

**PRAISE-SONGS OF  
ISRAEL: A NEW  
RENDERING OF  
THE BOOK OF PSALMS**

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Praise-songs of Israel: a new rendering of the book of Psalms by John De Witt

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**JOHN DE WITT**

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ISRAEL: A NEW  
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AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED  
TO THE MEMBERS OF  
AMERICAN BIBLE REVISION COMPANY,  
WITH WHOSE LABORS  
THE AUTHOR  
HAS BEEN DELIGHTFULLY ASSOCIATED  
FOR NEARLY TWELVE YEARS.

JAN-31917

~~1875~~



## P R E F A C E .

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IN introducing his work, the author uses some extracts from thoughts upon the subject which he published in a leading periodical several years ago, when a large part of the labor of this translation had already been performed.

It seems hardly possible that an attempt to translate faithfully any part of the Holy Scriptures, should be thought of disparagingly, as in rivalry with the Anglo-American Revision which will soon be completed. In that Revision, conservatism and compromise are characteristic features and controlling principles. The Revisers were obliged by the rules which they had heartily and wisely adopted, to confine themselves to the most necessary changes, always respecting the attachment of English-speaking people to the Authorized Version.

Most of all must this attachment be manifested to the more familiar parts of Scripture, and in the Old Testament especially to the Psalms. On account of their

devotional character and consequent fitness to excite or to express devotional feeling, the Psalms are probably read more than any other part of Scripture. Their language is to many not less familiar and precious than the words of our Saviour. In fact, as if they belonged to the New Testament rather than to the Old, we all use them as the readiest and most apt expression of our fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

What liberties will the Revisers take with our beautiful English Psalms? How far dare they suggest by their substitutions that their words are less than Divine? We can easily imagine reverent and passionate attachment declaring itself by such questions.

This attachment creates greater embarrassment in the Psalms than in any other portion of the Scriptures, and constitutes the most delicate and difficult feature in the Reviser's work. It often holds him equally poised between the "faithfulness" in rendering the Divine thought accurately, required by his rule, and an apprehension that all he has labored for will be rejected. For the amended Version can not be imposed by authority. It can only be adopted if generally approved.

It may be imagined that, under such restrictions, the Revisers have been constantly reminded that they are not independent translators, and changes that would otherwise be immediately adopted, must often be ruled out in favor of the less accurate rendering that has the



ground, unless the latter were decidedly misleading. Revisers, chosen as these were, would in most instances be guided to the best conclusion by their own feelings, since they are quite in sympathy with their constituents. How few would consent to any considerable change in Psalms xxiii., xc., or ciii., unless convinced that the translators were seriously in error?

It would be better, indeed, if we could rid ourselves of this slavery to certain forms of speech merely because they are familiar, so far, at least, as it prevents us from craving and accepting the exact Divine thought of Psalmist, Prophet, or Apostle. Those who believe in an inspiration extending to the words of Scripture can not consistently decline a more faithful though less familiar rendering, and should be the last to oppose the most thorough revision. The Revisers yield to none in admiration of the pure, rich, and melodious Saxon of the English Psalter. But they know well how often, by a delicate touch here and there, a Psalm may be illuminated, and its beauty, as well as its clearness and its power, be immeasurably enhanced. The effect may be produced by bringing out an emphatic pronoun, the slight change of a connective particle, the closer observation of a misconceived tense, and possibly the transposition of a word or of a clause into the Hebrew order for the recovery of lost emphasis, or some other like changes. Either of these changes separately may seem not worth making, and perhaps would accomplish

nothing, but unitedly they will often work wonders, with the alteration of scarcely one principal word.

Nevertheless, the restrictions we have described do exist, and they render the work of the Revisers very difficult. They are often obliged to decide on other ground than that of inherent fitness, and often to put aside manifest improvement in favor of the more ancient and familiar phrasing, if the sense is not materially affected. Those who wish and hope to see the thought of the original put forth in the clearest, strongest, and best English expression will not be gratified. It is only by independent, individual effort that such versions of the Psalms can be produced.

It was this that induced the writer to attempt the translation of the Psalms into language that should render the original more faithfully, and yet more poetically. Some of our English Psalms are almost faultless, whilst others fail in bringing out the spirit and rhythm of the old Hebrew bards, or are even awkward, prosaic, and obscure. Why should not individual scholarship and taste be laid under contribution to perform for the poetry of David, and other Hebrew masters of sacred song, what so many gifted minds have done for the poetry of Homer? Many such translations might be made in the interest of Bible study with the greatest benefit. It is easy to discriminate between their use in public worship, and the less sacred, yet not unsacred use which we now sug-

gest. What we have in mind is revision rather than translation, but revision less restricted than is proposed in the Anglo-American Revision, and that shall always seek the most exact expression of the cadences of Hebrew song in pure, rich, racy Saxon English of the earliest times.

By such considerations as these the author's mind was relieved from the fear of adverse criticism which at first oppressed him. As his work progressed, and especially when he communicated his thought to his fellow-Revisers and it was received with the most hearty approval and kindly interest, all hesitancy vanished.

The book as it is, with a mass of material for explanatory notes, which he hopes to issue in a few months, is the result of five or six years of delightful yet exhaustive labor. The intensity with which the work was prosecuted compelled entire cessation for considerable periods, under penalty of the most serious consequences, but perhaps with advantage to the work.

The author can not do himself justice without presenting in advance several general peculiarities of translation, which he has only adopted after much reflection, and which are in accordance with the most advanced grammatical principles.

The chief of these is the use of the English present tense to represent the two principal Hebrew tense forms, much more frequently than in the Authorized Version.