

Psalms: An Introduction

What are the Psalms?

- “A collection of inspired Hebrew prayers and hymns”

Difficulties with the Psalms

- Because of their poetic features of rhyme and repetitive meter, they present special difficulties for understanding
 - Especially because Hebrew poetry takes very different forms than traditional English poetry
 - And these forms can be lost in translation
 - And yet, the poetic form makes them more memorable
- Unlike most of the rest of Scripture, they are words about or to God from people
 - Normally Scripture is words from God to people
 - And yet are still inspired by God
 - Since they are not propositions, imperatives, or stories that get us in touch with God’s story, they do NOT *primarily* function for the teaching of doctrine or moral behavior
- Yet, they are profitable when used for the purposes intended by God:
 - To help us express ourselves to God and to consider His ways
 - Including joy and sorrow
 - Success and failure
 - Hope and regret
 - They help us to engage in true worship in every aspect of human experience
- Because of these difficulties, we frequently apply the psalms poorly
 - They are not all easy to follow logically
 - Or apply to our context as readily
 - Ex.) Ps. 23
 - In its symbolism, God is portrayed as a shepherd & the psalmist (and us) as His sheep (with all the implications of that expression)

What do we do with:

- Psalms like Ps. 88 which is thoroughly negative throughout and seems to express the misery of the speaker?
 - Is there a place for that to be used in a church service? Or is it for private use only?
- Psalms that tell of Israel’s history and God’s blessings on it?
 - Can a modern Christian make good use of it? Or is it only for Jewish use?
- Psalms that predict the coming of Messiah?
- Psalms that praise the benefits of wisdom?
- Psalms that discuss the glory of Israel’s human kings?
- Ps. 137 (and others like it) which declares the desire that Babylonian infants should be dashed against the rocks (v. 8-9)?