

Asterius On Psalm 11 Homily 2

As is well known, the tenth century Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT) used for modern Bible translations has 150 psalms whereas the Psalter in the Septuagint (LXX) has 151 psalms. This homily is based on Psalm 11 LXX which is Psalm 12 MT.

Most psalms have a title or superscription which may include names of composers or people to whom a psalm is committed, situational details, genre, and liturgical directions.¹ Whether these superscriptions were part of the original composition is unknown. In any case, the superscriptions are incorporated into the psalm text in the Hebrew MT, such that when the text was versified in the sixteenth century, they were counted as the first verse. This incorporation is already evident in some of the psalm fragments found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. For example, the oldest fragment 4QPs^a (= 4Q83, mid second century BCE) shows 'no special separation between title and text'.² More tellingly, 4QpPs^a (= 4Q171 *Peshar Psalms*) which contains commentary on Psalm 45, includes commentary on its superscription, as if it were part of the psalm proper.³ Early Christians who used the LXX also considered the psalm title or superscription to be part of scripture and would exegete it as such.

The superscription for Psalm 11 LXX in the Hebrew MT reads: 'To the leader: according to The *Sheminith*. A Psalm of David.' In the Greek LXX it reads: 'To the end, upon the eighth. A Psalm of David'.⁴ Asterius spends considerable time in the first part of the homily expounding this title, and in particular the significance of the eighth day in redemption history. He ends this section with the portion I have translated below. After this, Asterius picks up the next verse in Psalm 11 LXX – 'Save me Lord, for the godly man has failed' –and continues explaining the psalm, line by line, but rather more quickly.

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¹ In the Hebrew MT, 117 have a superscription, 125 if one counts 'Hallelujah' as a title in the Hallel psalms (Pss 113-118).

² Patrick W. Skehan, *The Qumran Manuscripts and Textual Criticism* (VTSuppl 4; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1956), 154. For appraisal, text and translation of 4QPs^a (= 4Q83) see Peter W. Flint and Andrea E. Alvarez, "The Oldest of the Psalm Scrolls: The Text and Translation of 4QPs^a," in *The Scrolls and the Scriptures: Qumran Fifty Years After*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Craig A. Evans (JSPSup 26; Roehampton Institute London Papers 3; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 142-169.

³ James H. Fraser, "The Authenticity of Psalm Titles" (MTh Thesis, Grace Theological Seminary, 1984), 16. For text of 4QpPs^a (= 4Q171) see Florentino García Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, 2nd. (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 206.

⁴ The reasons for this apparent discrepancy need not concern us here.

Translation

13. On the eighth day he was raised from the dead. *For the end, upon the eighth,*¹ when the end of the world became the beginning of the world and since death was cut off² on the eighth. *For the end, upon the eighth,* when also on the second eighth he appeared to Thomas and cut off³ his disbelief by belief.⁴ For the one who said ‘*unless I put my hand in his side*’,⁵ used the sight alone of Christ as a knife⁶ and cut off disbelief,⁷ and believing in him he said, ‘*my Lord and my God*.’⁸

14. *Eight days after the resurrection Jesus came to the disciples when the doors were shut and stood among them and said: ‘Peace be with you.’*⁹ For the enemy death, by [his] death had been put to death. *Then he said to Thomas: ‘Put your hand in my side,*¹⁰ not to pierce my side with a spear as the soldier, but (so that) you may receive the blood and water from my side in your mind, and learn why the blood and water came out, the two witnesses of the lord-killers: the blood in order to convict the Jews who said; ‘*His blood be on us and on our children*’;¹¹ the water, in order to accuse Pilate, who taking water and washing his hands, as innocent an innocent and righteous [man] scourged and crucified.¹² Put your finger, Thomas and put your hand, first your finger and thus your hand. First *taste that the lord is good,*¹³ [he] who while [you were] disbelieving did not beat you, and so receive the bread of life. And so Thomas had not yet tasted,¹⁴ and immediately blurted out the confession: ‘*And Thomas replied, saying to him: “My Lord and my God”*’.¹⁵

¹ Ps 11 (=12):1 LXX. Other translations possible, e.g. ‘concerning completion, over the eighth’; ‘for the end, concerning the eighth’.

² The verb used here is περιτέμνω (*peritemnō*) ‘cut around, cut away’. It can also mean ‘circumcise’, which in some contexts connotes conversion.

³ See note 2.

⁴ Or ‘by faith’.

⁵ John 20:25.

⁶ Or ‘sword’.

⁷ See note 2.

⁸ John 20:28.

⁹ John 20:26.

¹⁰ John 20:27. Lit. ‘Bring your hand to my side’.

¹¹ Matt 27:25

¹² Cf. Matt 27:24.

¹³ Ps 33:9 (=34:8 MT) LXX cf. 1 Pet 2:3. The verb used here is γεύω (*geuō*) ‘give a taste of’; mid. ‘taste, feel, make proof of’.

¹⁴ The verb γεύω (*geuō*) again. See note 13.

¹⁵ John 20: 28.