



nightchurch encouragement groups *briefing night* term 3, 2011 an introduction to Psalms

the collection of psalms

The book of Psalms is a collection of songs & poems written over some centuries by a number of different authors. Ps 90 is attributed to Moses. Other psalms may have come from this period but most of the psalms were written in the period from David to the exile.

The collection of psalms are not in chronological order or grouped thematically. You won't find similar psalms necessarily together. The psalms are divided into five books, probably to remind us of the Pentateuch but we're not sure. Each book ends with a praise psalm and the last book ends with 5 great praise psalms bringing the whole collection to a climactic conclusion.

Book 1 (1-41) and, to a lesser extent, Book 2 (42-72) are dominated by psalms headed 'a psalm of David', while Book 3 (73-89) consists mostly of psalms associated with Levites like Asaph and the sons of Korah. Book 3 includes many individual and communal laments expressing puzzlement at God's ways. Book 4 (90-106) has several psalms of God the universal King and Book 5 (107-150), climaxes with a great praise series.

reading the psalms

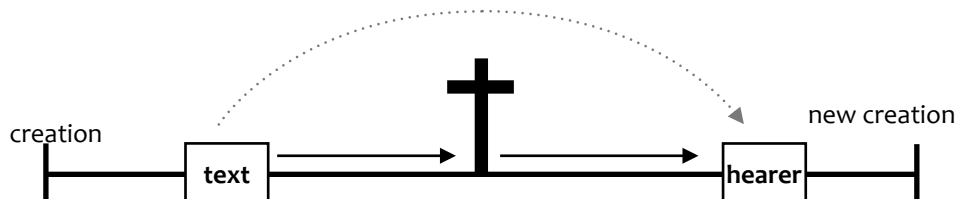
In the unfolding story of God's redemption of the world, the psalms allow us to hear the reflections of various poets on what has happened so far. They are expressions of faith & worship in the midst of real circumstances. They show how the ideal Israelite could & should respond to the Lord. They show faith expressed as prayer & praise. Interestingly, the Psalms are human words to and about God that are also God's word to us!

Within the Psalms we find the great themes of creation, redemption, covenant, law, holy war, the land, the temple, the king, human suffering & persecution, the faithfulness of God, and the hope of future salvation. The Psalms reflect upon the saving deeds of God and upon human failings. They describe the disintegration of the kingdom and the longing for the day when God will act to save his people. Some of the psalms rehearse salvation history, others extol God's greatness, others cry out in distress with a longing for restoration.

The psalms present the righteous one, the faithful Israelite, an ideal figure who is introduced in Psalm 1. Its important to realise that every Israelite was to be a "son of God" (Ex 4.22) but in time the king, as the representative of the people, was given the title the "Son of God" (2Sam 7.14). In the same way, in the psalms, the king is expected be the ultimate faithful Israelite. Its no accident that Psalm 2 presents this king immediately after Psalm 1's presentation of the ideal Israelite.

reading the psalms as Christians

All this helps us to know how to read the psalms as Christians. Jesus, the ideal Israelite & ultimate King, fulfils each psalm and indeed the whole collection. This means that rather than apply each psalm directly to us we must read the psalm through the saving events of the death & resurrection of Jesus.



In the psalms the faithful/godly one/righteous one, is firstly Christ and only then of those who are redeemed in Christ. In the psalms, the struggle of the righteous/godly/faithful one is firstly the struggles of Christ and only then of those who are in Christ. etc. In our studies we'll find repeated questions such as:-

What does this psalm teach us about the Lord God? How does this psalm anticipate Jesus? How does belonging to Jesus connect us to this psalm? How should this psalm impact our thinking & living? These questions will hopefully help us read the psalms correctly as Christians.

enjoying the psalms

We mustn't read the psalms in the same way that we read an epistle or narrative or prophecy. They have their own unique style.

"Most emphatically the Psalms must be read as poems; as lyrics, with all the licences and all the formalities, the hyperboles, the emotional rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry." (C.S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 1958 p3)

One common poetic technique that we find in the Psalms is Parallelism- ie. saying the same thing twice in different words.

Read Psalm 13

How would you describe the emotion of this psalm?

What does this psalm teach us about the Lord God?

How does this psalm anticipate Jesus?

How does belonging to Jesus connect us to this psalm?

How should this psalm impact our thinking & living?