Psalms of Confidence, pt.i

So far we’ve examined the psalms that are called hymns – songs of praise to God for his wondrous work in creation and for his providence as Lord and ruler of history; psalms of laments – songs of suffering and which are also identified by their many questions to God and prayers in anticipation of God’s deliverance; and psalms of thanksgiving – expressions of answered prayer to God for his covenant faithfulness on behalf of his people. At this time, we direct our focus on the psalms of confidence.

These psalms are so called because their main characteristic lies in their attitudes and actions of trust in the Lord. For this reason, they are also called psalms of trust. In this regard, we need to remember that the Hebrew view of life (as indeed, that which is and should be the Christian perspective) is that of a pilgrimage—a tough, challenging journey through the trials and hostilities of day-to-day living until the pilgrim eventually arrives in the Presence of God in whom and through whom he will experience eternal rest and comfort. However, this pilgrimage was not considered merely in terms of an individual journey but rather, in the context of the entire covenant community, one sovereignly created by God for his own glory and through which its members had access to Him in worship. This pilgrimage was especially honored and celebrated in in the Israelites’ journey up to Jerusalem for the three divinely appointed festivals of The Feast of Unleavened Bread which culminated in the Passover, The Feast of Weeks and The Feast of Booths.

Psalms of confidence are expressions of trust in God by his people as they encountered countless dangers and distresses of life. All of their travail was submerged under their strong confidence in him and in him alone. An outstanding aspect of such psalms is the psalmist’s keen and intimate awareness of the Presence of God. Many times the psalms would contain the elements of a declaration of trust in God; an invitation to trust him; the basis for such trust; a petition; they lament; and lastly, a vow to praise the Lord. However, all of these elements are not always present in every song nor do they always appear in the above stated order.

The key notion in the psalms of confidence is that of Yahweh as the Protector of his covenant people. We encounter this attribute of God, for example, in the well-known Ps 23 as he appears there as the divine shepherd who protects his sheep who are “prone to wander, prone to leave the God we love” as they go through the dark passages of death and also as the Protector of the traveler who is granted safety and hospitality in His tent from all the dangers of the desert. This image is fulfilled by the Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep and who, in so doing, gives them abundant life, Jn 10:10-11, 15, 17.

The idea of the protecting Presence of God was ingrained in the very fabric of Hebrew life. From the very beginning, they were well-versed in the Scriptures which spoke of God’s Spirit hovering protectively over the nascent creation before forming and filling it with all forms of life, Gen 1:2. God’s providential care was intimately
experienced by them in their wilderness journeys, Ex 13:18-22, as he led, directed and protected them in the theophany of a pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Later, God’s people enjoyed the most dramatic experience of him in such manner as he supernaturally rescued them from Egyptian captivity, Ex 14:19-31.

Some examples of psalms of confidence are 11, 16, 23, 27, 62, 91, 121, 125, and 131.