

A K E Y

T O T H E

BOOK OF PSALMS.

All things, said Jesus, must be fulfilled, which were written in the Psalms, concerning me, Luke xxiv. 44.

And they, to wit, the redeemed of the Lord, who had gotten the victory over the beast, sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints, Rev. xv. 3.

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A

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B O O K O F P S A L M S.

THE right of the book of Psalms to a place in the sacred canon hath never been disputed; and it is often cited by our Lord and his apostles, in the New Testament, as the work of the Holy Spirit. Whether David, therefore, or any other prophet, was employed, as the instrument of communicating to the church such or such a particular Psalm, is a question, which, if it cannot always be satisfactorily answered, need not disquiet our minds. When we discern, in an epistle, the well known hand of a friend, we are not solicitous about the pen with which it was written.

THE Psalms treat occasionally of the creation and formation of the world; the dispensations of providence; the discoveries of God's free and unmerited favour to his people; the transactions of the patriarchs; the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt; their jour-

ney through the wilderness, and settlement in Canaan; their law, priesthood, sacrifices, and ceremonies; the exploits of their great men, wrought through faith; their sins and captivities; their repentances and restorations; the sufferings and victories of David; the peaceful and happy reign of Solomon; the coming of the Messiah, with its effects and consequences; his incarnation, birth, life, passion, death, resurrection, ascension, kingdom, and priesthood; the effusion of the Spirit; the conversion of the Gentiles; the rejection of the Jews; the establishment, increase, and perpetuity of the church of Christ; the end of the world; the general judgment; the condemnation of the wicked, and final triumph of the righteous with their Lord and King.

THE Psalms were written upon a divine, preconcerted, prophetic plan; and contain much more, than, at first sight, they appear to do. Most of them have a double sense or meaning, viz. a literal or historical sense, and a spiritual or prophetic sense. In these psalms we have on one side, the Jewish nation; and on the other, the chosen in Christ Jesus: On one side, Canaan, and earthly happiness; on the other, heaven, and eternal blessedness: On one side a redemption from Egyptian bondage, and temporal evil; on the other, a redemption from the slavery of sin, and the damnation of hell: On one side, crimes atoned for by legal ceremonies,

sacrifices, and priests; on the other, sins expiated by the offering of the body of Jesus, once for all: On one side, temporal favours and kings; on the other, the Saviour, who delivers from eternal destruction, and brings to the enjoyment of eternal happiness; the everlasting King: On one side, the law, and every branch of it, adapted to a favourite nation; on the other, the gospel, suited to sinners of every nation, tribe, and tongue. It is evident then, that whatever God saith to David, under the quality of king of his chosen nation, he doth, at the same time, speak to Jesus Christ, as king of all the chosen in him, who are brought to the knowledge of the truth. To each of them he indeed speaks in a sense adapted to the nature of their respective kingdoms. The application to Messiah, of what God saith unto David, as king of his people Israel, is not a bare accommodation of words; but, when properly made, gives the highest and most noble meaning of them. The literal or historical meaning of the Psalms, so far as it can be attained, is worthy of our attention: but it hath no glory, in comparison of the glory that excelleth.

It may not be amiss to run through the book of Psalms, and point out some of the more remarkable passages, which are cited from thence by our Lord and his apostles, and applied to matters evangelical.

No sooner have we opened the book, but the second psalm presenteth itself, as an inauguration-hymn, composed by David, the anointed of Jehovah, when by him crowned with victory, and placed triumphant on the sacred hill of Zion. But let us turn to Acts iv. 25. and we there find the apostles, with one voice, declaring the psalm to be descriptive of the exaltation of Jesus Christ, and of the opposition raised against his gospel; both by Jew and Gentile.

IN the eighth psalm, we might imagine the writer to be setting forth the pre-eminence of man in general, above the rest of the creation; but by Heb. ii. 6. we are informed, that the supremacy conferred on the second Adam, the man Christ Jesus, over all things in heaven and earth, is the subject there treated of.

THE apostle Peter stands up, Acts ii. 25: and preaches the resurrection of Jesus, from the latter part of the sixteenth psalm; and, lo, three thousand souls are converted by the sermon.

OF the eighteenth psalm we are told, in the course of the sacred history, 2 Sam. xxii. that “David spake before the Lord the words of that song, in the day, that the Lord delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul.” Yet in Rom. xv. 9. the fiftieth verse of that psalm is adduced as a

proof, that “ the Gentiles should glorify God
 “ for his mercy in Jesus Christ, as it is written,
 “ For this cause will I confess to thee among
 “ the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.”

IN the nineteenth Psalm, David seems to be speaking of the material heavens, and their operations only, when he says, “ Their sound
 “ is gone out into all the earth, and their
 “ words unto the ends of the world.” But Paul, Rom. x. 18. quotes the passage to shew, that the gospel had been universally published by the apostles.

THE twenty-second psalm Christ appropriated to himself, by beginning it in the midst of his sufferings on the cross; “ My God, my God,” &c. Three other verses of it are, in the New Testament, applied to him; and the words of the eighth verse were actually used by the chief priests, when they reviled him; “ He trusted
 “ in God,” &c. Matth. xxvii. 43.

WHEN David saith, in the fortieth psalm,
 “ Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire—
 “ Lo I come to do thy will:” we might suppose him only to declare, in his own person, that obedience is better than sacrifice. But from Heb. x. 5. we learn, that Messiah, in that place, speaketh of his coming in the flesh, to abolish

the legal sacrifices, and to do away sin, by the sacrifice of himself.

THAT tender and pathetic complaint, in the forty-first psalm, " Mine own familiar friend, " in whom I trusted, which did eat of my " bread, hath lift up his heel against me," undoubtedly might be, and probably was, originally uttered by David, upon the revolt of his old friend and counsellor, Ahithophel, to the party of his rebellious son, Absalom. But we are certain, from John xiii. 18. that this scripture was fulfilled, when Christ was betrayed by his apostate disciple—" I speak not of you all; " I know whom I have chosen; but that the " scriptures may be fulfilled, He that eateth " bread with me, hath lift up his heel against " me."

THE forty-fourth psalm we must suppose to have been written on occasion of a persecution, under which the church, at that time, laboured; but a verse of it is cited, Rom. viii. 36. as expressive of what Christians were to suffer, on their blessed Master's account; " As it is " written, For thy sake are we killed all the " day long; we are counted as sheep appointed to be slain."

A quotation from the forty-fifth psalm, in Heb. i. 8. certifies us, that part of it is address-

fed to the Son of God, and that it celebrates his spiritual union with the church, and the happy fruits of it.

THE sixty-eighth psalm, though apparently conversant about Israelitish victories, the translation of the ark to Zion, and the services of the tabernacle; yet does, under those figures, treat of Christ's resurrection, his going up on high, leading captivity captive, pouring out the gifts of the Spirit, erecting his kingdom in the world, and enlarging it, by bringing the Gentiles to the knowledge of the truth; as will be evident to any one, who knows the meaning, and considers the force and consequence of the apostle's citation from it, Ephes. iv. 7, 8. "Unto every one of us is given grace, according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men."

THE sixty-ninth psalm is five times referred to in the gospels, as being uttered by the prophet, in the person of Messiah. The imprecations, or rather predictions, at the latter end of it, are applied, Rom. xi. 8. to the Jews; and to Judas, Acts i. 20. where the hundred and ninth psalm is also cited, as prophetic of the fore judgments which should befall that arch traitor, and the wretched nation of which he was an epitome.

THE evangelist Matthew, informing us, chap. xiii. 34. that Jesus spake to the multitude in parables, gives it as one reason why he did so, "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet;" Psal. lxxviii. 2. "I will open my mouth in a parable; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world."

THE ninety-first psalm was applied, by the tempter, to Messiah: nor did our Lord object to the application, but only to the false inference, which his adversary suggested from it. Matth. iv. 6, 7.

THE ninety-fifth psalm is explained at large in Heb. iii. and iv. as relative to the state and trial of Christians in the world, and to their attainment of the heavenly rest.

THE hundred and tenth psalm is cited by Christ himself, Matth. xxii. 44. as treating of his exaltation, kingdom, and priesthood.

THE hundred and seventeenth psalm, consisting only of two verses, is employed, Rom. xv. 11. to prove, that the Gentiles were one day to praise God for the mercies of redemption.

THE twenty-second verse of the hundred and eighteenth psalm, "The stone which the build-

“ ders refused,” &c. is quoted six different times as spoken of our Saviour.

AND lastly, “ the fruit of David’s body,” which God is said, in the hundred and thirty-second psalm, to have promised that he would “ place upon his throne,” is asserted, Acts ii. 30. to be Jesus Christ.

IT would be unreasonable to suppose, that no parts of the psalms may by us be spiritually applied, but such as are already thus expressly applied for us by the inspired writers. Let the believers of the truth consider attentively a New Testament citation from the book of Psalms; then let them as carefully read over, with a view to it, the psalm from which it is taken, and see if it will not serve them as a key, wherewith to unlock the treasures of eternal wisdom; if it will not “ open “ their eyes,” and shew them “ wonderful things” in God’s law. When we are taught to consider one verse in a psalm as spoken by Messiah, and there is no change of person, what can we conclude, but that he is the speaker through the whole? In that case, the psalm becomes at once as much transfigured, as the blessed person who is the grand subject of it, was, on the mount, when his countenance did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as snow. And if Messiah be the speaker of one psalm, what good reason can be given why another psalm, where the

same kind of scene is evidently described, and the same expressions are used, should not be considered in the same manner?

THE citations from the Psalms, in the New Testament, were made incidentally, and as occasion was given. But can we imagine that the church of Christ is not thereby farther instructed in the manner of applying the psalms to her Redeemer, and to herself? Should the disciples of Christ stop at the applications of the psalms to matters evangelical, thus incidentally and occasionally made by the inspired writers; because they are thereby directed how to proceed, with respect to the application of other psalms? Surely they should not.

IN such of the psalms as were written by David, and treat of his affairs, that extraordinary person is considered as an illustrious representative of Messiah, who is more than once foretold under the name of David, and to whom are applied, in the New Testament, psalms which do undoubtedly, in the letter of them, relate to David, and were composed on occasion of particular circumstances which befel him.

INDEED few of the psalms, comparatively, appear to be simply prophetic, and to belong to Messiah without the intervention of any other person. Most of the psalms that are fulfilled in

him, have a double meaning, which stands upon this foundation, that the ancient patriarchs, prophets, priests, and kings, were typical characters, in their several offices, and in the more remarkable passages of their lives, their extraordinary depressions and miraculous exaltations, foreshewing him who was to arise, as the Head of the holy family, the great Prophet, the true Priest, the everlasting King. The government of Israel, and the religious services appointed by the law of Moses, were types and figures of good things to come in Messiah's day; and the events which happened to the ancient people of God, were designed to shadow out particular occurrences, which should take place, in the accomplishment of man's redemption, and the rise and progress of the church of Christ. For this reason, the psalms composed for the use of Israel, and Israel's monarch, and by them accordingly used, do admit of an application to us, who are now "the Israel of God," and to our Redeemer, who is the king of this Israel.

OF the psalms which relate to Israel, some are employed in celebrating the mercies vouchsafed them, from their going forth out of Egypt, to their compleat settlement in Canaan. These were the constant standing subjects of praise and thanksgiving in the Israelitish church. But we are taught by the writers of the New Testament, to consider this part of their history

as one continued figure, or allegory. We are informed, that there is another Israel of God; other children of Abraham, and heirs of the promise; another Egypt, from the bondage of which they are redeemed; another wilderness, through which they journey; other dangers and difficulties, which there await them; other bread from heaven, for their support; and another rock, to supply them with living water; other enemies to overcome; another land of Canaan, and another Jerusalem, which they are to obtain, and to possess for ever. The provocations and punishments, captivities and restorations of old Israel afterwards, “happened unto them for examples,” types, or figures, of what should take place with respect to those who were to enjoy all the external privileges of the people of God, in New Testament times; “and they are written for our admonition.”

WHAT is said in the Psalms, occasionally, of the ceremonies, sacrifices, washings, and purifications, appointed by the law; of the tabernacle and temple, with the services therein performed; and of the Aaronical priesthood; all this, the believers of the truth should transfer to the sacrifice of Christ; to justification by his blood, and sanctification by his Spirit; to the true tabernacle, or temple, not made with hands; to what was therein done for the salvation of men, by him who was, in one respect, a sacri-

fice; in another, a temple; and in a third, the priest of the most high God; and to the things which concern this peerless One, as he also now is, a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man. The variety of strong expressions used in the nineteenth, and the hundred and nineteenth psalms, to extol the enlivening, saving, healing, comforting efficacy of a law, which, in the letter of it, could minister nothing but condemnation to guilty men, do sufficiently prove, that the Psalmist understood the spirit of it, which is the gospel itself, or the law, as fulfilled by the Messiah.

THE Psalms, thus applied, have advantages which no fresh compositions, however finely executed, can possibly have; since, besides their incomparable fitness to express our sentiments when under the influence of the truth, they are, at the same time, memorials of, and appeals to former mercies and deliverances; they are acknowledgments of prophecies accomplished; they point out the connection between the old and new dispensations, thereby teaching us to admire and adore the wisdom of God displayed in both, and furnishing us, while we read, or sing them, with an inexhaustible variety of the noblest matter that can engage the contemplations of man.

IN some of the psalms David describeth himself, as one hated and persecuted without a cause; as one accused of crimes which he never committed, and suffering for sins, the very thoughts of which he abhorred; and one whose life was embittered by afflictions, and his soul overwhelmed with sorrows; yet, withal, as one whom no troubles could induce to renounce his trust and confidence in the promises of God concerning him. In psalms of this sort, he repeateth his resolutions of adhering to the divine law, and complaineth of the implacable malice, and unrelenting fury, of his enemies. In them also, contrary to all appearances, he predicteth their destruction, with his own final exaltation. But it hath been already observed, that the ancient patriarchs, prophets, priests, and kings, were typical characters, in their several offices, and in the more remarkable passages of their lives, their extraordinary depressions and miraculous exaltations, foreshewing him who was to arise, as the Head of the holy family, the great Prophet, the true Priest, the everlasting King. And it is remarkable, that in the psalms referred to, the diction is now and then exaggerated, as it were on purpose to intimate, that they are to have their full accomplishment in the history of the true DAVID; his sorrows and sufferings; his resignation under them all; his obedience to the will of his father; the temper and behaviour of his be-

trayers and murderers; the judgments to be inflicted upon his enemies, and the glory to be conferred upon him.

OTHER psalms there are, which disclose far different scenes. In them, the sorrows of David are at an end, and the day of his deliverance hath already dawned. Jehovah appeareth in the cause of his afflicted servant. The adversary is dismayed and confounded. The anointed of God, according to his original designation, is at length elevated to the throne; the temple is planned by him, and erected by his son; the services of religion are appointed in perfect order and beauty; Jerusalem becometh a praise in all the earth; and the kingdom is established in honour, peace, and safety. In these psalms, there is frequently an uncommon glow in the expressions, and sublimity in the figures, as it were on purpose to intimate, that they are to have their full accomplishment in Messiah the prince, and in the things that concern his kingdom. The colouring which may seem too bold and glaring for David the Son of Jesse, or for Solomon his son, will no longer appear so, when laid upon their great antitype.

IN some of the psalms David appears as one suffering for his sins. When man speaks of sin, he speaks of what is his own; and there-

fore, every psalm, where sin is confessed to be the cause of sorrow, belongs originally and properly to us, as fallen sons of Adam, like David, and all other men. This is the case of the fifty-first psalm, and other psalms which are called penitential psalms. Sometimes, indeed, it happens that we meet with heavy complaints of the number and burden of sins, in psalms from which passages are quoted in the New Testament, as uttered by our Redeemer, and in which there seems to be no change of person, from beginning to end. We are assured, for instance, by the Apostle, Heb. x. 5. that the sixth, seventh, and eighth verses of the fortieth psalm, "Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire," &c. are spoken by Messiah, coming to abolish the legal sacrifices, and to put away sin, by the sacrifice of himself. The same person, to appearance, continues speaking, and, only three verses after, complains in the following terms; "Innumerable evils have compassed me about, mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up: they are more than the hairs of my head, therefore my heart faileth me." So again, there are no less than five quotations from different parts of the sixty-ninth psalm, all concurring to inform us, that Christ is the speaker through that psalm. Yet the fifth verse of it runs thus; "O God, thou knowest my

" foolishness, and my guiltiness is not hid from
 " thee." The solution of this is, that Christ,
 in the days of his flesh, standing charged with
 the sin and guilt of his people, speaks of such
 their sin and guilt, as if they were his own, ac-
 knowledging those debts to be his, for which,
 in the capacity of a surety, he had made him-
 self responsible.—The lamb which, under the
 law, was offered for sin, had the name " Guilt"
 given unto it, because the guilt contracted by
 the offerer was transferred to that innocent
 creature, and typically expiated by its blood.
 Was not this exactly the case, in truth and rea-
 lity, with the Lamb of God? " He did no sin,
 " neither was guile found in his mouth; but
 " he bare our sins in his own body on the tree.
 " He was made sin for us, who knew no sin,
 " that we might be made the righteousness of
 " God in him." In acknowledging the sin and
 guilt of his people as his own, he intimates
 that his death should be considered as a true
 and proper sacrifice for sin.—Christ and his
 church are also represented in the scriptures as
 one body. He is the head, and his people are
 the members. As the head speaks of the sin
 of the members, as his sin; the members speak
 of the righteousness of the head, as their righ-
 teousness.—This is a key to any claims of righ-
 teousness made in the psalms by the church and
 people of God, and to any confession of sin
 made by Jesus Christ.

IN some of the psalms there are passages which may be applied to Jesus Christ, and to the people who are connected with him, as they are conformed to his image according to their measure, and share with him in the happiness which is the reward of his obedience unto the death. This is the case of the psalms wherein the blessedness of all who fear God, or who serve him, is declared.

THE offence taken at the supposed uncharitable and vindictive spirit of the imprecations, which occur in some of the psalms, ceases immediately, if we change the imperative for the future, and read, not, "LET THEM BE CONFOUNDED," &c. but, "THEY SHALL BE CONFOUNDED," &c. of which the Hebrew is equally capable. Such passages will then have no more difficulty in them, than the other frequent predictions of divine vengeance in the writings of the prophets, or denunciations of it in the writings of the apostles and evangelists, intended to warn, to alarm, and to lead sinners to repentance; or to leave them inexcusable. It is true, that in the citation made by Peter from Psal. cix. in Acts i. 20. as also in that made by Paul from Psal. lxxix. in Rom. xi. 9. the imperative form is preserved; "LET his habitation be void, &c. LET their table be made a snare," &c. But the apostles generally

cited from the Greek of the LXX version; and took it as it there stood, when it was sufficient, without any alteration, to prove the point it was adduced to prove.

THE glory and blessedness of Messiah's reign, are represented, in some of the psalms, under images borrowed from the natural world, the manner of its original production, and the operations continually carried on in it. We behold a renovation of all things, and the world, as it were, new created, breaks forth into singing. The earth is crowned with sudden verdure and fertility; the field is joyful, and all that is in it; the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord; the floods clap their hands in concert, and ocean fills up the mighty chorus, to celebrate the coming of the great King, when all things respecting the church of God shall be perfected.

SPIRITUAL mercies are also represented, in some of the psalms, by temporal deliverances from sickness, prison, danger of perishing in storms at sea, and the sundry kinds of calamity and death to which the human body is subject; as also by scenes of domestic felicity, and by the flourishing state of well ordered communities, especially that of Israel in Canaan while the blessing of Jehovah rested upon it.

THE situation of the Israelitish church, during the captivity of the Jews in Babylon, as described in the hundred and thirty-seventh psalm, is a representation of the situation of the New Testament church, during the reign of Antichrist. And the destruction of ancient Babylon, as predicted in that psalm, is a figure of the destruction of mystery Babylon, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth.

THE parts of the book of Psalms which remain, are chiefly such as treat, without figures or examples, of wisdom and folly; of righteousness and sin; of the vanity of human life; of the perfections of God; of that patience with which the faithful should bear the sight of wickedness triumphant in this world, looking forward to the day of final retribution; and subjects of the like nature.

FROM what hath been observed, it is evident, that the objections which may seem to lie against the use of the Psalms, in the churches of Christ, cease at once. If it is said, Are we concerned with the affairs of David and of Israel? Have we any thing to do with the ark and the temple? They are no more. Are we to go up to Jerusalem, and worship on Zion? They are desolate, and trodden under foot by the Turks. Are we to sacrifice young bullocks, according to the law? The law is abolished,

never to be observed again. Do we pray for victory over Moab, Edom, and Philistia, or for deliverance from Babylon? There are no such nations, no such places in the world. What then do we mean, when, taking such expressions in our mouths, we utter them in our own persons, as parts of our devotions before God? Affuredly we mean a spiritual Jerufalem and Zion; a spiritual ark and temple; a spiritual law; spiritual sacrifices; and spiritual victories over spiritual enemies; all described under the old names, which are still retained, though "old things are passed away, and all things are become new."—By substituting Messiah for David, the gospel for the law, the church of Christ for that of Israel, and the enemies of the one for those of the other, the psalms are made our own.

T H E E N D.

