

Allen P. Ross, 2011 / 2013 / 2016. *A Commentary on the Psalms. Volume 1 (1–41) / Volume 2 (42–89) / Volume 3 (90–150)* (Kregel Exegetical Library). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic. 887 / 841 / 1018 Pages. Hardback. ISBN 978-0-8254-2562-2 / 2563-9 / 2666-7.

This three-volume commentary on the Psalms is one of the most extensive interpretations of this book of the Bible. The author (with a Ph.D. from Cambridge University, UK) is a professor at the Beeson Divinity School in Samford University (USA). Previously he taught, inter alia, at Dallas Theological Seminary. The commentary was written “with pastors, teachers and serious students of the Bible in mind” (III, p. 11). Vocalised Hebrew square script is used, but since a translation is provided in each instance, the commentary can be utilised also by those who have little or no knowledge of Biblical Hebrew.

The volumes are structured as follows: Vol. I has an approximately 180-page introduction. After the Preface (concerns and procedures) and list of abbreviations, there follows two short sections on the meaning and textual tradition

(MT versions, Qumran) of the Psalms. There are sections on the name of the book, the different numbering of the psalms (MT/LXX) and the headings, further also on the genres, function, and different groups of psalms, on the structure and formation of the book. A concise history of Psalms interpretation is linked to a selected bibliography. The first part further includes an introduction to biblical (psalms-) poetry and a categorisation of the psalms in terms of form and/or contents (laments and psalms of praise, Zion psalms and psalms of ascent, Hallel psalms, [YHWH-] enthronement psalms, royal psalms and wisdom psalms). This is followed by sections on “Psalms in Worship” and at the end on the theology (themes, genres, consideration on the history of salvation) and the “Exposition” (a sketching on the methodological approach).

The detailed exposition of all 150 psalms begins on p. 181 in the first volume, followed by the second volume. At the beginning of Vol. III there is (once again) a brief introduction and a list of abbreviations before the exposition proceeds and is completed on p. 969. At the end there is an index to the Hebrew terms and the places in the psalms where they are discussed, as well as a (in comparison to Vol. I) partly identical, but more extensive bibliography. The exposition of the psalms is structured as follows: Each psalm is characterised by a title. A translation, demarcated into poetic lines and with an indication of the segments (marked by blank lines), follows this. Notes on the text as well as variants of the Hebrew manuscripts and ancient translations are provided in footnotes to the translation. Under “Composition and Context” there follows terse discussions (with references to literature) on the contents, genre, linguistic peculiarities and dating. This is followed by a brief contents analysis in the form of a summary and presentation of the structure. The main part of the exposition is a “Commentary in Expository form.” Here one can find an exegetical and theological elaboration of the verses or verse groups. With the preparatory work for the study of the text and homiletics thus already done, this aspect is strengthened once more in the final section called “Message and Application.”

The strength of this commentary is in the translation and the justification for it by the author through references to the form of the text, variants, *etcetera*. His real concern is the exposition of the contents as a preparation for use in teaching and preaching – not only selected (“beautiful”) verses, but of the whole psalm and all psalms. This claim Ross has substantiated thoroughly and properly with his work. This is not a research commentary which discusses various different opinions in detail and which cites the representatives of the different views. He rather wants to provide guidelines, scientifically supported, to those who interpret the Bible and, with it, also the Psalms in the church (in Bible study, preaching, and teaching). In terms of type, I would classify the commentary with two key words beginning with “C” – “classic” and “conservative.” It is “classic” in the sense that the author perceives the psalms as “separate units” and discusses them thoroughly. The character of the Psalter as a book is indeed briefly taken into view in the introduction, but the embedding of the psalms and the additional

dimension of meaning gained through a continual reading of the psalms as part of a composition is hardly considered. The commentary can be described as “conservative” in its view on the David-headings (partially with information on the situation). Among conservatives and evangelicals, different positions manifest themselves on the question how *le-dawid* in the titles of the psalms is to be translated. Connected to this is also the dating of the psalms to a certain extent. In response to, *inter alia*, the commentary of John Goldingay, Ross pleads for serious consideration of the possibility of Davidic authorship. But he does not go so far as to consider all psalms assigned to David as being written by him (the preposition *lamed* “can [\neq must] be used for authorship,” I, p. 42). On the other hand, he wants to deviate from this tradition only with good reason. For the specific application, one must consider the comments on the individual psalms. With the traditional acceptance of the Davidic authorship, the newer, canon-hermeneutic oriented attitude goes hand in hand that the headings constitute part of the text and must be accorded more attention. This means that a Davidic psalm should in any case be perceived and interpreted as such – be it that the psalm originated with David, was attributed to him or was written for him (dedication), it must in any case be connected with the life and work of David (also in the interpretation and appropriation).

It is a pity that the titles in the “Outline” do not concur with those of the subsequent interpretation. The poetic quality of the text is only partially taken into account: the verse parallelisms are represented, but the structural building blocks are not considered, and the segmentation is based (only) on criteria of contents. The exposition follows the linear (“narrative”) sequence and scarcely takes spatial structures (chiasms, etc.) and their potential for meaning into consideration. Nevertheless: it is a good “reference work,” useful for those who work with and on the Psalms and pass on their message in a serving capacity. Especially the theological exposition will be of value to many, also in South Africa, who are engaged in Bible study, preaching and teaching.

The commentary demands and promotes, in its comprehensiveness, an in-depth and persistent preoccupation with it and with the psalms themselves – that is a good thing. This “evangelical” commentary is different from the “mainstream” and deserves precisely for that reason its place. The author deserves thanks and his commentary is wished a good reception and wide dissemination.

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