

Concordia Seminary - Saint Louis

Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary

Bachelor of Divinity

Concordia Seminary Scholarship

6-1-1955

The Concept of Life in the Psalms of David

Richard O. Hoyer

Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, ir_hoyerr@csl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv>



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hoyer, Richard O., "The Concept of Life in the Psalms of David" (1955). *Bachelor of Divinity*. 439.
<https://scholar.csl.edu/bdiv/439>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Concordia Seminary Scholarship at Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Bachelor of Divinity by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Resources from Concordia Seminary. For more information, please contact seitzw@csl.edu.

THE CONCEPT OF LIFE
IN THE PSALMS OF DAVID

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Old Testament Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Divinity

by
Richard O. Hoyer
June 1955

Approved by: Alfred von Rohr Samu
Advisor

Halter T. Rodes
Reader

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	INTRODUCTION	1
II	THE NATURE OF LIFE	4
III	THE PURPOSE OF LIFE	31
IV	THE GOAL OF LIFE	48
V	CONCLUSION	70
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	72

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When Shakespeare's Hamlet cried out in his famous soliloquy, "To be or not to be, that is the question," he was giving a classic expression to a universal human enigma, namely, the question of life itself. This enigma involves first of all the consciousness of self, the realization that I exist, that I am a personality all to myself and can be no other. I AM. From there the enigma expands to questions about the nature of this existence. What is life? What does it mean? For what purpose do I exist? And, most important, what is the end of it all? Is there a purpose, a goal to life? Or, to put it bluntly, is there anything after death?

To the New Testament Christian, these questions do not offer too great a problem, for Christ through His Evangelists and Apostles has revealed most of the answers. But to the student of the Old Testament, these questions do present a problem. The Old Testament just doesn't speak the same way as the New Testament concerning them. It sometimes gives the impression that it has no answer, or that its answers are vastly different from the answers of the New Testament. While the New Testament has its affections set on things above and is motivated constantly by the "glory that shall

be revealed in us," the Old Testament seems strangely this-world centered and says little or nothing of anything beyond. While the New Testament says, "to die is gain," the Old Testament longs for life and looks upon death as evil and as a curse. It is the purpose of this paper to show, to some extent, the Old Testament faithful's answers to these questions. It seeks to give his concept of life, what life meant to him, why he thought he was living, and what goal he thought there was in life, and in doing so, to point out that the difference in outlook between him and the New Testament Christian is a difference of language created by a differing amount of revelation, and is not a difference in the fundamental concept of life itself.

The most valuable source for ascertaining this concept of life in the Old Testament is the Psalter. Here is offered the most concentrated expression of the Old Testament's faith, for these brief hymns have no historic or prophetic intention, but are simply prayers, spoken from the heart and revealing the faith that it contained. For that reason, this work has been limited to the Psalter.

But to study all the Psalms for every hint they give of the Old Testament believer's view on life is beyond the scope of a thesis of this type. Therefore the research has been restricted to the 74 "Psalms of David" as they are marked in the Hebrew text. These are Psalms 3-32, 34-41, 51-65, 68-70, 86, 101, 103, 108-110, 122, 124, 131, 133,

138-145. Some sort of restriction had to be made, and this seemed to be the best for these reasons: First of all, because of the highly personal quality of these Psalms, and secondly, because they provide a reasonably good cross section of the entire Psalter. Most of the theological insights of the Psalter are contained in some degree in this group of Psalms.

Whether these Psalms were or were not written by David is not the point at issue. This study is not at all concerned with the authenticity of authorship, the dates of composition, nor the proper order. They are considered only as genuine prayers of the Old Testament faithful and as such are used to show their views on life. These Psalms provided the material for research, and for that reason, this paper seeks to be exegetical and attempts to give a complete statement of what the "Psalms of David" say regarding life, and does not attempt to give a survey of the views of all the scholars in this field.

The Hebrew Masoretic text was used. The translation is given in the words of the Authorized Version with necessary corrections written in brackets. A few commentaries were used when necessary to help with textual difficulties and to offer background material.

CHAPTER II

THE NATURE OF LIFE

It is common in much modern thinking to divide the life of man into two distinct levels. The lower level of life is simply that of a functioning organism, eating, breathing, reproducing--the life of an animal. The higher level is expressed in terms of the platonic "soul," meaning that the life of man is different in kind from that of the animal; it is unique and it is immortal. But the Hebrew mind, as it is expressed in the Psalter, scarcely ever makes a distinction between an earthly temporal life and an immortal life of the soul. When it speaks of life it has only one thing in mind, i.e., the simple animate existence of the living being. They did not make a definition of life and subtly distinguish levels. They lived, and that living was life. But it would be a mistake to draw from this the conclusion that the Hebrew man of God regarded his life on only that lower level of creaturely, animal existence. It is the burden of this chapter to show that the godly man of the Old Testament definitely regarded his life as derived from, and directly related to, the life of God, and, as such, his physical existence was a manifestation of a very real fellowship with God.

In order to give evidence of this concept of life

from the Psalms of David, it is essential first of all to appreciate one distinct and fundamental principle that they held in regard to life. And that principle is this: The righteous are to live and prosper; the wicked are to suffer calamity and die. This principle is evident throughout the Psalms of David, showing that this was a foundation stone of their concept of life. One of the most expanded statements of this principle is found in Psalm 37:9-11:

For evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth [land].

For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be.

But the meek shall inherit the earth [land]; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.

This thought is oft repeated in this Psalm.

Verse 22: For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth [land]; and they that be cursed of him shall be cut off.

Verse 29: The righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever.

Verse 34: Wait on the LORD, and keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land; when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it.

What the Psalmist means when he speaks of "inheriting the land" in this Psalm is rather important. It is quite definite that the land of Canaan was already inherited by Israel. To say, then, that inheriting the land means

simply to have an undisturbed enjoyment of their heritage¹, or that the land will be a permanent possession to them and their descendants², or that, oppressed by landowners they should rejoice in the knowledge that they should eventually own the land themselves³, is to make blunt and coarse a poetic image of life itself in all its fulness. It is the meek, the blessed, the righteous that shall live and have all the blessings of life, but the evildoers, the wicked, the cursed shall be cut off. The righteous live, the wicked die. }

Another passage using the same imagery to express this principle is Psalm 68:6,

God setteth the solitary in families [God makes the solitary dwell in a home]: he bringeth out those which are bound with chains [the prisoners into prosperity]: but the rebellious dwell in a dry land.

Again here it is shown that the righteous (i.e., the "solitary," or the wretched lonely, which term is used here to mean the righteous, just as the words poor, needy, meek are used. Cf. Psalm 109:22) are to dwell in a home, the

¹A. F. Kirkpatrick, The Book of Psalms (Cambridge: University Press, 1902), p. 190.

²Charles Augustus Briggs and Emilie Grace Briggs, "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms," in The International Critical Commentary (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906), I, 326-327.

³W. O. D. Oesterley, The Psalms (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939), I, 224-225.

promised land, that is, they are to have life and all its blessings, while the wicked rebels against God dwell in a dry land, a term picturing hardships, disaster, and death.

In Psalm 11:6-7 the principle is stated precisely:

Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest [scorching blast]: this shall be the portion of their cup.

For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright [the upright will behold his face].

The parallels in Psalm 69:28 are interesting:

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.

Whatever the "book of the living" might have meant and implied to the psalmist (cf. Ex. 32:32; Ezek. 13:9), it does show very definitely that the righteous, and only the righteous, are recorded in the book of the living. The wicked are blotted out. In an obvious allusion to the fate of Korah and his company (Numbers 16:30-33), Psalm 55:15-16 cries out against the wicked:

Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick [alive] into hell [Sheol]: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.

As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me.

Psalm 34:15-16 summarizes the whole principle:

The eyes of the LORD are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.

The face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

These passages are but a few examples of a principle that

is prevalent throughout the entire Psalter. The very existence of such a principle linking life and death so closely with a moral principle is evidence of the fact that life was regarded by them as a great deal more than a simple animal, biological functioning.

It is necessary to point out that in these Psalms the life which the righteous inherit is neither clearly nor explicitly thought of in the New Testament sense as a life "hid with Christ in God" that shall be revealed in eternal glory after death. The life of the righteous is an earthly, this-world life. Note Psalm 5:10-12,

Destroy thou them [charge them with guilt],
O God; let them fall by their own counsels; cast
them out in the multitude of their transgressions;
for they have rebelled against thee.

But let all those that put their trust in
thee rejoice; let them ever shout for joy, be-
cause thou defendest them: let them also that
love thy name be joyful in thee.

For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous;
with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield.

In this contrast between the wicked and the righteous, the inheritance of the righteous is not at all pictured as an eternal life with God, but as joy and rejoicing and the material blessings of life which God in His favor bestows. A similar expression is given in Psalm 68:1-3,

Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered:
let them also that hate him flee before him.

As smoke is driven away, so drive them away:
as wax melteth before the fire, so let the wicked
perish at the presence of God.

But let the righteous be glad; let them re-
joice before God: yea, let them exceedingly rejoice.

[Throughout, it is perhaps better to translate the verbs as simple futures].

There is here the same contrast between the wicked and the righteous, but while the wicked perish as smoke and as wax, the righteous rejoice and are glad, indicating a blessed, happy--and earthly--life. In Psalm 37:35-38 it is indicated still more clearly:

I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree.
 Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not:
 yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.
 Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright:
 for the end [latter time] of that man is peace.
 But the transgressors shall be destroyed together:
 the end [latter time] of the wicked shall be cut off.

Again the contrast between the wicked and the righteous is clearly stated, and again the blessing of the righteous is a completely earthly thing, a peaceful latter time. It is of course possible to translate אֲחֵרֵי as "posterity" rather than "latter time," and render the phrase, "there is posterity to the man of peace," but that is not of concern here. In either case, the blessing of life is an earthly, physical thing. One more passage, Psalm 55:22-23,

Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.
 But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction [grave]: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

The wicked are killed and the righteous live, but their life is expressed in completely earthly terms--it will not

"be moved," i.e., it will not suffer calamity or misfortune. (For this use of the word, *אִוֵּן*, cf. Psalm 10:6; 13:4; 30:6.) All this does not prove that the Hebrew had no hope for life after death⁴, but it does show that when they spoke of life as the blessing of the righteous they were not thinking in vague terms of something "hereafter," but of life as it is lived here and now.

The death of the wicked is something that is dealt out to them on the basis of a definite moral principle, pointing up the fact that life and death were not thought of as simply the normal biological course of events. One of the more important reasons why death should be meted out to the wicked is in order to vindicate and revenge the righteous. Psalm 31:17-18 is a case in point:

Let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave [Sheol].

Let the lying lips be put to silence; which speak grievous things proudly and contemptuously against the righteous.

Again in Psalm 34:21,

Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate [guilty].

It is because of their attitude toward the righteous that they are killed. In this category belong also the more chilling imprecations, such as the following: Psalm 58:6-10,

Break their teeth, O God, in their mouth:

⁴See Chapter Four.

break out the great teeth of the young lions,
O LORD.

Let them melt away as waters which run continually: when he bendeth his bow to shoot his arrows, let them be as cut in pieces [when he aimeth his arrows, let them be as though they were cut off].

As a snail which melteth, let every one of them pass away: like the untimely birth of a woman, that they may not see the sun [let them be like a snail which melts away as it goes along, like the untimely births of women, that have not seen the sun].

Before your pots can feel the thorns, he shall take them away as with a whirlwind, both living, and in his wrath [Very obscure. Perhaps: "while the flesh is yet raw shall He sweep them away with a whirlwind in wrath"⁵].

The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance: he shall wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.

Another such violent statement is found in Psalm 69:24-28,

Pour out thine indignation upon them, and let thy wrathful anger take hold of them.

Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.

For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded.

Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into thy righteousness.

Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.

(For this use of the book of life, cf. Ex. 32:32; Is. 4:3; Dan. 12:1.)

Another passage of equally violent language is found in Psalm 109:6-20, too long to be quoted here. In all these imprecations, the violence of the language is shocking, if not inexcusable. Be that as it may, they certainly do

⁵Kirkpatrick, op. cit., p. 330.

underscore heavily the principle that the wicked are to die!

A more profound reason for the death of the wicked is to be found in the Holiness of God. These Psalms assume that as God is holy, so shall He slay the wicked. This is hinted at in the Psalms quoted above, but it is brought out most clearly in the following passages.

Psalm 9:4-5, For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right.

Thou hast rebuked the heathen [nations], thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever.

It is because He judges righteously that the wicked are destroyed. In Psalm 11:5, a "soul" is attributed to God, and that soul hates the wicked:

But the wicked and him that loveth violence his soul hateth.

This is an anthropomorphism meaning simply that God is holy and therefore destroys the wicked. In Psalm 56:7, the Psalmist calls upon the anger of God's holiness to destroy the wicked, because they have sinned.

Shall they escape by iniquity [notwithstanding their iniquity]? in thine anger cast down the people, O God.

A corollary to this principle that the holiness of God demands the death of the wicked is the principle that the wicked die in punishment for their sin and revolt against God. An interesting and revealing passage in this connection is Psalm 55:19,

God shall hear, and afflict [answer] them, even he that abideth of old. Selah. Because ^{omit} they [those who] have no changes, therefore [and] they fear not God.

[The translation "afflict" for "answer" is from the ancient versions. It is a far more natural translation, but requires a change in the vocalization. As it stands, it would mean that God hears the raging of the wicked and answers them in judgment⁶].

This brief verse indicates that wicked are punished because they "fear not God." No specific sin is mentioned, though doubtless the Psalmist had many in mind, but only this fundamental revolt of a heart self-confident and secure against the living God. The resulting lack of fear is mentioned as the cause of death. This revolt deserves death from God pictured here as a holy judge. ("He that abideth of old," $\text{אֱלֹהֵינוּ אֲבָדֵנוּ}$, is perhaps translated better, "He that sits enthroned eternally." Cf. Deut. 33:27; Ps. 9:7-8; 29:10; 74:12; Hab. 1:12.) A similar passage is Psalm 52:5-7,

God shall likewise destroy thee [pull thee down] forever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.

The righteous also shall see, and fear, and shall laugh at him:

Lo, this is the man that made not God his strength; but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.

Here also is a demonstration of the wrath of God against a man who has revolted against Him and trusted instead in him-

⁶Ibid., p. 313.

self and his own wealth. So also the wrath of God is vented against the nations that forget Him: Psalm 9:17,

The wicked shall be turned into hell
[Sheol], and all the nations that forget God.

This revolt against God is also pictured in more personal terms - pride and boasting. In Psalm 12:3-4, God cuts off the proud,

The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips,
and the tongue that speaketh proud things:

Who have said, With our tongue will we
prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over
us?

In Psalm 5:5 boasters are cut down,

The foolish [boasters] shall not stand in
thy sight: thou hatest all workers of iniquity.

And finally, the wicked are punished by death for the sinfulness of their deeds. In Psalm 26:9-10, it is assumed that sinners and bloody men are taken away into death.

Gather not [take not away] my soul with
sinners, nor my life with bloody men:

In whose hands is mischief [evil plans],
and their right hand is full of bribes.

Psalm 55:23 states it precisely:

But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into
the pit of destruction [the grave]; bloody and
deceitful men shall not live out half their days;
but I will trust in thee.

In Psalm 28:3-5, the Psalmist expands on this point:

Draw me not away with the wicked, and with
the workers of iniquity, which speak peace to
their neighbours, but mischief [evil] is in
their hearts.

Give them according to their deeds, and ac-
cording to the wickedness of their endeavours:

give them after the work of their hands; render to them their desert.

Because they regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.

Note that in this passage the evil deeds themselves are linked to the basic sin of revolt against God - they regard not the works of the LORD.

From all these examples it can safely be concluded that the death of the wicked is not regarded as a process of nature, but as the curse of God. The other side of that coin shows that life is more than an animal existence, but is linked very closely with God himself, a personal, acting God who gives life to those who trust in Him. In Psalm 4:3 we have this summarized:

But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself.

It is the LORD Himself who sets apart the righteous and gives them life and its fulness; it doesn't just happen that way by a natural process. Furthermore, this setting aside the godly to life is a setting aside for Himself. So closely is life linked to God. It is God who gives the abundant blessings of life, Psalm 3:8,

Salvation belongeth unto the LORD: thy blessing is upon thy people. Selah.

[Salvation, סִלְוָה ? from יָקַח , to deliver, is used here, as commonly in the Old Testament, to mean deliverance from all evil].

This thought is reinforced in Psalm 5:12,

For thou, LORD, wilt bless the righteous;

with favour wilt thou compass him as with a shield. This points out clearly that the good fortunes of life are from God and not due to one's own efforts or to fate. Furthermore, the very preservation of life is due to the activity of God: Psalm 145:20,

The LORD preserveth all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy.

Psalm 138:7, Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me [keep me alive]: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.

Note that it is not the mighty warrior who preserves his life by the strength of his arm, but it is God who preserves the life that He has given. A like thought is in Psalm 30:3,

O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave [Sheol]: thou has kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

It is God that keeps men alive because life is from God. So also Psalm 9:13; 56:13; 103:4. A forceful summary is provided in Psalm 68:20,

He that is our God is the God of salvation [Our God is a God of salvations]; and unto GOD the Lord belong the issues [escapes] from death.

Deliverance from all evil and deliverance from death itself is from God, and not by quirk of history.

The link between God and the righteous is composed of more than the activity of God in giving and preserving life. The link also involves the heart and mind of man, in that

life is given to, and preserved in, those who are united with God by their trust in Him. This is stated in so many words in Psalm 37:39-40:

But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength [place of refuge] in the time of trouble.

And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust in him [took refuge in Him].

Here it is shown that deliverance from all evil is from God, sola gratia, and that this deliverance is given those who by their trust in Him are connected with His life - sola fidei. Psalm 34:22 repeats the thought:

The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.

["Redeemeth" is from פָּדָה , to loose, redeem, deliver. In this passage, with no mention of a price paid to anyone, the word must be taken to mean "deliver."]

God's loving activity gives life; man's trust received life. Life is inseparably connected with this fellowship between God and man.

But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God.

My times are in thy hand: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies, and from them that persecute me.

Make thy face to shine upon thy servant: save me for thy mercies' sake.

Let me not be ashamed, O LORD; for I have called upon thee: let the wicked be ashamed, and let them be silent in the grave [Sheol].

From the passages so far mentioned in this chapter, it is concluded that Old Testament faithful had a definite prin-

ciple in their concept of life, namely, that life is given by God to those who are righteous. Those who are not righteous, but rather persecute the righteous and sin in rebellion against God, must die. Life, then is directly connected with righteousness before God. It now becomes necessary to point out how they pictured this righteousness before God.

It is not difficult to define righteousness. $\text{P}^{\text{T}}\text{Y}$, righteousness, and $\text{P}^{\text{T}}\text{Y}$ the adjective, righteous, are derived from $\text{P}^{\text{T}}\text{Y}$, to be right, straight. In the Old Testament it has lost entirely its physical sense of straightness and is used only in the ethical sense of being just. In this sense it is used of a judge or king who maintains the right and dispenses judgment (2 Sam. 23:3) and more especially of God as being a just judge (Deut. 32:4; 2 Chr. 12:6; Ezra 9:15; Job 34:17; Ps. 129:4; Jer. 12:1; Dan. 9:14). When applied to a person, it is used primarily to describe a man who is obedient to God; hence he is just, upright, pious (Gen. 6:9; 7:1; Job 12:4; 17:9; Ps. 5:12; 11:13; 31:18; 34:19; 37:25; 72:7). Other words used in connection with this and having the same meaning are $\text{P}^{\text{D}}\text{J}$ perfect, and W^{T} straight. These are all attributes of God, and man is to be like God and be as righteous as He. (Cf. Lev. 19:2; Gen. 17:1) This being righteous even as God is righteous is more than simply imitating God. It is rather to enter into a living fellowship with Him. Psalm 69:27 indicates this. Speaking of the wicked, it reads,

RIGHTED'S

Add iniquity unto their iniquity; and let them not come into thy righteousness.

The righteousness of God is spoken of as a sort of aura into which the righteous enter, thereby indicating a real fellowship.

That righteousness is viewed as a fellowship with God is shown even more clearly in the passages of those Psalms dealing with the sin of man. These passages show that sin destroys man's righteousness and at the same time separates him from God; therefore, this righteousness must be a fellowship with Him. Psalm 38:1-4 shows clearly that sin and iniquity destroy man's righteousness and bring down the wrath of God and the griefs of life:

O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.

For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore.

There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest [health] in my bones because of my sin.

For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

Psalm 31:9-10 pours out the distress and grief caused by sin:

Have mercy upon me, O LORD, for I am in trouble [distress]: mine eye is consumed with grief, yea, my soul and my belly.

For my life is spent with grief [vexation], and my years with sighing: my strength faileth because of mine iniquity, and my bones are consumed.

The plaintive cry of Psalm 41:4 for preservation of life shows that death itself is the result of sin: }

I said, LORD, be merciful unto me: heal

my soul; for I have sinned against thee.

So also Psalm 68:21,

But God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such as one as goeth on still in his trespasses [guilt].

But sin causes a great deal more than grief and distress, it causes also a separation from the eternal God. These Psalms show that the Old Testament man of God was very much aware of this. Psalm 27:9 reveals a man well aware that physical pain is not the worst punishment meted out by an angry God, but rather the removal of His presence:

Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

Psalm 60:1 shows an awareness that the distress and grief that is the result of sin is indeed caused by a separation from God:

O God, thou hast cast us off, thou hast scattered us, thou has been displeased; O turn thyself to us again.

Psalm 6:5, written by a man sick unto death, spells out the tragedy of death, even a total separation from God:

For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave [Sheol] who shall give thee thanks?

And in the parallels of Psalm 65:3-4 sin is shown to separate man from God:

Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away. Blessed is the man whom thou chooseth, and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell

in thy courts.

Sin, iniquity, and guilt are therefore clearly seen to remove all righteousness from man and to separate him from God entirely. One thing more needs to be pointed out, namely, that the psalmists recognized this sin and enmity against God to be the common property of all men by their very nature. Psalm 14:2-3 and its parallel in Psalm 53:2-3 indicate the universality of man's rebellion:

The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek God.

They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

So also Psalm 143:2 makes the separation universal:

And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

In the greatest of penitential Psalms, David confesses his sin to be a part of his nature:

Behold, I was shapen [brought forth] in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. Psalm 51:5.

So also Psalm 58:3 confesses the essential evil of man:

The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.

But if all men are sinful and no longer righteous, if they are cut off from God by their sin, how can these Psalms still make that persistent distinction between the wicked and the righteous, and place their authors almost consist-

ently in the camp of the righteous? For this reason alone, that righteousness is no longer obtained by being perfect as God is perfect (for this is impossible, since all have sinned), but righteousness is given to those who in repentance and trust look to God for mercy and are totally dependent upon His grace.⁷ It is for this reason that the Psalmists, who count themselves among the righteous, make such frequent protestations of repentance, humility, and trust in the mercy of God. It is because of these factors that they are accounted righteous. They are expressions of repentance: Psalm 38:18,

For I will declare mine iniquity; I will
be sorry for my sin.

Again in Psalm 69:5,

O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and
my sins are not hid from thee.

Psalm 25:7.11, Remember not the sins of
my youth, nor my transgressions: according to
thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness'
sake, O LORD.

For thy name's sake, O LORD, pardon mine
iniquity; for it is great.

Even more important are the frequent graphic pictures of the righteous as being poverty-stricken, physically crushed,

⁷The few passages that sound "self-righteous" e.g. Psalm 7:8; 18:20 ff.; 17:1 ff., are merely claims of comparative righteousness, of being innocent of specific charges, and general professions of purity of purpose and single-hearted devotion to God. They are not claims of absolute sinlessness, nor do they reveal an attitude of self-complacency. Ibid., pp. lxxxvii-lxxxviii.

or spiritually broken in their repentance. Psalm 109:21-24.
26,

But do thou for me O GOD the Lord, for thy name's sake: because thy mercy is good, deliver me.

For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me.

I am gone like the shadow when it declineth: I am tossed up and down as the locust.

My knees are weak through fasting; and my flesh falleth of fatness.

Help me, O LORD my God: O save me according to thy mercy.

The terms אֲדָמָה and אֲדָמָה are practically synonymous and refer to physical poverty (cf. Ex. 22:24; Deut. 15:4; 24:12; Ps. 10:2.9). The phrase is often repeated, e.g. Psalm 12:5.7; 69:29; 70:5. But that these passages are not used to mean simple physical poverty is shown by the contexts. In each case the Psalm contrasts the arrogant wicked with the poor righteous. Hence, it is not the poverty of physical means that marks the righteous, but a poverty of pride and arrogance. This fits precisely with the many passages that speak of God's contempt for the proud and haughty: Psalm 138:6,

Though the LORD be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off.

Psalm 12:3-4, The LORD shall cut off all flattering lips, and the tongue that speaketh proud things:

Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?

So also Psalm 5:4; 18:27. It also accords with the Psalm-

ist's desire to be humble: Psalm 131:1-2,

LORD, my heart is not haughty [lifted high],
nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself
[walk] in great matters, or in things too high
[wondrous] for me.

Surely, I have behaved [calmed] and quieted
myself [my soul], as a child that is weaned of
his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child.

But this whole concept of the righteous being repentant,
poor, and humble is best summed up in these classic
passages,

The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a
broken heart; and saveth such as be of a con-
trite [crushed] spirit. Psalm 34:18.

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit:
a broken and a contrite [crushed] heart, O God,
thou wilt not despise. Psalm 51:17.

It is only as man is repentant, fully aware of the horror
of sin, conscious of his own futility and dependent on God
alone that he can hope to obtain righteousness.

The total dependence of man upon God for His favor and
deliverance is expressed in these Psalms in terms of trust
and fear. It is the constant trust in God in reverential
fear that marks the righteous man. Psalm 62:8 gives ex-
pression to the totality and the confidence of this trust:

Trust in him at all times; ye people,
pour out your heart before him: God is a
refuge for us. Selah.

Psalm 36:7-8 gives personal witness to the fact that such
trust is not blind and vain, but because God is merciful
the trust is abundantly fulfilled:

How excellent [precious] is thy loving-

kindness, O God! therefore the children of men
put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

They shall be abundantly satisfied with
the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make
them drink of the river of thy pleasures.

These Psalms have many expressions of this trust (cf. Psalm
4:5; 5:7-8; 17:7; 23:1-4; and many more). Many of these
passages, however, express a trust for deliverance from the
enemy, or from affliction, or simply for prosperity. Psalm
36 quoted above is an example, also Psalm 5:7-8; 17:7; 40:4.
But it would be wrong to conclude that their trust was
simply a pagan exercise, a means to a worldly end. It is
far more profound: Psalm 34:8-9,

O taste and see that the LORD is good:
blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there
is no want to them that fear him.

This passage is not urging to trust God and see how profit-
able it is, but is a personal witness to the fact that the
man who trusts in God is blessed by Him with His personal
fellowship, of which prosperity is but the external sign.
This is more clearly presented in Psalm 31:19-20,

Oh how great is thy goodness, which thou
hast laid up for them that fear thee; which
thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee
before the sons of men!

Thou shalt hide them in the secret [hiding
place] of thy presence from the pride [perhaps,
snares] of man.

Here it is deliverance from persecution that is given to
those who trust - but what a deliverance! "Hidden in the
hiding place of His presence!" This is a "spiritual"

blessing rather than a "physical" one. It is fellowship with God. Psalm 103:17 is clearer still:

But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children.

"Mercy" and "His righteousness" is offered to trust indicating that it is a possession of God that is sought, not a possession of worldly good. As final proof, there are in Psalm 63 two passages which express a desire for nothing else but to have God, completely apart from any worldly desire:

Verse 1: O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee; my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty [weary] land, where no water is.

Verse 3: Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.

These passages show clearly that what the psalmist wanted was to live with God and that this was more important to him than anything on earth. (Cf. the beautiful expression of this in the non-Davidic Psalm 73:25-26.) This fact must be constantly kept in mind to understand the many expressions of trust in these Psalms, otherwise the interpretation can degenerate to regarding them as merely selfish prayers for deliverance and prosperity. Therefore Psalm 23:1, "The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want," is shown by Psalms 31, 34, 51, 63, and 103 to mean a trust not only for the satisfaction of physical want but for the

satisfaction of the basic spiritual want. God gives Himself to those who trust in Him. So also are Psalms 7:1; 13:5-6; 23:4; 25:1-2; 31:1; 14-17; 38:15; 40:11; 57:1; 62:1-2; 143:8 to be understood.

Since man, therefore, is by his sinful nature and sinful deeds unrighteous and separate from God, he is reduced to a state of total dependence on God for mercy. He can only trust. Through this trust, God gives man righteousness. Psalm 23:3 speaks to this fact:

He restoreth my soul; he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

God leads us in righteousness, implying that by ourselves we would not be righteous. He does it not because we deserve it, but "for His name's sake," in mercy, that He might "prove Himself such as He has declared Himself to be."⁸ Also Psalm 51:12:

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.

In this great Psalm of repentance, there is no mention of either oppression by the enemy or physical affliction, but only of sin and guilt. Therefore "salvation" here cannot mean deliverance from affliction or oppression, but deliverance from sin back to the fellowship with God. This salvation, this fellowship which is righteousness, God must give! Cf. also Psalm 24:5.

⁸Ibid., p. 126.

Moreover, this righteousness is not given by overlooking sin, making it of no consequence and thereby destroying the holiness of God, but it is forgiven. This is shown in Psalm 32:1-2,

Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

Psalm 103:10-14 speaks of the immensity of guilt, the abundance of mercy, and of absolute forgiveness:

He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust. [Cf. also Psalm 103:3].

Psalm 65:3-4, Iniquities prevail against me: as for our transgressions, thou shalt purge them away.

Blessed is the man whom thou choosest and causest to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.

Here it is shown that by the forgiveness of sins, God causes man to dwell with Him, thereby giving righteousness.

Psalm 51:11 indicates that the giving of righteousness is even more than the forgiveness of sins. It is the indwelling of the Spirit of God Himself:

Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me.

Therefore the gift of God's righteousness involves more


than the negative aspect of removing guilt, but has also the positive aspect of the giving of His Spirit. In this same positive aspect, Psalm 139:1-6 speaks of God's knowing the righteous, literally besieging him:

O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me.
 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising,
 thou understandest my thought afar off.
 Thou compassest [winnowest] my path and my
 lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.
 For there is not a word in my tongue, but,
 lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.
 Thou hast beset [besieged] me behind and
 before, and laid thine hand upon me.
 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it
 is high, I cannot attain unto it.

The giving of righteousness is shown here to be an act of God in which He not only forgives sin but seizes man and makes him His own. He gives fellowship when he gives righteousness.


Righteousness, then, is not a matter of being perfectly good and living with God by virtue of this goodness (for man is sinful), but it is living with God because He in His mercy has forgiven our sins and made us His own. Righteousness is a relationship to God created by God's mercy in action and received by man's repentance and trust.

Earlier in this chapter it was shown that these Psalms had a constant and definite principle, that the righteous lived and the wicked were killed. If life is given to those whom God had made righteous and brought into fellowship with Him, and the unrighteous, or those separated from God, are expected to be killed, then life is the

physical, visible manifestation of a fellowship with God. 

So in Psalm 28:1 it is written,

Be not silent to me: lest if thou be silent
to me, I become like them that go down into the pit.

If God is silent, if He removes Himself from man, then man is like those who go down to the pit -- he is as good as dead. Life consists in fellowship with God; without that fellowship there is only death. This thought is repeated in Psalm 143:7. A positive expression of this thought is found in Psalm 36:9. In this verse it is shown that life is from God who is the fountain of life. Only with God and in His light is there any life for man. Life, then, is fellowship with God! 

For with thee is the fountain of life; in
thy light shall we see light. Psalm 36:9.

This is the concept of the nature of life.

CHAPTER III

THE PURPOSE OF LIFE

Life is lived. Therefore, in any study of a concept of life it is not enough simply to say what it is and where it goes, but it must also be concerned with the question of "Why?" Why does man live? It is not, however, the question, to what end does man live, but the question, what is man to do with the life he has? Is life to be pictured as a pilgrimage to a better goal? Or is it simply an existence into which a man is thrust and from which he is taken, both without his consent, without any meaning or purpose? Is life to be endured, or does one live to do something? It is the burden of this chapter to show what the Old Testament man of God thought in reference to these questions as his thought is revealed in the Psalms of David. But these Psalms are prayers, hymns of praise or petitions for help, and are never contemplative or philosophical poems. Therefore, they do not discuss the purpose of life as such, but only imply it. Nevertheless, they do reveal that they regarded the purpose of life as both theocentric and teleological, God-centered and goal-conscious.

That life is theocentric, i. e., that the purpose of life is centered in God and His will, and is not centered in self and the satisfaction of personal desires and goals,

is shown by these Psalms' recognition of God as the Lord and master of life. Illustrative of this are the many references in these Psalms to God as the king. Psalm 29 extols the glory of God as the almighty Lord of all nature, and climaxes its praises in verse 10 with the words, "Yea, The LORD sitteth king forever!" He is the Lord and king of all things in the world, and therefore Lord also of the life of man. So also in Psalm 10:16 and 24:7-10. This is made much more personal in Psalm 5:2,

Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King,
and my God: for unto thee will I pray.

Here God is called "my king." He is my Lord, therefore I live for God and not just for myself. So also Psalm 145:1,

I will extol thee, my God, O king: and I
will bless thy name for ever and ever.

See also Psalm 20:9.

A corollary to this, and of even greater importance, is the recognition by the Psalmist of his role as the servant of God. The titles of Psalms 18 and 36 ascribe them to "David, the servant of the LORD." In Psalm 143:2 the Psalmist calls himself the servant of God and couples it with a plea for forgiveness:

And enter not into judgment with thy servant:
for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

So also in Psalm 27:9,

Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy
servant away in anger; thou hast been my help; leave
me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation.

The expression occurs quite frequently in these Psalms (19:11.13; 31:16; 34:22; 25:27; 69:17; 86:2.16; 109:28; 144:10) making it quite evident that the Old Testament faithful regarded life as being lived in the service of God, and not in the service of self.

Another facet in this concept of a theocentric purpose in life under the Lordship of God is seen in Psalm 56:13,

For thou hast delivered my soul from death:
wilt thou not deliver my feet from falling, that
I may walk before God in the light of the living?

[It is possible so to translate לֹא אֶפֶן as a question requiring an affirmative answer (cf. Gen. 4:7; 20:5; Num. 23:26; Job 1:10), but it is more in keeping with the progression of thought in the Psalm to translate it as a simple affirmation, almost the same as לֹא , "lo!", as in 1 Sam. 20:37; 2 Sam. 15:35; Ruth 2:8; Prov. 8:1; 14:22. Thus it would read, "Yes, my feet from falling that I may walk before God in the light of the living."]

Here life is pictured as a walking before God, illuminated by the light of life which is His presence (cf. Psalm 36:9). Life, then, is not living for self, but, as God is the Lord, it is living for Him.

To keep the picture straight, it must be pointed out that these Psalms never speak of being under the Lordship of God as an unpleasant and undesired servitude. It is not a forced subjection, but a voluntary and a pleasant subjection. So Psalm 65:4 can call the man blessed and satisfied who walks with God:

Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy court: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.

The difficult passage of Psalm 16:2 likewise indicates that life under the Lordship of God is the only way to have a good life:

O my soul [omit], thou [feminine, hence the assumption that the soul is addressed] hast said unto the LORD, Thou art my Lord: my goodness extendeth not to thee [literally, "my goodness is not to Thee." Best translated, "my goodness is not beyond Thee," or, "I have no good apart from Thee."]

It is because the Psalmist recognizes God as his Lord and realizes that a life in His service is a blessed and fulfilled life that there are in these Psalms so many ascriptions of glory to God. Psalm 145:1-2,

I will extol thee, my God, O king: and I will bless thy name for ever and ever.
Every day will I bless thee: and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.

Because God is his king, the Psalmist praises and blesses Him: Psalm 63:3-4,

Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.
Thus will I bless thee while I live: I will lift up my hands in thy name.

Here it is stated that because the fellowship with God is better than life itself, therefore the Psalmist will praise and bless God as long as he lives. See also Psalm 3:3; 29:1-2; 57:8-11; 68:34 which joyfully ascribe glory to God, recognizing His Lordship.

Life, then, is theocentric. Its purpose is to live for God because He is the Lord. } This living with God, which is the purpose of life, would seem from these Psalms to involve four factors: worship, witness, love, and joy. The first of these is worship, which is a direct result of that joyful recognition of the Lordship of God. Worship is regarded as a definite purpose of life, not as simply a function of it. They lived to praise; they did not praise in order to live. This is shown in Psalm 6:5,

For in death [Sheol] there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?

Here the Psalmist pleads for life, not for selfish reasons, but in order that he might remember God and give Him thanks and praise. This would indicate that he regarded life as lived in order to worship God. This idea is almost literally repeated in Psalm 30:9,

What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?

For similar expressions, cf. Hezekiah's prayer in Isaiah 38:18-19; Psalm 88:10; 115:17. There is a like thought in Psalm 142:7,

Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise thy name.

Whether the prison mentioned in this passage is an actual place or simply symbolic for distress is immaterial here. The important thing to note is that he seeks deliverance not for his own sake but for God's sake, that he might

praise His name. So also Psalm 30:11-12 speaks of being delivered to the end that he might praise God.

Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness;

To the end that my glory may sing praise to thee, and not be silent. O LORD my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever.

So praise, or worship, an integral part of the recognition of the Lordship of God, is a purpose for which man lives.

But the worship of the Old Testament faithful is not a pagan worship of superstitious duty, but the free response of a thankful heart to the gifts of God. Psalm 54:6 speaks of sacrificing with a free will, and praising in response to the goodness of God:

I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O LORD; for it is good.

Psalm 63:3 has the Psalmist praising God not in fear or bound by duty, but in response to the lovingkindness of God:

Because thy lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee.

Psalm 34:1 in expressing both the spontaneity and the constancy of praise shows that worship is freely offered from a thankful heart and not forced from a heart full of fear:

I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

Psalm 122:1 speaks of worship as a thing of joy and not a thing of duty:

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.

This worship, which is a purpose of life, is to be distinguished from pagan worship in yet another way. These Psalms show that the Old Testament man of God recognized worship to be not a cultic ritual that was effective ex opere operato, but an expression from the heart which alone made it acceptable to God. So Psalm 4:5 exhorts to "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness," that is, in a right spirit. In Psalm 86:12 it is shown that worship was from the heart, thereby disclaiming hypocritical ritual as worship:

I will praise thee, O Lord my God, with
all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for
evermore.

So also Psalm 9:1. Furthermore, the cultic worship of ritual and sacrifice without the accompanying worship of the heart which the sacrifices were to represent and symbolize are condemned in these Psalms. Psalm 40:6,

Sacrifice and offering thou didst not desire;
mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering
and sin offering hast thou not required.

Psalm 69:30-31,

I will praise the name of God with a song,
and will magnify him with thanksgiving.
This also shall please the LORD better than
an ox or bullock that hath horns and hoofs.

Psalm 51:16-17,

For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would
I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering.
The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a
broken and a contrite [crushed] heart, O God, thou
wilt not despise.

Finally, worship is not devised in the mind or heart of man, but is a gift of God. Note the plea of Psalm 51:15,

O Lord, open thou my lips: and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.

If God opens his lips, then he can worship; otherwise the sin that separates him from God will also prevent his worship. Note also Psalm 65:4,

Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causeth to approach unto thee, that he may dwell in thy courts: we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple.

It is God, by His own gracious will, that causes man to worship and to be blessed and satisfied in that worship.

Worship, then is a gift of God; it is offered freely from the heart; it is a purpose of life that is theocentric in every sense.

Closely related to this realization that they live to worship God is the realization that they live also to witness to others about God. Psalm 26:7 speaks of telling the wondrous works of God to others as a part of worship:

That I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving, and tell of all thy wondrous works.

So also Psalm 9:1 and 11,

I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. Sing praises to the LORD, which dwelleth in Zion: declare among the people his doings.

See also Psalm 109:27. It is in this very worship of God that the greatest witness to God takes place, and also the greatest edification of the congregation. Psalm 34:2-3

has the Psalmist boasting, i.e. witnessing, that others might be edified:

My soul shall make her boast in the LORD:
the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.

O magnify the LORD with me, and let us
exalt his name together.

Psalm 40:3 expresses the almost identical thought:

And he hath put a new song in my mouth,
even praise unto our God: many shall see it,
and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.

Cf. also Psalm 22:22.25; 26:12; 35:18 which point out that this witnessing is done "to the congregation."

This witness for which man lives takes place also outside of the sphere of worship. It is also done by personal contact. Psalm 40:9-10 speaks of "preaching righteousness" to the congregation:

I have preached righteousness in the
great congregation: lo, I have not refrained
my lips, O LORD, thou knowest.

I have not hid thy righteousness within
my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and
thy salvation: I have not concealed thy loving-
kindness and thy truth from the great congregation.

Psalm 51:13 speaks of actual instruction:

Then will I teach transgressors thy ways;
and sinners shall be converted unto thee.

And, lest it be forgotten, they knew that they lived not only to testify to the congregation, but also to their own children and the generations to come. Psalm 145:4 mentions this:

One generation shall praise thy works to
another, and shall declare thy mighty acts.

So also Psalm 22:31,

They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

Though it is not very strong and is usually connected with the praise of God as the universal God, there is also evidence that the godly recognized, as a part of the reason for their existence, their duty to witness also to the nations other than Israel. In Psalm 57:9 the Psalmist witnesses to the nations through his worship:

I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations.

Likewise in Psalm 108:3,

I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations.

See also Psalm 18:49.

From all these passages it can safely be concluded that the Old Testament man of God, recognizing the Lord of all things, knew that he lived to worship and that a necessary part of that worship was a witness both to the congregation of Israel and to the heathen.

But the relationship between the man of God and his fellowmen involved more than witness, which, after all, could have been done in a very indifferent and withdrawn manner. The relationship included also a very real and personal love. This is the third purpose for which man lived: to serve, in love, his fellowmen. One aspect of

this love was closely connected to his witness. This aspect was that of brotherly reproof, correcting each other in love. Psalm 141:5, though difficult, has much to say along this line:

Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness: and let him reprove me; it shall be an excellent oil [or, oil for the head], which shall not break my head [or, let not my head refuse it]; for my prayer also shall be in their calamities.

In verse four, the Psalmist asks for deliverance from evil men and from the sinful luxuries of life, and follows it up in this verse with a plea for help from his brethren, even if it be help that smites. This is the service of men of God toward one another, a service of loving edification. The book of Proverbs speaks much of this, cf. Prov. 27:6, "faithful are the wounds of a friend." Also Prov. 3:11 f.; 13:18; 15:5.31.32; 28:33. A similar thought is presented in Psalm 69:6,

Let them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded [put to shame] for my sake, O God of Israel.

In verse five the Psalmist confesses his sins and in this verse asks that his sin might not offend his brother.

This is love of a high order!

The love of man to man is expressed not only on that religious plane, but also on the plane of love for those in physical need. A touching passage along this line is in Psalm 41:1,

Blessed is he that considereth the poor
[the languishing, the weak]: the LORD will de-
liver him in time of trouble [evil day].

Psalm 37:21 also indicates the love of the righteous for those in need:

The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again:
but the righteous sheweth mercy, and giveth.

Finally, there is also some indication that the Old Testam-
ent faithful knew that their love was to encompass all
men - even their enemies. Psalm 109:4-5 records the love
of the Psalmist for his adversaries; a love given even
when returned with hate:

For my love they are my adversaries: but I
give myself unto prayer [literally, "I am prayer."
For this type of forceful expression, cf. "I am
peace," Psalm 120:7].

So also in Psalm 35:13-14, speaking of his enemies which
were falsely accusing him, the Psalmist writes:

But as for me, when they were sick, my
clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with
fasting: and my prayer returned into mine own
bosom.

I behaved myself [walked] as though he had
been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily,
as one that mourneth for his mother.

These Psalms, then, give evidence that the Hebrew knew his
life to be under the Lordship of God, and for that reason
lived in order to worship, to witness, and to serve, in
love, his fellowmen. But there is yet a fourth purpose
for which they lived, as these Psalms indicate, and that
is simply to enjoy life. Yet, this joy, too, is theocen-
tric. They found their joy, their peace of mind and their

happiness not in riches or in health or in pleasure as such, but they found it in God. This is revealed in Psalm 51:8,

Make me to hear joy and gladness; that
the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice.

Here, in the midst of fervent prayer for forgiveness, the Psalmist asks for joy and gladness. It is to be noted first of all that a petition for joy and gladness is quite acceptable. Life meant very much to these people, especially since God had granted them little revelation of anything after death.¹ For that reason they looked upon life as something to be enjoyed, and joy, therefore, was one of the reasons for which they lived--a purpose of life. But it must also be noted in immediate connection with this, that this enjoyment of life exists only in fellowship with God. That is shown by the context into which this passage is fitted, a context of repentance. Because he has sinned, God has removed His Presence. David repents and asks for renewal of God's favor and fellowship--and with that, for joy and gladness. These same points are repeated in verse 12:

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.

This verse follows immediately after the plea that God remove not His Holy Spirit from him, showing the close con-

¹For further development of this, see Chapter Four.

nection between fellowship with God and joy. Likewise, joy is linked with the word "salvation," or "deliverance," which in this Psalm of repentance can only mean deliverance from sin and guilt. This, too, points out that the joy of life is found only in God. Also Psalm 63, which speaks so beautifully of the soul's friendship with God, equates the joy of life with the joy of knowing God:

Verses 5-6: My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow [fat, or abundance] and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips [lips shouting for joy. Cf. Job 3:7; 20:5]:

When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches.

Psalm 21:6 concludes a section which counts the blessings of God with words which show that joy is found only in God:

For thou hast made him most blessed for ever: thou hast made him exceeding glad with thy countenance [Thou wilt make him rejoice in gladness with Thy presence].

To make the picture complete, Psalm 4:7 puts the joy that is to be had with God above any physical pleasure:

Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.

These passages are sufficient to show us that Old Testament faithful regarded happiness and joy as a thing to be desired and a reason for living, but that joy and happiness was not found in satisfaction of fleshly desire, but was found in fellowship with God. Cf. also Psalm 16:11; 30:11-12; 32:11; 64:10.

From all these passages it can safely be concluded

that the Old Testament faithful recognized the purpose of life to be completely theocentric. But a study of their understanding of why they lived is not by any means exhausted by showing its theocentricity, for the teleological aspect of their understanding has an equally prominent part. They lived fully aware of the fact that life was not lived just for the moment, but was headed toward a goal. What that goal was is never explicitly stated, and it is therefore assumed that the goal was never completely known, but that is the concern of the next chapter. Here it is necessary only to point out that the purpose of life was seen to be not only God-centered, but also goal-conscious.

That they regarded life as headed toward a goal is shown by their consistent picturing of life as a path. In Psalm 17:4-5 the path of the righteous is distinguished from the path of the wicked:

Concerning the works of men, by the word of thy lips I have kept me from the paths of the destroyer [violent].

Hold up my goings in thy paths, that my footsteps slip not [My goings held fast to thy paths, my steps have not been moved].

In Psalm 101:2 the Psalmist promises to walk on an upright path:

I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way [on a path of uprightness]. O when wilt thou come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart.

Psalm 142:3 pictures life as a path:

When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me.

So also Psalm 37:23. Furthermore, the path on which they desire to walk is God's path, a course of life and conduct that God prescribes. Psalm 25:3,

Shew [make me to know] me thy ways, O LORD; teach me thy paths.

For that reason God is repeatedly asked to lead and guide and destroy the obstacles in this path: Psalm 5:8,

Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies: make thy way straight before me.

Psalm 31:3, For thou art my rock and my fortress; therefore for thy name's sake lead me, and guide me.

Psalm 23:2-4, He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death [or, perhaps, "deadly gloom." The meaning remains the same.], I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

So also Psalm 32:8; 86:11; 143:8.

It must also be pointed out that the picture of a path for life shows not only that they were goal-conscious, but also that they were time-conscious, that is, they were aware of a past and a future, and not simply aware of a goal. Or the picture was used not only to show that life was going someplace, but also to show that there was a

righteous and a wicked way to go, that is, they were concerned with the way life was lived as well as with the goal of life. But be that as it may, it still remains true that life was pictured consistently as a path, and a part of that picture, since paths generally go somewhere, shows that their view of life was goal-conscious.

The purpose of life, then, is both theocentric and teleological. Life, lived under the Lordship of God, is to be lived in the worship of God, in witnessing for Him to the congregation and to the heathen, in the love of one's fellowman, and in the joy of fellowship with God. It is to be lived teleologically, in the awareness that life has a goal and that God is leading us to it. These are the purposes for which man lives.

CHAPTER IV

THE GOAL OF LIFE

The biggest problem in a study of the Old Testament concept of life is the question of their understanding of the telos, the end or the final goal of life. It is hard for a Christian today, to whom the New Testament has defined the doctrines of immortality and heaven so clearly, making them familiar concepts and basic to his theological thinking, to put himself into the Old Testament frame of reference and into the context of the revelation given to them, and understand their thoughts concerning the goal of life. It is for that reason that the answers given to the question of what the Old Testament man believed concerning a future life have gone to such extremes. The answer is often either that the Old Testament contains a clear teaching on immortality, or that the Old Testament is absolutely ignorant of anything like an after-life. It is the burden of this chapter to show, as honestly as possible, what the Old Testament man of God believed concerning the end of life, as his faith is revealed in the Psalms of David.

On the negative side, there are three basic factors of interpretation that must be taken into consideration. In the first place, there is no mention of a heaven as it is thought of today. The heavens, i.e. the firmament, is

sometimes referred to as the dwelling place of God (cf. Psalms 2:4; 104:3.13), but this is a physical place, and God is pictured as dwelling there anthropomorphically. It is not pictured as the eternal home of the righteous. Since such a place of bliss where a man would live in eternal perfect fellowship with God is not mentioned in these Psalms, it is assumed that the existence of such a place had not been revealed to them. If it had, it surely would have been an object of longing, and as such it would have been spoken of in their Psalms at least as often as it is mentioned in the collects of the New Testament church.

In the second place, these Psalms reveal an urgent desire to stay alive, implying a lack of hope for anything good after death. There are many petitions to God asking for the preservation of life. In Psalm 143:11, the Psalmist in mortal danger, pleads for his life:

Quicken me [Keep me alive], O LORD, for thy name's sake: for thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.

In Psalm 25:20, the same plea is presented in different words:

O keep my soul, and deliver me: let me not be ashamed; for I put my trust in thee.

Psalm 6:4 records the plea of a man near death:

Return, O LORD, deliver my soul: oh save me for thy mercies' sake.

In Psalm 26:9, recognizing death to be the fate of the wicked, the Psalmist prays:

Gather not [Take not away] my soul with sinners, nor my life with bloody men.

For other such passages, cf. Psalm 17:13; 22:20; 25:20; 86:2; 40:17; 70:5; 109:26. It must be noted that in none of these prayers do the psalmists suggest the alternative, "If it be Thy will, take me to live with Thee in heaven." Furthermore, these Psalms also contain expressions of thanks to God for the prolongation of life, an attitude not entirely in keeping with a hope for a better hereafter. Psalm 30:3, taken from a Psalm of praise for deliverance from peril that threatened death, is a good example:

O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave [Sheol]: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

Psalm 138 is another prayer of praise, and in verse 7 the same thankfulness for being kept alive is expressed:

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me [keep me alive]: thou shalt stretch forth thine hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me.

Even the well known Psalm 23 breathes thankfulness for the preservation of life: Psalm 23:4,

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death [or "deadly gloom." The meaning remains the same], I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Psalm 41 counts the blessings of the man who considereth the poor, and a part of those blessings are enumerated in verse 2:

The LORD will preserve him, and keep him

alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth:
and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of
his enemies.

Natural as it may be to desire to stay alive, nevertheless, the urgency of that desire in these Psalms and the lack of any explicit statement of hope for something better beyond death indicates that they had no clearly defined hope for anything good outside of life on earth.

The third negative factor to be considered is the occasional expression of despair at the thought of death. In Psalm 6 the Psalmist pleads for mercy and for the preservation of life, and says in verse 5:

For in death there is no remembrance of thee:
in the grave [Sheol] who shall give thee thanks?

There is no hope here that death might lead to something better, but only despair. A similar thought is in Psalm 30:9,

What profit is there in my blood, when I
go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee?
shall it declare thy truth?

For other expressions of this type, cf. the non-Davidic Psalms 88:10; 115:17; Is. 38:18-19. Another despairing refrain is the one that laments the frailty and temporality of man. Psalm 144:3-4,

LORD, what is man, that thou takest knowledge of him [that Thou hast known him]! or the son of man, that thou makest account of him [that Thou hast thought of him]!

Man is like to vanity [$\text{וְ\text{כִּי} \text{וְ\text{כִּי} \text{וְ\text{כִּי}}$ a breath]:
his days are as a shadow that passeth away.

So also Psalm 103:15-16,

As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

Finally, the heart-rending words of Psalm 39:4-6,

LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee; verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity [surely every man standing is altogether a breath]. Selah.

Surely every man walketh in a vain shew [in an image]: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.

Verse 13: O spare me [Look from me], that I may recover strength [brighten up], before I go hence and be no more.

Those are the negative factors, speaking against any thought that the Old Testament man of God looked forward to an eternal life with God in heaven after death. But the problem is by no means solved by saying that.

There are also four positive factors of interpretation which indicate something different and must also be considered. In the first place, there is the concept of Sheol. Sheol is frequently referred to in those Psalms, as it is in the entire Old Testament, and warrants a brief investigation. The word שְׁאוֹל is sometimes derived from the verb שָׁאַל , to ask, from the fact that Sheol is always asking, demanding all, without distinction. It is probably better to trace the word, with Gesenius, to

שִׁיבָה, a hollow, hence a hollow and subterranean place, from the unused verb שִׁיבָה, which from its derived nouns (שִׁיבָה hollow of the hand, שִׁיבָה, a fox which lives in caverns) seems to have had the sense of hollowness. The following distinctions can be made concerning Sheol:

1. It is sometimes used to mean simply the grave, the place of burial. But this use is rare and dubious. In Psalm 49:14 the Psalmist states that the way of the rich and the wise and the brutish is folly, and as proof of this he says,

Like sheep they are laid in the grave [Sheol]; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave [Sheol] from their dwelling.

This seems to describe simply the grave or sepulchre.

Psalm 141:7 also apparently uses the term Sheol to mean the grave:

Our bones are scattered at the grave's [Sheol's] mouth, as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth.

2. It is a place. Job calls it a "land of deep darkness" (Job 10:21). Isaiah speaks of it as a place having gates: "I shall go to the gates of the grave [Sheol]" (Is. 38:10). And throughout the Old Testament its use indicates that the Old Testament authors had a definite place in mind. Cf. Gen. 37:35; Job 7:9; Ps. 16:10.

3. It is a subterranean place. Numbers 16:30-33 gives the best indication of this in the story of the pun-

ishment of Korah, Dathan and Abiram:

The earth opened her mouth and . . . [they] went down alive into the pit [Sheol], and the earth closed upon them.

Cf. also: Deut. 32:22; Job 11:8; Ps. 55:15; 86:13; 139:8; Is. 14:9; 57:9; Amos 9:2.

4. It is a place where the dead exist. Gen. 37:35 is interesting in this connection. Jacob, at the news of the death of his son said, "I will go down into the grave [Sheol] unto my son, mourning." This gives the impression that Jacob expected to meet his son in the realm of the dead. The use of the term in the Psalter in contrast to life also clearly indicates this: Psalm 30:3,

O LORD, thou hast brought up my soul from the grave [Sheol]: thou hast kept me alive, that I should not go down to the pit.

Cf. Gen. 42:38; 44:29-31; Ps. 89:48; 143:3.

5. All the dead go there, without discrimination. Prov. 30:15-16 gives a graphic picture showing that Sheol receives all the dead:

There are three things that are never satisfied, yea, four things say not, It is enough; The grave [Sheol]; and the barren womb; the earth that is not filled with water; and the fire that saith not, It is enough.

So also Prov. 27:20, "Hell [Sheol] and destruction are never full." The wicked go there (Ps. 9:17, "The wicked shall be turned into hell [Sheol].") Cf. Ps. 55:15.) and also the righteous (Gen. 37:35, Is. 38:10.)

6. It is a place of separation from God. This is

well indicated by the words of Hezekiah in Is. 38:10-11,

I said in the cutting off of my days, I
shall go to the gates of the grave [Sheol]. . .
I said, I shall not see the LORD.

Cf. also Ps. 6:5; 31:47; 49:15; 88:3.5; Is. 38:18.

As such it is a place of unhappiness: Ps. 18:5, "The sorrows of hell [Sheol] compassed me about," (also Ps. 116:3), and a place of punishment, Ps. 9:17, "The wicked shall be turned into hell [Sheol]." (Also Ps. 55:15; 63:9; Num. 16:30-33; Is. 5:14; 14:13-15.)

But even though it is a place of separation from God, it is still subject to God's power. Psalm 139:8,

If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there:
if I make my bed in hell [Sheol], behold, thou
art there.

Cf. also Amos 9:2; Hosea 13:14.

From this it can be seen that the Old Testament faithful did not look upon death as the final end of existence, but thought in terms of an existence continuing even after death. It was not much of an existence, not deserving the name life, gloomy and unhappy, but still an existence. Because they conceived of even this much of an after-life, the concept of Sheol becomes a positive factor in determining their thoughts on the goal of life.

The second positive factor is the Old Testament's view of the nature of life itself. As it was pointed out in Chapter Two, the basic idea of life was that it was a physical manifestation of a fellowship with God. This

EXISTENCE
AFTER
DEATH
-SHEOL-

fact is profound significance when it is related to their view on the goal of life. Those to whom God has given the blessing of life actually receive fellowship with the eternal God. The implication that since the righteous are in fellowship with the eternal God, they too are eternal is not completely lost on the Old Testament man of God. The implication is reflected from a passage such as Psalm 41:12-13:

And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever.

Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.

It is probable that verse thirteen was added to close the first book of the Psalms, but if it is a part of the original Psalm, then the implication of the eternity of man would seem to be drawn directly from the eternity of God. Psalm 16:11 also hints at this implication:

Thou wilt shew me [make me to know] the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

Moreover, as life is a fellowship with God, so death is seen to be a curse of God and a separation from Him. This, too, was pointed out in Chapter Two. In this connection, there needs to be stressed only the fact that death is never viewed as a good thing. It is the fate of the wicked, it is the curse of God, it is separation from Him. Psalm 143:7 speaks of death as a separation from God:

Hear me speedily, O LORD: my spirit fail-
eth: hide not thy face from me, lest I be like
unto them that go down into the pit.

Cf. also the parallel to this in Psalm 28:1. Psalm 69:27-28 cries out against the wicked that they be removed from the righteousness of God and from life:

Add iniquity unto their iniquity: and let
them not come into thy righteousness.
Let them be blotted out of the book of the
living, and not be written with the righteous.

Psalm 55:4-5 speaks of death as a terror and a horror:

My heart is sore pained within me: and the
terrors of death are fallen upon me.
Fearfulness and trembling are come upon me,
and horror hath overwhelmed me.

In this manner, these Psalms consistently speak of death. And yet they knew, as every man knows, that all men die--even the righteous who are in fellowship with the eternal God. There must have existed, then, this constant tension in their mind: Death is a separation from God, and the righteous live in fellowship with God--yet the righteous die. And yet, this tension never seems to create a problem. It is never discussed in these Psalms. Instead there are expressions such as these: Psalm 23:6,

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the
house of the LORD for ever [for length of days].

The Psalmist does not write, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and then I am cast off from God and cursed." The tension is ignored and death creates no problem for him. Also Psalm 103:15-18,

As for man his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth.

For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more.

But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children;

To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them.

Here the vanity of man is lamented and the certainty of death, but the Psalmist immediately speaks of the eternity of Jahweh's mercy on those that fear Him. Again, the tension is ignored, and death creates no problem. The fact that life and death are viewed in this way, and yet the tension this creates causes no problem, makes this a positive factor in determining the Old Testament view on the goal of life.

The third positive factor is closely related to the second, and consists in the very real and genuine love that these Psalms express toward God, a love that is undimmed by the realization that all must die. There are in these Psalms many passages that reveal this love toward God. Psalms expressing love toward God Himself, as Psalm 145:1-2,

I will extol thee, my God, O king; and I will bless thy name for ever and ever.

Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever.

Also Psalm 34:1,

I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

There are Psalms expressing love for God in the worship of the temple as Psalm 122:1,

I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.

Cf. also Ps. 27:4; 65:4. Yet in all these Psalms, never once is the certainty of the curse of death permitted to dim their love for God. Certainly, knowing death to be the curse of God and the fate of the wicked, loving God would be a difficult, if not impossible feat, knowing that all must die. And yet they did love God, thereby revealing a view toward the goal of life that cannot be ignored.

As their love for God reveals a positive attitude toward the end of life, so also their hope and trust in Him. This is the fourth factor that must be considered. They knew death to be a curse of God involving separation from Him, and they knew that all must die. A God who would punish them in the end with the curse of death is hardly a God in whom trust could be placed. And yet they did trust God, and the certainty of their death did not cause a ripple in that trust. Psalm 103:10-14 shows their trust in the mercy of God in spite of their sin, and even in spite of the fact that they were dust and certain to die:

He hath not dealt with us after our sins;
nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

For as the heaven is high above the earth,
so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far
hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

They trusted in the goodness of God, a goodness that extends over all His works, a goodness which apparently even the curse of death cannot destroy: Psalm 145:8-9,

The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy.

The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works.

Some passages in these Psalms express a trust in God that specifically transcends the fear of death. Psalm 39:4-7 is a good example. The futility of life and the certainty of death is the subject, but it ends with an emphatic expression of trust in God:

LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.

Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily man at his best state is altogether vanity [surely every man standing is as a breath]. Selah.

Surely every man walketh in a vain shew [in an image]: surely they are disquieted in vain; he heapeth up riches and knoweth not who shall gather them.

And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.

So also in Psalm 16:8-10, the Psalmist expresses his trust, a trust that God will deliver his soul even from Sheol:

I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved.

Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory [perhaps, liver] rejoiceth; my flesh also shall rest in hope [shall dwell securely].

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [abandon my soul to Sheol]; neither wilt thou

suffer thine Holy One [godly one. Cf. Ps. 4:3; 12:1; 32:6] to see corruption [the pit].

In Psalm 141:7-8 the Psalmist sees the mortality of man and the certainty of death, but lifts his eyes beyond death to God, in trust:

Our bones are scattered at the grave's mouth [mouth of Sheol], as when one cutteth and cleaveth wood upon the earth.

But mine eyes are unto thee, O GOD the Lord: in thee is my trust; leave not my soul destitute.

Psalm 55:15-16.23 shows that trust in God saves from the fate of the wicked:

Let death seize upon them, and let them go down quick [alive] into hell [Sheol]: for wickedness is in their dwellings, and among them.

As for me, I will call upon God; and the LORD shall save me.

But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction [$\text{לְבַיְתָא דְּמַוְתָא}$] to the pit of the grave]: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

For other passages along this line, cf. Psalm 23:6; 31:14-17; 52:5.8; 86:13; 138:8, and the non-Davidic Psalms 49:15; 73:24.

These are the basic factors for discerning these Psalms' view on the goal of life. On the negative side there is the absence of any reference to a heaven; there is the urgent desire to stay alive, a desire unbalanced by a submission to the will of God in the hope of something hereafter; there are the occasional expressions of despair at the thought of death. On the positive side there is

their idea of Sheol, indicating an existence after death, however low a form of existence that might be; there is their basic idea of life as a fellowship with God, since in that fellowship man must be eternal as God is eternal; there is their love of God, genuine and undimmed at the realization that all, even the righteous, must die; there is their hope and trust in God that transcends the certainty of death.

The interpretation that is sometimes offered concerning the Old Testament view of the end of life, namely, that death was regarded as nothingness in Sheol, from which there is no return, practically the same as annihilation, is indeed possible if only the above mentioned negative factors are considered. But such an interpretation would be in contradiction to the positive factors--if death is a nothingness in Sheol from which there is no return, then life can be no real fellowship with the God Who is eternal. Or, if God cuts off that relationship at death and curses even the righteous with an eternal separation from Him, then it would be impossible for these psalmists to have such a fervent love for God and such a confident trust in His mercy and goodness. It is impossible to love and trust in a God whom you know will eventually curse you with separation from Him.

A more plausible solution is that they interpreted death as a happy end if it comes in old age when a man is

"full of years," has experienced all the goodness of life, and is ready to die. With this interpretation, immortality and heaven are completely eliminated and the only goal of life is to live life completely and fully. This interpretation can point to these Psalms' fervent clinging to life for corroboration, for a long life would be their chief goal. Death would correspondingly be viewed as evil only if it came in youth or in the prime of life before a man was ready to die. Psalm 34:12 seems to speak to just this interpretation of the end of life:

What man is he that desireth life, and
loveth many days, that he may see good?

The goal of life is here expressed as length of life and the goodness of it. Also Psalm 37:35-39 speaks in this manner:

I have seen the wicked in great power, and
spreading himself like a green bay tree.
Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not:
yea, I sought him, but he could not be found.
Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright:
for the end [אֲחֵרֵי הַיָּמִים latter time] of that man
is peace.

But the transgressors shall be destroyed to-
gether: the end [אֲחֵרֵי הַיָּמִים latter time] of the
wicked shall be cut off.

But the salvation of the righteous is of the
LORD; he is their strength in the time of trouble.

Here the contrast between the fate of the righteous and the wicked seems to be that the righteous have a peaceful old age, while the wicked are cut off before their time. Or, if אֲחֵרֵי הַיָּמִים is to be translated "posterity," the passage would be interpreted to mean that the only real immortality

that they knew was in their posterity, and the goal of life was to live to a peaceful old age and to have many children to perpetuate their name. Psalm 25:13, describing the blessing of the man that fears God as prosperity and posterity, would be a parallel:

His soul shall dwell at ease [lodge in goodness]: and his seed shall inherit the earth.

Cf. also Psalm 37:28.

But such an interpretation of the goal of life does not regard the consistent view of death as a curse involving a separation from God. If death were a welcome release in old age, then it would have been spoken of as such--but never in these Psalms is there mention of a happy death. Death, as the fate of the wicked, involving separation from God, is always evil, no matter at what age it comes. This is, to be sure, an argument from silence, but, in this case, it bears much weight. Furthermore, the one Psalm whose author confesses to be old (Psalm 37:25, "I have been young and now am old") does not look forward to death. He encourages the righteous, assuring them that they shall "inherit the earth," (v. 3.11.) and contrasting their peaceful old age and seed with the sudden death of the wicked and their seed (v. 28; 35-38) but does not speak of death in any other way but as the fate of the wicked received from the righteous hand of God. Furthermore, the difficult passage in Psalm 17:14-15 speaks disparagingly of posterity

as the final good in life, but finds it in God:

They [the wicked] are full of children [or, are satisfied with children], and leave the rest of their substance to their babes.

As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness.

A long full life with many children was indeed a blessing devoutly to be wished, but to say that they considered this the goal of life, and death nothing more than a peaceful end is to overlook the consistent view of death as the punishment of the wicked involving separation from God, a view which eliminates any interpretation of death as a good and blessed end.

If all the positive factors are properly exploited, the final conclusion as to these Psalms' view of the goal of life is found in their hope and trust in God. It is a trust in God that, as He has been with them in the past, blessed them with peace and prosperity, guarded and protected their lives, so He will be with them in the hour of death and bless and protect them in anything that lies beyond. What does lie beyond they do not know exactly because they had not been told, and it is to the everlasting credit of their faith and dependence on the revelation of God that they did not create an elaborate picture of heaven and hell from the speculations of their own mind. The fact that they do not speak of heaven does not mean that they had no hope for anything good after death, but means only that

they had received no explicit revelation. They trusted in God that no matter what might come after death, He would be with them as He had been with them in life.

The fact that they had received no clear revelation of what lay beyond death resulted also in their earnest desire for the preservation of life. It is readily understandable that a people who knew little or nothing of a life beyond the physical life they were living on earth would cling mightily to it. Whether or not their faith is to be faulted on this account is beside the point. It is enough to understand that their earnest desire to stay alive does not mean that they had no hope for anything good after death. It means only that they clung to the life of which they were sure. Beyond that, they trusted in God that He would be with them in death as He had been with them in life.

The occasional cries of despair in these Psalms are often a corollary to this love of life. When death is seen to be a cessation of the only life they knew, and a separation from God Himself, it is natural that in moments of Anfechtung, when their trust in God was strained, that they should speak of death as the end of all. This is the case in Psalm 6:5 and 30:9. Furthermore, what appears to be a cry of despair is sometimes nothing more than a device to glorify God. Thus in Psalm 144:3-4 the mortality and weakness of man is used simply to contrast the

glory of God, and in Psalm 103:15-16 it is used in contrast to the mercy of God. Or, as in Psalm 39:4-6, it may not be despair at all but rather a meditation on the brevity of life that it might be the better appreciated. In every case they are seen to be not so much despair for anything good after death, but the anguish of a weak faith or a meditation on the frailty of man that redounds to the glory of God.

There are many examples of this trust in God to be with them through death and into whatever lies beyond. Psalm 52:5.8-9 contrasts the fate of the wicked with that of the righteous under the metaphor of trees:

God shall likewise destroy thee [pull thee down] for ever, he shall take thee away, and pluck thee out of thy dwelling place, and root thee out of the land of the living. Selah.

But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: I trust in the mercy of God for ever and ever.

I will praise thee for ever, because thou hast done it: and I will wait on thy name; for it is good before thy saints.

The wicked are rooted up out of the land of the living, but the righteous flourish as an evergreen olive tree. (Cf. Jer. 11:16; Hos. 14:8; Ps. 1:3; 92:12 ff.) Then, realizing that even the righteous must die, he immediately adds that he trusts the mercy of God forever. It is reinforced with verse nine, "I will praise Thee forever, because Thou hast done it." His praise is as eternal as the God who gives him life. There is no vision beyond death,

but simply a fervent grasp on God. Psalm 39:4-7 laments the vanity of life, but ends not on a note of despair, but with a triumphant trust in God: "And now Lord, what wait I for? My hope is in Thee!" Faced with the certainty of death, he clings to God. In Psalm 16:10-11, the Psalmist, knowing full well that all men must die, yet confidently expresses a trust in God that he will not die but live:

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell
[abandon my soul to Sheol]: neither wilt thou
suffer thine Holy One [godly one] to see cor-
ruption [the pit].

Thou wilt shew me [make me to know] the
path of life: in thy presence is fulness of
joy: at thy right hand there are pleasures
for evermore.

Note the expressions used for that life, "in Thy presence," "at Thy right hand," indicating that he views that life as eternal as God, since it is in fellowship with God. Psalm 17:15 can be taken as an expression of hope for a life beyond death:

As for me, I will behold thy face in right-
eousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake,
with thy likeness.

This verse is in contrast to verse fourteen in which the life of the wicked is shown to be self-centered and godless. The righteous live for God, to see His face in righteousness and to be like Him after death. The idea of awaking from death is used also in Job 14:12; Is. 26:19 and Dan. 12:2. But this cannot be pressed, since the Psalm is contrasting the type of life of the wicked and

the righteous, not their final end. "When I awake" would then be used to mean simply "daily" as in Prov. 6:22, and, perhaps, Ps. 139:18. For other passages expressing this hope, cf. Job 19:25; Psalm 49:15; 73:24.

These passages do indicate a trust in God that not even the certainty of death could defeat. But the best evidence that their view of the end of life was a trust in God's continuing grace and mercy lies inherent in the positive factors mentioned earlier in this chapter. Only in this way can the reality of their love for God and their view of death as a curse of separation from God be taken seriously. Death being evil, they could not have loved and trusted in God as they did unless they saw His grace and mercy to the righteous continuing through death into whatever lay beyond. Even more important, this is the only logical conclusion that can be drawn from their basic concept of life as a fellowship with God. Life is a gift of God given to the righteous that they might live with Him; as they are in this fellowship with God, so they will be eternal as He is eternal. This is the final goal and hope of life.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

This study has endeavored to discover the Old Testament concept of life, to show what life meant to the Old Testament man of God, why he thought he was living, and what goal he thought there was in life. Regarding the nature of life, it is seen, by means of the basic principle that only the righteous receive the gift of life from God while the wicked are killed, and by observing the definition of death as a separation from God, that life is not a mere creaturely, biological functioning of an organism, but is itself a religious and spiritual thing, a physical manifestation of a fellowship with the eternal God. The purpose of life was shown to be both theocentric and teleological. Life was lived conscious of the fact that God was their Lord and Master, and, consequently, they lived to worship God, to witness for Him, to love all men, and to find the joy of life with God--all of it theocentric. They were also conscious of the fact that life was not lived to get everything possible out of each individual moment, but was headed toward a goal, a goal toward which they walked throughout life and a goal toward which God led them. What that goal was, was not revealed in detail to these psalmists. But of this they were sure, that the

curse of separation from God involved in death was meant for the wicked and not for the righteous. And though the righteous also die, as do all men, yet God in His mercy and grace would be with them through death into whatever lay beyond as He had been with them throughout life on earth. This is the concept of life revealed in the Psalms of David.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Bible, Holy. Authorized Version.

Briggs, Charles Augustus and Emilie Grace Briggs. "A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms." The International Critical Commentary. I. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906.

Gesenius. Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon. Translated from the German by Samuel Prideaux Tregelles. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1950.

Kirkpatrick, A. F., editor. The Book of Psalms. Cambridge: at the University Press, 1902.

Kittel, Rud., editor. Biblia Hebraica. Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937.

Oesterley, W. O. E. The Psalms. New York: The Macmillan Co., 1939.

Young, Robert. Analytical Concordance to the Bible. Twenty-second revised edition. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1936.