

**PRA YERS AND DEVOTIONAL
MEDITATIONS, COLLATED
FROM THE PSALMS OF
DAVID**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649422890

Prayers and devotional meditations, collated from the Psalms of David by Elihu Burritt

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ELIHU BURRITT

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LONDON:
SAMUEL BAGSTER AND SONS,
15, PATERNOSTER ROW.
1870.

138. f. 109.



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P R E F A C E.

As no human character is so fully delineated in the Bible for our instruction as David's, so none of the sacred writers have recorded experiences, thoughts, and sentiments so human, and so apposite and applicable to every possible condition of human life, as those we find in his Psalms. No man, woman, or child, in this or in any age to come, can pass through any experience of affliction, joy, or sorrow, without being able to find in these words of David a prayer or thanksgiving, breathing full of the feeling the heart would express. In these prayers and thanksgivings, he gives us the history of his own personal, inner life; and it is the only autobiography the Bible contains. We have the histories of Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, Solomon, Job, Daniel, and other patriarchs and prophets. But they are all silent as to those inward experiences which are most common and human to every soul of man. They confess to no sins of thought, word, or deed. Even Jacob, wrestling with the angel, with all his life behind him in fresh remembrance, does not pray as a penitent sinner. Job confesses to no sin; and as he lies complaining in the dust, he almost boasts of his perfection. These fathers of the faithful hardly shew us a human side to which we may lean for fellowship and sympathy in our weaknesses. But in David we have a complete and common humanity, with all its falls and fears, its hours of fainting faith, its longings, hopes, and sorrows, its sharp and sudden temptations and trials. In all these characteristics, he comes to us in two histories; one written by another biographer, the other by himself, in words which will breathe with the life of everlasting truth to the world's end.

The biography of David introduces him to us as a boy, and describes the strange vicissitudes through which he passed to the throne of Israel, and which followed him all the years that he filled it. No man ever did or could pass through a greater variety of conditions. He was hunted like a partridge on the mountains by a powerful and jealous king, as an outlawed pretender to the crown. As an outlaw he lived in caves, and other hiding-places, in daily peril of his life. When these failed him for safety, he took refuge with the

old hereditary enemies of his country; even offering to accompany them on their raids upon it. Sometimes he played the crazy man at a heathen court to obtain its favour. When at last the crown was set upon his head, such a series of aggravated family troubles as few kings ever knew, came upon him in quick and painful succession. His best beloved son attempted to dethrone, banish, and even kill him. Another son committed a most abominable crime. Nearly all his children seem to have troubled him exceedingly with their conduct. Then he himself fell before temptation into such great sins that the whole nation was punished severely for one of them, and he personally for others. Such is the history of David's public and private life, as written for us by a pen not his own, and written without palliation of his sinful, or exaggeration of his good deeds.

In his Psalms we have David's inner life written by himself. We have his thoughts and emotions in all these sad and sudden vicissitudes, as he was passing through them. We hear the very cry of his soul to God for help when they rent him with affliction. We feel the pulse of his joy when the Divine hand lifted him out of the miry clay and horrible pit, and set him upon a rock of safety. We hear his pleading prayer for forgiveness as he lies and cries with his lips in the dust under the weight of a great sin. His voice, sad, low, and soft, with sick-bed accent, comes to us from his night-hours of sleepless pain and languishing, or gushing with the most human tenderness from the new-made grave of a child loved as fathers love. He has a word for every affliction, hope, joy, fear, faith or weakness, that any human heart can feel.

It is for these qualities that the Psalms of David, even under the brightest sunlight of Gospel revelation and Christian faith, have been so prized and used for devotional meditations and exercises. Indeed, it may be allowed a Christian to wish that some one of the disciples of Christ had given us in full one of those prayers which he addressed to his Father at times, when he felt the burden of humanity with its weaknesses heaviest upon him; one of those prayers which the midnight heard, when he was sorely tried with the ills and temptations which that human flesh was heir to which he had taken upon him for our salvation. Or if one of the company that kneeled around St. Paul on the sea-shore, could have given us the prayer which he put up for them and himself, when his heart was soft with the tenderest emotions of human nature at the parting, it would have been a precious heritage to the Christian world. But David wrote his whole life in his prayers and songs of praise and thanksgiving. These contain more of supplication to the Heavenly Father than all the other sacred books put together—supplication for the individual

soul, in all its conditions of feeling and experience, and for every social fellowship of prayer, great or small. It is an interesting coincidence, that the Psalms are nearly equally divided between invocation and meditation; and also between prayers for the individual in his closet, and prayers for the family circle or the greater circle of the sanctuary.

But in the very structure of the Psalms we have a resemblance to the incidents of David's life. Like the vicissitudes which marked it, the transitions in almost every psalm are wide and sudden, both in subject and sentiment. Indeed, the very next verse to one full of tender and beautiful feeling, often expresses a sentiment which no Christian heart can adopt or approve; and one might well wonder how his could have moved with two such different emotions the same hour or even day. It is as if, when lifting up his soul on the mountain-tops in lofty communion with the moon and stars, as the work of his Father's fingers, and while it was soaring with the divine afflatus to higher visions of His glory, he suddenly heard the footsteps of his pursuers, that were hunting him from cave to cave, from one hiding-place to another. One may well conceive that such transitions of condition and feeling must have come in the space between many a couple of verses seemingly penned or uttered in the same hour. These transitions of subject and sentiment are so frequent, that there are only two or three psalms in the whole collection perfectly relevant to Christian meditation and prayer in private or public devotions. But, in reading through the whole, the continuity of every special line of reflection, or character of sentiment, may be clearly traced across these breaks, or intersecting subjects.

This is the work which the compiler of these Prayers and Devotional Meditations felt would be useful and even welcome to thousands who look to the Psalms of David for thoughts and sentiments most in sympathy with those they would make their own in their religious exercises and daily life. He has taken twelve different subjects, or lines of reflection, and traced each coherently to its natural development and conclusion. In doing this, he has collated verses from ten to twenty different psalms on the principle of Handel's Messiah, selecting them for such mutual relevancy that they might seem to have been written or composed originally in the order in which he has placed them. In the first place, a Reading, or Lesson, is thus collated or compiled, of the length of an ordinary chapter in the New Testament, and dwelling upon one general subject. Then a Prayer is compiled in the same way, which the Reading might naturally inspire or suggest.

The compiler believes that the Reading and Prayer for the Sick will be found especially useful. He earnestly desired to make them so, not only to