PRAISE AND PROPHECY IN THE PSALTER
AND IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Quotations of and allusions to the Psalter abound in the New Testament. According to the Index of Quotations in the United Bible Societies Greek New Testament there are more than four hundred quotations and allusions. Of these some 130 are quotations, 70 of which are introduced with formulas. It is not hard to see why the Psalter was so important to early Christians. The Royal Psalms readily lent themselves to emerging christology, while the Lament Psalms clarified aspects of Jesus’ Passion and the suffering and persecution many of his followers experienced. Psalms of praise contributed to the early church’s liturgy and thankfulness to God for what had been accomplished in his Son the Messiah Jesus.

The Psalter was understood in early Christian circles as prophetic, much as it was at Qumran, whose scholars produced commentaries (or pesharim) on several Prophets and Psalms. Indeed, the Risen Christ in Luke 24 instructs his disciples concerning all that is written in “the Law and the Prophets and Psalms.” Luke’s grammar here suggests that “Psalms” are closely linked with “the Prophets.”

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3 The Greek reads: δει πληρωθήναι πάντα τά γεγραμμένα ἐν τῷ νόμῳ Μωϋσεως καὶ τοῖς προφήταις καὶ ψαλμοῖς περὶ ἐμοῦ (“everything written about me in the law of Moses and the Prophets and Psalms must be fulfilled”). The RSV translates “… the Prophets and the Psalms …,” which is misleading. There is no definite article preceding “Psalms.” We do not have here an instance of the tripartite canon (i.e. the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings), but only the first two divisions—the Law and the Prophets, the latter of which was understood to include the Psalms. This is probably how the reference in 4QMMT should be
It is not surprising that the Psalter was regarded as inspired and as prophetic. Its association with David was doubtless a major reason for its authoritative reception in early Judaism and Christianity. The tradition of an inspired David reaches back to ancient Scripture. We are told that when David was anointed the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily (cf. 1 Sam 16:13). David and others were said to “prophesy” with musical instruments (cf. 1 Chron 25:1). Probably the most important scriptural tradition refers to inspired utterance (cf. 2 Sam 23:1-2):

1 Now these are the last words of David: The oracle of David, the son of Jesse, the oracle of the man who was raised on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel: 2 “The Spirit of the LORD speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue.”

The tradition of an inspired, even prophetic David grows in the intertestamental period. According to 11QPs\textsuperscript{a} 27:11: “All these he (David) spoke through prophecy which was given him from before the Most High.”\textsuperscript{4} Similarly says Josephus: “the Deity abandoned Saul and passed over to David, who, when the divine spirit had removed to him, began to prophesy” (Ant. 6.8.2 §166). Further evidence of David’s inspiration is seen in healing powers attributed to some of his Psalms that were “for making music over the stricken” (11QPs\textsuperscript{a} 27:10; cf. 1 Sam 16:16-23; 18:10; 19:9; Ps 91:5-6; Tg. Ps 91:5-6).


understood: “We have also written to you that you should examine the book of Moses and the books of the Prophets and David [תנשא כהא וחלאים ויהודית]” (4Q397 frgs. 14–21 line 10).