

## *Psalms: Hermeneutics*

### **Hermeneutical Observations**

- Since Christians for generations have almost instinctively turned to the Psalter in times of need, perplexity, or joy
  - There is a hesitation to offer a ‘hermeneutics of the psalms’ lest they be stripped of their emotional impact
- Nevertheless, some observations are in order
  - Hopefully to make them still a greater joy to read, sing, and pray
- How do these words spoken *to* God function for us as a word *from* God?
  - Precisely in the ways they functioned for Israel in the first place
  - As opportunities to speak to God with the help of words He inspired others to use to speak to Him in times past

### **Basic Benefits of the Psalms**

1. The psalms can serve as a guide to worship
  - The worshiper who seeks to praise God or to appeal to God or to remember God’s benefits can use the psalms as a formal means of expression of his or her thoughts and feelings
  - A psalm is a carefully composed literary preservation of words designed to be spoken
  - When a psalm touches on a topic or a theme that we wish to express to the Lord, it can help us express our concerns despite our own lack of skill to find the right words
2. The psalms demonstrate to us how we can relate honestly to God
  - They do not so much provide doctrinal instruction as they give, by example, instruction in the godly articulation of even the strongest feelings
3. The psalms demonstrate the importance of reflection and meditation on that which God has done for us
  - They invite us to:
    - Prayer
    - Meditation: Controlled thinking on and discussion of God’s Word
    - Reflect on fellowship with other believers
  - Such actions help shape in us a life of purity and charity
4. The psalms, like no other literature, lift us to a position where we can commune with God
  - Capturing a sense of the greatness of His kingdom and of what living with our heavenly Father for eternity will be like

### **A Caution**

- The psalms do not guarantee a pleasant life
- It is an over-literalization of the language of the psalms to infer from some of them that God promises to make believers happy and their lives trouble-free
  - David did not have this experience, despite his expression of God’s blessing in the strongest terms
- The psalms, taken as a whole, remind us that God deserves praise for His greatness and goodness in spite of and in the midst of our misery