

Another Support For Thirtle's Theory for the Psalm Titles

I believe the superscriptions & subscriptions in the psalter are part of the original text and, thus, they are inspired. James Thirtle was an early 20th century theologian who popularized the idea that the psalm titles, the way they are divided in our English bibles today, are inaccurate.

For example, many psalms have the phrase “for the choir director” as the first phrase that is mentioned in the psalm’s superscription (the title of the psalm). Thirtle believes, and rightly so, that this phrase “for the choir director” should not be the first phrase of the title of a psalm but rather it should be the first phrase of the subscription (the conclusion of the psalm) of the preceding psalm.

An example may help to illustrate this.

Psalm 55

Superscription:

For the choir director; on stringed instruments. A Maskil of David

The text of the Psalm (all 23 verses)

If Thirtle’s theory is applied, it would be slightly rearranged as follows:

Psalm 54

Superscription

A Maskil of David; when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, ‘Is not David hiding himself among us?’

The text of the Psalm (all 7 verses)

Subscription

For the choir director; on stringed instruments.

Psalm 55

Superscription

A Maskil of David

The text of the Psalm (all 23 verses)

Subscription

For the choir director; according to Jonath elem rehokim (lit. *The silent dove of those who are far off*)

In Psalm 55 and 56, we find another reason why Thirtle’s theory proves to be correct. Psalm 55:6 contains David’s prayer that if he had wings like a dove (*Jonath*) he would fly away and be at rest.

Interestingly, the way the English bibles today have the beginning of Psalm 56 as “For the choir director; according to Jonath elem rehokim...” is one evidence that these psalm headings are slightly switched. Rather than this phrase (“For the choir director; according to Jonath elem rehokim...”) being the *superscription* (=psalm title) of Psalm 56, it should rightly be the *subscription* (=psalm conclusion) of Psalm 55. How rightly would this fit as David spoke in the psalm of having the wings of a “dove” (*Jonath*) to fly away for safety. And the very melody that he composed this poem to was the *Jonath elem rehokim* (the ‘dove’ [*Jonath*] of those who are far off).

This provides one additional small detail to further enhance the conclusion that Thirtle’s theory of the rearranging of the Psalm titles is, in fact, correct. (See Habakkuk 3 for a similar “Psalm” and note how the beginning of the song and the end of the song fits Thirtle’s theory precisely.)