

THE BOOK OF PSALMS

Psalm 19

The teacher should read carefully the quotation from *Our Heavenly Father's Book* which forms the major part of the Adult notes. This gives a general background of information in regard to the book of Psalms as a whole, from which he may draw such facts as he thinks will interest his class. The point which should be stressed in all the classes is that the Psalms are songs inspired by the Lord to direct the expression of our feeling and thought about Him and our relation to Him. It will also be helpful to our church services if the older children, young people, and adults can be impressed with the rightness and power of singing the Psalms and the value of learning the chant form, which is the only way in which they can be sung without doing violence to the letter.

Doctrinal Points

It is the Lord who gives us all good things, and we must keep this fact always in mind.

The books between II Kings and Psalms do not have an inner sense.

It is truth from the Lord which turns us from our natural selfishness. "Fear of the Lord" does not mean fear of punishment.

Our hearts need cleansing as well as our thoughts and conduct.

Notes for Parents

The Psalms constitute perhaps the best known and best loved book in the Bible. Psalm 23, the "Shepherd Psalm," has probably been learned by more Christians than anything but the Lord's Prayer. This is because it speaks of the Lord's protection and comfort, and when we are in trouble or bereavement—as we all are at one time or another—we inevitably turn to the Lord for help. He is our Creator and knows our states and needs as no merely human friend can, and we feel instinctively that we need Him.

Even men who have professed not to believe in God at all have often been known to call upon Him in times of danger.

We should, however, look to the Lord for other things besides protection and comfort. We need Him just as much when our skies are bright and everything is easy for us. In fact those are the very times when we are most likely to forget Him and to let the “secret faults” and “presumptuous sins” of which Psalm 19 speaks gain dominion over us. We need the Lord’s constant correction and guidance if we are to keep the words of our mouths and the meditation of our hearts acceptable in His sight. And this is, after all, the most important thing in life. What God thinks of us is much more important than what men think. The Psalms express for us all these needs of ours, and the more we read them the more deeply they will enter into our thought and life and the more the Lord can do for us through them.

When we look up at the stars at night and think of the wonderful order with which day and night follow each and the world is maintained without any effort or planning of ours, it should make all of us realize how great and wise our Creator is and want to learn more all the time of His ways so that we may order our own lives in harmony with them. All our troubles and unhappiness come from thinking of ourselves first and trying to run our own lives without the Lord’s guidance and help. The more whole Psalms we know, the more help we can get from them.



Primary

Connect the lesson with David and be sure the children know that the Psalms are meant to be sung and that the Lord gave us these songs to sing. Follow the notes and questions in the Primary notes as an outline. In talking of the meaning of Psalm 19 you can help the children to see that even at their age they can understand and use some of the Psalms.

Do you like to sing? Do you ever sing when you are unhappy? No, we sing when we are happy. We pour out our happiness in our singing, and then other people know we are happy and that helps to make them happy too.

Do you know that in the Bible there is a whole book of songs? It is called the book of Psalms, because a *psalm* means a song of praise. The Psalms are songs of praise to the Lord because He is so good to us. He made us all and He made the beautiful world for us to live in. He gives us our food and our clothing and our homes and every good thing we have. He wants us always to be happy; so He has given us His Word to teach us the way to happiness. We sometimes think that we would be happy if we could only have everything we want, but we ought to know better; for often when we get what we think we want, it does not make us happy at all.

The children of Israel loved to sing.

Do you remember how Moses sang after they crossed the Red Sea?

That was the way in which he naturally expressed his thanks to the Lord.

The Psalms were inspired in the minds of David and others by the Lord and then written down to become part of the Word.

David was called the “sweet psalmist of Israel.”

The Psalm we have for today is titled “To the chief musician, a Psalm of David.”

Perhaps the Lord had put the words into David’s mind on some night when, as a young boy, he was sitting out under the stars guarding his father’s sheep at Bethlehem.

When we think of the beautiful world the Lord has given us to live in, we can understand the words of this Psalm.

We know that the Lord’s way is the right way.

Then we remember how many faults we have.

And then we can pray the last two verses.

Let us read the whole Psalm together.

Junior

The background of the book as a whole, the difference between the Jewish canon of Scripture and the New Church canon, and the facts about the temple choirs and bands will interest the Juniors, but be sure to spend part of the lesson time on the outline of Psalm 19, so that they will feel that they understand it.

You will notice that in taking up the book of Psalms at this time, we are passing by several books in our Bible. All these books, from I Chronicles through Job, are interesting and useful books which you will want to read someday, but they do not have an

inner sense. They, as well as the books of Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, and Daniel, were placed by the Jews among the Kethubim or Hagiographa, meaning the Sacred Writings. The Hebrew Bible consists of the Law (the five books of Moses), the Former Prophets (Joshua through II Kings, except Ruth), the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea through Malachi), and the Sacred Writings, which include all the other books of our Old Testament. The Sacred Writings were not considered to be directly inspired like the Law and the Prophets. The Lamentations of Jeremiah are actually a continuation of the book named for him and are of equal inspiration, and the Lord Himself, by several statements in the Gospels, restored the Psalms and Daniel to the inspired Scriptures. See Luke 24:44 and Matthew 24:15.

The Psalms were used in the temple worship. We are told that in the days of the temple four thousand of the tribe of Levi were assigned to carry on the musical part of the service. They were divided into twenty-four “courses” of skilled musicians, each course serving in turn for one month out of every two years. In each course some were singers and some played upon instruments. They sang in parts, and women’s voices as well as men’s were used. And they had many different kinds of instruments: wind instruments such as trumpets, cornets, and flutes; stringed instruments such as the harp and psaltery; and percussion instruments such as the timbrel or tambourine, cymbals, and triangle. Read Psalm 68:25. The music was much simpler than most of ours today and the instruments more crude, but as these musicians spent much of their lives in instruction and practice, we can imagine that their performance was relatively as perfect as that of our finest choirs and orchestras today.

It is quite probable that the Jews hesitated to include the Psalms among their most sacred books because they were their “hymn book.” But seventy-three of the Psalms are directly attributed to David and many others are traditionally believed to have been written through him, and we must remember that David in his last

words said: “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.” Read II Samuel 23:1-2. David was called “the sweet psalmist of Israel.”

A psalm is a “song of praise.” Music is an expression of our feelings. We know that we often hum or sing or whistle without thinking about words at all. And we know that when we listen to music, it is our emotions which are affected, for often we find that we cannot even express afterward what we have felt. The Psalms were inspired by the Lord to give us a true form for expressing the feelings which we ought to have about the Lord and our relation to Him. So they have come to be perhaps the most read, most used, and most loved part of our Bible. They cover the whole range of religious feeling: awe, adoration, gratitude, humility, penitence, and prayer.

Some of the Psalms cover this whole series of emotions in a single Psalm. Such a one is Psalm 19, which we have chosen for our special study today. It is titled, “To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.” This would indicate not only that it was written through David, but that it was written down by him for the “chief musician” to be included in the hymn book being prepared for the service of the new tabernacle which David erected after he brought the ark to Jerusalem. The words may have been put into David’s mind by the Lord after David was anointed by Samuel (I Samuel 16:13) and while he was still in Bethlehem caring for his father’s flock. We can imagine the young man, with the sheep all around him, lying out under the open sky looking up at the stars.

The Psalm expresses first our wonder at the perfection and order of the beautiful world the Lord has given us to live in. Day and night succeed each other without any planning or effort of ours, and everyone in the world sees these things and should be able to realize from this alone something of the greatness and glory of the Creator. Then with verse 7 we pass to the thought of all that the Lord’s law, or truth, does in our souls and of how earnestly we should desire to know and to obey His judgments. And this brings us to a realization of how far short we fall of being

what we ought to be, and to a desire to be shown our faults so that we can get rid of them.

The prayer in the last verse of the Psalm is one which we should all learn and repeat often. It is a prayer that we may be always true and good both inside and out in the sight of the Lord.

Intermediate

The general purpose of the book of Psalms and the spiritual meaning and application of Psalm 19 are the points of emphasis for this class.

The books printed in our Bibles between II Kings and the Psalms are—like the book of Ruth, which we also omitted—interesting and valuable books, but not part of the New Church canon of the Word. The Jews do not consider the Psalms part of their most sacred literature either, but the Lord Himself gave them their place when He said that interiorly they treat of Him (Luke 24:44). It is this inmost connection with the Lord which makes a book part of the Word. The Jews probably hesitated to include the Psalms because they thought of them as their hymn book.

The Psalms are songs—songs of praise. Originally they were all sung. Many of them were written through David, who as we remember was called “the sweet psalmist of Israel.” We remember also that he was known as a skillful player upon the harp or lyre. After David was anointed by Samuel (I Samuel 16:13) it is said, “The Spirit of the Lord came upon David”; and among David’s last words (II Samuel 23:2) he said, “The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue.” He knew that the words of the Psalms he wrote were inspired in his mind by the Lord.

Music is an expression of the emotions, and we cannot always put our feelings into words. In the Psalms the Lord puts into words for us all the many and varied feelings and thoughts which we have concerning Him and our relation to Him. That is why the Psalms are so much loved and why many of them are so well known.—Even the most self-confident and thoughtless people have experiences which make them realize their need of the Lord, and

sometimes their hearts can be reached through the Psalms.

Psalm 19, which we have especially for our lesson today, is entitled “To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.” It is possible that the words of this Psalm came into David’s mind from the Lord while he was still a young man in Bethlehem guarding his father’s sheep. He had been called from his inconspicuous shepherd’s life to be anointed by Samuel and had had the experience of being given strength to kill a lion and a bear (I Samuel 17:32-37). As he lay out under the stars at night, with the sheep all around him, we can imagine that he must often have thought about the wonderful things that had come to him through the spirit of the Lord. It is when we are thinking quietly about the meaning and purpose of our lives and our relation to the Lord that the Lord can come closest to us.

The natural heavens, with the sun, moon, and stars, do make us realize how great and wise and wonderful their Creator must be. But you remember from our lesson on the Creation story that the heavens picture the spiritual or heavenly plane of our minds, and that the sun, moon, and stars picture love to the Lord, faith in Him, and knowledges of heavenly things. It is these “heavens” within us which make us different from animals and able to come into the “image and likeness” of our heavenly Father. It is of these things—truths from the Lord through His Word—that the Psalm really speaks.

That is why, after apparently speaking of the sun of the natural heavens, the Psalm suddenly says, “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul.” It is the Lord’s truth which converts or turns our souls away from selfishness and toward the Lord. The same law or commandment enlightens our eyes, that is, makes us able to understand the real meaning of life and of the things that happen to us.

What do you think the “fear of the Lord” is? It is certainly not the fear of punishment, for that would hardly be called “clean, enduring forever.” The time when we are afraid of punishment is the time when we are doing wrong things, and it is not a happy

time which we should wish to continue. And besides, we know that the Lord never punishes—evil punishes itself. No, the fear of the Lord of which the Psalm speaks is the holy fear of doing anything which would be against the Lord and the coming of His kingdom, anything that would separate us from Him. We can understand this from the way we feel toward our parents at different times. When we are in selfish, willful states, all we fear is punishment; but when we are in happy, unselfish states, we would do anything rather than hurt our parents because we love them so much. This is the good kind of fear we shall have even in heaven, which Psalm 111:10 tells us is “the beginning of wisdom.” We are never wise except when we are good and loving. We know that. We often look back at our willful, selfish actions and wonder how we could have been so foolish.

Then in our Psalm (verses 10 and 11) we think how happy we are when we are good and obedient. In keeping the commandments “there is great reward.” The Lord can give us all good things if only we will follow the way which He has showed us. But verses 12 and 13 remind us that we are naturally selfish and weak and need the Lord’s help from day to day to search out the bad things in our hearts and minds and put them away from us. Verse 13 is a prayer for this help. We do not understand our own hearts very well. Sometimes we suddenly become willful and disagreeable without really knowing what started it, and afterward we cannot imagine why we behaved as we did. These are the “secret faults” and “presumptuous sins” which try to get control of us, and which we need to see and fight with the Lord’s help.

The final verse of the Psalm is one which we should all learn and say often. It was the final prayer which the Lord put into David’s mind after he had been meditating on all these things, and it is meant for us, too. If we think about it and say it often, it will help us to keep our hearts free from ugly, selfish feelings, and to keep our tongues from saying hasty, hurtful things. As you grow older, this Psalm will mean more and more to you and you will find many other Psalms which will help you in developing the heavenly

character which the Lord wants you to have.

Basic Correspondences

the glory of the Lord = divine truth in its light
the sun = divine love
honey = enjoyments from good
honeycomb = pleasures from truth

Senior

After giving something of the general background of the book of Psalms, the teacher should concentrate on its use for our individual instruction and inspiration and in our worship, using Psalm 19 as an example and following Swedenborg's outline of its internal meaning.

We have been tracing the history of the children of Israel from their beginning with Abraham through their captivity in Egypt and return to the Holy Land to the height of their glory as a nation, and then their decline because of their own ingratitude and faithlessness until they were finally carried away captive.

Now we come to a book which has very little to do in its letter with the history of the Hebrew nation. Perhaps this is one reason why the Jews never ranked it with the Law and the Prophets, but classed it with the Hagiographa or Sacred Writings not directly inspired. Another reason probably is that the book of Psalms was the "hymn book" of the temple, not brought out to be read to the people, but in constant use in the musical part of the worship.

The Lord, however, said to His disciples after the resurrection that all things must be fulfilled "which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms" concerning Him (Luke 24:44). He named the Psalms with the Law and the Prophets as containing a meaning which applied to His life in the world. A few Psalms in the letter contain evident prophecies concerning His life. Psalm 22, from which He quoted on the cross, is such a one. But inmosty all the Psalms treat of the Lord and of the various states through which He passed when He assumed our finite human nature. It is this inmost sense which is the final proof of

divine inspiration.

In their internal sense the Psalms describe the states of men in their relation to the Lord. We can find in the Psalms adequate expression for all the emotions which the thought of God excites in us. For the Psalms are songs, and music is the expression of the emotions. That is why the Psalms are so universally known and loved. Everyone finds something in them which appeals particularly to him. With the exception of the Lord's Prayer, the twenty-third Psalm is certainly the best-known part of the Bible. This is because the most universal craving of the human soul is for protection and comfort. But we should look to the Lord for other things besides these. We should seek His guidance, His judgment, and His correction. The Psalms which express the sense of our own sins and inadequacy are not so popular, but we need to read them even more often. And we need to be very familiar with the Psalms which are specifically songs of praise and thanksgiving, because it is the Lord who gives us all the good things we have and we need to keep this fact always in mind in order to avoid self-praise.

The Psalm chosen for our special study today is not a long one, but it follows a complete pattern of worship. We find its general interpretation in Swedenborg's "Summaries of the internal sense of the Prophets and Psalms," one of the manuscripts found and published after his death. It was apparently an outline of a proposed longer work. We may wish that the work could have been completed, but the outline is extremely helpful. Of Psalm 19 we find the following explanation:

- Verses 1-4. The Divine truth will go forth in every direction.
- 5-6. This truth will go forth from the Lord from the first things to the last things of heaven and the church.
- 7-11. This Divine truth perfects man, because it is wisdom.
- 12-13. There will be no pride.
- 14. Thus there will be what is pure and acceptable.

From this outline we see that divine truth in its effects on the individual life is the subject of this Psalm from beginning to end. What seems in the letter to be a quite natural recognition of the

Lord's handiwork in the order and beauty of the material universe is also a recognition of the universal application of divine truth. This understanding explains the apparently sudden shift of thought of our own weakness and inadequacy, so that the Psalm ends in a humble plea for the Lord's help in discovering and overcoming these weaknesses.

It is interesting to compare this Psalm with Psalm 111, which has a very similar pattern. We notice the same general thought throughout, but there is a difference in emphasis. In Psalm 19 we begin with the name *God* (Elohim) which, we remember, shows that the subject concerns divine wisdom, and, although in the rest of the Psalm the name *Lord* (Jehovah) is used, showing that divine love is the necessary motivating power, the Psalm is full of such "truth" words as speech, line, law, testimony, statutes, commandment. The Psalm begins with truth and carries through to love, "the meditation of my heart." In Psalm 111, on the other hand, the name Lord is used throughout and the striking words in that Psalm are "love" words such as works, righteousness, compassion, meat (food). This Psalm begins with love and carries through to truth, "a good understanding." This constant emphasis on the actual inseparability of good and truth is something to watch for in all our study of the Word. Good desires are helpless without truth by which to bring them into right expression and act, and truth without the desire to act according to it is turned to falsity.

Seventy-three of the Psalms are attributed by their titles to David, and many of the others are believed to have been given through him. Swedenborg always gives references to this book under the title of *David*. But many scholars attribute some of the Psalms to other writers, and we may note that Psalm 90 is entitled "A Prayer of Moses, the man of God," and that Swedenborg considered the titles of the Psalms inspired. However, he makes no direct allusion to this title in the writings. The book of Psalms is generally divided into five "books," each book closing with a doxology. The division is as follows: Psalms 1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150. The first book was probably arranged under

David's supervision for use in the new tabernacle he erected after he brought the ark to Jerusalem. The second book is believed to have been collected and added under King Hezekiah, the third under King Josiah, and the fourth and fifth after the return from captivity.

Adult

The background, history, and nature of the book of Psalms are the important subject for this class, touching briefly on the analysis of Psalm 19 by way of example. If there is time, it may be helpful at the end to ask each member of the class to tell what is his favorite Psalm and why.

In Luke 24:44 the Lord, after His resurrection, says to the assembled disciples, "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me." Thus the Lord Himself assigned to the Psalms the same degree of inspiration which the Law and the Prophets possessed. And we read in II Samuel 23:1-2: "Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, The Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and his word was in my tongue." The ancient Hebrews, probably because the Psalms were their temple songs and were not specifically concerned with their history, did not class them with the Law and the Prophets, but with the Kethubim or sacred writings, and that is where they are placed in the Hebrew Bible of today. We might note that the books of Lamentations and Daniel were also so classed, and that with the exception of these three books the New Church canon of (Old Testament) Scripture and the Jewish canon are identical.

In the 1880s the New Church Board of Publication issued in several small volumes a *Manual of Religious Instruction* prepared under the direction of a committee of the American New-Church Sabbath School Association. Two volumes of this series, a brief

outline of the history and general content of all the books of the Bible called *Our Heavenly Father's Book*, were written by the Rev. William B. Hayden. They are among the fine work of the past which we are in danger of losing through neglect. It would be hard to produce a more interesting brief statement concerning the book of Psalms than Mr. Hayden's; so it has seemed well to include in our present Sunday school material the bulk of his brief chapters on this book and on the "Music and Choirs of the Temple." Mr. Hayden says:

This collection of inspired sacred poems is placed in the Bible as one book, and has been so regarded since the days of Nehemiah, probably, or four hundred and twenty-five years before Christ. The Hebrew title, Tehillim, means Praises, or Songs of Praise. Our word Psalms is derived from Psalmoi (Psalms, originally, the twang of a stringed instrument), the Greek of the Septuagint version. The term Psalter comes also from the Greek, Psalterion, through the Latin, Psalterium. (Psaltery was primarily the name of a species of harp.) It may be looked upon as an inspired Hymn Book. There are one hundred and fifty of these hymns, of different styles and length. They include a wonderful diversity of subjects, expressing every phase of religious feeling and experience; and are adapted to all the wants of private devotion, as well as to the public worship of the Lord in the sanctuary. They were originally intended and arranged for musical performance, with instrumental accompaniment.

The principal author is David, the King, "the sweet Psalmist of Israel"; and the whole book, as referred to in the New Testament, bears his name. Seventy-three psalms are ascribed to him in their titles; Asaph is named as the author of twelve; eleven are ascribed to the sons of Korah; to Solomon two (72 and 127); one to Ethan (89); and one to Moses (90). This last therefore is the oldest one in the collection, and in the original language bears every mark of being very ancient. The remaining fifty are anonymous; though it is highly probable that many of these also were written by David. They were all composed in close connection with the national sanctuary, and in the line of holy prophets and seers.

In the Hebrew Bible the collection is divided into five books, each one closing with a doxology except the last, to which, as well as to the whole collection, the final Psalm serves as a doxology.

The first book contains the first forty-one Psalms (1-41) and closes with the doxology, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting and to everlasting. Amen and Amen." Thirty-seven of these psalms bear

the name of David; while the other four are usually ascribed to him, and no doubt correctly. The psalms in this book are remarkable for the predominance of the Divine name Jehovah (Lord) over that of Elohim (God). As before explained, this shows that in these psalms the operations of the Lord's love, mercy, goodness, compassion, tenderness, and forgiveness are principally treated of; and thus that their appeal is primarily to the human heart.

In this no doubt we have the original Hebrew Hymn Book, the first collection made for the service of the Jewish Church. It was most probably arranged by David himself, after he became King at Jerusalem, or under his supervision and authority, about one thousand years before Christ. . . . Psalm 23 is presumed to have been composed by David, when, as a young man, he tended his father's flock at Bethlehem, as also 19. (It is believed by many that Ps. 2 was originally numbered 1, and that the psalm at present standing first, was prefixed as an introduction to the whole collection, at a much later date.)

The second book contains thirty-one psalms (42-72), ending with the doxology, "Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name forever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. The prayers of David, the son of Jesse, are ended." The first eight of these are ascribed to the sons of Korah; eighteen bear the name of David; one (50) that of Asaph. The last one (72) is sometimes attributed to Solomon, but seems rather to have been written for Solomon, perhaps a prayer and invocation at the time of his being anointed and proclaimed king by the command of David.

This book is believed to have been collected and added to the first in the reign of the good King Hezekiah, or about seven hundred years before the Christian era. In it the Divine name Elohim (God), greatly predominates over the name Jehovah: showing that in these psalms the operations of the Divine Wisdom and Truth are principally treated of, with His attributes of sovereignty, majesty, and power; while they appeal most directly to man's understanding and conscience.

The third book includes the next seventeen psalms (73-89). The first eleven are ascribed to Asaph; four to the sons of Korah; one to David (86); and one to Ethan the Ezrahite (89). In the psalms of Asaph the Divine name Elohim predominates, in the remainder of the book the name Jehovah. It closes with the doxology, "Blessed be Jehovah forevermore. Amen and Amen"; and is supposed to have been collected and added to the others in the reign of Josiah, about six hundred and twenty-five years before Christ.

The fourth book, opening with the prayer of Moses, Ps. 90, includes seventeen in all, to 106. Of these only three bear titles, 101 and 103 being ascribed to David. This book, therefore, is one emphatically of anonymous psalms, for the most part of a very general character, evidently arranged with reference to the service of song in the sanctuary, abounding in praise and thanksgiving. Throughout, the name Jehovah prevails; the name Elohim (God) being rarely used except in connection with a pronoun or some epithet, as *my God, God of Jacob*, etc. It is believed to have been compiled and added soon after the return from the Babylonish captivity, probably in the time of Ezra, and either by him or under the supervision of the great synagogue, a little more than four hundred and fifty years before Christ. It closes with the doxology, "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel from everlasting to everlasting; and let all the people say, Amen. Praise ye the Lord."

The fifth book contains the remaining forty-four psalms, 107 to 150. Ps. 107, the opening psalm of the return is supposed to have been sung at the first feast of tabernacles (Ezra 3). In this book are found the fifteen "Songs of Degrees," 120-134, presumed to belong to the period when the Jews under Nehemiah were repairing the walls of Jerusalem in the face of their enemies, and to have been sung by the workmen and guards while engaged in their duties. As Zerubbabel, and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, were members of the great synagogue established by Ezra, the authorship of this book is mainly attributed to them. In the Septuagint, Vulgate, and Peshito versions, many of these psalms are ascribed to those prophets in their running titles. In this last collection the name Jehovah prevails almost exclusively. It is largely devoted to thanksgiving and praise, and closes with the ascription which has passed so widely into Christian usage, *Hallelujah*, "Praise ye the Lord. . . ."

In the original language several of the psalms are arranged in alphabetical order. Each verse usually begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, till all are gone over. This may be seen exemplified in Ps. 25, which has twenty-two verses, the number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet. There are seven of these psalms, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145. But they do not all carry out the plan regularly or fully. In 111 and 112 every half verse begins with a different letter. In 37 every alternate verse has such a beginning; while Ps. 119 has twenty-two divisions or cantos, each one of which begins thus, and in our Bibles has the names of the respective Hebrew letters written over them. Every couplet also of this psalm contains some reference to the Word of the Lord, under the several appellations of Word, Law, Precepts, Testimonies, Commandments, Judgments, and Statutes. . . .

Several of the Hebrew words in the titles of some of the psalms refer to the musical performance. *Neginoth* means stringed instruments; *Nehiloth*, some wind instrument, like flutes. *Alamoth*, meaning *virgins*, probably denoted the treble voices. *Selah*, so frequent in the midst of psalms, is supposed by many to denote a pause or rest in the music; by others, however, with more probability, it is believed to have indicated the point at which the *instruments* were to *lift up*, joining in with the *voices*, which up to that place had been singing alone.

We read in Exodus of the song of triumph that was sung at the deliverance at the Red Sea, with the accompaniment of music and dancing. After this we find frequent allusions to it [music]. As described in the Bible, it is in connection with its true and most proper use, of praise and thanksgiving to the Lord, and the public worship of the sanctuary. The cultivation of it by the Levites was a part of their official training; while in the schools of the prophets founded by Samuel, it received marked attention and reached a high degree of development. In the days of David and Solomon, when the psalms had come to be written, and especially after the temple service began, the arrangements in connection with it were very elaborate and complete.

Of the thirty-eight thousand men who composed the tribe of Levi in the reign of David, four thousand were set apart for this service. The three great divisions of the tribe had each a representative family in the choir, or band; Heman and his sons represented the Kohathites, Asaph the Gershonites, and Ethan (or Jeduthun) the Merarites. As the functions were hereditary, and the members had ample leisure for the pursuit and practice of the art, great proficiency and genius were developed in certain families.

Over this great body of musicians presided the sons of Asaph, Heman, and Jeduthun, twenty-four in number, as heads of the twenty-four courses of twelve each into which the skilled minstrels were divided. These skilled or “cunning” performers were two hundred and eighty-eight in number, each having a number of pupils, or sub-choir under his immediate supervision. Each “course,” or full band would thus consist of one hundred and sixty-six musicians presided over by a body of twelve skilled players or leaders, with one of the sons of Asaph, Heman, or Jeduthun as chief conductor of the whole.

The instruments employed covered a wide range. What they all were is not now in every instance known. Great ingenuity however was summoned to devise every possible form; and we know that each of the three most general kinds was represented in great variety: 1. wind instruments,

like the trumpet, cornet, and flute; 2. stringed instruments, like the harp and psaltery; 3. the instruments that are beaten, like the tambourine, cymbals, and triangle. The Hebrew names of many of these we still find written in the titles of our psalms.

The singers were a separate body from the instrumental performers, and seem to have included female voices, and to have been distributed into *parts* . . . It is believed that children also were sometimes included. [See Psalm 68:25, Ezra 2:65, and I Chronicles 25:5-6, and also I Chronicles 16.]

When we think of the lifetime effort of these choirs, it should at least make us willing to put a little time ourselves into learning to sing the Psalms in the only way in which they can be sung, the chant form. Realizing that music is the expression of the heart, we should wish to sing as well as to read the Psalms.

One further point should be noted in regard to the Psalms in general, which Mr. Hayden does not mention. Our attention is called to it by the editor of Swedenborg's summary of the internal sense of the Psalms. He says: "The titles which appear in the common English Bibles at the head of many Psalms, in Roman type, are part of the sacred text, and contain an internal sense like every other portion of the Word of God, as is evident from their being referred to in these Summaries of the Internal Sense." This fact is seldom called to our attention.

The Psalm we read for our specific assignment today, Psalm 19, is, as Mr. Hayden has noted, one thought to have been composed by David in his youth when he was tending his father's flocks. The long night watches under the skies would set the current of divine inspiration in such a direction. Swedenborg's interpretation of it is as follows: "Verses 1-4 [the original Latin, following the Hebrew, says 1-5, counting the title as verse 1], The Divine truth will go forth in every direction. 5-6, This truth will go forth from the Lord from the first things to the last things of heaven and the church. 7-11, This Divine truth perfects man, because it is wisdom. 12-13, There will be no pride. 14, Thus there will be what is pure and acceptable." We notice that, although the subject of the Psalm is truth and its effects, only in the first verse is the name *God* (Elohim)

used. Everywhere else it is *Lord* (Jehovah). This suggests that it is truth proceeding from love or good which has these effects in the human life. If we study this Psalm in the light of Swedenborg's brief interpretation of it, the familiar words will take on new and deeper significance for us. The last verse is a prayer we might all well say in the quiet moments before the opening of our church services.

From the Writings of Swedenborg

Arcana Coelestia, n. 2826¹³: "There is indeed a fear within all worship, but under another appearance and another condition, and this is *holy fear*. But holy fear is not so much fear of hell and of damnation, as it is of doing or thinking anything against the Lord and against the neighbor, and thus anything against the good of love and the truth of faith. It is an aversion, which is the boundary of the holy of love and the holy of faith on the one side; and as it is not a fear of hell and damnation, as before said, those have it who are in the good of faith; but those have less of it who are in the good of love, that is, who are in the Lord."

Suggested Questions on the Lesson

- P. What book of the Bible are we studying today? *Psalms*
P. What is a psalm? *a song*
I. What did the Lord tell His disciples about the Psalms? *they told about Him*
P. Through whom were many of them written? *David*
J. How were they used by the Hebrews? *hymns*
J. What do they teach us? *ways of expressing our feelings about the Lord*
P. What is the first verse of Psalm 19? *"The heavens declare . . ."*
J. What do you think this means? *refers to our awareness of the perfection of creation*
I. What is said in this Psalm about the law of the Lord? *". . . perfect, converting the soul"*
S. What is meant by the "fear of the Lord"? *desire not to displease Him*
I. What is the last part of the Psalm about? *happiness in doing right, prayer to continue in this state*
S. What does that mean for us? *our need to ask the Lord's help to overcome our faults*