



PREFACE

My father once remarked that when the Lord's people come to the Lord's house they often come dragging heavy burdens; hence, he said, he usually tried to include something in his preaching that might prove heartening to them. 'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God' (Isa. 40:1). And often the Lord's people have found the balm of Gilead flowing from the Psalms. Hence one of the reasons for these expositions—a few of the saints might be fortified.

But why deal with only the first twelve psalms? Because there are one hundred and fifty of them! When preaching from larger biblical books I will often treat only a chunk of the whole book at a time, leave the book for a while, then come back to it later and tackle another segment. I wanted to give our people a taste of the psalms, and so I thought a 'Psalm Sampler' focusing on Psalms 1–12 would fill the bill. What follows are those expositions, which were almost entirely Sunday evening sermons preached to the congregation of Woodland Presbyterian Church. I have not tried to hide the sermonic form, and I have not 'messed with' formal footnoting. The translations provided are my





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own. I am aware of some repetition which occurs, which, I think, is because sometimes the psalmist ‘harps’ on the same point.

Two matters call for attention. One is the use of ‘Yahweh.’ Whenever most of our English translations read ‘the LORD’ (with ‘Lord’ in small caps), they indicate that they are translating the covenant name of God, the consonants of which are YHWH, with ‘Yahweh’ being about the closest we’ll probably get with pronunciation. That name was ‘explained’ in Exodus 3:14–15 as shorthand for the strange ‘I am who I am,’ or better, ‘I will be what I will be.’ One must simply remember that in Exodus 3:12 Yahweh had specified what kind of ‘being’ he is talking about—‘But I will be *with you*’ (my emphasis). So Exodus 3:14 means ‘I will be present is what I will be.’ In light of verse 12, God does not here stress his being or existence so much as his presence. And ‘Yahweh’ captures and summarizes that thought—he is the God who will be present to be all that his people need him to be. ‘Yahweh’ means the God who is present to help. I don’t expect to replace ‘the LORD’ in popular Christian usage. But ‘Yahweh’ is a personal name, while ‘the LORD’ is a title. ‘Wife’ is my spouse’s ‘title,’ and I suppose I could call her that, but I much prefer ‘Barbara,’ which is her name. By the same token some of us prefer ‘Yahweh’—there’s a devotional warmth in a personal name that a title can’t convey.

The second matter involves a criticism some will have of these expositions. I do not take a ‘Christological’ approach and explain these psalms as speaking of Jesus (unless they do, e.g., Pss. 2 and 8). Why is this? Because I do not think Jesus wants me to do so. Some insist that Jesus insists in Luke 24 (vv. 25–7, 44–7) that every Old Testament





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passage speaks of him in some way. That, I am convinced, over-reads (and misreads) the passage. Jesus explained to the disciples 'in all the scriptures' the things concerning himself (v. 27), and he referred to all things written about him 'in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms' (v. 44). Note the 'in.' Jesus did not say every Old Testament passage spoke of him; he rather took the apostles through the plethora of passages in all parts of the Old Testament that did speak of him or point to him in some way. (For a fuller discussion, see my *The Word Became Fresh* [Christian Focus, 2006], 134–8).

