

Who Wrote “the Psalms of David”?

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Sam A. Smith

Biblical Reader Communications

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Who Wrote “the Psalms of David”?

What the Bible Says About Personal Apostasy and the Possibility of Losing One’s Salvation

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Contents

Introduction 5

The Historicity of the Psalm Titles 11

Evidence Supporting Davidic Authorship 16

Conclusions Concerning Davidic Authorship 19

The Number of Davidic Psalms 20

Bibliography –Works Cited 22

Introduction

“Who wrote the psalms of David?” might seem like an odd question; however, since the advent of modern higher criticism the authorship of some seventy-eight psalms traditionally ascribed to King David has been challenged. While these scholars don’t agree as to which, if any, of these psalms are the work of David, they generally agree that the ascriptions of authorship contained in the titles of seventy-three of these psalms have little or no historical validity. The task here will be to explore the arguments employed by the critics in denying Davidic authorship of these Psalms, and to demonstrate that the real basis for these critical objections is not historical at all, as they allege, but rather, a theologically and philosophically imposed “grid” that views the Scriptures as being the product of purely natural religious evolution. Since this issue has been thoroughly hashed in scholarly Old Testament literature, it is not the author’s intent to present new evidence, so much as to make some of the more technical, and widely scattered information available to the general reader, who might have neither the time nor the availability of a theological library to do the research.

The Superscriptions

All but thirty-four of the one hundred and fifty psalms have some type of superscription (i.e., prefatory title), which in the Hebrew text appears as the first verse of the psalm, but which in the English Bible appears as an unenumerated title.¹ These titles may classify the psalm as being of a certain type, give musical notation, describe the circumstances surrounding the composition of the psalm, or indicate authorship. Of particular importance is the usefulness of the titles in determining authorship. The title *ledawid* (“of David”) is attached to seventy-three of the psalms and has traditionally been taken to indicate Davidic authorship. However, since the advent of radical higher criticism with its naturalistic assumptions, the antiquity, meaning, and accuracy of these titles has been challenged. E. J. Young summarizes the modern scholarly opinion.

For the most part, the titles are rejected by modern criticism as being of practically no value. It is rather generally held that the

¹ Those psalms which do not have a superscription are: Pss. 1-2; 10; 33; 43; 71; 91; 93-97; 99; 104-107; 111-119; 135-137; 146-150.

titles were added at a much later time, and that the titles which refer to an event in David's life were simply taken from the books of Samuel. Further, the basic philosophy of the development of Israel's religion which underlies so much of the modern treatment of the Psalter necessarily precludes attributing much value to the witness of the titles.²

Determining the reliability of these titles is crucial to the question of authorship as has long been recognized. Frederick Eiselen pointed this out when he commented: "The attitude with reference to the date and authorship of the psalms is determined largely by the attitude toward the psalm titles."³ Unquestionably, the validity of the psalm titles is the central issue in the discussion of Davidic authorship. Thus, in regard to the question of authorship, our focus must be on the psalm titles.

Objections to Davidic Authorship

The numerous arguments raised to Davidic authorship of the psalms so titled basically fall into two categories, both of which relate directly to the titles themselves: 1) It is suggested that the title "*ledawid*" does not denote authorship but simply the name of a collection of psalms. According to this view, the psalms were considered to be "suitable to David," i.e., fitting his character or circumstances, but not necessarily authored by him. 2) It is asserted that the titles, though ascribing authorship to David, are historically unreliable because they ascribe Davidic authorship to psalms that internal evidence indicates cannot be Davidic in origin.⁴

The Meaning of "*ledawid*"

Since Davidic authorship is largely dependant on the meaning of *ledawid* (Hebrew, "of David") in the psalm titles, and since a failure to sustain such an ascription as referring to Davidic authorship would

² Edward J. Young, An Introduction to the Old Testament, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950) p. 279.

³ Frederick Carl Eiselen, The Psalms and Other Sacred Writings: Their Origin, Contents and Significance, Biblical Introduction Series (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1918) p. 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, see footnote p. 47.

preempt much other discussion, this objection will be considered first. Rogerson and McKay provide an introduction to this objection:

The meaning of the Hebrew phrase "*ledawid*" has been much discussed. Traditionally, it was taken to denote Davidic authorship. In modern scholarship, it has often been taken to mean "belonging to the Davidic collection," while a third view is that the phrase was meant by those who added it to denote authorship, but that these editors were not guided by any reliable tradition. There is probably some truth in all three of these views.⁵

In an earlier work, Eiselen stated the following:

This view, as the whole discussion of the question of authorship on the basis of the psalm titles, rests upon the interpretation of the expression "of David," "of Asaph," etc., as implying authorship. It is not impossible, however, that in some cases at least, these phrases were not intended to indicate authorship at all. In some instances the Hebrew preposition *le* may have been used with the meaning "belonging to," that is, implying possession rather than authorship. Thus the psalms credited to the sons of Korah may have been derived from a collection in the possession of the Levitical family. In the same way, the psalms ascribed to Asaph, Ethan, and Heman may have been derived from collections in the possession of families or guilds bearing the names of these men. Similarly, the expression "of David," as found in the psalm titles at the present time, may have been used to suggest that the psalms so marked were taken from a collection bearing the title "Psalms of David," perhaps because the nucleus of the collection was thought to be Davidic. In other cases, the phrase may be used with the meaning, "suitable for David," that is, a psalm befitting the character or circumstances of David. In either case, the interpretation implying authorship would be due to a later misunderstanding of an ambiguous Hebrew phrase.⁶

⁵ .W. McKay and J. W. Rogerson, Psalms 1-50 (London: Cambridge University Press, 1977) p. 4.

⁶ Eiselen, The Psalms and Other Sacred Writings, see footnote p. 47.

Eissfeldt, who takes the position that the titles refer to compilers rather than authors, indicates the lack of solid evidence for his position when he says:

The most important of the names of “compilers” are those of David, to whom 73 psalms are ascribed, and the Korahites and Asaph, both of which appear twelve times in the titles. These names are always introduced with the particle le, which may mean by, for, or concerning. There is thus room for various interpretations. The notes lb`l, lkrt, l'qht which appear at the top of some of the clay tablets from Ugarit, where the l is certainly not followed by the name of the author, but by the name of the hero of the poem — Ba`al, Keret, Aqhat, may lead us to the assumption that the l of these psalm titles is to be understood similarly, and not, as was formerly the predominating view, as l auctoris. Nevertheless the traditional interpretation cannot in fact be abandoned, in any rate in the sense that the tradition as we have it regards the names following the l as denoting the compiler, or the performers. This later could be considered for the Korahites and Asaph, and does in fact denote something very different from the first possibility. In the case of David the point is confirmed by the fact that in thirteen cases there is added to the expression by David a note on the occasion on which he is supposed to have composed or recited this poem (Pss. iii, vii, xviii, xxxiv, li, lii, liv, lvi, lvii, lix, lx, lxiii, cxlii). In one or two cases, as for example with Ps. xviii, the possibility does not seem to be quite excluded that we have a composition which really goes back to David. But this is not really the case with the 73 psalms ascribed to David. Here the ascription to David is rather to be explained on the grounds that latter generations, as the books of Chronicles show (I-xxii, 2-xxix, 5), regarded him as the originator of their entire cultic organisation [sic], and so also as the composer of their temple songs.⁷

If Eissfeldt’s view is taken as a fair representation of the position of modern higher criticism, then two points become obvious: 1) There is no lexical or syntactical reason for rejecting Davidic authorship. If *ledawid* can represent compilers, it can certainly represent authorship. Rejection

⁷ Otto Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: An Introduction, trans. by Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1965) pp. 451-451.

of Davidic authorship then is an assumption based purely on other criteria (historical or theological). 2) The view of modern criticism stands in contrast to the New Testament record, which directly ascribes seven psalms to David—which name cannot be understood as representing a compiler (Psa. 2 cf. Acts 4:25; Psa. 16 cf. Acts 2:25-31; Psa. 32 cf. Rom. 4:6; Psa. 69 cf. Acts 1:15-20; Psa. 95 cf. Heb. 4:7; Psa. 109 cf. Acts 1:16-20; Psa. 110 cf. Luke 20:41-44).⁸

One strong indication that *ledawid* was intended to indicate authorship is the inclusion of the historical allusions in thirteen of the titles (Psa. 3; 7; 18; 34; 51; 52; 54; 56; 57; 59; 60; 63; 142). Concerning these historical allusions, Young says:

In the Hebrew titles the phrase *ledhavidh* occurs, and this phrase while it need not necessarily refer to authorship is generally regarded as so referring. The contents of some of the titles...refer to some event in David's life, and here the phrase *ledhavidh* is clearly intended to indicate authorship by David. If that is the case here, it would seem also to be the case with the other occurrences of the phrase. The titles, therefore do ascribe the authorship of many Psalms to David.⁹

It would seem that while one might argue the point that some of the *ledawid* expressions might not have been intended as claims of authorship, the expression is clearly used as such in numerous instances. That fact combined with the obvious antiquity of the titles should be given due consideration with respect to the question of authorship.¹⁰ Indeed, it seems reasonable on the grounds of consistency of usage to

⁸ All but two of these psalms are titled "*ledawid*," (Pss. 2 and 95). Given that the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the OT made in the third century B.C.) lists twelve additional psalms as Davidic, it is not inconceivable that some of the titles have been lost from our relatively late (tenth century A.D.) Hebrew manuscripts. (This is not to suggest that the LXX titles are without problems of their own.)

⁹ Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 288.

¹⁰ With respect to the antiquity of these titles, J. B. Payne says: "From the view point of lower criticism, no significant evidence exists for denying the authenticity of the psalm titles within the text of the OT. All Heb. MSS contain these titles. The earliest VSS [versions], except for the Syr. [Syriac], not only exhibit their trs. [translation] but even misrepresent (e.g., in the LXX [Septuagint]) certain of their meanings which had been lost because of their antiquity." [Explanations in brackets added.] *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Encyclopedia*, S.v. "Psalms, Book of," by J.B. Payne.

assume an authorship credit for all of the *ledawid* expressions unless it can be demonstrated on solid historical grounds that such could not be true.

The Historicity of the Psalm Titles

Modern higher criticism has deduced a number of arguments intended to demonstrate that the psalm titles place the psalms in historical settings inconsistent with their internal characteristics. The following arguments are a synthesis of objections to Davidic authorship by Driver and Eissfeldt:¹¹

- a) Psalms which address the king directly or refer to him in the third person cannot have been written by David since he was himself, the king (e.g., Psa. 20; 21; 61; 63; 72; 110).
- b) Some psalms contain Aramaic words and expressions, which evidence a later date.¹²
- c) Some psalms have stylistic affinities with psalms thought to be of a later date (e.g., 9-10; 15; 34; 37; 145).
- d) Some psalms do not correctly reflect David's historical situation or personal character. Note the following examples: 1) Some imply the present existence of the Temple (5; 27; 28; 63; 68; 69; 101; 138). 2) It is questionable whether the expression "holy hill" would have been applied to Zion prior to the establishment of the sanctuary there (3; 15; 24; 26; 27). 3) Some imply that the time in which the psalmist lived was an evil time when the godly were oppressed—which does not accurately describe David's time. 4) Some of the psalms refer to the king or to David in a way that would seem unnatural for him to write about himself (20; 21; 61). 5) Some of the psalms express a devotion and depth of insight and theology too advanced for David's time.

However, consider the following problems with those arguments:

- a) That David would not have referred to himself in the third person is both conjectural and demonstrably incorrect. In 2 Samuel 23:1-7 are recorded "the last words of David." In verse one David refers to himself by name in the third person, and subsequently employs the third person verb (*huqam*) to describe how he was "raised on high," he then refers to himself again in the third person as *mesiah elohe*, "[the] anointed of God." It clearly seems that such license was acceptable in Hebrew poetry.

¹¹ See Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, pp. 373-380; Eissfeldt, The Old Testament: An Introduction, pp. 451-454.

¹² *Ibid.*, see footnote on p. 374. (Driver gives a partial listing of these Aramaisms.)

b) The presence of presumed Aramaisms in these psalms is no longer regarded as an indication of late composition as was previously thought by some critics. Dahood says:

The tendency in recent years to assign earlier rather than later dates to the composition of the psalms comports with the evidence of the Ras Shamra texts. These show that much of the phraseology in the Psalter was current in Palestine long before the writing prophets, so the criterion of literary dependence becomes much too delicate to be serviceable.¹³

c) The stylistic affinities in question generally refer to the alphabetic structure of some of the psalms. Even Driver, who posits this argument, admits that there is no proof that alphabet arrangement was not used in Davidic times.¹⁴ Delitzsch adds this on the use of the alphabetic arrangement in psalms ascribed to David:

Even Hitzig does not allow himself to be misled as to the ancient Davidic origin of Ps. ix and x. by the fact of their having an alphabetical arrangement. These two Psalms have the honor of being ranked among the thirteen Psalms which are acknowledged by him to be genuine Davidic Psalms. Thus therefore the alphabetical arrangement found in the other Psalms cannot, in itself, bring us down to 'the times of poetic trifling and degenerated taste.'¹⁵

With respect to the use and appropriateness of this stylistic feature in Davidic times, Delitzsch adds:

Moreover, the alphabetic form is adapted to the common people, as is evident from Augustine's "Retract." i. 20. It is not a paltry substitute for the departed poetic spirit, not merely an accessory

¹³ William Foxwell Albright and David Noel Freeman, general eds., The Anchor Bible, (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1966), Psalms I, by Mitchell Dahood, p. xxx of the Introduction.

¹⁴ Driver, An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament, pp. 374-375.

¹⁵ F. Delitzsch, Psalms, vol. 5i, p. 160, in *Commentary on the Old Testament* by C. F. Kell and F. Delitzsch (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, reprint 1980).

to please the eye, and outward embellishment—it is in itself indicative of mental power.¹⁶

Respecting stylistic features of a more unique and personal signature, Perowne says of David, “He [David] was the model after which they copied; his the fire which kindled theirs. So great a poet inevitably drew a host of others in his train.”¹⁷ Perowne’s observation may well explain some of the stylistic affinities with later psalms. It is certainly reasonable to assume that David’s writing would serve as a model for later psalmists.¹⁸ Several additional items need to be addressed:

1) As Young has commented, if the psalms ascribed to David specifically referred to the temple *i.e.*, the permanent sanctuary built in Jerusalem, then it would indeed be difficult to understand how David could have written those psalms, since the temple was not constructed until after his death.¹⁹ However, the terms used in these psalms to refer to the “temple” or the Lord’s “house” are words appropriate for referring to the tabernacle used prior to the construction of the permanent structure. Coppes states:

It is to be noted that the term *hekal* is applied to God’s house while it was still a tent (1 Sam. 1:9; 3:3). In Psa. 27, the temporary structure where David placed the ark is called a house (*bet*), a temple (*hekal*), a booth (*sukka*), and a tent (*ohel*).²⁰

2) That Zion would not have been designated by the expression “holy hill” prior to the construction of the permanent temple structure is merely conjectural. 2 Samuel 6:12 describes the transfer of the Ark of the Lord from the house of Obed-edom into the city of David (located on Zion). The presence of the ark of God on Zion made the expression

¹⁶ Ibid. Delitzsch, p.161.

¹⁷ J. J. Stewart Perowne, The Book of Psalms, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976) p. 11.

¹⁸ For an extensive discussion of these and additional arguments see: “The Heading of the Psalms,” by R. D. Wilson, in the Princeton Theological Journal, vol. 24, No. 2 (April, 1926), pp. 389-395.

¹⁹ Young, Introduction to the Old Testament, p. 293.

²⁰ Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, S.v. “*hekal*,” by Leonard J. Coppea. See also 2 Samuel 22:7 in which the term “*hekal*” is used to describe the tabernacle prior to the construction of the permanent temple structure.

“holy hill” quite appropriate. That Zion was viewed as a sacred location can be seen from the fact that the name “Zion” eventually came to designate the temple complex, which was located on nearby Mount Moriah (Isa. 8:18; 18:7) and even the entire city of Jerusalem (2 Kings 19:21).²¹

3) Even a casual reading of the books of Samuel reveals that the times in which David lived were turbulent. Much of David’s life was spent either fleeing enemies or pursuing them. David’s exile resulting from Absalom’s rebellion (2 Sam. 15-18) evidences that even late in his reign he had many powerful enemies. It seems unrealistic to think that he didn’t have opposition both prior to this conspiracy (2 Sam. 15:12) and after it.²² That David’s enemies not only opposed him, but his policies, and his religion as well, seems quite certain.²³

4) It is true that the writer of these psalms often refers to himself in rather glowing terms which ordinarily might seem, at the very least, lacking in humility and somewhat unnatural. However, two factors should be given consideration before denying Davidic authorship on that basis. First, in the psalm ascribed to David in 2 Samuel 23, which is generally not in dispute, he refers to himself as “the man who was raised on high,” and “the anointed of the God of Jacob,” also “the sweet psalmist of Israel.” Whatever one may make of David’s mode of thought as he wrote, it is apparent from the historical record of Second Samuel that he did make such statements concerning himself. Second, when one considers David’s position as the divinely anointed king (2 Sam. 23:1), a fact of which he was very conscious, such statements can be seen not as personal glorification, but as the exaltation of God as he reveals his provision for the nation’s continuance.

5) That these psalms express a devotion and depth of theological insight too advanced for David’s time is based solely on a prior

²¹ Merrill C. Tenny, gen. ed., The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1973) p. 914.

²² Note also the revolt of Sheba ben Bichri in 2 Samuel 20.

²³ If one considers the implications of the Davidic covenant (2 Sam. 7:4-29), the conclusion could be drawn that opposition to David—as the Lord’s anointed (2 Sam. 23:1)—was tantamount to opposition to the will of God. Thus a connection can be made between the political and the religious. Such a connection may well explain some of the difficulties introduced by the imprecatory psalms.

assumption of the naturalistic development of Israel's religion. The historical record must be allowed to speak for itself and not be adjusted simply to fit a narrowly preconceived notion with respect to its origin and development.

In light of these observations there doesn't seem to be any good historical or theological reason for denying Davidic authorship of the psalms so titled. (The reader who wishes to do additional research on the historicity of the psalm titles can also find much material in F. Delitzsch's book on the Psalms.)²⁴

²⁴ See Delitzsch, Psalms, vol. 5i, pp. 7-37 (If using the 10 volume set referenced here, volume 5 contains three sub-volumes (i, ii, iii).

Evidence Supporting Davidic Authorship

Consideration will now be given to the reasons for accepting the *ledawid* psalms as of genuine Davidic authorship.

a) There is no historical reason for denying such psalmody to David's era. J. B. Payne states:

From the viewpoint of higher criticism, all now recognize that poems in the psalm form appear in the OT long before the time of David (cf. Exod 15; Deut 32-33; Judg 5). In particular, archeological research in Babylonia and Egypt has brought to light advanced hymnody, centuries before Abraham. The recovery of Canaanitish lit. at Ugarit has furnished significant parallels to the psalms, from the time of Moses (cf. J. B. Patton, Canaanite Parallels in the Book of Psalms) and the major researches of M. Dahood (Anchor Bible, Psalms).²⁵

b) It appears that the psalm titles, which in seventy-three instances ascribe authorship to David, are ancient.²⁶ They appear in all of the Hebrew manuscripts and all of the early versions except the Syriac (Aramaic). To date, no solid historical evidence has been produced which would discredit these titles as they appear in the Hebrew manuscripts. In addition, the research of R. D. Wilson has demonstrated the compatibility of these psalms to the period in which David lived.²⁷

c) The historical records of both the Old and New Testaments attest to the fact that David authored many of the psalms. The Old Testament attests to David's psalmody in 2 Samuel 1:19-27; 3:33; possibly chapter

²⁵ The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, S.v. "Psalms, Book of," by J. B. Payne.

²⁶ For an extensive discussion of the manuscript evidence for these titles, see: R. D. Wilson's article *The Headings of the Psalms* (under the subsection titled: "The Text of the Headings") in the Princeton Theological Review, vol. 24, No 3 (April, 1926), pp. 370-389. (All of Dr. Wilson's journal articles are available free in a permanent achieve at: <http://www.biblicalreader.com/Wilson/index.html>.)

²⁷ *The Headings of the Psalms -Part 1* The Princeton Theological Review Vol. 24, No. 1 (1926), beginning on page 1; and *The Headings of the Psalms -Part 2* The Princeton Theological Review Vol. 24, No. 3 (1926), beginning on page 353.

22; 23:1-7; and 1 Chronicles 16:7-36.²⁸ The New Testament likewise ascribes seven psalms to David (Psa 2 cf. Acts 4:25; Psa. 16 cf. Acts 2:25-31; Psa. 32 cf. Rom. 4:6; Psa. 69 cf. Acts 1:15-20; Psa. 95, cf. Heb. 4:7; Psa. 109 cf. Acts 1:16-20; Psa. 110, cf. Luke 20:41-44).

As far as David's place among the psalmists, Delitzsch says:

In David the sacred lyric attained its full maturity. Many things combined to make the time of David its golden age. Samuel had laid the foundation of this both by his energetic reforms in general, and by founding the schools of the prophets in particular, in which under his guidance (1 Sam. xix. 19 sq.), in conjunction with the awakening and fostering of the prophetic gift, music and song were taught. Through these *coenobia*, whence sprang a spiritual awakening hitherto unknown in Israel, David also passed. Here his poetic talent, if not awakened, was however cultivated. He was a musician and poet born. Even as a Bethlehemite shepherd he played upon the harp, and with his natural gift he combined a heart deeply imbued with religious feeling. But the Psalter contains as few traces of David's Psalms before his anointing (*vid.*, on Ps. viii, cxliv) as the New Testament does of the writings of the Apostles before the time of Pentecost. It was only from the time when the Spirit of Jahve came upon him at his anointing as king of Israel, and raised him to the dignity of his calling in connection with the covenant of redemption, that he sang Psalms, which have become an integral part of the canon. They are the fruit not only of his high gifts and the inspiration of the Spirit of God (2 Sam. xxiii. 2), but also of his own experience and of the experience of his people interwoven with his own. David's path from his anointing onwards, lay through affliction to glory. Song however, as a Hindu proverb says, is the offspring of

²⁸ Critics have often sought to minimize the weight of external evidence by inferring the inaccuracy of the OT historical books. Driver (*Literature of the Old Testament*, pp. 378-379) seeks to show that the psalm ascribed to David's era in 1 Chronicles 16:7-36 is actually a synthesis of three exilic or post-exilic psalms (Psa. 105:1-15, 96:1-13, and 106:47-48). Yet he fails to present any conclusive reason for assigning Psa. 105, 96 and 106 to the exilic or post-exilic era. Likewise, Eiselen follows the same approach—denying the validity of the OT historical books (*The Psalms and Other Sacred Writings*, pp. 52-53). Denial of such clear-cut external testimony allows the negative critic to retreat into the more obscure areas of historical allusion, religious and theological ideas, relationship with other psalms, and matters of language and style—about which there is much opinion and little fact.

suffering.... His life was marked by vicissitudes which at one time prompted him to elegiac strains, at another to praise and thanksgiving; at the same time he was the founder of the kingship of promise, a prophecy of the future Christ, and his life, thus typically moulded [sic], could not express itself otherwise than in typical or even consciously prophetic language. Raised to the throne, he did not forget the harp which had been his companion and solace when he fled before Saul, but rewarded it with all honour. He appointed 4000 Levites, the fourth division of the whole Levitical order, as singers and musicians in connection with the service in the tabernacle on Zion and partly in Gibeon, the place of the Mosaic tabernacle. These he divided into 24 classes under the Precentors, Asaph, Heman, and Ethan = Jeduthun (1 Chron. xxv comp. xv. 17 ssq.), and multiplied the instruments, particularly the stringed instruments, by his own invention (1 Chron. xxiii. 5; Neh. xii. 36)²⁹

²⁹ Delitzsch, Psalms, vol. 1 of vol. 5, pp. 8-9.

Conclusions Concerning Davidic Authorship

In summarizing the discussion of Davidic authorship, certain points bear restatement:

- a) The oldest texts of the book of psalms contain seventy-three titles that include the expression "*ledawid*." While it is possible that such an expression might be employed in a sense not indicative of authorship, in thirteen of these psalms the expression is combined with historical allusions to the life of David in such a way as would most naturally indicate that the expression denotes authorship. If *ledawid* indicates authorship in these thirteen instances, it is not unreasonable to assume, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that the expression carries the same meaning in the other sixty psalms.
- b) Objections to Davidic authorship commonly rest on a prior assumption of the natural (as opposed to "supernatural") development of Israel's religion, rather than upon historical fact. Typically, such objections either deny the antiquity of a psalm based on its advanced theological content or link it with other psalms which have been dated late using the same assumptions. Negative criticism characteristically seeks to disassociate the question of authorship from external evidence (i.e., other books of Scripture which refer to Davidic authorship of psalms), since all such evidence supports Davidic authorship of many of the psalms.
- c) There is no historical evidence that any of the psalms titled "*ledawid*" are out of character for David or his time period.
- d) Both the Old and New Testaments authenticate Davidic authorship in referring to many of the psalms as the composition of David.³⁰

Given the observations above it seems quite reasonable to conclude that David authored those psalms that bear the *ledawid* ("of David") inscription.

³⁰ The N.T. employs such ascriptions as: "*ho tou patros hemon din pneumatou hagiou stomatos David piados sou eipon*," ("[You spoke] by the mouth of our father David, your servant saying...")—Acts 4:25a, cf. vv. 25b-26; "*autos gar David legei en biblo psalmon*," ("for David himself says in the Book of Psalms...")—Luke 20:42a, cf. vv. 42b-44); "*...edei plepothenai ten graphen hen proeipen to pneuma to hagion dia stomatos David*," ("...the Scripture must be fulfilled which the Holy Spirit spoke before through the mouth of David...")—Acts 1:16a cf. v. 20.

The Number of Davidic Psalms

To the seventy-three psalms titled “of David” must be added at least five others that are ascribed to David by other portions of Scripture.³¹ Those psalms are: Psalm 2; 95; 96; 105 and 106. Psalm 2 is ascribed to David in Acts 4:25, and Psalm 95 is ascribed to him in Hebrews 4:7. The three Psalms: 96; 105 and 106 are contained in part in 1 Chronicles 16:7-36, which is there ascribed to David.³² This yields a total of seventy-eight known Davidic psalms. It is at least conceivable that some of the untitled psalms, other than the five mentioned above, are also Davidic; however, there is no way to determine that for certain.

There can be no doubt that David occupies a unique place among the psalmists of Israel. As Perowne has pointed out, his poetry was the pattern of all to follow.³³ Young lists these six qualities that contributed to David’s unique abilities as a psalmist: 1) his skill as a musician; 2) his skill as a poet; 3) his deep feeling and imagination; 4) his true worship of the Lord; 5) his rich and varied experience; and, 6) his special endowment of the Spirit of God.³⁴

With respect to David’s musical ability, the historical books are replete. 1 Samuel 16:17-18 indicates that even as a youth David enjoyed wide reputation as a skillful musician; years later, Amos wrote of the fact that David composed songs (Amos 6:5). 2 Samuel 1:17-27, though a dirge, is indicative of his ability as a poet. One doesn’t have to read far in the Psalms to discover that David was a man of intense emotional expression. Take, for example Psalm 6:6 where he said: “I am weary with my sighing; every night I make my bed swim, I dissolve my couch with my tears,” or Psalm 32:3-4 in which he wrote: “When I kept silent about my sin, my body wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my vitality was drained as with the fever heat of summer.” The intensity of his devotion to the Lord can be seen in Psalm 63:1 where he said: “O God, Thou art my God; I shall

³¹ The 73 psalms containing the title “of David” are: Pss. 3-9; 11-32; 34-41; 51-65; 68-70; 86; 101; 103; 108-110; 122; 124; 131; 133; 138-145.

³² Their order of appearance in 1 Chronicles 16:7-36 is: Psa. 105:1-15; 96:1-13; 106:47-48.

³³ Perowne, The Book of Psalms, p. 11.

³⁴ Young, An Introduction to the Old Testament, pp. 288-290.

seek Thee earnestly; my soul thirsts for Thee, my flesh yearns for Thee...”

It is certainly an understatement to say that David led a life of varied experience; one who started out in life as a shepherd boy, won acclaim as a skillful musician and composer, was selected to serve in the court of King Saul, demonstrated himself to be a military genius, spent years in hiding as a fugitive, finally ascended to the throne of Israel only to have the kingdom split and reunited and then ripped from him by his own son. Yet, doubtless, his greatest qualification for authoring these psalms was a special presence of the Holy Spirit. David was acutely aware of this presence, for he prayed in Psalm 51:11, “Do not cast me away from Thy presence, and do not take Thy Holy Spirit from me.” Though some of these qualities may not have been unique to David, it seems reasonable to say that the character of his psalms is due to the fact that, in the providence of God, these qualities came together in one man — David, “the sweet psalmist of Israel.”

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