

I. OUTLINE OF PRESENTATION

I hope to do three things in our talk today:

- a) Outline a framework for seeing Jesus in most of the Psalms [fancy word for which is “Christology of the Psalter”]
- b) Highlight the unique role Psalms 1-2 as an Introduction to the book, and
- c) Preach the Message of Psalms 1-2 which concerns

How to Prosper in This Life and the Next:

Choose The RIGHT LIFESTYLE (Psalm 1) and The RIGHT LORD (Psalm 2)

Message in a Nutshell:

- A. Regarding the Christological Framework.¹
As part of the Introduction to the Book of Psalms, Psalm 2 (and to a lesser extent Psalm 1) sets a messianic tone for the whole book of Psalms.²
- B. Regarding the Role of Psalms 1 and 2.³
Psalm 1 provides a door of entry to the Psalms that welcomes the reader to “meditate” on the Book as Torah, thereby growing in righteousness (see Ps 1:2). Psalm 2 provides a parallel door of entry that directs the reader to interpret the Book of Psalms with reference to the Messiah (i.e., His anointed Son, the King of the Jews, the unsuspecting ruler of the nations). (Alternatively, Psalm 1Thus, what were once a collection of prayers and hymns (which they continue to be) are also to be understood in broad terms as Davidic “prophecies.” In my opinion (and that of many others) the best way to interpret these prophecies is as partial “types” [prefigurations] of Christ—in other words, as with any type, certain aspects reflect the person and/or ministry of Christ, whereas others do not.⁴
- C. Regarding the Message of Psalms 1-2. Psalm 1 urges us to choose the right lifestyle of diligently following God’s instructions—as opposed to the peer-pressure fed lifestyle of wicked (or, presumably, even secular people). Psalm 2 urges us to choose the right Lord by submitting to the authority of His divinely begotten son, Jesus—as opposed to pagan rulers (or, presumably, other widespread ungodly cultural forces). Importantly, both Lifestyle and Lord are to be embraced. (With only the former we risk adopting mere self-righteousness or moralism; with only the latter we risk giving mere lip-service to Jesus’ lordship without obedience to His precepts.)

II. QUOTABLE QUOTES AND SUMMARY NOTES

¹ For ease of reference, see my pencil-drawn diagrams.

² See my pencil-drawn diagrams, noting that, in addition to Psalm 1 preceding Psalm 2 as a *prior door* reflecting the requisite Torah piety of the Messiah, ala Deut. 17:15-18, Psalm 1 can also be understood as a *parallel door* (as in a side-by-side double entry); it is this second scenario that is described in what immediately follows above.

³ This understanding of the Psalms as messianic prophecy was a Jewish construct; that it predates Jesus and Christianity is clear from a version of the Psalms found among the Dead Sea Scrolls (i.e., 11 QPs^a).

⁴ Compare the well-known “type” of Christ in the Book of Numbers, namely the serpent set on a pole, which to look upon brings healing. Some parts pre-figure Christ (being mounted on a pole as a means of deliverance), whereas others do not (for example, that the figure uplifted is a serpent). An example of what does prefigure Christ is Divine sonship in Psalm 2; an example of what doesn’t prefigure Christ is David’s confession of sin in Psalm in 41:4, though much of the rest of this Psalm does fit (vv. 7, 9).

A. Regarding Psalm 1

“Like a tree that quietly, invisibly, constantly receives strength and life through its roots, so are we given God’s Word as a steady source of life.” (Jacobson, 64.)

“One who walks in the way of the righteous must struggle against the traffic, buffeting against the currents of peer pressure and group-think. Yet in spite of this, it is still the way of happiness.” (Jacobson, 60.)

B. Regarding Psalm 2

“[O]ne main motif of the psalm is kingship. But a second major motif is the idea of ‘speech.’ It is with speech that the kings of the earth rebel, it is with speech that God answers their rebellion, it is with speech that the Davidic king answers their challenge, and in the end, the kings of the earth find themselves speechless before the power of God.” (Jacobson, 66.)

“In worldly terms, might makes right. But on God’s terms, right makes might. The righteous—those who live under God’s sovereignty—will be vulnerable to the powers of the world (Ps. 3:1-2), but they will never be without help (3:8).” (McCann, cited in Jacobson, 71.)

“The striking claim of Psalm 2 is that true happiness is found by those who take refuge in God (2:12).”
(ibid.)

“Like Psalm 1, Psalm 2 envisions independence from God not as freedom but as bondage. True liberty consists rather of living in relationship with God and taking refuge in God and God’s anointed. As the New Testament says, “if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed (John 8:36).” (Jacobson, 71.)

III. ISSUES

1. What “introductory message” is conveyed by Psalms 1 and 2 together?

Suggestions include the following:

--“The Book of Psalms may be seen as a magnificent struggle between the two ways---that of Yahweh, his anointed king, and the company of the just, and that of the wicked, the sinners, and the evil-doers.” Moreover, “The introduction to the Psalter states a) that what follows is indeed Torah, to be studied (Psalm 1), b) that Yahweh is king (Psalm 2) and c) that He has vested a human king with kingly authority (Psalm 2). (David Howard.)

--Psalms 1-2 suggest David⁵ is the author of the Psalms and interpreter of the Torah as the guide to righteousness (Psalm 1). The nations and those who walk in paths of wickedness are equated on the one hand and the anointed king and those who walk the way of righteousness on the other. (Sheppard, adapted slightly.)

--The way of the Lord’s instruction and the rule of the Lord’s anointed are chief clues to what matters While Psalm 2 invites the reader to hear the voice of the Lord’s anointed in the following psalms, Psalm 1 says that what we hear is the voice of anyone who lives by the Torah. . . .” (Miller, slightly adapted.)

-* (Especially noteworthy:) Individual meditative reflection upon the Psalms as torah . . . brings joy and nourishment (Psalm 1) in the context of a world where nations plot and engage in war, a world, nevertheless, ruled by the Lord and where those who are hurting can find refuge (Psalm 2). (Limburg, ABD 5, 535.)

⁵ As my student Dr Ryan Ball has pointed out, David is *not* mentioned in either Psalms 1-2 despite the fact that, as recipient of the dynastic promise in 2 Samuel 7 and in light of the Davidic imagery in Isaiah 7-11, he is clearly the main royal figure in the Psalms. The omission of David’s name is significant in that it leaves room for the future Messianic heir—whose name will not be David, to be envisaged, namely Jesus/Emmanuel.

--I subscribe to the view, based on the collocation of the Psalms together with the Book of Proverbs and Job (and as the Introduction to this “wisdom” collection in the Hebrew canon) that Psalm 1 is analogous to Proverbs 1:1-6 which tells of the proper disposition of the reader as well as what she/he might expect from reading the book, and that Psalm 2 is analogous to Proverbs 1:7 which provides the theme of the book that follows it. This makes the Messiah the foundational theme of the entire psalter, at least from an eschatological/prophetic perspective.

C. On reading the psalms ‘messianically’ (i.e., with reference to the Christ)

-as both *typological* and *prophetic*

J. J. S. Perowne, a 19th century Anglican, very helpfully advocates a “typologically-prophetic” mode of interpretation, explained as follows (*Psalms Commentary* of 1878, p. 49): “[T]he Psalms to a large extent foreshadow Christ, because the writers of the Psalms are types of Christ. And it is of the very nature of a type to be imperfect. It foretells in some particulars, but not in all, that of which it is the type. Were it complete in itself, it would not point further; through its very incompleteness it becomes a prophecy. Now the Psalms are typical. They are the words of holy men of old—of one especially whose life was fashioned in many of its prominent features to be a type of Christ. But just as David’s whole life was not typical of Christ, so neither were all his words.”

He continues:

“Hence we can freely and safely adopt this principle of interpretation in all cases. We can see in every Psalm which may reasonably be regarded as Messianic, a primary reference to the writer and to his own circumstances; and, so far as confessions of sin meet us, an exclusive reference; whereas in all else, *without maintaining a conscious prophecy, we can recognise the language of a type waiting its proper accomplishment in the Antitype.*” (*ibid.*, p. 55.)⁶

-as psalms originally about a Judean or Israelite king that later came to embody hope in a future ideal king, the Messiah

Mays: “the royal psalms [e.g., Psalm 2] themselves came at a later stage in their history to be read as hope for the one who comes . . . Once Isaiah had been on the scene, the psalms began to be drawn into the context of prophecy itself, and to move into another genre. Within Old Testament history itself, these psalms began to be read and understood themselves as messianic prophecy. The inauguration they described awaited a candidate; the title ‘Son of God’ hung in the air because there was no specific human historical person to whom it could be given.”

IV. RELEVANT TEXTS

1. **Proverbs 1:1-7-verses 2-6 I equate with Psalm 1 as purpose and verse 7 I equate with Psalm 2 as theme**

⁶Perowne (*Commentary on Psalms*, pp. 53-54) writes further with respect to Psalms 2, 20, 21, 45, 72, 110 “In all . . . a King is celebrated. In all, some Jewish monarch, either on his accession, or at some critical period of his reign, is the immediate object before the eyes of the inspired Poet. But in all the monarch grows larger and larger and fairer than the sons of men. He is seen ever in the light of the promise made to David, and in that light he is transfigured. Human he is, no doubt: many words spoken of him pertain only to a human king; but many also are higher; many cannot, expect by force of exaggeration, be made to apply to one who wears the frailty together with the form of man. There is but one interpretation by which the apparently discordant elements in these Psalms can be held together. It is that according to which the Psalms are regarded, not simply as predictive, but as properly typical [i.e., typological] in their character.”

¹The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel:

²To know wisdom and instruction, (=*Psalm 1*)

to understand words of insight,

³ to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;

⁴ to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—

⁵ Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain guidance,

⁶ to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles.

Prov. 1:7 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge (=*Psalm 2*)
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

2. Deuteronomy 17: 15-17--*where the future King is, among other things, to meditate upon the law of God (cf. Psalm 1:1-2; Ps.2)*

¹⁵“One from among your brothers you shall set as king over you. You may not put a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. ¹⁶ Only he must not acquire many horses for himself or cause the people to return to Egypt in order to acquire many horses, since the LORD has said to you, ‘You shall never return that way again.’ ¹⁷ And he shall not acquire many wives for himself, lest his heart turn away, nor shall he acquire for himself excessive silver and gold. ¹⁸“And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests. ¹⁹ And it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them, ²⁰ that his heart may not be lifted up above his brothers, and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left, so that he may continue long in his kingdom, he and his children, in Israel.