

# Remarks on the English Psalter

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## Table of Contents

Preface.....	1
REMARKS ON THE ENGLISH PSALTER.....	3
TABLE OF SIGNS AND MARKS.....	5
INDICATIVE MOOD.....	5

### Contents

Preface

Remarks on the English Psalter

Translation of the First Book of Psalms (1 - 41).

"TWO ESSAYS ON THE HEBREW TENSES.

San Francisco and Auckland on to Sydney.

(26.10.77. Put by till England, Si placebat illi." [being an])

Examination of the Hebrew Bible as to the Structure and Idiom of the Language

Translation of Genesis 1 - 4

Showing the style of Scripture, or the mode of revelation when written.

This last is good. G.V.W.

### Preface.

Piety in the reading of Scripture is precious, and I thank God that there are many (whose mother tongue is English) who study the English Psalter.

Still to piety must be added *divine* intelligence, or we shall come short of blessing; for that which men call the *Old* Testament presents us with the providential and governmental ways of the Creator toward man upon *earth*. Man was on trial. After he had fallen, could he save himself? And it was not until the gospel of Jesus Christ the Saviour came, and was given forth in the New Testament, that life and immortality were brought to light. Man a ruined creature tried — is always man *lost*. Israel, indeed, will have passed through more than three thousand years of trial and failure as a nation ere it gives up its self-righteousness. A man as fallen *deserves* nothing at God's hand but rejection; but Christ, "the man that is Jehovah's fellow," "God manifest in flesh," overcame and won for Himself a place, in which, on God's behalf, He is now Saviour of the lost, Saviour to all who find grace to receive Him. He alone is a ruined sinner's refuge, Himself, who died on the cross, and rose again, deserves everything at God's hand; this is through faith the believer's rest, and here should be the centre and end of our new,

our eternal life,

If still standing upon his own ground as a mere creature, a man may find in the Psalms how others have been upon the path he is treading, and been, too, in deeper sorrow and difficulties than himself; but while still holding fast to *self*, he will not see how Christ suffered *for* our sins, and now lives *for* us who believe in Him, so that we may live to Him, and wait for Him till He comes to fetch us. Self and worldliness, and acting for time, will as naturally result from the one course as unselfishness, heavenly-mindedness, and living to God and Christ result from the other; viz., that of seeing Christ as the one great Person and subject of the Psalms. The testimony of the Holy Spirit in the Scriptures, as in His teaching, is always to Jesus and His works, etc.

No one can understand the Psalms aright who does not see Christ in them. Read any book without seeing the *writer's* mind in it, and you will misunderstand it.

Language supposes the power of intercommunion between those that use it. But it supposes more; viz., correspondence of mind, to some extent, in them, and not only the knowledge of the forms of speech of the particular language in question. These, however perfect they may be, are not equal to the mind that can use them, and which judges of their force, or else uses them amiss.

Wonderful and adorable is He who, being God, has Himself spoken as God manifest in flesh to man; and who has referred, too, to the pre-eminent authority of the written Word. (John 5: 46, 47.) Man is thus left without excuse. And, note it, men could understand Him; for through grace many *did* so, unto eternal life. He who made man Himself knows the mind and faculties of man; and He could, and did, use words with life-giving power, so as to bow the will of man, and move hearts and minds and consciences in those that received Him.

But more than this, God the Holy Spirit (owning the Anointed of God as the centre and end of all God's actings) has given to us not only *the truth* as presented in Jesus when down here, and who then went on high and sent down the Holy Spirit to form us down here for Himself, but He has also given us God's *counsel, plans, choice, ways*, and the outline of the future from the cross of the Christ (as the One in whom a heavenly and an earthly people were destined from before the foundation of the world to be secured) until His new heavens and new earth, yet to come, be set up.

Now observe this. He, Jesus, has been born of the Virgin Mary, by the Holy Spirit; has lived on this earth; has made good His testimony, and done His work. He suffered on Calvary, but now (risen from among the dead) He sits at God's right hand. Grace had from the beginning delighted in the Son; and it cast much in the histories of men of God down here (as Adam, Noah, Moses, David, etc.) into types of Him that was to come. And further, when He came as Messiah, and was rejected, He opened up His glory as the last Adam, life-giving Spirit, and Heir of all things. But Himself has come, has made atonement in death under judgment, and is now pardon and life-giver to the believer. Note this, because the first book of the Psalms (1 to 41) gives us Himself and His position at His first coming; the experiences He then made, and what He did thereon. He had access to Jerusalem, and was found there; and there were in Jerusalem and in the land Israelites who were waiting for the consolation promised. But He is now on high, earth rejected, though heaven honoured.

Now if I study the first three gospels, I get light divine upon this first book of the Psalms. They give me the pictures of Himself, and as going through His course of humiliation — the moral side of Himself and His life on earth, from Bethlehem till His receiving up into glory.

In the Acts and the Epistles, I get a God-inspired yet detailed commentary upon this humiliation and its results, whether immediate or on to the final state. Such being the case, I do not think it too

much to say, that if I or you, reader, are acquainted as we (made partakers of the benefit) ought to be with the Gospels and Acts and Epistles, then the first forty-one Psalms will be read in the light of God, and not merely (blessed as that is) with reverence and piety. Of one thing we are *sure*; God, when He wrote these Psalms, used words correctly according to the truth of what was before His own mind and of that which came to pass. Read these Psalms according to God's mind in them, then according to that which was true as to the being, position, experiences, etc., of the Anointed man. They are given to us by God in the Gospels, Acts, and Epistles. And you will find both humbling enough, while so occupied, and intelligence to gladden your heart and brighten your mind through the operation of the Spirit given to those that believe. Nothing has struck my own mind, after the perusal of the Psalms and the Gospels, more than the moral impossibility of any created mind having originated the idea, firstly, of such a wondrous person as the Lord Jesus was, individually and morally too; and, secondly, of the necessity for such an One to be found and to come in if the whole outline of truth as presented in the Psalter was to be made good.

So Saul of Tarsus, when locked up in nature's darkness, but glorying (after the flesh) in Abram and David, what a contrast from Paul when he saw that Jesus had taken Moses' place and David's! Read the epistle to the Hebrews, and contrast Paul with Saul, and the contrast is less, really, than when you see the contrasts between Christ with His Melchizedek priesthood, sin done away, and Aaron with his priesthood ever recalling sin to mind: the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched in heaven, and the perishable tabernacle in the wilderness. What a contrast!

Any translation which really contains one jot or one tittle at variance with the truth of Jesus Christ and any part of His work must, so far forth, be in error, and the error should be corrected. But while learning the truth through the text and by the Spirit, I must know God's truth, His subject in eternity, and heaven as my subject, ere I can correct my defects in doctrine, or read the Psalms aright.

Context is said by some to be *the key* to the Hebrew language. I have no objection to make to this statement. I wish it had been more followed out and acted upon. I remark, however, that the observation is *necessarily* true of every language. For instance, in Greek, let any one write a disquisition on the term "beginning" as connected with our Lord. If he does not mark and observe the contexts of Gen. 1: 1, and Mark 1: 1, and John 1: 1, and its force generally in John, he will be without a right clue, even if he fall not into error. A teachable mind has to weigh forms and terms of a language ere using them; and much more important still in divine grace is the mind of the Spirit of God as given to the believer. (John 6: 52, 63; 1 Cor. 2)

## REMARKS ON THE ENGLISH PSALTER.

I was struck some years ago with the fact of there existing in English *two* authorized translations\* of the Psalms of David, that of the Prayer Book, and that of the Bible. This fact, and another connected with it; viz., that so far from being identical, these two authorized versions differ widely the one from the other, both impressed me.

\* Bagster and Sons, Paternoster Row, London, published these, side by side, with notes by L. C. L. Brenton; and also a hexaglot Psalter, presenting the Hebrew, and the Bible, and the Vulgate, and Jerome's, and the Prayer Book, and the LXX versions in parallel columns, all visible at one and the same time.

I had no leisure then in which to follow up the subject.

My lot had been cast providentially where the English language had sway, and I had received the

authorized version as a gift from God in His grace and providence. But to that same providence I owed the knowledge of Hebrew and Greek and Latin, and felt called upon, whenever I could, to examine God's book as He wrote it, and to see how far man had, in any measure, mingled anything with the unsullied transparency of the Word. God's truth is so divine and unique, that it will shine forth even out of a defective translation. But this would not justify anyone in preferring, for any reason whatsoever, a bad to a good version of the same.

The painful impression (referred to above) was deepened when I had leisure to examine the books referred to on the previous page. It was also confirmed by the new translation into German in the recent Elberfeld Bible, etc.

I began to look at the question *seriously*, and this little book is one result thereof.

1. I have, in my prefatory remarks, set forth the test and touchstone, to which every statement as from Scripture must be submitted.

2. The correctness of this is confirmed by the Authorized Version. Its weak points and failures grew up out of comparative ignorance in the learned translators of the subject of Old Testament prophecy; viz., man, the human being, after the fall, in which the race was ruined, under the providence, and government of God. He was tried as to whether he could restore himself. If they had seen that as the subject, they never would again and again have put the New Testament assembly forward in the Old Testament as that in which the promises to Israel were to be fulfilled. For the Old Testament presented man failed and failing while trusting to himself; the New Testament presents God's great salvation in Christ. Nor would they, if they had understood God's subject in the New Testament (viz., the Man that was Jehovah's fellow, winning, as the only obedient One, all things for Himself), ever have made His Church, as set up at Pentecost, to be the means of introducing the millennium instead of its ending in Babylon. Then will He come forth, His heavenly saints already with Him in heaven, and set up the kingdom on earth in Israel. *God* has used and honoured their translation. I bless His name for it. Yet through it would I go on toward something better.

3. Much, of course, turns upon the right understanding of what has been called by the Rabbis *moods* and *tenses*. Can I present the difficulties in this part of the subject to the mere English reader? I judge it might be done, and done in a way that the thoughtful would see, first, the difficulty on the Hebrew side of the question; and secondly, by carefully comparing it with a supposed representative in English of the Hebrew Psalter, get valuable help, or at least food for thought.

In trying to do this, I would (with as little alteration as possible) use the English Bible translation; drawing out from it words, and marking in English what will correspond with the Hebrew *as to its moods and tenses*; this representation of the Psalms carrying in it the signs and marks of the table adjoined.

Hebrew grammarians tell us that there are *but* four moods (or modes) in Hebrew — the Indicative, the Infinitive, the Imperative, and the Participial forms.

*And* that it is only the Indicative which has *tenses* which mark *times*. The older writers call the first of these two *the Perfect*; and the second, *the Future* (now called by many *the Present*).

# TABLE OF SIGNS AND MARKS.

## INDICATIVE MOOD

*p* to mark the English word which represents the Hebrew word, which the Rabbis say is a *perfect*, and which carries the pronominal affix (or sign of the person) *at its end*.

*f* to mark the English word which represents the Hebrew word, which the Rabbis say is a *future*, and which carries the pronominal prefix (or sign of the person) *before it*.

The persons in both are 1st, 2nd, and 3rd, sing. and plural.

### INFINITIVE MOOD

*b* to stand before every INFINITIVE.

### IMPERATIVE MOOD

*c* before every IMPERATIVE.

### PARTICIPIAL FORMS

*d* before every PARTICIPLE.

### "AND" THE CONJUNCTION

*v* to precede every "and" however translated, "and" being called in Hebrew *vav*.

Thus, Bible version:

Ps. 1: 1. Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful.

v. 3. And whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Ps. 2: 8. Ask, etc.

Ps. 3 Title a Psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom, etc.

Ps. 1: 1. "Walk," "stand," "sit," are in Hebrew perfects.

v. 3. "Do," "prosper," are futures.

Ps. 2: 8. "Ask" is an imperative.

Ps. 3 Title "fled" is an infinitive.

Which might be represented thus:

Ps. 1: 1. Blessed *is* the man that *p* has not walked in the counsel of the ungodly, *v* and in the way of sinners *p* has not stood, *v* and in the seat of *d* the scornful *p* has not sat.

v. 3. *v* And all that *f* he does *f* shall prosper.

Ps. 2: 8. "*c* Ask."

Ps. 3 Title *b* in his fleeing from, etc.

*This may suffice for an illustration.*

[What can be *observed* in any of the languages in which God has been pleased to write, I would

state. Let others correct and add more.

1. Neither of the so-called *tenses* (both of which are in the Indicative Mood) has absolutely what we call a time of its own.

*p* The *preterite*, or *perfect*, naturally and properly refers man (but then it may do so *in one way or another*) to a past time; *e.g.* "In the beginning God *p* created the heaven and the earth. And the earth *p* was without form, and void." (Gen. 1: 1, 2.) By "created" and "was" God marked a time past; and we have *creation* and its original state ere it was afterwards *formed* to its state as fitted for Adam.

But then GOD says that He has a way of His own: "*He calleth things which are not as though they were.*"\* (Rom. 4: 17.) He does so sometimes. And to the mind of man, if humble and attentive, there is no mistake likely to arise. God is in eternity, and if He speaks His purpose and intention, and speaks of it thus: "*p* I have made thee a father of many nations," there is no mistake. To Him all time is. People around Abraham might *jeer* him for his credulity. But Abraham (as we see Rom. 4) knew the ground *he* was upon, and took God at His word. The fiat of God's word is a sure ground for faith to rest upon; and Abraham looked away from himself and his circumstances to God and His power and truthfulness. To this I may return again. But what the Rabbis called Pret. or Perf. is *contingent*, or *dependent*,† as to its time, as noticed above. And the use of the term "tense," either as to it or the other form, is calculated to lead the mind in a wrong direction.

\*Gen. 12 to 17 may be studied as to this way of God, and the prophets also, and the New Testament. Many instances are there.

†I prefer either of these terms (as giving a *positive* idea) to the term *aorist*, which (if I understand it) is *negative*.

*f* has still more of this *contingent*, *dependent* character about it. In *p* there is its own distinctive characteristic as past; and my *impression* is that none of the apparent exceptions are exceptions at all. The law stands good; only the law has a wider range than man's range; for man is man, and on earth and in time; but this mode and style of speaking is found to have been adopted by men, holy and unholy, in Scripture. God speaks *in the past*, of that which is in counsel and purpose, and therefore as sure as if it were done already. Man will be found in Scripture to have so spoken where his own mind was fixed and settled that so it should be — changing will, his own mortality, the power of circumstances being overlooked, and surcharging with uncertainties his "I have done it." God is God, and eternity and heaven are His; and His counsels, plans, fiats, stand within His circle, and cover over to faith (now that they are revealed to us) all difficulties. But *f*, as I said, is more absolutely *contingent*. "Whatsoever he *f* doeth shall *f* prosper." (Ps. 1: 3.) Here we have apparently a present time and a future *time*. It could be said of Christ, "All that He *does shall* prosper." He, the corn of wheat, had to die, that it might bring forth much fruit. His cross *here* and the throne *there* above are inseparable. In many a Scripture the Spirit has put forward for the faithful the attributes and character of Jehovah — His actings, too, as prayer-hearing, or as having appointed certain things to be hereafter, as glory or judgment. Faith would naturally say, "Thou *art* my Father and my God," and as naturally adds, "Therefore I wait for Thy Son to come and take us home to Thy house. As to what faith has given, I *am* pardoned, God is my Father; as to what hope waits for, it is to see the Lord Himself." *f* would be a contingent; and unless I get away from Hebrew, or want to subject Hebrew idiom to the idiom of another language, I had better give up the term *tense*.

But I may have to return to this. I give now a summary of Ps. 1 and 2, a divine introduction to the Psalter:

Ps. 1. Here the demonstrative article is twice used; in v. 1 once, and in v. 4 once.

v. 1 describes the blessedness of "The or That individual," who alone never had a blot from association with any of man's wicked confederacies.

v. 2. He knows no delight but in Jehovah's law, and is wholly occupied with it, and

v. 3. The one ever prosperous one. There is but one whom this suits.

But (mark the contrast) v. 4: "The ungodly" as a class. Alas! save one, there is none righteous, no not one (Rom. 3: 10); none have any stability here; none of them will have any standing in the judgment, any place among the righteous.

v. 6. Jehovah Himself is judge between the last Adam, together with those to whom He is a root, and the ungodly who turn their backs on Him.

Ps. 2. The one man dissociated from all evil down here (Ps. 1), has been rejected by man; but is here seen to be Jehovah's anointed.

vv. 1, 2. Vain and imbecile all men's efforts against Him whose cause is Jehovah's. (vv. 3-5). For He has said, Yet have I set Him king in Zion (v. 6). Himself, the earth-rejected one, reads out as Son from on high the decree and the promises to Him (7-9); and then in grace and mercy gives warning.

Study these two Psalms in themselves, and then study them in the Gospels and Acts and Epistles, according as the Holy Spirit there casts light on them through the Lord and His apostles and prophets. If you find enough to humble you, you will find enough, too, of light given to you about Himself who is the subject of them to make you worship and adore].

The portion above between brackets ( [ ] ) is no formal grammatical dictum, but a statement of impressions made upon my own mind while working through the whole Psalter, so as to observe the *force* and power of the Rabbis' moods and so-called tenses, and tested by their current use therein, and the doctrines they lead to, and how far they agree with God's subject as before referred to. I have marked all the occurrences in Hebrew of *vav* (which is equivalent to our "and"), so that everything may be tested by that which is given in English. In working out this, my mind has *perhaps* formulated a theory which might admit of a clear statement. But if there is a theory coming to the birth, I would try and prove it ere I state it. But up to this moment I am still only learning.

As to the *statement* of "the law of *vav*\* conversive" (for so it was taught me) — that the introduction of a fresh "and" connected with a verb could turn a future into a past or a past into a future — I have long given it up. It could not be so. Nor if (misled by the Will-o'-the-Wisp light of "tenses") you admit it, will you find that it solves the difficulties. In a moss or bog you look out for an "and" to put you right, and find none; or, forgetful of your "and" occurrent, you go on sound in doctrine, because you have overlooked it, but know not what to do with it now that you have found it.

\*The doctrine of *vav* conversive. The past tense, with the prefix *vav*, expresses *future* time when preceded by "a verb in the *future* or by an *imperative*." And "the future tense, with the prefix *vav*, and dagesh in the following letter, is used to express the past."

A law to be a law must be universal and undeviating. Such is not the case with the statement I have referred to, and it is no law. This Professor Lee and others have shown. To pull down is easier than to build up. Other statements have been made as containing the law of the so-called tenses, but not kept to by their own makers.

My present attempt is neither a new translation of the Psalms nor "a word for word" translation.

But if I, sitting down to my Hebrew Psalter with the Bible (English) in my hand, can so far remould it (the English) "clause for clause," according to the Hebrew — the English bearing remembrancers of all the "ands" occurrent, and of all the moods and other various verbal forms in Hebrew — it will, in the measure in which it at once retains, and recalls to mind the old treasure in English and yet presents the Hebrew idioms, be of interest, and may be of value. Such a book as a young converted Hebrew, knowing Hebrew well, but English only colloquially, could understand, is just that at which I aim.

*My intentional departures* from the English Psalter were such as these:

1. To change Old English words whose meaning was formerly different from what it now is. The *old* word now misleads. For instance, "leasing" (Ps. 4: 2, Ps. 5: 6) is not gleaning, but "lying;" "discomfit" (Ps. 18: 14) for "discomfort." So "prevent" (Ps. 21: 3; Ps. 59: 10; Ps. 79: 8; Ps. 88: 13; Ps. 119: 147, 148) is equivalent to our modern word "anticipate." So Ps. 29: 9, "discover" for "uncover, lay bare." So "quick" (Ps. 55: 15; Ps. 124: 3) is "alive" (and not quickly), etc.

2. To mark the demonstrative article or pronoun by writing "the" with a large T — thus, "The" or "That" — and this even if it does not stand the first word in a sentence.

3. To put in italics all the words supplementary to the sense; but this is what the Authorized Bible Version has done.

4. To omit the "O's" ("O Jehovah," etc.). They are contrary to Hebrew custom and mind. A hundred "O's" in a modern prayer would tell of feeling in him who prays, and of weakness; not of faith. Look at the New Testament.

5. To translate into *English* the titles at the heads of some of the Psalms, and any Hebrew word left *in* them as Selah, Higgaion.

6. To render the word "Go-i" in Hebrew always Nation; and its plural, "Go-im," as Nations. "Gnam," People; and "Gnamim," as Peoples. "L'ummim" (a plural), as, side-nations, "Ohm," singular; and "Ummim," plural (which do not occur in book 1)

I *incline*, at present, to look at them as perhaps Gog and Magog, whether of the Old Testament or the New Testament (as Rev. 20: 8).

G.V.W. 5.1.77, Motuiki.