

Notes on the Sermon on Psalm 144

II. QUOTABLE QUOTES AND SUMMARY NOTES

*“Then and now, whenever God’s people are under assault they do well to remind themselves of all that their loving God has done for them in the past, insignificant though they are. They can quite properly ask him to act in ways that even in modern times might be described as the rending of the heavens, a bolt of lightning, a rescue from a sea of troubles. They know that his, and their, chief weapon is the truth of the gospel, to destroy the lies which (like Samson’s hair) are the secret of the enemy’s great strength. They are sure that nothing but good can result, even from the most disastrous circumstances, when God’s people are taking refuge in the Rock.” (Wilcocks, *Psalms 73-150*, BST, 271.)*

1. Summaries of Psalm 144

A. “The distinct nature of Psalm 144 as a mixture of elements can be explained through its connection with Psalm 18 and its placement in the Psalter. The first eleven verses are a reuse of Psalm 18, except the royal thanksgiving for deliverance accomplished in Psalm 18 is now a call for God to deliver again. The warfare imagery in Psalm 18 is moved forward in Psalm 144, showing the urgency of the situation.” (Belcher, *Messiah in the Psalms*, 154.)

B. “This is one of those psalms that seem remarkably familiar Two-thirds of it turn out to be a reworking of verses adapted from far back in the Psalter. . . . Its framework is provided by several verses from [Psalm] 18, one of the David psalms of Book I. That in its turn is connected with the history of David’s reign in 2 Samuel, where chapter 22 reproduces it almost exactly, together with the introductory heading it has in the Psalter: ‘David sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.’ Against the backdrop of the reign of the great king, we may highlight four of the points that that earlier psalm makes. First, what the Lord means to David: he is his rock, fortress, deliverer, refuge, shield, stronghold (18:2). Then what he has done for David: he has parted the heavens and come down; with smoke, arrows, lightning, he has reached down from on high and has rescued him from deep waters (18:9, 14, 16). Thirdly, what he has made of David: he has trained his hands for battle (18:34). Fourthly, what he has overcome on David’s behalf: as David’s Rock, he is exalted above all the power of foreign nations, giving victory to his chosen king (18:43-47, 50). (Wilcocks, 269-70.)

C. “David, the Lord’s anointed ruler, pleads that God would defeat his foreign foes. David recognizes his dependence on the Lord and cries out to him to give him victory (vv. 1-11), and he recounts blessings that would flow from that victory (vv. 12-15). Many of the dominant themes throughout the psalter appear here: the Lord as refuge, request for divine intervention, rescue from enemies, and the centrality of David. These themes closely parallel Ps[alm] 2, where the Lord grants victory to his anointed ruler over the ruler’s enemies and his own. In both Ps[alm] 2 and Ps[alm] 144, the Lord is a refuge, a blessing formula concludes the psalm and the Lord and his anointed enjoy an extremely close relationship as they oppose outsiders. The chief difference is that the king in Ps 2 is unnamed, while Ps 144 explicitly names the victorious king as David.” (Howard, *ZNIVSB*, 1179.)

2. On the Messianic Ending of the Psalter (and the role of Pss 144-145)

A. “While 2 Chronicles, a post-exilic work [like the Psalter in its present form] . . . concludes with an interest in the rebuilding of the house [temple] (2 Chr 36:23), the Psalter does not sustain a similar interest in temple rebuilding beyond Ps 136. Rather, it brings back Davidic psalms,

concluding again with the emphases of kingship, deliverance, and secure dwelling.” (Ho, Design, 80).

- B. “Pss 144-145 at the end of the Davidic Collection[s] . . . mark the beginning of a realized, ideal Davidic socio-community identified by ultimate justice, peace, and praise. . . . [T] motif of affliction and supplication remain until a consummative shift in Pss 144-45.” (Ho, 252.)
- C. “The crescendo and convergence of idealization and democratization at the end of [Psalms 138-145] and the Final Hallel [146-150] completes the metanarrative of the Psalter. Here, the issues of injustice, ignominy, infirmity, and insecurity suffered by the *chasidim* [faithful] are finally resolved. . . . when we arrive at 145:18-20 ‘the text sings of the global and universal kingship of God [over all creatures] but the attention is inescapably attracted by what this kingship means to the own group of *chasidim*.”(HO, 255-56, citing Grol)
- D. “The Davidization of the Psalter by the design of these five Davidic Collections¹ allows the three (or four) identities and storylines to converge—the monarch David, the Messianic king and the *chasidim*.² The reader of the Psalms is the fourth story, merging with the story of the *chasidim* and interfusing with the large plotline of YHWH’s purposes.” (Ho, Design of the Psalter, 262.)
- E. “The placement of Psalm 144, a Davidic psalm, in Book V keeps the promise of the Davidic covenant alive for God’s people. A collection of Davidic psalms frames Book V (108-110, 138-45), with the latter collection coming just before the closing psalms of praise (146-50). There are also connections between Psalms 2 and 144 in the theme of the rebellion of the people and in the closing of each psalm with a doxology. What was inaugurated in Psalm 2 is now coming to a close in the final defeat of God’s enemies. This eschatological hope is something for which God’s people today still wait: the coming of our king in the clouds of heaven to bring a final defeat to the forces of evil. The frailty of the human nature of our king was seen in his humiliation and death, which fits the plea for God to rescue and deliver him from the deceitful enemies (vv. 3-4, 11). The initial victory has been won because our king was delivered from the power of death leading to a new song of victory (v. 9). Although our king reigns now at God’s right hand and God’s people experience spiritual and some temporal blessings now, the full outpouring of blessings that Psalm 144 speaks about will not take place until the final victory. Our king will return in full battle array coming in power from heaven in the full glory of deity to defeat all his enemies and bestow on his people full covenant blessing (Rev. 19:11-21). The abundant fruitfulness of eschatological blessings will be theirs to enjoy to the full in the new heavens and earth. This abundant blessing of God’s final victory will lead God’s people to full and abundant praise of their king (Pss. 146-50) as all creation joins in the chorus. We are blessed to have a king who is the LORD!” (Belcher, *Messiah in the Psalms*, 155-56.)
- F. “Psalm 144 is placed in the final Davidic collection of the Psalter (138-45), keeping alive the hopes of the post-exilic community for a Davidic king. Thus, the psalm looks forward and

¹ This is a reference to five groupings of psalms specifically associated with David, 3-41; 51-71, 86; 101-103; 108-110; and 138-145.

² “Chasidim” is a Hebrew word for what I have called the “godly covenanters” in Psalm 149. They are noteworthy for referring to a group of righteous people who do the Messiah’s work in Psalm 2 of reigning in rebellious foreign rulers. (In my judgment and that of many others, they describe followers of the Messiah who work *in tandem with* [i.e., *do not replace*] him in the future to quell evil and thus pave the way for complete peace and justice in the end-times, a work that is already underway in the ministry of disciples doing the kingdom work of the Savior, whose instructions do not, at least yet, include taking matters into our own hands.)

expresses hope of victory and blessing through him. This future hope is an eschatological one as the journey to the end of the Psalter brings God's people to the final eschatological battle (reflected also in 149:5-9).³ The final victory of God's people will result in an outpouring of eschatological blessing (144:12-15) and the participation of all creation in the praise of God (150)." (Belcher, *Messiah in the Psalms*, 154.)

3. The Message Implied by the Overarching Structure of the Psalter (according to Peter Ho):
Exhortation and Encouragement

"I suggest that the timely theological message that proceeds from the structural design of the Psalter is twofold: an exhortation and encouragement. The horrors of the exile, the demise of Israel's kingship and the destruction of the temple as YHWH's punishment of Israel's covenantal unfaithfulness must be grasped and internalized (Amos 2). Such reflections are not uncommon in exilic and post-exilic texts (cf. Mic 3; Ezek 22:6; Neh 9:34; 2 Chr 28:19). In other words, there is a theological exhortation to return to covenant faithfulness.

At the same time, one cannot reflect on YHWH's covenant with his people without being encouraged by the covenantal promises. Readers would recall that God would raise up a better prophet (Deut 18:18), priest (1 Sam 2:35) and king (2 Sam 7:12-13) God would also rebuild Jerusalem that had been mired in ruins (Isa 44: 26-28). Through a Righteous Branch, God will gather the scattered people of Israel and make them dwell securely (Jer 23:4-8; Jer 30:9-10). We have at various junctures in the book pointed out how messianic emphases in post-exilic prophetic books (e.g., Micah and Zechariah) correspond to the messianic tendencies in the Psalter. Likewise we have also discussed the messianic emphases present in the LXX [ancient and influential Greek version] Psalter. Messianic themes were also present in various Second Temple literature." (Ho, *Design of the Psalter*, 263.)

4. "Five elements of messianic hope" (after Starling and Ho):

1. The Messianic hope is a Davidic hope. It rests upon YHWH's covenant with David;
2. The Messianic-Davidic hope represents the hope of Israel. The Davidic Covenant is also a 'democratized' covenant between YHWH and Israel;
3. The Messianic hope is a hope for the nations. All the ends of the earth shall be blessed through this Messianic king;
4. The Messianic hope is a vindication of the righteous suffering Messiah, who represents the suffering poor, who will become the 'godly';
5. The Messianic hope is the expression of the rule of YHWH. The rule of the Messiah is inseparable from the rule of YHWH. (From Ho, *Design of the Psalter*, pp. 259-60, fn 293, referring to, and in agreement with Starling.)

5. Moses and David in the Psalms, Moses and David in Jesus

Ho clearly finds a "message and theology arising from the juxtaposition of Moses and David, and integration of Torah piety and kingship in the Psalter." (263.) He notes, "To be sure, the reader would be confronted with this comparison right at the beginning of the Psalter. Psalms 1 and 2 clearly contrast the motifs of Deuteronomistic [i.e., Deuteronomy-like] Torah piety with the messianic kingship. Our discussions on Book IV is another clear starting point. The Mosaic Ps 90 and the entire Pss 90-92 form an inclusion with the Davidic Pss 101-103 around the YHWH Malak [i.e. "Yahweh reigns"] psalms at the center. The idealized kingly (and 'blameless') figure ruling with integrity in his house in Pss 101 invites comparison with Moses who is also faithful in God's house (Heb 3:2-5). Since Ps 92 clearly alludes to the

³ "Both McCann and Kim have used the term eschatological to refer to Psalm 144, the latter showing connections between Psalm 144 and Zechariah 14 to emphasize the eschatological motifs." (*ibid.*, 276, fn 177.)

Song of Moses (cf. Deut 32), a comparison between Moses and David as song leaders in Pss 92 and 103 is inevitable.” (Ho, *Design*, 262.)

6. On a possible further relationship between Psalm 18 and 144—that is a relationship informed by their positioning within the macrostructure of the Book of Psalms

“The Songs of Deliverance in Pss 18 and 144 are two strategic locations that mark the establishment of two Davidic kingships [i.e., present-day fallible Davidic, and ideal future Messianic]. The first [is] the establishment of the human monarch [reflected in Ps 18] and the second is the that of the Messianic king, who will usher in a final period of bliss [reflected in Ps 144]. These two locations also parallel two key references to David’s victories over his enemies in 2 Sam 7 and 22. Between these locations [both in Samuel and in the Psalter], the storyline of kingship and Zion go through a depressing brokenness in Books II-III before the turning point in Book IV. The final DC-V (i.e., Psalms 138-45) emphasizes David’s (and also the *chasidim*’s [i.e., righteous followers in Psalm 149]) patient supplication, an unchanging motif across the three Sections.” (Ho, *Design*, 262.)

IV. RELEVANT PASSAGES

Psalm 145-*here the psalmist, identified as David, and who because of the structure of the Psalter is to be identified with the future Davidic Messiah, praises the LORD. And in doing so, He initiates the praise of God with which the Book ends (146-50). Here, then, the Messiah may be understood to teach us to praise. At the same time, there is a Trinitarian reference: the Spirit of God has left for us an inspired text in which we hear the eternal Son of God offering praise to the Father. And that these words were originally penned by a mere human echoes the words of 144 and Psalm 8, “what is man that You are mindful of him, the Son of a human that you give consideration to Him?” And the surprisingly affirmative answer we read of in Psalm 8 is echoed in the fact that not only is the Messianic king’s mission shared with humans (Ps 149:4-9; cf. Ps 2:9-11) but so also is His identity. (This is true not only because the Son of God became a son of David, a human, but because the Davidic Messiah is partly ‘democratized’ in Book V; in other words, at times the people are inextricably associated with the King, in the same way Israel is at times the Suffering Servant of Isaiah.)*

A praise song, of David.⁴

See your Bible for the psalm itself.

Revelation 19:11-16 (see also 17-21)-*reference in the future to the Lord defeating enemy nations, as mentioned in Pss, 2, 149*

¹¹Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron.⁵ He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords. (ESV.)

⁴ Note how the title brings together the *David* who preceded in Psalms 138-44 with *praise* which follows in Psalms 146-50. The implication would seem to be that David undergirds/lies behind the praise-filled conclusion to the Psalter; compare David’s role in the Book of Chronicles as the mastermind behind the worship and praise of God in the Temple.

⁵ Compare Psalms 2, 149 and the warrior imagery also of Psalm 144.

