



SHALOM *in* PSALMS



A DEVOTIONAL *from* THE JEWISH HEART
of THE CHRISTIAN FAITH

JEFFREY SEIF, GLENN BLANK,
AND PAUL WILBUR



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Jeffrey Seif, Glenn Blank, and Paul Wilbur, *Shalom in Psalms*
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The Vision and How It Came Together

The book you have in hand is part of a larger, joint-venture translation project, a collaborative effort of a number of Messianic Jewish scholars, rabbis, and friends.

Messianic Rabbi Mark Greenberg and his wife, Daniah Greenberg, conceived the visionary idea of gathering Messianic scholars from across the broad spectrum of Messianic experience to see if they could work together on a translation. Mark and Daniah wanted it to be Jewish friendly, punctuated with Messianic Jewish nuances, accentuated with Messianic artwork, accurate, readable, and accessible to children—in short, a Messianic Family Bible.

This is no small vision!

The image of a shepherd leading sheep is the task and challenge of pastoral leadership. When it comes to getting scholars together—and Messianic Jewish scholars at that—it might have been more like a shepherd chasing a herd of cats! As they say, two Jews, three opinions!

Could we really do it—assemble a vetted translation representative of the whole Messianic Jewish movement? Yes, because everyone on this project loves the Bible and loves *Yeshua*.

Guided principally, though not exclusively, by the able hands of Rabbi Dr. Jeffrey Feinberg, the New Covenant Scriptures came to life under the title of *The Tree of Life Bible—The New Covenant*. That attended to, and with the first run nearly exhausted not long after it came off the press, we began working on the Older Covenant (*Tanakh*), at which time I was brought on

by Rabbi Mark and Daniah Greenberg to serve as the project manager and vice president.

A team of text managers came together (Rabbi Jeffrey Adler, Rabbi Barney Kasdan, and Dr. Vered Hillel) and, along with several new translators with expertise in ancient Semitic languages, began work on renderings of the Hebrew Bible.

The Tree of Life Version (TLV) translation of the Psalms you have in hand was built on the Jewish Publication Society's 1917 version of the Hebrew Bible, now in the public domain. It had been guided by the able hands of our literary editor, Rabbi Dr. Glenn Blank, developed by a principal translator, Dr. Ihab Griess, double-checked by Dr. Patrice Fischer, and tweaked and approved by our theology committee (constituted then by Dr. Ray Gannon, Dr. Rich Robinson, and Rabbi Jeffrey Adler, and chaired by Rabbi Eric Tokajer). It was then sent to another language expert, Dr. Mordecai Cohen (in Israel), sent back to Dr. Blank, and then sent to Fred Edelstein for a final readability review—all with a mind to leave as good an impression on your mind's eye as possible.

Meanwhile, we also started a Messianic Jewish commentary on the Psalms. I had just recently finished shooting a television series in Israel on the Psalms of Ascent with Zola Levitt Presents and was geared up for psalms as a result. Given the popularity that the Psalms enjoy in the broader culture, often turned to by folk looking for biblical medicine for life's assorted hurts, developing a book to go hand in hand with the new rendering of the Psalms seemed a natural. But just as the translation itself represents the breadth of the Messianic Jewish movement, I didn't want to do the commentary alone.

Who would help me?

Spirited along by the vision of this project, I asked longtime good friend Paul Wilbur if he'd be willing to come alongside me and assist with commentary on the Psalms. He's a well-known artist—surely everyone in the Messianic movement and much of the Christian world knows and loves his music and gift for worship. I figured some might want to know more of his mind on the Psalms too. In this volume you will hear Paul the scholar as well as Paul the worshiper.

Messianic Rabbi Dr. Glenn Blank is less known to the broader world, yet he faithfully serves the Lord behind the scenes. He is one of the longest-running team members in the translation project and arguably the hardest working. He

brings to the project valuable expertise in linguistics and literary theory. Given all the hard work he has done to make us all look good, I wanted readers to experience Glenn speaking in his own voice, as well as cleaning up all of ours.

In sum, though I conceived the idea of writing a Psalms devotional commentary, the book you have in hand was a team effort of talented people who give all the praise back to the Lord. My hope is that what has come from our hearts and minds will go to your minds and hearts—that you will find it useful for study and even more so for prayer. Above all, I hope that you'll hear God's heart for you, not only as you open up God's Word but also as you open yourself to it. My prayer is that you will hear Him speak to you in ways that make a difference for you.

Thank you for trusting us with the task of translating and commenting on God's Word for you.

Blessings,
Jeffrey Seif, DMin

A Worship Leader's Introduction to the Psalms

The book of Psalms has long been a source of encouragement and comfort for all who journey into its pages. The songs of the psalmists (not all are written by David) reveal many aspects not only of the writers but of the Author of all Scripture as well. As a teacher/songwriter/worship leader, I often refer to these verses for much more than just writing material—they are words of life to all who find them. There are psalms of healing and deliverance, prophetic songs that found their ultimate fulfillment in Israel's Messiah, songs of His presence and protection, and so much more.

Psalms 22:4 declares that *ADONAI* inhabits and is enthroned upon the praises of His people; Psalm 16:11 tells us that in His presence there is fullness of joy with pleasure at His right hand; and Nehemiah adds that the joy of the Lord is our strength (8:10). So I would like to encourage you with this spiritual truth—those who begin in praise will continue in joy and most certainly will finish strong. This book of meditations on the Psalms has been compiled not only for your edification but with the sincere desire for you to receive revelation that will inspire and provoke you to love and good deeds.

I pray that the Holy One of Israel who breathed these words into the psalmists so many years ago will revive them in your heart with insight and revelation so that you may finish strong!

Blessings and shalom,
Paul Wilbur

A Literary Editor's Introduction to the Psalms

The word *psalm* comes from a Greek word meaning a song to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument. Many of the psalms do refer to harp and lyre. It came to mean a song of praise, from which comes the Hebrew name of the book, *Tehillim*. Praise is indeed a major theme, though many psalms sing other notes, such as intercessory cries, laments, complaints, vows, sacrifices, and repentance. Yet even the songs of anguish or sorrow or questioning almost always return to God's praise.

The collection of psalms developed over hundreds of years. In the tenth century BCE, David and his court composed a core collection, likely including Psalms 3–16, 51–71, and 130–145. Levitical musicians who led Temple worship added more, notably Asaph contributing 73–83 and the sons of Korah providing 42–49 and 84–88. Royal psalms celebrated important public events during the reigns of David's descendants, such as a coronation (2), wedding (45), and Temple petitions on his behalf (20, 72, 89, 132, 144). Also scattered through the collection are hymns exalting the wisdom of *Torah* (1, 15, 19, 34, 37, 53, 73, 78, 94, 111, 112, 119, 139), possibly first inspired by the discovery of the scroll of Deuteronomy during the reign of Josiah. Other psalms (74, 79, 126, 137) mourn the destruction of the first Temple in 586 BCE. Sometime after the exile and the building of the Second Temple, the book of Psalms took its present form of five divisions or books (1–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, and 107–150), each ending with a brief doxology or exaltation of God. One possible explanation for the five books is to parallel the five books of the *Torah*.

Psalms are poems sung or chanted in the Temple. We encourage you to read them aloud or make up new melodies to chant them, as the *Ruach HaKodesh* leads. Enjoy the vivid imagery, the emotional pathos, the building up of ideas, and the ebb and flow of feelings. Rather than rhymes, Hebrew poetry uses parallelism, where two lines of a verse build on the same meaning as in, for example, Psalm 27:1:

ADONAI is my light and my salvation:
whom should I fear?
ADONAI is the stronghold of my life:
whom should I dread?

Or two lines of a verse may contrast in meaning as in, for example, Psalm 27:10:

Though my father and my mother forsake me,
ADONAI will take me in.

The poets are not rigid about it, however: the second line may develop the idea in the first, or the first line may illustrate an idea in the second as in, for example, Psalm 42:2:

As the deer pants for streams of water,
so my soul pants for You, O God.

The psalms teach us many different ways to pray. Many prayers are deeply personal, reflecting circumstances in the lives of David and other ancient *kedoshim*, to which we can still relate today. Others are corporate, calling us to honor our God as a community. The Levites sang psalms designated for services in the morning, evening, or the watches of night, as well as for festivals and appointed times. Thanksgiving ushers us through the gates of His sanctuary. Praise affirms our trust in His promises and His power to protect us. Worship urges all people and all creation to exalt Him with all our being. Petitions raise our voice in times of trouble or trial, sickness or slander, persecution or poverty. Wisdom urges us to trust in God's ways, confess sin and do good, seek answers to difficult questions such as why evil people prosper while good people suffer in this life, and reaffirm God's faithfulness to those who wait patiently on Him.

There are a few technical terms in the Psalms that are difficult to translate. Some appear in the introductory verses, such as *miktam* and *shiggaion*. These terms may indicate musical instruments or poetic genres. In some cases, we provide translations that we believe are plausible though not definitive. The word *Selah*, which appears in the body of many psalms, is untranslatable; it may indicate a musical interlude or a poetic break in a song.

The psalms are a tremendous source of hope and consolation. Again and again they assure us that the God of Israel prizes His people, forgives the sinful, and will ultimately deliver the faithful, culminating in a confidence that God will give eternal joy to His *kedoshim*. The ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah were but a foretaste of the glorious kingdom of God. Most wonderfully, the psalms contain many prophetic hints about the coming Messiah, the promised seed of David, the priest according to the order of Melchizedek, the suffering servant, and the triumphant savior and Lord.

Glenn David Blank, PhD



PSALM 1



Torah Is a Tree of Wisdom

- ¹ Happy is the one who has not walked in the advice of the wicked,
nor stood in the way of sinners,
nor sat in the seat of scoffers.
- ² But his delight is in the *Torah* of *ADONAI*,
and on His *Torah* he meditates day and night.
- ³ He will be like a planted tree over streams of water,
producing its fruit during its season.
Its leaf never droops—
but in all he does, he succeeds.
- ⁴ The wicked are not so.
For they are like chaff that the wind blows away.
- ⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand during the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.
- ⁶ For *ADONAI* knows the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked leads to ruin.

Jeffrey Seif and Glenn Blank

Though the first word is often translated “blessed,” our preference for “happy” derives from the core meaning of this Hebrew word, אֲשְׁרֵי, *ashrei*. “Blessed” sounds more religious than need be. Everyone wants to be happy—the religious and nonreligious alike—yet not everyone abides religious language or even believes in a personal God who is willing to help people be happy. *Ashrei* is not a giddy or jolly feeling but a calm contentment. The “delight” that one feels from meditating on the *Torah* (2) is a satisfying *shalom*, secure in one’s

relationship with *HaShem*. Israel's ancient and inspired songbook attests to a gracious God, predisposed to shine His favor upon those who live value-centered and virtuous lives, who follow the counsel of the wise rather than "the advice of the wicked" (1). Because God knows their ways (6), the righteous will be rewarded accordingly (3). Is that good news for you? Are you looking beyond the present for better things in *olam haba*, the world to come? Godly wisdom (for this is the first of many wisdom poems in the Psalter) knows about a happiness that comes with trusting faithfulness, drawing life from the Spirit of God and "producing its fruit during its season" (3)—which looks and tastes like His Spirit, with the sap of patience, kindness, and faithful love. On the other hand, manipulative and perverse scoffers are promised no such abiding happiness, their futures blown away in the wind (4). In the Hebrew Bible, a kindly disposed and just God dispenses His grace in accordance with how we "walk" or live our lives, step-by-step (1). If you share in the righteousness of Messiah, you can take heart, even in difficult times. For a righteous person is "like a tree planted by the waters," so firmly rooted that "its leaves will be green" even in a time of drought (see Jer. 17:8). That's something better and more enduring than whatever is trendy or "hot" today. That's good news from the Hebrew Bible, which is God's news for all.

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Coronation of Messianic King

- ¹ Why are the nations in an uproar,
and the peoples mutter vanity?
- ² The kings of earth set themselves up^a
and rulers conspire together^b against *ADONAI*
and against His Anointed One^c:
- ³ "Let's rip their chains apart,
and throw their ropes off us!"

a. 2:2. Hebraically, *usurping power*.

b. 2:2. cf. Mark 3:6.

c. 2:2. Heb. *Mashiach*, or *Messiah*. cf. John 1:41.

- ⁴ He who sits in heaven laughs!
ADONAI mocks them.
- ⁵ So He will speak to them in His anger,
 and terrify them in His fury:
- ⁶ “I have set up My king
 upon Zion, My holy mountain.”
- ⁷ I will declare the decree of *ADONAI*.
 He said to me: “You are My Son—
 today I have become Your Father.”^d
- ⁸ Ask Me, and I will give the nations as Your inheritance,
 and the far reaches of the earth as Your possession.
- ⁹ You shall break the nations with an iron scepter.^e
 You shall dash them in pieces like a potter’s jar.”^f
- ¹⁰ So now, O kings, be wise,
 take warning, O judges of the earth!
- ¹¹ Serve *ADONAI* with fear,
 and rejoice with trembling.
- ¹² Kiss the Son, lest He become angry,
 and you perish along your way—
 since His wrath may flare up suddenly.
 Happy is everyone taking refuge in Him!

Glenn Blank

In America, after all the campaigns and elections are over, the succession from one president to another is peaceful and orderly. For that and more, we must thank God for George Washington. But it was not so for ancient kings. We need only look at the plotting and scheming among David’s sons and their supporters (1 Kings 1:5–53). It could have ended up in bitter and bloody war had not the prophet Nathan and wise old King David intervened to arrange the coronation of the young Solomon. After Solomon, though, things got worse, with Rehoboam and Jeroboam splitting the kingdom of Israel in two (1 Kings 12).

If much was at stake then, how much more so when we consider the crowning of David’s greater Son, the Anointed One (מָשִׁיחַ, *Mashiach*)? Much was

d. 2:7. cf. Matt. 3:17.

e. 2:9. cf. Rev. 12:5; 19:15.

f. 2:9. cf. Rev. 2:27.

at stake then for everyone in the kingdom, and much is at stake for us as we look for Messiah to establish His kingdom on earth. The power brokers of this world are in a raucous tumult (1), rallying supporters and conspiring for one of their own choosing against the choice of the royal Father (2), and complaining about conditions left by the past regime (3). Suddenly the scene soars to heaven, where *HaShem* scoffs at the rabble-rousers (4) and makes it clear that He alone will determine the new king (6).

Then He turns His attention to address His chosen One, the Son (7). In ancient times, it was common to think of a king as a son of the gods. But something more is happening here: as the Father proclaimed at His immersion, *Yeshua* is His one and only beloved Son. If David could promise the surrounding nations as an inheritance to Solomon, God alone can promise all nations as the inheritance of *Mashiach*. A time is coming when the power brokers of this world will finally “be wise” (10), serve with fear and trembling (11), and kiss the royal Son in humble homage (12).

Whose side are you on? If you have not put your trust in the royal Son, fear the wrath of His coming judgment! But if you have, rejoice, for His kingdom and His grace will endure forever!

❄❄❄❄❄❄❄❄❄❄ PSALM 3 ❄❄❄❄❄❄❄❄❄❄

Magen David

- ¹ A Psalm of David, when he fled from his son Absalom.
² *ADONAI*, how many are my foes!
 Many are rising up against me!
³ Many are saying to my soul:
 “There is no deliverance for him in God.” *Selah*
⁴ But You, *ADONAI*, are a shield around me,
 my glory and the lifter of my head.
⁵ I cry out to *ADONAI* with my voice,
 and He answers me from His holy mountain. *Selah*
⁶ I lie down and sleep.
 I awake—for *ADONAI* sustains me.
⁷ I will not be afraid of ten thousands of people all around
 who have taken their stand against me.

- ⁸ Arise, *ADONAI*! Deliver me, my God!
 For You strike all my enemies on the cheek.
 You shatter the teeth of the wicked.
- ⁹ Deliverance belongs to *ADONAI*.^a
 Let Your blessing be on Your people. *Selah*

Glenn Blank

Have you ever been in a tight spot? Have you ever felt like someone was giving you a tough time, way beyond anything you deserve? You cry out to God for help, and you wonder if He hears you? David was in such a situation when he was fleeing from the rebellion of Absalom his son (1)—not to mention when he was fleeing from Saul earlier in his life. Yet David doesn't focus on Absalom or Saul or any other human adversary in his cry to God. His foes rising up against him loom larger than the particular humans who were chasing him. These foes were challenging God Himself. If "there is no deliverance for him in God" (3), to whom can he turn? David seemed to understand, as he saw "ten thousands . . . who have taken their stand against me" (7), that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but . . . against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). In such a struggle, you can only cry out to *HaShem* and take your stand in Him, taking up the shield of faith (Eph. 6:16). Then you will know that He alone is "a shield [מגן, *magen*] around me, my glory and the lifter of my head" (4). He alone is your security, when you lie down and when you rise up. He alone is your "deliverance" (3, 9) or salvation—יְשׁוּעָה, *yeshuah*. (This word—which became the Name of Salvation in person—appears over sixty times in Psalms alone.) Remember that your tight spot is a temporary trial, but your יְשׁוּעָה is from the holy mountain and your glory is from the Eternal One.

a. 3:9. cf. Rev. 7:10.