

The Suitability of the Psalms

(adapted from *The Psalms in the Worship of the Church*, 2004)

The Old Testament, including the Psalms, was given the New Testament church as well as that of the OT era. The OT was written for our learning and admonition – Rom 15:4, 1 Cor. 10:11. The New Testament Church must understand the Psalms in light of the coming of Christ; this is clearly the understanding expressed by the authors of the New Testament and by Christ Himself (Luke 24:44-48).

- The Psalms speak clearly of Christ as God and man

The writers of the NT apply the title, “Lord” to Christ; this is the same title used in the Psalms to refer to God. In the light of the NT, we understand that Christ is God come to us in the flesh (Heb. 1:8-12, John 8:56-58, Acts 2:29-36).

Jesus is also the Son of David according to the flesh (Rom. 1:1-4, Luke 1:32, Rev. 22:16). The life of Christ incarnate is prophesied, as he affirmed, in the Psalms. In the Psalms, we sing about Christ in the theologically profound manner taught in the Scriptures. He is both God and man; God the Lord and the Son of David.

- The Psalms speak clearly of the Messiah

In the Psalms we see that the Messiah is a King. He is spoken of in the Psalms as present, and as yet to come. Psalm 110 with Mark 12:35-37, Heb. 1:13.

Messiah was the one to come and judge the nations, Ps. 96:10, Acts 17:31. When the NT writers quote the OT showing that Jesus is the Messiah, they frequently appeal from the Psalms:

Psalm 8 Hebrew 2:6-9, 1 Cor. 15:27-28

Psalms 2 and 110 Acts 4:25-28, Hebrews 1:5, Matthew 22:43-46

Many of David’s Psalms clearly have Christ in view, e.g. Ps. 24, 98.

Christians find Christ’s life, death, resurrection, reign and return in the Psalms; thus they are eminently suitable for Christian worship.

- The Psalms are Trinitarian

They reveal the relationship between the Father and the Son

Ps. 2:1-7, Psalm 110

The writer of Hebrews cites the Psalms when he argues that Christ is the son of God (Heb. 1:1-13)

- The Psalms reveal the work of the Holy Spirit

Although the Psalms do not teach as explicitly about the Holy Spirit as the NT, they do reveal much about the Holy Spirit. In this they generally surpass the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures. His omnipresence (Ps. 139:7), His work in creation (Ps 33:6, 104:30), His role in the renewal of the saints (Ps. 51:10-12), His role in sanctification (Ps. 143:10, 40:8, 119:11) is shown in the Psalms.

Because the Psalms are the result of the operation of the Spirit (2Samuel 23:2-3), they are full of the Spirit. Christians are to sing the Psalms “in the Spirit,” and thus He instructs us and writes His words on our hearts.

- The Psalms express NT eschatology
“eschatology” – doctrine of “last things,” i.e. the return of Christ and the events associated with it

From the NT, we understand that Israel’s entry into the land of Promise was not the final rest which God had prepared for his people (Heb. 4:1-11 interprets Ps 95)

The psalter is arranged in such a way that it moves from speaking of the Anointed One primarily in historical terms (Ps. 1-89) to speaking of Him primarily in future terms, as Messiah. Yet even Psalm 2 speaks of a King greater than David (Acts 4:24-30). The Psalter presents Christ at center of history in his death and resurrection (Ps. 22 & 16) and at the end of history (Ps. 98:1-8). Yet it also connects him with the beginning of history in Ps. 8, which speaks of man as ruler of creation. Hebrews 2:1-9 teaches that Christ is the man who fulfills Ps. 8, sharing in our humanity as the second Adam, suffering death, and being exalted to the right hand of the Father.

The Psalms teach of the kingdom of God (Ps. 93:1-2, Ps. 96:10, 97:1); they reveal that the kingdom given to Christ is universal and eternal. The Psalms also contain the present calling of the NT church to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth (Ps. 57:9, 67:1-5, 96:3-5, 10); thus the psalter anticipates the present missionary task of the Church and the Church’s hope of the coming of Christ at the last day.

Although much of the language of the Psalms is cast in Old Testament types and shadows, we are able to understand those references in light of the New Testament – that Christ is the sacrifice anticipated (Eph. 5:2), that the history of Israel is our history (1 Cor. 10:1-12, Heb. 11).

- Singing the Psalms helps us in our sanctification

The Psalms, because they are the songs of the Holy Spirit, are “spiritual” in the fullest sense. Though they speak often of earthly things, they constantly direct the believer to God. “Voicing the Psalms, with their messianic, missiological, and eschatological perspectives, will nourish the heavenly-mindedness of New Testament believers.”

The Psalms contain sayings which are hard - as do the other Scriptures. At times, we find that we cannot sing the Psalms as our own; in such cases we must understand that we sing them with Christ and in Christ, as the word of Christ. Such are the “cursing psalms” which have caused confusion for some Christians, as well as the Psalms in which the sinlessness of Christ is expressed