

Monday Evening Bible Reading Group: Some thoughts on the Psalms

Paula Gooder: Journalling the Psalms: A guide for reflection and prayer: The Psalms contain some of the most beautiful lines in Scripture: lines that inspire and comfort us when we need them most and draw us into a life of prayer and praise.....They take us on a rollercoaster of emotion, from joy to anguish, from praise to fury, from deep calm to utter torment.... The Psalter was designed for public worship....Ask yourself what the Psalm you are reading might be saying to you.

Bible from Scratch: The hymn book of Israel: 150 songs expressing faith, hope and love, and also fear, rage and despair. Rather than rhyme, Hebrew poetry uses ideas: the ideas are set out with repetition, expansion or contrast. This is the longest book in the Bible. The Psalms are being real with God. For private prayer and public worship. Quiet and noisy. Closely connected with music. Martin Luther said the Book of Psalms could be called a little Bible – containing in brief and beautiful form all that is to be found in the whole Bible. Owes a lot to King David 1010-970 BC. Most popular part of the Old Testament among Christians.

Idiot's Guide to the Bible: About 75 of the Psalms are David Psalms. A number of the Psalms connect with the Jesus story, e.g. Psalm 110. (The New Testament writers knew their Psalms.) The Psalms lift us above the mundane world. Important themes are the endurance of God's love, and the "King" theme. Psalms written from 1200 BC to 580 BC. They express the inexpressible.

The Psalms: A Commentary for Prayer and Reflection: Henry Wansbrough: There is a lot we don't know about the Psalms. They are the most striking part of a Middle Eastern tradition, and some are based on ancient Canaanite hymns to the old gods. Songs of mercy. Songs of exile: no king and no Temple; with the Law becoming the dominant theme. Pilgrim Psalms. The Hebrew originals tended to be craggy rather than melodic. 2 centuries BC the Greek translation (Septuagint – 70 authors) went for a more melodic style, and made some changes to the numbering.

The Wisdom of the Psalms: Philip Law and Terry Waite: Greek and Roman Churches went through all Psalms once a week. C of E aimed for once a month. Some people read all psalms once a day. They have been the pop songs of their day: sung in the fields. Christian perspective changes reading of some Psalms: a different picture of God. You can make them specific for your needs, e.g. Psalm 3 was recommended in the wake of the Spanish Armada; and Psalm 2 verse 11 was highlighted for the 1750 English earthquake.

People's Bible Commentary: St Augustine's conversion owed a lot to the Psalms. To enter into the meaning of the Psalms, we need to take off our sandals! Imagination is needed. Don't look for logic. An intimate relationship with God. A strong sense of community. Worship context. The righteousness of God, and the loving compassion of God.

The Meaning of the Psalms: Michael Wilcocks: To read the whole Psalter is a good strategy. Think of the Psalter as a book of photographs.

Psalms: A B Rhodes: These lyric poems spring from encounters with God. The first disciples in gaol sang the psalms from memory. [Terry Waite likewise.] Other Middle Eastern songs were more mythological, and polytheistic. More emphasis on sin and forgiveness than in previous songs. In Hebrew, the title of the collection is People's PRAISES. Traditionally 5 sections, originally probably 3. Focus on God activity: creation, salvation, kingly reign, judgement, election/choice, revelation. God is righteous, holy, faithful, loving.

The Psalms: Arthur Weiser: Most of the psalms are pictures without a frame – in other words, we don't know their context for certain. The Reformation drew a lot on the psalms. [Interesting, inasmuch as so did the monasteries and the liturgies!] The psalms are reflective, but are grounded in lived experience. There are psalm types, but there is diversity within those types. Hymns, laments, thanksgiving, blessings and curses, wisdom and teaching. The titles were added later. There are other psalms elsewhere in the Old Testament; and the New Testament Psalms are based on the Old Testament Psalms. A long process of creation. They have enriched and shaped/challenged the life of the Church, and the lives of individual believers.

Tom Wright: Finding God in the Psalms: Sing, Pray, Live: Full of power and passion, horrendous misery, and unrestrained jubilation, tender sensitivity and powerful hope. If the psalms had been lost and were now discovered, they would feature on the front page of every newspaper in the world.

A personal reflection: *Every part of every Psalm is worth reading. You don't have to sign up to every expression of feeling: The revengeful anger can be recognised, but, preferably, not shared. Mood quite frequently changes within the same Psalm. The dominant mood won't necessarily reflect your current mood – a healthy reminder that when you are feeling miserable there are still things to be grateful for; and when you are feeling elated there are still things to worry about. The individual matters. The community matters. That goes for every individual and every community.*