A COMMENTARY ON
THE PSALMS

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Volume 1 (1–41)

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Kregel Academic

A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1–41)

Published by Kregel Publications, a division of Kregel, Inc., 2450 Oak Industrial Dr. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505-6020.

The English translations of the original Greek or Hebrew texts of the Bible are the author's own. The traditional renderings have been retained as much as possible because of the use of the psalms in churches, but the English has been modernized where appropriate.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Ross, Allen P.
Commentary on the Psalms / Allen P. Ross.
p. cm.
1.Bible. O.T. Psalms—Commentaries. I. Bible. O.T. Psalms. English. New International. 2011. II. Title.
BS1430.53.R67 2011
223'.2077—dc22

2010028703

ISBN 978–0–8254–2562–2

Printed in the United States of America
16 17 18 19 20 / 6 5 4 3 2

To my aunt and uncle,
The Reverend Leonard and Beatrice Sukut,
for a lifetime given to ministering the Word of God
in exposition and music

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PREFACE FOR VOLUME 1

For hundreds of years the Book of Psalms has been one of the richest resources for the expressions of worship and the development of the spiritual life, and at the same time one of the more complex and challenging sections of the Bible for expositors, to which the many commentaries attest. Even in the past few years several commentaries have appeared, as well as a steady production of literature on Psalms as a whole or on different aspects of individual psalms, and a number of new and interpretive translations. Each of these contributes to our understanding of the text, but there is no final word on the Book of Psalms. People who write on the psalms know this full well, for the subject matter is vast and many difficulties remain unsolved. There are so many ways that people have used the psalms in sermons, theological arguments, and pious devotions, beginning with ancient Israel and continuing to this day, that a complete study of the interpretation of the Psalter is most unlikely. Clearly, any commentary on the Psalms will be circumscribed by its purpose, and yet the challenge remains to be as thorough as possible while being concise.

My purpose in writing this commentary was to focus on the chief aim of exegesis, the exposition of the text. Many people preach or teach from the psalms, but too often take lines or sections from a psalm for the message, or limit their expositions to a select few psalms, perhaps those that are most often quoted in the New Testament. All the psalms should be carefully studied by believers

and used in their meditations, prayers, and praises; but they should also be expounded in the assemblies of the churches for edification and exhortation, because as a part of Holy Scripture they are divinely inspired and must not be ignored. By exegetical exposition I mean that the exposition should cover the entire psalm, and that it should not only explain the text verse-by-verse but also show how the message of the psalm unfolds section-by-section. After all, a psalm is a piece of literature and therefore has a unified theme and a progression of thoughts developing that theme. Of course, the expositor will have to determine how much detail from the psalm can be included in the allotted time, but with the development of the message in mind that choice will be less arbitrary. If such expositions are developed for the church, the response will be enthusiastic because so many people have come to love the psalms, having learned to live by them in times of trouble and distress, as well as to celebrate with them in times of victory and blessing.

So I have written this commentary for pastors, teachers, and all serious students of the Bible who wish to develop their understanding of the Book of Psalms and to improve their ability to expound it with precision and depth. The format and contents of this commentary are then geared to my purpose and audience. Consequently, I have not included detailed discussions of all the different views down through the history of interpretation, and I have been selective with technical discussions of related matters and proposals for the resolutions of difficulties. I have tried to keep in mind my chief concern, that is, what a pastor or teacher needs to have for the development of an expository message. There are many things that would have been included if the purpose was more academic; but from my experience of teaching the exposition of the psalms in the seminary classroom and expounding them in the churches, I have a gained a fairly good sense of what needs to be explained and how it can be done in a limited period of time.

For those interested in studying the related questions and concerns in more detail, other works are available and can be consulted. In the chapter, "History of the Interpretation of the Psalms," I have given a basic bibliography of selected commentaries and helpful resources. At the end of Volume 3 I have provided a lengthy bibliography of specific studies, keyed to the relevant psalms.

The expositor should have several works on the psalms available, works that make their unique contribution and complement the study as a whole. My commentary is designed to move from the exegesis of the text to the formation of the exposition, that is, not simply commenting on lines and verses but putting the material together in an expository format. I do not expect expositors to put the material together in the way I have done or simply follow my outlines and points—although I would not object, but it is my hope that these arrangements will help expositors see how the material can be arranged and inspire them to develop their own expositions for their particular situations—albeit remaining true to the text.

In writing a commentary on the Psalms there are a number of things that had to be decided. In general, I wanted to write the commentary so that it would be easy to read, but not simplistic. It had to be thorough, and so that meant including necessary technical information, but in a way that would not disrupt the discussion. So I have kept technical terms and Hebrew words in parentheses in the commentary so that the English sentence is completely readable. In the footnotes on textual problems, I have put the Hebrew and Greek forms in the sentences but translated them so that the expositors who may not be up on the languages would still understand the variants and the arguments, and those that know the languages would have the information before them.

I have kept the translation of each psalm very close to the text and did not include too many clarifying words (which when used are in italics). I have tried to retain traditional renderings as much as possible because of the use of the psalms in the churches; but I have modernized the English. The figures of speech have not been decoded or given dynamic equivalents but retained in the poetry. At times there will be lines that seem cryptic or unusual. It is poetry, after all, and in a translation the poetry should be retained as much as possible. If paraphrases are used for the translations, the exposition may be once removed from what the text actually says, and this can influence how it is explained in the congregation. I have avoided doing this, although a degree of paraphrasing was necessary for understanding in some instances. The commentary discusses these cases.

Textual criticism is a necessary part of the study of a psalm. This should be obvious to those who have compared a psalm in different modern English versions, perhaps the one they brought to church and the one the expositor is using. There will be questions for sure—not a great number in a given psalm but some nonetheless, and on occasion it might be necessary to say we cannot be sure what the original manuscript had. I decided to note all the significant textual problems to help the expositor with these questions. With the more involved problems I have tried to explain the variant readings in an understandable way. In dealing with textual problems that were significant (that meant a change of meaning), I laid out the relevant material and offered my conclusion on the matter, whether it harmonized with the Hebrew text or the versions. In places where there was no clear solution for the textual problem, I presented the more plausible options and modern proposals. In such cases where the Hebrew reading was difficult but made sense, I retained it in the translation but left the material in the footnote for the expositor to decide what was the more probable reading. I have avoided the temptation to rewrite the text so that it makes better sense to me. Most of the difficulties centered around differences between the Hebrew text and the Greek version. In the commentary I refer to the old Greek version, popularly called the Septuagint, as simply "the Greek," or "the Greek version" or "the Greek translation." Later Greek revisions and translations are identified by name. In most cases the overall meaning of the psalm was not greatly changed by textual problems, but individual lines and expressions were. At least in having the difficulties laid out this way the expositor will be better equipped to explain why some modern versions have translated the passages the way they did.

In a number of places the word in the text seemed to be too difficult to make sense as to the original reading; in such cases numerous proposals have been made. Almost all these proposals made sense in the passage—that is what the commentators are trying to do after all—but often they required too many changes to be made in the text. I am inclined to be more skeptical where there is no evidence in Hebrew manuscripts or versions to support the proposed change; nevertheless, each textual problem

had to be analyzed on its own merits and the choice explained. Expositors may disagree with my choice here and there, but at least they will have an easier time thinking through the problem with the variants explained.

In the Book of Psalms, the expositor also has to explain precise meanings of the words. In the psalms there are many rare words (and these often created textual difficulties); these have to be clarified, and that means considering proposals for etymological connections. Even with well-known words there may be a precise nuance in a psalm that has to be clarified. I have included a good number of word studies on the most frequently used terms in the Psalter. These are not full word studies in such a short space; rather, these are meant to help the expositor focus on the meaning of the word within its range of uses in the Bible. Each word will be discussed in a footnote in connection to the verse in which it is found; in other places where that word appears, a reference to the passage where the word study occurs is included in parentheses in the text. At the end of Volume 3 there is an index of all these word studies.

The psalms are filled with poetic language that needs to be explained clearly in the exposition. I have provided a very general survey in my chapter, "Literary Forms and Functions in the Psalms," and then throughout the commentary I explained the figures of speech and other poetic devices as they have bearing on the meaning of the text. Rather than refer to the figures in general terms, I have specified the precise figure being used and how it works in the psalm. If this kind of explanation is done well in the exposition, people will gain a much better understanding of the text.

One of the biggest challenges for translating and expounding the Psalms is the interpretation of the Hebrew tenses. Beginning Hebrew students quickly learn the range of nuances for the different tenses and how to decide when each should be used—the so-called perfect tense, imperfect tense, forms with sequential "and" (*wāw*), and volitional forms. That this decision remains a difficulty for us can be seen in a comparison of different English Bibles. Where there is disagreement in the translation (often a choice between an English present tense ["he judges"] and a future ["he will judge"], or perhaps a volitional mood ["may he

judge"]), I have tried to work with each form in its context, preferring the more common nuances of the forms in difficult lines to the rare and perhaps questionable uses. Still, this is poetry, and so some unusual syntactical constructions do occur. And in Hebrew, some verbal forms may be spelled the same but have very different translation values in various contexts—it is often a translator's choice. At times the parallel structure of the lines of poetry may help in the choice of a translation, but that only works if the parallel lines are synonymous in some way; at other times the identifiable pattern of a psalm may help determine the translation of the verbs, but that too is not always possible since there are so many mixed types or passages that do not follow the praise or lament patterns. And the way the verb was translated in the versions often raises additional questions that cannot be answered apart from other evidence. When there is a difficulty with the tenses or other syntactical constructions, I have usually provided the options and then explained my choice. The change in tenses (from a present to a future, for example) may not make a great difference in the interpretation of the psalm, but then again it may. Where all the translations agree, that is good reason for caution before proposing a different translation.

The issue of higher criticism cannot be avoided in the study of any book in the Bible, and the Psalter is no exception. On the one hand, we might say that the date, authorship, and occasion of a psalm is not important to the interpretation because a poem stands on its own as a timeless piece of literature, and especially since we do not have this information for the majority of them. On the other hand, higher criticism often has a bearing on the interpretation of the psalms, as a brief survey of the commentaries will show. With many psalms, a superscription may supply the author, the occasion, or the use of the psalm in Israel's worship. While these notes were most likely added later when the psalms were being compiled, they nonetheless provide traditions that cannot simply be discarded. If a psalm is attributed to David, that should at least be given some consideration in the study; if there is no reason that David could not have written that piece, then the tradition may be considered reliable. This note of authorship may have no relevance to the exposition at all. Furthermore, if there is no other indication of the occasion in the psalm, one

should be cautious in providing one and making it an integral part of the exposition. Modern scholarship generally places most of the psalms in the late pre-exilic time or post-exilic time, even though commentators do allow that many of the psalms were from the early monarchy period, or from David, even if they have been put to use in the last books of the collection. I see no reason to abandon the traditional view that David actually wrote many psalms, yet not all of them by any means, and not necessarily all that are traditionally attributed to him. Each psalm has to be studied on its own. The psalms that make up the collection seem to come from different times over a thousand years, and in most cases it is impossible to say when they were written or by whom. This issue will be an ongoing debate; in the commentary I have laid out the proposals for each of the psalms and where necessary responded to them. The expositor will soon discover that a good deal of time can be spent on matters of higher criticism, time that should be spent on the exposition of the text.

Another aspect of the study of the psalms necessarily requires correlating the material with the later revelation, especially the New Testament. The exposition must show how the theological message should be connected with New Testament revelation, even when the New Testament does not cite or allude to the specific psalm. At times the exposition will have to explain the ways of thinking or the activities referred to in the psalms in the light of the New Testament, for many of these have changed or been modified, even though the theology that informs them remains.

Correlation with later Scripture will, of course, focus on messianic elements in the psalms, whether prophetic or typological, but this has to be done carefully: the exposition must first develop the theological message of the psalm as it was written and then show how it came to fulfillment in the New Testament. In this way the continuity of Scripture will be maintained and the manner which the writers of the New Testament used the psalms better understood. I have attempted to follow this procedure in the messianic and eschatological passages.

Finally, the development of the exposition from the exegesis is basic to this commentary. For each psalm I have written a detailed exegetical outline to provide a clear analysis of what

the different parts of the psalm are saying. Then this outline is changed into a homiletical outline that I have used as the headings of the commentary proper. In the conclusion I have provided a summary expository idea for the whole psalm, a short statement of the message of the psalm. The expositor will word these ideas differently for various purposes, but they do provide a sample of how the material can be unified and expressed in clear and relevant statements. I have explained this procedure more fully in my chapter, "Exposition of the Psalms."

My work in the Book of Psalms has been guided and inspired by a number of people. In particular for instruction in and inspiration for the study of the psalms, I owe a special debt of gratitude to Professors Bruce K. Waltke and John A. Emerton. Also, for years my colleague Donald R. Glenn was a reliable source of precision and clarification in the exegesis of the text. And over the years the work of my students has provided continual opportunities to think through the passages and find better ways to explain the meaning of the text. I am also grateful to Beeson Divinity School for much encouragement and help as well as a sabbatical along the way. And I wish to thank the folks at Kregel for taking on this project, Jim Weaver who was behind it from the start and Paul Hillman for his careful work with the commentary.

As I was working on the psalms, my mind easily ran to the innumerable saints who for centuries have sung, prayed, and expounded these passages. It was easy to identify with them because the study of the Book of Psalms immediately inspires meditation, prayer and praise, and the desire to teach them to the church so that worship and service may bring greater glory to God. In my own life I have had the privilege of praying and singing them in the worship services, drawing on them for my spiritual growth, and expounding them in many different congregations. By writing this commentary I want to honor all those who in prayer, praise, and proclamation make careful use of the Psalter.

ABBREVIATIONS FOR ALL VOLUMES

Symbols

//	parallel lines of poetry; the point of division between them
=	the equivalent of
<	derived from

A

A	Codex Alexandrinus (A), Greek uncial manuscript of the Bible, fifth century A.D.
AJBL	*Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute*
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature*
ANET	*Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (J. B. Pritchard)
AnOr	*Analecta orientalia*
AO	*Archiv orientalni*
Aquila	Greek version made about 130 A.D.
ASTI	*Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute*
ASV	American Standard Version, 1901
ATR	*Anglican Theological Review*
AUSS	*Andrews University Seminary Studies*
AV	Authorized Version

B

B	See Vaticanus
BArch	*Biblical Archaeologist*

BASOR	*Bulletin of American Schools of Oriental Research*
BBR	*Bulletin for Biblical Research*
BDB	*A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs)
BH3	Biblia Hebraica (Kittel)
BHS	Biblia Hebraica (Stuttgartensia)
Bib	*Biblica*
BibSac	*Bibliotheca Sacra*
BibV	*Biblical Viewpoint*
Bijdr	*Bijdragen Tijdschrit voor filosophie en theologie*
BiTod	*Bible Today*
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*
BR	*Bible Review*
BSOAS	*Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*
BT	*The Bible Translator*
BTB	*Biblical Theological Bulletin*
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift*
BZAW	*Beihefte zur ZAW*

C

CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CJT	*Canadian Journal of Theology*
CTJ	*Calvin Theological Journal*
CTM	*Concordia Theological Monthly*

E

e.g.	for example
EncBib	*Encyclopedia Biblica*
EncJud	*Encyclopedia Judaica*
ESV	English Standard Version
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
EvQ	*Evangelical Quarterly*
EvTh	*Evangelische Theologie*
ExT	*Expository Times*

G

GKC	*Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. by E. Kautsch, trans. by A. E. Cowley
Greek	The Old Greek version, Septuagint

Greek^{A}	Greek, Alexandrinus
Greek^{B}	Greek, Vaticanus
Greek^{S}	Greek, Sinaiticus
Greek^{L}	Greek, Luciant
GTJ	*Grace Theological Journal*

H

HALOT	*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, et al)
HAR	*Hebrew Annual Review*
HBT	*Horizons in Biblical Theology*
HeyJ	*Heythrop Journal*
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HTS	*Harvard Theological Studies*
HUCA	*Hebrew Union College Annual*

I

IB	*Interpreter's Bible*
ICC	*International Critical Commentary*
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*
i.e.	that is
IEJ	*Israel Exploration Journal*
Int	*Interpretation*
IB	*Interpreter's Bible*
IDB	*Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*

J

JANES	*Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies*
JAOS	*Journal of the American Oriental Society*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JBQ	*Jewish Bible Quarterly*
JBR	*Journal of the Bible and Religion*
JEOL	*Jaarsberichte v. h. Vooraziatische-Egyptisch Genootschop 'Ex Oriente Lux'*
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JNES	*Journal of Near Eastern Studies*
JNSL	*Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages*
JPS	*Jewish Publication Society*

JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JRel	*Journal of Religion*
JPS	*Jewish Publication Society*
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSOT	*Journal of the Study of the Old Testament*
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
Jud	*Judaica*

K

k^{e}thîv	what is written, the letters in the manuscript for words where the vowels are from the oral tradition (see also *q^{e}rê*)
KBL^{3}	*Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti Libros*, 3rd Edition (Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner)
KJV	King James Version

L

LSJ	*A Greek-English Lexicon* (ed. by Liddell, Scott, and Jones, Oxford: Clarendon, 1925–40; addenda and corrigenda, 1968; supplement, 1996)

M

ms(s)	manuscript(s)
MT	Masoretic Text, the received Hebrew text printed in BHS

N

NASB	New American Standard Version of the Bible
NBD	*New Bible Dictionary*
nd	no date
NEB	New English Bible
NIDOTTE	*New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis* (ed. by Willem A. VanGemeren)
NIV	New International Version
NJPS	New Jewish Publication Society
NJV	New Jewish Publication Society Version

NLT	New Living Translation
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTS	*New Testament Studies*

O

Or	*Orientalia*, new series
OT	Old Testament
OTS	*Oudtestamentische Studiën*
OTSt	*Old Testament Studies*

P

PIH	*Psalterium iuxta hebraeos* (Jerome's translation from the Hebrew)
PTR	*Princeton Theological Review*

Q

Q	Qumran, as in 11QPs^{a} (the Psalm a scroll found in Qumran, cave 11)
q^{e}rê	what is read, the oral tradition of a word represented by the vowels written with a different word in the text (see *k^{e}thîv*)

R

RB	*Revue biblique*
ResQ	*Restoration Quarterly*
RevExp	*Review and Expositor*
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RTR	*Reformed Theological Review*

S

SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBTh	*Studia Biblica et Theologica*
Sem	*Semeia*
SJOT	*Scandanavian Journal of Theology*
SJT	*Scottish Journal of Theology*
SP	Samaritan Pentateuch
StTh	*Studia Theologica*

s.v.	under the word, meaning see under
Symmachus	Greek version made near the end of second century A.D.
Syriac	the Bible of the ancient Syriac Church

T

Targum	ancient Aramaic paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament* (ed. by G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren)
Theodotion	Greek version made in the early second century A.D.
ThL	*Theologische Literaturzeitung*
ThT	*Theology Today*
ThZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift*
TynB	*Tyndale Bulletin*

U

UF	*Ugaritische Forschungen*

V

Vaticanus	Codex Vaticanus (B), Greek uncial manuscript of the Bible, 325–350 A.D.
VT	*Vetus Testamentum*
VT Supp	*Vetus Testamentum Supplement*
Vulgate	ancient Latin Bible, traced to Jerome

W

WTJ	*Westminster Theological Journal*
WW	*Word and World*

Z

ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft*

VALUE OF THE PSALMS

It is impossible to express adequately the value of the Book of Psalms to the household of faith. For approximately three thousand years psalms have been at the heart of the spiritual life of the people of God. The array of prayers, praises, hymns, meditations, and liturgies in the collection cover all the aspects of living for God in a world that is antagonistic to the faith. They have always been important for the expression of the faith, both privately and corporately. In Israel the collection of the psalms formed the hymn book of the temple, with many psalms being designated for regular use on certain days and at different occasions, including festivals and holy days. For early Christians, the psalms were also treasured because of their value in the prayers and praises of the people, but more so because of their application to Christ in the writings of the New Testament. Down through history wherever the psalms formed the prayers and praises of worshiping communities, they became well-known. In modern Christian congregations, however, the use of the psalms has almost fallen by the way to the detriment of the spiritual life of the church, and the prayers, hymns, and songs that have replaced the psalms in worship do not have the substance, power, and beauty that they have.

The change is significant in view of the importance of the psalms throughout the history of the faith. When combined with belief and understanding, the psalms were used to inform

doctrine, inspire sermons, and provide the main resource for the development of the spiritual life. Kirkpatrick wrote:

> When men and women, forsaking their ordinary callings, dedicated their lives to devotion and prayer in monasteries and communities, the singing of the psalms formed a large part of their religious exercises. In course of time the recitation of the psalter became a clerical obligation as well. Various schemes or uses were drawn up. Fixed Psalms were generally assigned to certain of the canonical hours, while at the other services the remainder of the Psalms were recited "in course."[1]

Holladay illustrated this by surveying the structure of the psalms in the different religious orders, noting that the arrangement became the outline for the prayer life of the community.[2]

Throughout the history of the church, the great importance of the Book of Psalms has been recognized and proclaimed again and again. It is not my purpose here to collect scores of witnesses to the fact; but a few examples will serve to introduce the study of the book. For example, Augustine described the spiritual benefit he received from the psalms when he wrote:

> In what accents I addressed Thee, my God, when I read the Psalms of David, those faithful songs, the language of devotion which banishes the spirit of pride. . . . How I addressed Thee in those Psalms! how my love for Thee was kindled by them! how I burned to recite them, were it possible, throughout the world, as an antidote for the pride of humanity . . . .[3]

The psalms were so highly valued that a thorough knowledge

1. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge: At the University Press, 1914), p. ci.
2. William L. Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993), pp. 176–77 (see pages 175–184 for a survey of the use of the psalms in the divine office).
3. *The Confessions of St. Augustine,* ix. 4, in *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. by Philip Schaff (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994 reprint), p. 131.

of them was early on required for ordination. Kirkpatrick cited a few examples: Gennadius, Patriarch of Constantinople (458–471 A.D.), would not ordain anyone who had not been diligently reciting the psalms; the second Council of Nicaea (587 A.D.) concluded that no one was to be consecrated bishop unless he knew the Psalter thoroughly; and the eighth Council of Toledo (653 A.D.) ordered that no one be promoted to any ecclesiastical position who did not know perfectly the entire collection.[4] Praying these prayers and singing these hymns were recognized to be essential to the spiritual life of believers, especially any who would lead the churches in devotion and worship.

And this recognition of their importance continued in the Protestant world. Martin Luther said of the collection:

> You may rightly call the Psalter a Bible in miniature, in which all things which are set forth more at length in the rest of the Scriptures are collected into a beautiful manual of wonderful and attractive brevity.[5]

John Calvin said of the psalms:

> Here the prophets themselves, seeing they are exhibited to us as speaking to God, and laying open all their inmost thoughts and affections, call, or rather draw, each of us to the examination of himself in particular, in order that none of the many infirmities to which we are subject, and of the many vices with which we abound, may remain concealed.[6]

And Hooker wrote:

> The choice and flower of all things profitable in other books, the Psalms do both more briefly contain and more movingly

4. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. cii.
5. *Works*, ed. 1553, Vol. iii, p. 356. For a little more information, see Holladay, *The Psalms through Three Thousand Years,* pp. 192–195.
6. John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms,* Trans. By James Anderson. 3 Volumes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963 reprint), p. xxxvii.

> express, by reason of that poetical form wherewith they are written.[7]

Several collections of verse were printed for the church after the Reformation, including selections from the Psalms, songs and hymns from other portions of the Bible, traditional medieval liturgical hymns, and original compositions patterned after Scripture. For example, one of the earliest and most thorough collections of biblical lyrics and comparable poems was *The Hymnes and Songs of the Church* (1623), designed to supplement the Psalter in the liturgy. The New England *Bay Psalm Book* (1640) included metrical versions of the Psalms; it became the authorized text for congregational singing in New England. The hymns of the church after the Reformation, then, were patterned after the kinds in the Book of Psalms—by 1640 there were over 300 editions of the Psalter in English.[8] Anyone studying the psalms in detail will understand why they became so important to the spiritual life of the church; Perowne said:

> We cannot pray the psalms without realizing in a very special manner the communion of the saints, the oneness of the Church militant and the Church triumphant. We cannot pray the Psalms without having our hearts opened, our affections enlarged, our thoughts drawn heavenward. He who can pray them best is nearest to God, knows most of the Spirit of Christ, is ripest for heaven."[9]

That the Psalter has for ages served as the book of praises and prayers for the worshiping community as well as for devout individuals in their private meditations should be enough to prompt churches of today to reconsider their place in the instruction and development of the spiritual life of the church. They should be the model for our songs of praise, the instruction for our prayers

7. Hooker, *Ecclesiastical Polity,* Book V, Chapter xxxvii, Par. 2.
8. See Coburn Freer, *Music for a King*, 14–15; and Terence Cave, *Devotional Poetry in France c. 1570–1613* (Cambridge, 1969).
9. J. J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1966 reprint of the 1878 edition), I:40.

and meditations, and the inspiration for our quest for piety. They should also be considered for their benefit to our understanding of what worship is about, for they were inseparably bound to Israel's worship by divine inspiration. Since prayer and praise—indeed, worship—must be informed, these psalms must be interpreted correctly, taught clearly, and preached convincingly. The church is missing one of its richest experiences if it ignores the Book of Psalms or relegates it to a routine reading in a service without any explanation.

A clear explanation, however, does not come easily. Those who would expound the psalms for use in the spiritual life and worship of the people of God will find some challenges. They will first have to resolve textual difficulties; and this task is not made any easier by the fact that modern translations opt for one or another of the available readings.

Another challenge for the expositor comes from the different approaches taken in the study of the psalms in commentaries. These will have an influence on both translations and interpretations of many psalms; and so expositors will have to think critically when using the various resources.

Poetry itself presents a challenge for the interpretation and application of the psalms. It will take some practice for expositors to be able to work comfortably with the poetic structures and figures of Hebrew poetry. Some of the poetic language is universal and therefore fairly straightforward; but much of it is not obvious. To explain the imagery will require awareness of the use of biblical language as well as the culture of ancient Israel.

And finally, Hebrew grammar and syntax will pose a challenge to many expositors. It will be obvious to anyone who surveys how the various English Bibles translate the tenses of the verbs and other constructions of the language that some knowledge in this area is necessary. If expositors are not familiar with the forms and constructions of Hebrew, they will have to find reliable resources to help them understand the translations and commentaries. Since these are not always in agreement, expositors will have to weigh the arguments and decide what the precise emphasis of a given line of poetry should be, based on context and use in Scripture.

The following chapters will include discussions of these challenges in more detail and offer directives for the study of the

psalms in these and other areas. The commentary itself will attempt to explain the meanings of the words, the biblical imagery, the constructions of the language, and the variations in translations and interpretations in the most important cases in the psalm so that the expositor will have more information with which to make an interpretive decision.