

THE PSALMS

A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY

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PREFACE

The Psalms have always been a special book for both Jews and Christians. In Biblical times they formed the very backbone of Israel's worship to their God. For the Church the Psalms have been used in various ways – Christians have used them for their worship over the centuries, but also to inform them as they created additional liturgical expressions of worship.

In our day, however, Christian worship uses the Psalms only in marginal ways. Many hymns of the Protestant Church have obviously gone to the Psalms for their doctrinal content, at least until modern times. In our present culture, however, we've taken another route and know little (or care little!) for what the Psalms are really saying. Most churches in fact have even dispensed with the old hymns of Church tradition. We now occasionally use the book for devotional literature, and only a few passages at that. Psalms describes an ancient culture that we don't understand anymore. In fact most of the subject material of the Psalms would offend modern churchgoers, with its apparently vengeful and warlike God who focused on things that mean nothing to us.

What we've seemed to have missed in our modern age is that the Psalms were written not by man but by God. David and his students wrote down what God revealed to them. David saw the living God; he heard the worship of Heaven just as, for example, the Apostle John did as recorded in his book of the Revelation. He learned how to approach Israel's God, and what issues were on God's heart. He was passionate about God's will being fulfilled on earth. He knew what the congregation had to do to please their God; he wrote things that would truly glorify God. The Lord put David in this critical place in history just for this very purpose.

So the Psalms aren't an option for God's people, they were mandated for them. If we want to please God, this is how we must worship him. It's a pattern for the entire Church – past, present and future.

All this he [*God*] made clear to me in writing from the hand of the LORD, all the work to be done according to the plan. (1 Chronicles 28:19)

So today's worship leaders, when they formulate a new kind of worship reflecting our present culture's fads, are ignoring God's commands – to their spiritual harm. We may be enjoying ourselves, but we aren't going to get anywhere with God if we don't approach him according to his commands.

But a large part of this spiritual disconnect between us and God is that we don't understand the issues involved. David was working with a thousand years of Israel's history through its rich relationship with God. We can't ignore the Old

Testament; we have to go back and learn its lessons, and then David's Psalms are going to make more sense to us.

The purpose of this Commentary is to bring out that rich spiritual heritage of Israel's history and watch David use it in his worship, both for individuals and for the congregation. We need to take seriously the fact that these concepts form the eternal foundation for Christ's Church. David wasn't just seeing God in Heaven, he was following the eternal Son who stands before his Father and glorifies him in a way that is pleasing to him. Our great High Priest taught David and others what life in God's presence is really like, and what our high calling is as we congregate around the throne of God.

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