

The Half Hour That Changes the World

Psalms

Book 19

Basic Question behind the book:

Where can I find words to express my worship and my prayers when my own words aren't enough?

Summary of book:

The answer to the question above is quite straight forward. Such words exist, in a number of places, one of which is the book under consideration here, the book of Psalms. It is the hymn book of the Old Testament. Like any hymn book it has a variety of authors which includes people we know (like King David) and those we don't (like Asaph). They are written from a variety of human emotions and experiences (joy, anger, fear, contentment etc.). The rest of the Bible might speak to us, but the Psalms speak for us. The Psalms are split up into five sections:

Book 1:	1 - 41
Book 2:	42 - 72
Book 3:	73 - 89
Book 4:	90 - 106
Book 5:	107 - 150

There may have been earlier collections before the five-fold structure above. For example, Psalms 121 - 134 are known as the Song of Ascents. Hebrew poetry is unlike English poetry. The latter is focused on how the words sound and the rhythm. The former is focused on the thought forms. The main feature is what is called parallelism where the thought in the first sentence is expanded, confirmed or contrasted in the second sentence.

Vital Statistics:

Purpose: To provide poetry & hymnody for expressions of praise, worship and confession to God.

Author and Dating: David is linked with 73 Psalms; Asaph – 12; the sons of Korah- 9; Solomon – 2. The rest are by individuals or are anonymous. It is impossible to date any of the Psalms accurately, but we're talking about a collection from a long period of time.

Setting: A variety of historical contexts and occasions in the lives of individuals and groups.

Other Reflections:

These poems include:

- Psalms of Praise
- Communal Laments
- Personal Laments
- Royal Psalms
- Individual Thanksgiving

Walter Brueggemann's classification of the Psalms gives us a different perspective:

- Psalms of the Ordered World
- Psalms of the Disordered World
- Psalms of the Re-Ordered World

C S Lewis in "Reflections on the Psalms" (1958):

"The Psalms are poems intended to be sung, not doctrinal treatises nor even sermons... They must be read as poems if they are to be understood."