

Psalms Discussion Qs & the Big Picture

What are some major issues that come to our attention in the study of the Psalms?

Some major issues are a) the meaning of covenant remembering, b) some principles related to our personal relationship with God that involve the entirety of our being including our emotions, and c) the challenge of the imprecatory Psalms for how we relate to God's and our enemies now in the time between the comings of Christ. Finally, d) we have the matter of Messianic Psalms.

A few comments can be made about each of these issues.

a) One thing we learn is that there are many **remembrance Psalms**, which are historical-redemptive in nature (they call the people of God to look back and not forget God's redemption and to see how He has remembered His covenant; cf. Psalms 78, 105, and 106). Covenant remembering is applicable to the new covenant memorial of communion. Contrary to those who restrict communion to ritual action, as if the doing is the saying, and thus there is no need for preaching communion remembrances, these Psalms inform us about covenant remembering. Such remembering centers on the redemptive action of God (for example, and commonly, they cite His redemptive work by the death of the firstborn of Egypt; cf. Ps. 78.51; 105.36). Remembering also involves the call to the people of God to remember His works and not forget them as they have done so often (cf. Ps. 78.35-38, they remembered, they were not faithful, He atoned for their iniquity, and He remembered their frailty). Of course, to remember is to hear and obey, but the big picture of the Psalms roots that obedience in the details of the Lord's covenant faithfulness (cf. the theme of Deuteronomy of looking back at and remembering God's redemptive action in order to go forward in obedience. There is a reflective and meditative side to remembering and Moses directed this remembering in His *sermon* that we know as the book of Deuteronomy). The remembrance Psalms support the case for preaching communion remembrances (PCR) that unpack, in one communion after another, what Jesus meant when He said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, do this in *remembrance* of me" (i.e., engage covenant remembering at communion).

b) From the Psalms **we learn much about our emotions**. We learn how proper it is for us to come before the Lord in worship in the fullness and the reality of how we feel. The Psalms are an anatomy of all parts of the soul (Calvin) and they "inform our intellect, arouse our emotions, direct our wills and stimulate our imaginations (Longman, *How to read the Psalms*, 13). Thus, we learn that "conversation between God and his people is direct, intense, intimate and, above all, honest" (Ibid 12).

c) We learn about the Psalmist's hatred of God's enemies and His prayer for their destruction. We have to understand **imprecatory Psalms** in different ways from the old covenant to the new. In the old, the point is not personal vindictiveness but the glory of God (Ps. 115.1) and thus, it is a perfect hatred enflamed by reverence for God (Ps. 139.20f) and balanced with obedience to the law (Ps. 119) that includes loving the neighbor (Lev. 19.18; Deut. 6.5).

Longman (Ibid 138-140) has some helpful comments on this topic and they relate to the fact that our enemies include principalities and powers beyond flesh and blood. He says, we must learn that our attitude toward those outside the church is different now. The church is not now a people that is to be separate from the nations and that judges the nations with the sword (as in the conquest of Canaan). Instead of judgment, Christ gives the nations the gospel (judgment will come at the harvest at the end of the age) and thus the church is made up of people from all nations. The church carries on warfare against the deceiver of the nations, against spiritual forces of evil (Eph 6.12). By the efficacious death of Christ, those taken captive by the devil are set free (Heb 2.14-15; we are delivered from the domain of darkness, Col 1.13). Thus, ministers of the gospel are to do their work with patience and without quarreling trusting God to give repentance to those ensnared by the devil (2 Tim. 2.24-26).

d) On the question of **Messianic Psalms**, we should note that all the Psalms are Messianic because they all represent the true Israelite, Christ. His words are in all the sentiments of the Psalms and thus are easily applied to the crucifixion in the NT (cf. into thy hands I commend my spirit as a word on every believer's lips). What do we say about the sins of the Psalmist himself? In one sense, the Psalmist represents Christ and the sins are not in view (cf. David's last word and his blamelessness, 2 Sam. 22.24); thus, the Israelite represents the true Israelite, Christ, *without sin*. In another sense, *the sins confessed are Christ's* as well in that He takes them to Himself for punishment in the place of His covenant people.