when he says (Eph. 5:19) –

"Making melody IN YOUR HEART to the Lord."

If this is not our fixed and peaceful frame of mind, even amid sorrow and trial, then we have not yet found the power of the Truth and the mind of Christ.

Singing in joyful thanksgiving and worship always accompanied the sacrifices in the Temple, and made them acceptable.

Christ and the apostles sang together in praise to God on the night he was betrayed. (The usual portion sung at the Passover time was Psalms 113-118).

Paul and Silas joyfully sang praises to God—in prison and in great suffering.

Paul, writing to the Ephesians and the Colossians, prescribes the singing of Psalms, and so does James (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Jam. 5:13). Many of our hymns are from the Psalms. (All those we used this morning were.)

The spirit of praise is the godly frame of mind: the joyful, confident recognition of the eventual, irresistible triumph of goodness and godliness.

The Psalms combine true, inward, spiritual living with the fullest respect and obedience to God's specific appointed outward forms of worship, in perfect balance. Neither dare be neglected: neither dare be set against the other, or exalted to the exclusion of the other.

The Psalms manifest intense delight and interest in all holy seasons, services, observances, etc., and a fervent longing to be in God's Tabernacle. While giving full weight to the spiritual aspect, we dare not belittle the literal. There is deep wisdom in all God's requirements and appointments. It is only the mind of the flesh that considers itself too "spiritual" and mature to need to obey the specific ordinances and commands.

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The fundamental requirement that the Scriptures present to us for attaining salvation is that we MUST have the mind of Christ. We must put away the natural thoughts of the flesh, and bring our thoughts and desires and interests into harmony with his. The Psalms are the major provision that God has made to enable us to do this.

David was uniquely the "*man after God's Own heart*" or mind. He perfectly illustrates in his life, in his weaknesses and his strengths, in his stumblings and in his overcomings, the man who is well-pleasing to God.

The Psalms of David present the mind of the ideal man. Not the perfect man, in the sense of never having experienced imperfection, but the IDEAL man in God's sight, who out of weakness is made strong, and who, from the flesh, rises to the Spirit. The characteristics of this man are—

Unshakable trust in God;

Entire devotion of the life to God's service;

Full submission to God's will;

A deep, intimate mutual relationship of love with God;

A constant longing for God's presence;

An unmovable conviction of God's perfect righteousness;

An overwhelming consciousness of God's nearness;

A confident assurance of God's omnipotence, and of the final eternal triumph of goodness and the suppression and destruction of all evil, and the joyful salvation of all faithful servants of God who "hold fast to the end."

The Psalms show us man as he is, and what he may become in the love and promise and providence of God.

We find portrayed therein a deep sense of sin and weakness, together with integrity of purpose and recognition of the divine standard of perfect holiness that is the pattern and the ideal. The mind of Christ—the godly mind—recognizes mortal weakness and uncleanness, and seeks for divine strength and holiness—recognizes the sorrow and vanity and death related to present things, and seeks for joy and peace and love in God.

The Psalms express, above everything else, intense devotion and absolute trust. Their chief characteristic, and the chief characteristic of David himself, is an intense awareness of God's immediate and all-pervading presence and care—over all nature, but especially over those who seek Him, most strikingly expressed in Jesus' words (Matt. 10:29)—

"Not a sparrow falls without your Father."

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Psalm 1 is an introduction to the whole book. It sums up its entire message and purpose—the blessedness, happiness, joyfulness, God-favoredness, of the godly man—

"Blessed is the man . . ."

This was Jesus' first word in his teaching, as he began his public ministry to Israel—

"Blessed are the poor" (the trembling—the reverent—the godly) in spirit" (Matt. 5:3).

It is fitting that this book of praise, which so beautifully expresses the mind of Christ, should start in the same way as his oral, personal teaching.

"Blessed" includes all good—excludes all evil. It is all we need to know or have. If we are among the blessed of God we have everything, we lack nothing.

If we are not among His blessed, then nothing matters. Nothing can begin to compensate us for the loss of this all-important, all-embracing thing.

Verse 1: Tells us what the godly man does not do.

Verse 2: What he DOES do.

Verse 3: His blessing and destiny.

We cannot go any deeper, nor make the message any simpler, than this. This is life: plumbed to its depth and reduced to its simplest realities.

Attain this, and you have attained everything. And it can be learned, practiced, perfected anywhere, anytime, and under any circumstances.

"... that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful" (Psa. 1:1).

"Walking, standing, sitting" seem to express progressive degrees of association and involvement.

"Ungodly, sinners, scornful" seem to indicate degrees of active and confirmed wickedness.

Everything in life is moving. We cannot stand still. We are going up or down—toward life or death. If we WALK incidentally with the unconcerned ungodly, if we permit a transient and apparently harmless passing association to develop, we shall soon find ourselves STANDING with the deliberate sinners, and at last SITTING down with those who are confirmed in their scornfulness of God.

Why? Because to enjoy the company of the ungodly we must deliberately dull and suppress our spiritual sense, as with a drug, and this is fatal.

We must stifle our conscience—and this course is fatally progressive. And when we choose it, God judicially pushes us deeper into it, to our own helpless destruction. He sends a "strong delusion."

Truly we inevitably must have many contacts with the world, both of necessity in daily activity, and by choice in endeavoring to proclaim and radiate the light of the Truth. Jesus actively and deliberately filled his ministry to the utmost with contact and association with people—even the openly sinful.

But he was never for a moment one of them, or one with them, though his enemies made great capital out of this association—

"Behold, a friend of publicans and harlots!"

But he was always completely separated from them by a perfect insulation of purity and holiness of mind and purpose.

He never for a moment forgot his one great purpose in life, his perfect oneness with God.

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"Blessed is THE MAN . . ."

—and only Christ is the perfect fulfillment of this Psalm—"THE MAN." But all may share in his blessing by being in him and like him as best they possibly can.

"His delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law doth he meditate day and night" (v. 2).

Two important thoughts are here:

1. Delight in the law of God.
2. Constant day-and-night meditation.

To be acceptable to God, we must "delight" in His law. We must perceive its beauty and necessity and desirability. It is the freely-given, joyful allegiance of our hearts that God desires—not just the enforced obedience of our bodies, however dutiful and faithful such obedience may be.

We must see the *beauties* of God's holy law, and we must be irresistibly moved by His love and goodness to *want* to please Him and draw near to Him.

We must love His law, both because it is holy, and because it is His. Truly, spiritual love cannot be forced or invented, but it CAN be *learned* and *developed*.

God first reveals Himself to us as all-good and all-powerful. He asks our love, and He asks us to conform ourselves to eternal reality.

He teaches us that we are by nature animal and unspiritual—unable to either comprehend or conform to purity and spirituality, but He assures us that love and affinity for these divine things that lead to eternal life CAN be learned and developed.

He assures us that the more we learn, the more we shall love, and the more we love, the more we shall learn. It is a progressive spiral upwards to life and joy, just as living after the flesh is a progressive spiral downward into sorrow and death.

"In His law doth meditate DAY and NIGHT."

Does this seem like an impractical ideal—only for those who do not have a pressing daily round of labor and responsibility to take care of?

Perhaps we are missing the meaning of the meditation. It is not necessarily a withdrawn, abstract, inactive meditation, but rather a positive, active, practical application of the law of God to every phase and detail of life's necessary activities.

We should do nothing, say nothing, think nothing, without the guidance of the law of God.

It must be our constantly consulted compass—our "meditation day and night." We must ask at each step of the way, "What is the will of God?"—which is but another way of saying (and it is the whole key to life that we perceive and realize this)—it is another way of saying, "What is the way of wisdom, and joy, and harmony, and facing reality?"

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"He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water."

The law of the Lord is the river of water, without which the tree does not have a chance to live at all, let alone to bring forth fruit.

It is not enough just to have a vague urge to do what is right. There are people on both sides of every war with a driving urge to do what is right, and they cheerfully murder each other fulfilling that urge.

Clearly something more is necessary—and that is: TRUTH, Reality, Divine Light and Guidance.

The big issue is: are we going to trust our own natural thoughts and emotions and opinions as to what is right and good, or are we going to recognize that our own natural thoughts—however well intentioned, however well pleasing to us—are deceptive and fatally misleading; and consciously seek God's law for guidance.

The latter course offers the only POSSIBLE chance of success and acceptance, and yet so pitifully few—even of those who claim to be Christ's brethren—follow this course.

The common view is: "I think this is all right, so it must be all right. I think this worldly fashion is all right. I like this worldly custom. It is so pretty. It is so appealing to the flesh. It pleases me and gratifies my lusts. I see no harm in it. I do not want to look into it honestly, and find out the real truth about it, and what GOD thinks of it. I do not really care what God thinks—I am only interested in what I think and like."

This is human nature—the thinking of the flesh; and if we are honest with ourselves, we can all see ourselves here, with our head in the sand of our own self-will.

But what about God's law, which we profess to love. If God has spoken on a subject, even (as we may think) obscurely—the only possible course of honesty, wisdom and love is to study it intently, search it out, and if there is any doubt as to the meaning, to keep on the safe side, because we love God.

Sometimes God is obscure on purpose, so that the true state of our heart and love will be exposed.

If our roots are not reaching ever more deeply and thirstily into this pure river of water that is God's law, we do not have a chance of life at all, for we are voluntarily (though perhaps blindly and unknowingly) choosing the flesh-pleasing way of death.

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"That bringeth forth his fruit in his season."

This is what John said—

"Bring forth FRUITS. Every tree that bringeth not forth fruit is cut down and cast into the fire"
(Jn. 15:2).

This is the test. "Faith without works is dead." Where is our fruit? What do we have to show? What have we done, what are we doing, for God?

Truly at best we are unprofitable servants, and we cannot be discouraged if our best seems very little, as long as we can honestly say it IS our most and our best.

"His leaf shall not wither" (Psa. 1:3).

Here is the real test of the wisdom of anything. What is the END? Will it last? Are we building for eternity? Or are we building on sand? Is the ultimate result of our course life or death?

Planning and providing for the future is recognized in the world as the difference between thoughtful intelligence and improvident stupidity, yet the REAL planning and preparing for the future almost everyone neglects.

But how soon health fails, and life comes face to face with death, and it is all over, and one more sinks into an endless grave—

"This their way is their folly" (Psa. 49:13).

But, "HIS leaf shall not wither." He, and he alone, has really planned for the future, and the future is his—in glorious, endless immensity!

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"And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper."

Can we take this literally and unqualifiedly?—

"WHATSOEVER he doeth shall prosper."

Are we guaranteed success in everything we do? Yes, we ARE, if our "everything" is the everything of the godly man—

"ALL things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom. 8:28).

There are no failures, no mistakes, no disappointments, in the great and triumphant plan of God.

There IS a way of life in which we are *guaranteed* success and satisfaction in everything we do. That way is to *"bring every thought into captivity to Christ"*—to have but one pure, clear, single aim and intent in life: the fulfilling of the will of God.

In this way of life—(which only Christ perfectly achieved, but to which all can steadily get closer with ever-increasing satisfaction and success)—everything we do and everything that happens to us is, and is joyfully SEEN to be, one more meaningful, purposeful, necessary step carrying us forward to our eventual eternal goal at the end of the way (Prov. 4:18)—

"The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

"AND WHATSOEVER HE DOETH SHALL PROSPER."