

**Studies on Psalms: A Review Article**

By Richard E. Allison\*

Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999, 539 pp., paperback.

Massell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 2001, 266 pp., hardback, \$24.99

Leslie L. Crenshaw, *The Psalms: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001, 187 pp., paperback.

Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on the Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998, 484 pp., paperback, \$35.00.

Leslie L. Mays, *Psalms*. Louisville: John Knox, 1994, 457 pp., hardback, \$34.95.

Gene H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1989, 151 pp., paperback, \$10.00.

Craig C. Broyles, Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University in Canada, views the Psalms as originally written for use in liturgy. "A Psalm was originally designed as liturgy and not a chapter in a book." Their function is to help the people of God in worship.

The "Table of Contents" lists the psalms in numerical order as they appear in the NIV and supplies a title for each by the author. The "Introduction" of some 41 pages contains a number of interesting features. The psalm is defined. Then the various genres are introduced: Temple Entry Liturgies, Hymns (in their many varieties), Royal Psalms, Wisdom and Torah Psalms. In addition, OT traditions, David and the Psalms and a very interesting treatment of spirituality and the psalms receive consideration. The work concludes with a Subject Index and a Scripture Index.

Broyles makes a careful section by section exposition of each Psalm in this volume of the New International Commentary series. Key terms and phrases are highlighted. Extensive footnotes follow each chapter and contain helpful textual and

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technical information. Utilizing the latest scholarship, the author has produced a friendly commentary and the Psalms for the general reader and the serious student.

C. Hassel Bullock, the Franklin Dryness Professor of Biblical Studies at Wheaton College, has authored a comprehensive tome to introduce readers to the elements of interpreting the Psalms. This work is one part in a series by Baker Academic entitled *Encountering Biblical Studies*.

The author deals in three parts with many of the various dimensions found in the Psalms such as: literary and hermeneutical, literary and theological and use of the Psalms in worship. In Part I, Bullock treats: name of the book, nature of the book, place in the canon, title, superscriptions, musical and literary notations, instrumental types of poetry and structure. Interpretation is viewed through the psalmists, the editors and the viewers experience followed by six rules for interpreting the Psalms.

In Part II, the author portrays historically the manner in which the Psalms have been utilized in preincarnational revelation, the Qumran Scrolls, the New Testament temple worship, synagogue worship, Christian worship and meditation.

In Part III, a major portion of the work, the author develops the various themes in the Psalms. These include: praise, lament, thanksgiving, trust, royalty, reign of God, wisdom, penitence, torah and imprecation. Each of these categories is identified, defined and illustrated.

This work is obviously not a commentary but resembles an encyclopedia disclosing to the serious student all they ever wanted to know about the Psalms. The work is impressively researched with obvious dependence on a comprehensive knowledge of many great scholarly works on Psalms. Included are five pages of footnotes, four pages of bibliography, four pages of glossary and ten pages of scriptural indices. In addition there is a liberal use of illustrations, sidebars, exegetical explorations, chapter outlines, objectives and study questions for each chapter.

The erudite, James L. Crenshaw, Robert Flowers Professor of Old Testament at Duke University, in his work *The Psalms: An Introduction*, takes one on a major journey through a menagerie of views on the Psalms, their composition and transmission. Part I relates an exploration of the scope of Psalms considering: Psalms of David, Asaph, Korahites, Moses, Solomon, Ethan, Psalms of Ascent and Hallel Psalms. These are then related to Psalms outside the Psalter such as: other parts of the biblical text, the Apocrypha, Qumran, and additional Psalms of David and Solomon. Part II considers various approaches to Psalms such as: Jewish interpretation, Christian prayers, reflection on human nature, cursing of enemies, metaphors handbook for religious life, source for historical data, classification of types and artistic design. These illustrate the various approaches to interpreting the Psalms. Part III focuses

author's method for interpreting and engaging the text of Psalms. This he illustrates in extended treatment of four very different Psalms: 73, 115, 71, 24. His reach throughout is an attempt to get others to "appreciate the literary artistry and logical sensitivity of the ancient poets."

One of the most insightful commentaries on the book of Psalms is entitled, *The Art of Worship*, by Robert Davidson. The title is a bit misleading. The subtitle is accurate, *A Commentary On the Book of Psalms*.

The introduction is short and limited to three topics: "The History of Interpretation," "The Poetry of Worship" and "The Book." The commentary develops the characteristic five book arrangement of the Psalter. Each section opens with a short, succinct introduction followed by penetrating commentary on each and every one of the Psalms. A four page selected bibliography concludes the work.

The highlight of the book is the insightful commentary. Each Psalm in essence is meticulously treated and succinctly developed. The meanings of important new words are illuminated with precision. Cultural idioms are explained. While logical in approach, it spans the gap between scholarly and devotional use of the Psalms. It has appeal and utility for scholars, teachers, worship leaders, pastors, students and devotional readers of the Psalms.

"Interpretation, A Bible Commentary For Teaching and Preaching," has a very excellent commentary entitled *Psalms*, by James L. Mays. The series is published by Knox Press. *Psalms* is one of the thirty-five volumes available. The general editor is James L. Mays, the author of this volume. His skill with Hebrew, the culture and theology are exceptional. The intended audience is teachers and preachers in the church. Dr. Mays is Professor Emeritus of Hebrew and Old Testament Interpretation at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia.

The underlying assumption of the work is that Psalms were originally composed for worship. This theme guides the commentary throughout. The Psalms in order are treated in a descriptive fashion usually containing a concise outline at some point in the exposition. The Psalms receiving the greater consideration deal with those prominent in worship, those referred to most in the New Testament and those that have been most important to the church down through history.

The "introduction" is extensive treating such topics as: importance, anatomy, history, types and theology. The work concludes with a four page bibliography. The pages of commentary on the 150 psalms is devotional, theological, exegetical and inspirational. It is to be recommended for personal devotions, study or preparation for teaching or preaching.

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The Psalms are tools for prayer asserts Eugene Peterson in his work entitled *The Answering God*. The author states that Psalms one and two are introductory. The first directs one to the practice of Torah meditation. The second develops expectation for Messiah in a world where intimidation by unbelieving rulers is rampant. Prayer begins with the third Psalm and continues through the remainder. The Psalms run the gamut of human experience. They move from chaos to form. The tendency of humans is to be more spiritual than God. The Psalms call us to get real. Praying Psalms out loud assists us in "entering things as they are...Evil is encountered, wickedness is confronted." The scandal Psalm, 137, comes out of Israel's painful experience and humiliation. It ends with a double "blessedness," for those given to meditation and listening. The hatred is assuaged by praying it out and then remembering God's faithfulness, the justice, and the presence of God. Prayer does not legitimize hate, it uses it. The Psalms focus on life and are called forth by the experiences of life. Categorization of the Psalms should be left to the scholars. The author says, "We do better to enter the sequence of the Psalms...learning to enter what comes...practicing the presence of God."