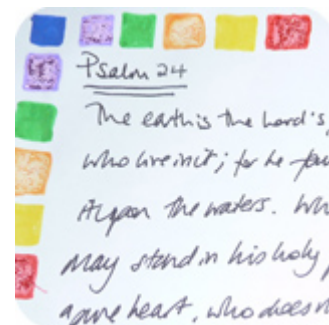


## The Psalms and Mission

Issue 33 Editor: Tim Davy

12 May 2010 saw the public launch of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission, a new Redcliffe College initiative aiming to serve the Church by engaging in research, teaching, writing and speaking on mission in the Bible, and the Bible in mission thinking, practice and training.



In my editorial I outline the activities of the Centre in more detail, one of which is to produce an annual issue of Encounters on a Bible and mission theme. This current edition focuses on The Psalms and Mission. The launch event also included Redcliffe's 2010 Annual Lecture in Bible and Mission, delivered by Prof. Gordon Wenham on the theme of 'The Nations in the Psalms'. The lecture is provided in full along with responses from myself, Eddie Arthur (Wycliffe Bible Translators) and David Spriggs (Bible Society).

Brian Russell and Tony Hughes outline missional readings of particular psalms, and a Redcliffe student offers a fascinating vision for the use of psalms of lament in order to help prevent missionary attrition. Finally, with kind permission from the author and Paternoster Press, we have included Ian Stackhouse's chapter on Praying the Psalms from his book, *The Day is Yours: Slow Spirituality in a Fast-Moving World*.

I trust you will enjoy this edition of Encounters. Please read, reflect and join in the conversation.

Tim

Tim Davy teaches Biblical Studies and is Director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission at Redcliffe College. He writes the [Bible and Mission blog](#) and also edited issues 17 and 29 of Encounters on the themes of [Mission and the Old Testament](#) and [The Bible and Mission](#).

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- **[Editorial](#): The Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission.**  
(Tim Davy, 761 words)
  - **[Article 1](#): The Nations in the Psalms.**  
(Prof Gordon Wenham, 5513 words)
  - **[Article 2](#): The Nations in the Psalms and the Psalms in the Nations - a response.**  
(Tim Davy, 912 words)
  - **[Article 3](#): Psalms 1-2 as an Introduction to Reading the Psalms Missionally.**  
(Dr Brian Russell, 2083 words)

- [\*\*Article 4: Reflections on the Nations in the Psalms.\*\*](#)  
(Eddie Arthur, 485 words)
- [\*\*Article 5: The Nations in Isaiah 40-55.\*\*](#)  
(Rev Dr David Spriggs, 1218 words)
- [\*\*Article 6: Missionary Attrition and the Psalms of Lament.\*\*](#)  
(Name withheld, 1041 words)
- [\*\*Article 7: A Missional Reading of Psalm 47.\*\*](#)  
(Tony Hughes, 1664 words)
- [\*\*Article 8: Praying the Psalms.\*\*](#)  
(Rev Dr Ian Stackhouse, 2598 words)
- [\*\*Book Review: Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-local Perspective.\*\*](#)  
(by Al Tizon; Regnum Books)
- [\*\*Book Review: Understanding and Using the Bible.\*\*](#)  
(edited by Christopher J.H. Wright and Jonathan Lamb; SPCK)

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Go to the Encounters website at [www.redcliffe.org/encounters](http://www.redcliffe.org/encounters) to read what others are thinking on the Discussion Board. Use the Voice your comments form to add to the debate.

*Please Note: The views expressed in articles are those of their authors  
and do not necessarily reflect the position of Redcliffe College.*

# Editorial:

## The Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission



Author: Tim Davy, Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission, Redcliffe College.

### Introduction and Background

As a Redcliffe College initiative the Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission (CSBM) aims serve the Church by engaging in research, teaching, writing and speaking on mission in the Bible, and the Bible in mission thinking, practice and training.

Our goal is to encourage Christians to reflect on mission biblically and the Bible missionally. We aim to do this in ways that are scholarly, relevant, accessible, practical, faithful, imaginative and passionate.

We are committed to high quality activity in several key areas:



### 1. Teaching

CSBM is fully integrated with the life and teaching of Redcliffe, a College that equips and prepares missionaries and cross-cultural Christian workers for life and ministry. We offer training on and off campus.

#### MA in Bible and Mission

Deliver a [Postgraduate MA in Bible and Mission](#), consisting four taught modules (Method and Content in Missiological Study, Reading the Bible Missionally, Bible Engagement in Intercultural Contexts, plus one other), and a dissertation on a Bible and Mission subject.

#### Other teaching and speaking

CSBM is involved in the undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programmes at Redcliffe, leading whole modules and delivering specialist content on others. We will contribute to Redcliffe's intensive and tailored teaching formats at the College and in other locations. We will engage in teaching and preaching in Church, conference and organisational settings.

### 2. Annual public lecture and bi-annual consultation

Each year a significant speaker will be invited to deliver Redcliffe's 'Annual Lecture in Bible and Mission'. In 2009 Revd Dr Chris Wright delivered the first lecture of this kind. The 2010 lecture was given by Prof Gordon Wenham.

We will host a bi-annual consultation on the Bible and Mission. Bible and Mission scholars, practitioners and students will be invited to attend and contribute. The 2011 consultation will be on the topic of Bible Translation.

We are using technologies such as video-streaming and other new media applications to make these events accessible. This will enable the participation of those not able to be at the events, and will also act as a resource subsequent to the event.

### 3. Writing

Publishing at both academic and popular levels to encourage further reflection within the Church and the academy on the Bible and Mission in theory and practice.

Edit an annual issue of Redcliffe's E-journal, Encounters, on a Bible and Mission theme, usually based on the contents of the public lecture and consultation. Along with the current issue, previous editions of Encounters have looked at [Mission and the Old Testament](#) (April 2007) and [The Bible and Mission](#) (June 2009).

A website [www.bibleandmission.wordpress.com](http://www.bibleandmission.wordpress.com) has been developed, which features the frequently updated Bible and Mission blog and resources and links useful to those engaged in the research, writing, study and practice of Bible and Mission. These are key ways of disseminating what is happening at the Centre, and passing on knowledge in a quick and accessible way. We are also using [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) to develop the Centre's reach and encourage interaction across the globe.

#### **4. Hosting a Visiting Bible and Mission Scholar**

Each year CSBM will invite a scholar from the Majority World to join us. Normally, this scholar will be currently engaged in their doctoral research, preferably on a Bible and Mission theme. They will tend to be based at Redcliffe and will contribute to the teaching programme and life of the College. They will also carry out some research for the Centre, as arranged with the Director. The rest of the time they will be working on their own research.

#### **5. Strengthen Redcliffe's already excellent Bible and Mission resources**

Redcliffe is already an excellent place to study the Bible and Mission. CSBM will further strengthen the resources available to students, as well as those who wish to visit the College for research purposes, sabbaticals, home leave, and study breaks.

#### **6. Partnership**

CSBM thrives on partnership and is committed to working with organisations, agencies, networks, churches and individuals who share a passion for the Bible and mission.

*The Bible and mission cannot be separated. The Bible is both the story of God's missionary activity and also a vital tool in the work of mission. As an organisation devoted to the translation and use of the Scriptures, Wycliffe Bible Translators are delighted to be working in partnership with Redcliffe and others to develop the Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission.* (Eddie Arthur, Executive Director, Wycliffe UK)

#### **More information**

If you would like to know more about the Centre and our activities, or would like to discuss ways of partnering with us please [contact Tim Davy](#).

[<back to top>](#)

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Please Note: The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of Redcliffe College.

If you would like to respond to this article, please use the 'Voice your comments' form on the [Encounters](#) website ([www.redcliffe.org/encounters](http://www.redcliffe.org/encounters)). You may prefer to email your response to [mission@redcliffe.org](mailto:mission@redcliffe.org), in which case please remember to include your full name, your organisation/role and whether you would like your comments posted on the [Encounters](#) discussion board.

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Author: Prof Gordon Wenham is Tutor in Old Testament at Trinity College, Bristol.

When I blithely accepted the invitation to give this lecture, I thought it would be quite an easy topic to speak about. All you need to do is to look up the mention of nations or peoples in the Psalter, then put the passages in some sort of logical order to build up a composite picture of the nations as they are depicted in the Psalms. But as I read the psalms with this in mind and what some others have written on the topic I realised there were problems I had not thought of. The nations are discussed even when the term is not used. Sometimes specific nations are mentioned, such as Egypt, Edom or Babylon. Or their leaders are mentioned, their kings, who represent the nations. Some psalms, e.g. 100, which on the face of it appear to be addressed to Israel alone, have been seen to addressing all the nations, e.g. Ps 100:1 'Make a joyful noise all the earth!'. Other scholars have argued that the Psalms should be read eschatologically and present a programme for future of Israel and the nations. These are some of the issues that are raised by this topic.

## A canonical approach

But there is a more fundamental one of exegetical method. Should we read the psalms as independent songs, or should we read them as parts of a collection? Is it right to allow the message in one psalm to influence our reading of the next? Or should each psalm be interpreted in isolation? Connected with this major issue is another. Should our exegesis aim to recover the sense of the original poet who composed the psalm, or should we be content to recover the sense of the psalm as it was understood by the editors of the Psalter? These issues have been hotly debated down the centuries, and particularly in the last 20 or 30 years.

## Psalms 1 and 2 as programmatic

It is not my intention to discuss these issues in depth this evening. Rather I shall simply state my preference for the modern canonical approach to the psalms, which favours reading the psalms in sequence in their present final form in the book. The canonical approach does not ignore discussion of the original author's understanding of a psalm, but it holds that the most accessible and authoritative sense of a psalm is that of the Psalter's editor, a sense that is opened up by reading the psalm within its wider context of surrounding psalms. This method is best demonstrated by Vesco in his recent French commentary entitled *Le Psautier de David*.

So let us turn to the Psalter and read it through consecutively, noting where the nations are mentioned. The Psalter opens with two untitled psalms. Their anonymity is quite unusual in the first 90 or so psalms, thereafter there are quite a proportion of psalms without a title giving the author's name. This anonymity and their position at the beginning of the Psalter has led most commentators to recognise that psalms 1 and 2 are introductory to the whole collection. Recent canonical critics would go further and affirm that these two psalms are programmatic: that is that they introduce the major themes of the Psalter.

Psalm 1 introduces the fundamental choice facing everyone: are you one of the righteous or one of the wicked? The righteous meditates on the law of the LORD day and night and everything he does will ultimately prosper, whereas the way of the wicked will perish. The psalms that follow are full of references to the conflicts between the righteous and wicked. Many are the complaints of the righteous as they suffer at the hands of the wicked. They cry

out to God to save them in what are termed the laments, and when that happens they sing thanksgivings in gratitude.

The theme of conflict emerges with full vigour in Psalm 2. Here the nations led by their kings attack the God-appointed king in Jerusalem, so vv. 1-3. Older form critics suggested that the background to this psalm is the accession of a new king in Jerusalem. The surrounding nations, who formed part of the Davidic empire, seize the opportunity of a new and inexperienced king in Jerusalem to rebel, to 'burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords'. Perhaps speaking through a prophet, God declares that the nations' plans will fail. Why? Because God has appointed the king of Jerusalem. More than that God has adopted the new king at his coronation as his son. And as God's son the new king will rule the nations surrounding Jerusalem. They may be thinking of rebelling, but they are advised. 'Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with trembling.' This is the sort of scenario that older commentators think explains the original composition and use of the same. They may be right.

But how does one's understanding of the psalm change if one sees it as announcing a major strand in the Psalter's theology? How would it have been understood by the editor or editors of the Psalter, who must have lived in the post-exilic era, when there was no Davidic empire, no king in Jerusalem, not even an independent Jewish state, just a province of the Persian empire? We could I suppose think this coronation psalm was preserved just for antiquarian interest, but its placing at the beginning of the Psalter and the references later to the promises to the Davidic king make this unlikely. Rather it witnesses to an enduring belief among the Jews that God's promises to David are still valid and that there will be a new David who will restore the great empire by reconquering the nations. Psalm 72:8 prays that the new Solomon will 'have dominion from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth'. Similarly Ps 89: 35-36 reminds God of his oath to David:

'Once for all I have sworn by my holiness,

I will not lie to David;

His offspring shall endure forever,

his throne as long as the sun before me.

Finally near the end of the Psalter that promise is reaffirmed:

'The LORD swore to David a sure oath.....

"If your sons keep my covenant....

Their sons also forever shall sit on your throne.'"(132:11-12)

This highlighting of the promises to David in an era when there was no Davidic king shows that the editors of the Psalter looked for their fulfilment in the future. In other words they interpreted these psalms messianically. They looked for a new David who would emulate the achievements of his great forefather.

If the new David is yet to be revealed, so too must the activities of the nations lie in the future. Their raging, their plotting against the new David, their subjugation, and their serving the LORD with fear. Thus in a few verses the second psalm gives a sketch of the Psalter's vision of the future relationship between the nations on the one hand and Israel and Israel's God on the other. Mitchell sums up the significance of Psalm 2 as follows:

'That means the ensuing collection to be about ultimate war between the LORD's anointed and his foes, his triumph and the establishment of his universal dominion, centred on Zion. The combined effect of Psalms 1 and 2 together may be that Psalm



1 foretells the triumph of the righteous divine king who meditates on the law of the LORD, and Psalm 2 shows him going forth to battle with its predicted outcome.' [1]

More controversially he goes on:

'The two psalms together announce....the eschatological wars of the Lord, describing the coming events and the allegiance to the LORD required of those who triumph.' [2]

### Five themes

Let us unpack these ideas more slowly. I think we can see in Psalm 2 five themes that keep recurring in the Psalter.

1. The divine choice of David as king. See v. 7
2. The choice of Jerusalem or Zion as God's dwelling place. v. 6
3. The attack of the nations on the Davidic king in Jerusalem. v. 1-3
4. The defeat of the nations. vv.8-9
5. The invitation to the nations to serve the LORD. vv. 11-12 [3]

We shall trace these themes through the Psalter. The next psalm is headed a psalm of David. For nearly two centuries these titles have been under critical suspicion. It is alleged that they are later additions to earlier psalms and therefore cannot be relied on to tell us who actually wrote the psalms. I think most of the reasons cited for doubting the antiquity of the titles are pretty weak and subjective, but whether the sceptics are right or wrong, these titles tell us who the editors of the Psalter think wrote them. And as I have already said, it is the editors' understanding of the psalms we are trying to recapture. So canonical readers must take the headings seriously. We must hear the voice of David in those many psalms headed 'A Psalm of David'.

But what do we find when we read Psalm 3 this way? We find an attack of the enemies, vv. 1-2 (Theme 3); God's choice of David, v. 3 (Theme 1); God dwelling in his holy hill i.e. Zion (Theme 2); and Faith that the enemies will be defeated (cf. Theme 4). Theme 5, the invitation to submit to God and his king is not mentioned. Nor is it clear that the king's enemies are the nations, indeed the title, 'A psalm of David, when he fled from Absalom his son' seems to rule this interpretation out. Another difference from Psalm 2, is the promise of victory. David prays for it, but it is not clearly promised as it was in the previous psalm. This uncertainty about the outcome of the conflicts between the righteous David and his wicked enemies runs through many psalms. Typically they end on a positive note as in 3:8, 'Salvation belongs to the LORD, your blessing be on your people.' But the presence of so many laments witnesses to the intensity and length of the struggle David faces.

If some of the titles identify David's enemies with other Israelites, does this mean that other nations are not his enemies? Not apparently in Psalm 7. David appeals for God's intervention against his enemies in v. 6. 'Lift yourself up against the fury of my enemies; awake for me; you have appointed a judgment.' He continues in v. 8, 'The LORD judges the peoples; judge me, O LORD, according to my righteousness.'

Kirkpatrick comments on this judgment scene. 'The psalmist prays that "the peoples" may be summoned to stand round the tribunal. It is a general summons. No distinction is made between Israel and other nations. Jehovah is exercising his judicial functions in their fullest extent as the Judge of all the earth.' [4] This picture of the nations summoned to account for their deeds is developed in Psalm 9. It should be noted that Psalm 9 is deliberately linked with Psalm 7, by its opening lines echoing the closing lines of Psalm 7.

Ps 7 ends: 'I will give thanks to the LORD....

I will sing praise to the name of the LORD, the Most High.'

Ps 9 begins: 'I will give thanks to the LORD....

I will sing praise to your name, O Most High.'

This linkage justifies us seeing Psalm 9 as a commentary on the allusion to universal judgment in 7:8. Evidently David sees his present success as the result of the heavenly judgment in his favour (see vv. 3-4). From the perspective of the Psalter's editors this must have been problematic, for there was no David in their day. For them the divine decree in the heaven still stood, promising them ultimate victory. In this way the hope first expressed in Ps 2 that the nations will be defeated is reaffirmed. But is this destruction of all the nations? Surely not: it is the enemies of the Davidic king, v. 3. It is the wicked, who parallel nations, in v. 5. It is their name that is blotted out forever and ever. These early Davidic psalms do not mention the possibility that there may be righteous among the nations, who will escape this judgment, but in the light of the programmatic statement inviting them to serve the LORD 2:11, it cannot be ruled out.

This is clear in the great Davidic thanksgiving Psalm 18. Here David at the height of his success, having seen off the challenge of Saul's family and subdued the surrounding nations, ascribes this success to the LORD:

'You made my enemies turn their backs to me' v. 40

'You delivered me from strife with the people; you made me the head of the nations'  
v. 43

That some nations survive the conflict is apparent from their service to David. He is their head. He is going to praise God among them v. 49. Submission to the Davidic king is clearly the prerequisite for their salvation. Earlier in the psalm David has said:

'With the merciful you show yourself merciful;  
with the blameless you show yourself blameless....  
For you save a humble people,  
but the haughty eyes you bring down.' (18:25, 27)

It would therefore seem that these are qualities that David looked for in his subjects, including subjects from the nations (cf. Ps 101).

But how would this psalm have been understood by the later editors? Why did they include it for their contemporaries to meditate on? The very last verse shows they believed this psalm was permanently relevant.

'Great salvation he brings to his king  
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,  
to David and his offspring forever.' (18:50)

Vesco sums up the message to the later readers,

This Davidic psalm ...comes to reassure the nation that God will come to deliver them from the oppression to which they are subject.....Psalm 18 is a messianic song of



thanksgiving after the exile. The king awaited in the future is a model of justice. God will save him and make all the peoples submit to him. To a people in anguish this psalm brings hope. As he did at other times in theophanies God will intervene again on behalf of his messiah.... All the nations will recognise one day that there is no other God except Israel's.' [5]

That there is hope for the nations is clear in the familiar Ps 22. The first 20 verses describe in vivid detail the suffering of David at the hands of his enemies. With such comments as 'they have pierced my hands and my feet' and 'for my clothing they cast lots', the Christian reader cannot but see this as a prophecy of the crucifixion. And such a reading is quite consonant with a canonical interpretation from post-exilic times, for many of the Davidic psalms describe the psalmist's suffering at the hands of his enemies. And in the editors' understanding they must describe the suffering of the new David. What the evangelists and later Christian readers do is to affirm that Jesus is that new David.

From verse 21 onwards the mood of the psalm suddenly changes. His prayer has been heard (v. 24) and he declares 'You have rescued me.' (v. 21). The psalmist's vindication is cause for jubilation among 'the congregation', 'the offspring of Jacob', that is among the Israelites, but not only them.

All the ends of the earth shall remember  
and turn to the LORD,  
and all the families of the nations  
shall worship before you.  
For kingship belongs to the LORD,  
and he rules over the nations.' (22:27-28)

The psalmist sees the impact of this deliverance resounding into the future.

Posterity shall serve him;  
it shall be told of the LORD to the coming generation;  
they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn. (22:30-31)

Some commentators suggest that the psalm envisages 'the conversion of all peoples' [6], or at least that all nations to earth's remotest bound, will pay homage to Jehovah.' [7] If they mean everyone from every nation will be converted, I think they are suggesting a universalism that conflicts with other passages in the psalms; e.g. 2:9; 149:6-9. The scope of salvation may be universal: it is open to all nations, but not all nations and certainly not every member of every nation will accept the terms of that salvation.

Lohfink has argued that Psalm 23 does indeed represent the sentiments of such a convert. He calls God his shepherd, i.e. His king. The psalmist is on his way to the temple in Jerusalem, where he hopes to dwell for ever. Such a pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem is of course part of the prophetic vision of Isaiah 2:2-4, Micah 4:1-5, and Zechariah 14:16-19.

Then according to Lohfink we have in Psalm 24 the conditions for entry to the holy city to which the converted Gentiles must conform.

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?

He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not lift up his soul to what is false  
and does not swear deceitfully. (24:3-4)

If this is the thinking in putting psalms 23 and 24 after psalm 22, it is possible that those who fear him in Ps 25:14 include Gentiles to whom God 'makes known his covenant.' As Lohfink observes, it would be remarkable for other nations to be included in the covenant, but this is where the sequence of thought leads him. He writes, 'The promise of the covenant of Israel also for the peoples, which psalm 25 comprises, is obviously unique in the whole Hebrew bible.' [8] I remain intrigued, but unconvinced. The titles of the psalms, which must be taken seriously on a canonical reading, make it difficult to suppose that the author of psalm 23 could be supposed to be a converted Gentile. Neither the historic David nor the eschatological David was a Gentile. And while the psalmists may well have known of the pilgrimage of the nations to Jerusalem, Psalm 24 would be an obscure reference to it.

While we could continue to work our way steadily through the Psalter, endeavouring to see how one psalm leads into the next, the constraints of time mean that we must be more selective. Psalm 33 is one of the few hymns in the first book of the Psalter. It is a response to the appeal at the end of Ps 32 to 'Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, O righteous' (32:11). Ps 33 essentially praises God for his work in creation (vv. 8-9) and for his continuing providential care (vv. 18-19). But this has implications for peoples who plot in vain (2:1). Whereas their plans will be frustrated, God's will stand for ever (vv. 10-11). Clearly the nations believe their armies will achieve their goals, but the psalmist affirms their ineffectiveness in vv. 16-17. Only if God is on their side will the military succeed vv. 18-19. Quite what the nations were planning is left unsaid. But in the light of psalm 2 and psalms 46-48, an assault on Jerusalem seems the most likely plan. These psalms promise God's protection of the city, but like the promise of eternal Davidic dynasty, this hope too seem to have been disproved by history in the era that the psalms were collected. Psalm 44 gives poignant voice to this feeling. This is the first psalm attributed to the sons of Korah and probably dates from pre-exilic times, perhaps the same time as Ps 60 with which it has many affinities [9]. Some defeat by surrounding nations prompts this outburst. The psalm insists that the defeat cannot be attributed to some major sin v. 17, so why did God let it happen? He must have gone to sleep! (v.23). In the post-exilic period, when they made a strenuous effort to keep the law, the Jews must have asked the same question. The next group of psalms suggest some answers.

Psalm 45 may originally have been a royal wedding song. But in its present setting it is to be understood as a messianic psalm, the messiah is marrying his bride Israel. Verse 2

You are the most handsome of the sons of men;  
grace is poured upon your lips;  
therefore God has blessed you forever.

Is rendered by the Jewish targum

Thy beauty, O King Messiah, exceeds that of the children of men;  
a spirit of prophecy is bestowed upon thy lips.

While v. 10, an address to the bride

Hear, O daughter, and consider and incline your ear

is translated

Hear, O congregation of Israel, the law of his mouth, and consider his wondrous works.

The messianic interpretation is of course presupposed by the New Testament in such passages as Hebrews 1:8-9 and passages where the church is described as the bride of Christ, and those likening the kingdom of heaven to a wedding.

Psalms 44 and 45 bewailed Israel's oppression by her enemies. Psalm 45 on the other hand looks forward to their submission to king messiah. 'The peoples fall under you.' v. 5; 'The people of Tyre will seek your favour with gifts.' (v. 12), and 'nations will praise you for ever and ever.' (v.17) Vesco sums up the relationship between the two psalms well.

'After the supplication of ps 44 which wondered about a possible rejection of Israel by Yahweh and presented the elect people as animals destined for the slaughter house, Ps 45 brings a message of hope. It conjures up the messianic reign, it recalls the ancient promises and it announces a glorious future for a people humiliated by a foreign occupier. The messiah, victorious, priest and king, will reign with law and justice. His people will be married to him. Ps 45 has led us to the temple of Jerusalem. And it is about Jerusalem that Ps 46 is going to speak.'

Psalms 46-48 are often called Songs of Zion for they celebrate Jerusalem as the city where God dwells and which he protects. The nations may attack Jerusalem, but they will be thwarted because lives in her (46:5-10).

Ps 47 continues in the same vein (see vv. 1-4). Note now a new element. The peoples are summoned to clap their hands and shout for joy, *because* they have been defeated, v. 3. This implies a fundamental change of attitude. They have been converted. They recognise the Lordship of the God of Israel, and this makes them and their leaders part of the people of the God of Abraham [10]. After this remarkable openness to the possibility that all the nations will join in the worship of the God of Israel, they reappear in the more typical guise in Ps 48 attacking the city of God, where again they are defeated. This oscillation between the nations attacking the city of God on the one hand, and acknowledging the sovereignty of the son of David and worshipping his God on the other, characterises the rest of the Psalter. The failure of their attacks it is hoped will lead to submission and worship, but that is obviously not always the case. Nevertheless the attitude to the nations seems to become more positive as one reads on, in much the same way as laments become fewer and hymns of praise become more frequent later in the Psalter.

Three consecutive psalms (66-68) speak of the whole earth or all the nations or their kings praising the LORD or bringing him tribute.

66:4 declares 'All the earth worships you and sings praises to you. 68:29 affirms 'Because of your temple at Jerusalem kings shall bear gifts to you.' and even more strikingly 'Nobles shall come from Egypt; Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God.' (68:31)

And sandwiched between these two psalms comes Ps 67, which repeatedly urges all the peoples and nations to praise God. The same Hebrew tense is used through most of the psalm, and it may be translated as a jussive (let x happen) or as a future prediction (x will happen). In the opening verses the sense is clearly jussive and in the last two verses future. But what about v. 5? Should it be translated 'Let the peoples praise you' jussive so EVV or 'The peoples will praise you' so Kirkpatrick.

The latter is a more satisfying climax and prepares the way for the predictions of 68:29, 31.

The theme of this magnificent psalm is the march of God to victory. It traces the establishment of His kingdom in Israel in the past; it looks forward to the defeat of all opposition in the future, until all the kingdoms of the world own the God of Israel as their Lord and pay Him homage. [11]

The issue of jussive versus future surfaces again in Psalm 72. As a prayer for Solomon it makes best sense to translate the verbs as jussives. 'May he have dominion from sea to sea...may desert tribes bow down before him' (72:8-9, so RSV, ESV, NRSV), but read messianically a future sense is perhaps preferable, 'He shall have dominion...shall bow before him' (so AV, NIV). Though one might pray for the new David to enjoy universal dominion, it would seem more consonant with other passages to see that dominion as promised. But whether we take Ps 72 as hopes or promises, there is no doubt that the ultimate fulfilment involves all nations acknowledging the rule of the messiah. As Ps 86:9 puts it so clearly: 'All the nations you have made shall come and worship before you, O Lord, and shall glorify your name.'

Psalm 87 develops these ideas in an amazing way. Verses 4-6 are the words of God. He declares that Israel's traditional great enemies, Egypt (Rahab) and Babylon and the Philistines are being granted citizenship of Jerusalem. The formula granting this citizenship is 'This one was born there'. Other peoples mentioned such as the Cushites from Nubia and the people of Tyre show that the list is representative of all the peoples of the world.

'The names that are mentioned mark the four heavenly quarters: west (Egypt), east (Babylon), north (the land of the Philistines and Tyre, and south Cush.' [12]

In Ps 45 Israel was pictured as the bride of the Messiah. Here we have another picture, Jerusalem i.e. its inhabitants, is the mother of the nations. They enjoy a similar relationship to God as Israel, for God declares they know him (v. 4). Kirkpatrick sums up the import of this psalm magnificently:

'This psalm is fittingly placed here, for it expands the thought of 86: 9 in the style and the spirit of prophecy. It is terse, abrupt, enigmatic, like a prophetic oracle; in its breadth of view and fulness of Messianic hope it vies with the grandest of prophetic utterances. It depicts Zion as the metropolis of the universal kingdom of God, into which all nations are adopted as citizens. The franchise of Zion is conferred upon them as though it were theirs by right of birth.

'Thus the Psalm is a prediction of the incorporation of all nations into the Church of Christ, and the establishment of the new and universal nationality of the kingdom of God.' [13]

or to put it Zenger's way

'The world revolution of Psalm 2 becomes transformed into a great world family in Psalm 87, when Zion as the mother of messianic Israel (psalm 2) and mother of all mankind (ps 87) becomes the capital of the world king Yahweh himself. That is the great theme of the fourth book of the psalter.' [14]

The last psalm of book 3 is 89 which is a prolonged lament over the end of the Davidic monarchy: God seems to have forgotten his promise to David.

He had 'sworn by my holiness;

I will not lie to David.

His offspring shall endure for ever,  
his throne as long as the sun before me. (89:35-36)  
But now you have cast off and rejected;  
You are full of wrath against your anointed.  
Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,  
which by your faithfulness you swore to David? (89:38, 49).

### **Book four**

It seems to many modern commentators that the next book of the Psalter (psalms 90-106) are an answer to this lament. At the heart of book 4 is a group of psalms celebrating the LORD's kingship. Mowinckel saw these psalms as used in the autumn festival of tabernacles when God was ritually enthroned as king. It is not necessary to buy this theory to see that psalms 93-100 do indeed focus on the LORD's reign, several of them begin or include the cry 'The LORD reigns.' Though some commentators see this reign of God as a substitute for a messianic king, this seems unlikely given the prominence of the messianic psalms placed at key places in the psalter. It is also unlikely because clearly royal/messianic psalms appear in the fifth and final book of the Psalter, e.g. Pss 110 and 132. But there is no doubt that the hope of the conversion of the Gentiles is reinforced in the fourth book. Ps 100 is a further example, as is Ps 96. Note how 96:1 summons all the earth to sing to the Lord; that his saving deeds have to be proclaimed to all nations v. 3; verse 8 urges them to come to the temple with their sacrifices, and verse 9 makes it clear that this applies to the whole earth. Verse 10 may even be the confession of the peoples worshipping the Lord in Jerusalem. [15] Whereas in vv. 1-3 Israel proclaims God's deeds in history, here the nations 'confess YHWH, the king and sustainer of the world, with a quotation from 93:1.' [16] Similar sentiments to those in ps 96 are found in Ps 98: God's saving deeds prompt a new song, v. 1. The nations see it in v. 2, so all the earth must burst forth into joyful song, vv. 4-5.

But all these remarks are capped by Psalm 100 which Zenger declares is the most spectacular statement of theology in the OT. Already we have been told that the nations will hear of God's deeds, confess that he is king, and offer sacrifices in Jerusalem. Now they appropriate the covenant formula to themselves. Like Israel they see themselves in a covenant with the LORD. The nations say:

Know that the LORD, he is God!  
It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture (100:3)

### **Zenger writes**

'If we read Psalms 93-100 as a continuing context, the nations move steadily into the center of the event, drawing closer and closer to Israel and its God.

'Psalm 100, as the climax of the composition, integrates the nations of the world in worship before the God of Zion: they should, and they will, shout aloud to YHWH, serve him (and not the idols; cf. 97:7) with joy, and experience his nearness – like Israel and together with it.' [17]

Not all commentators share Zenger's daring reading that makes v. 3 a confession by the nations, but it is clear that this psalm calls on all of them to join in the true worship of the God of Israel.

## Book five

In the fifth and final book of the Psalter, psalms 107-150, we find the five themes set out in Ps 2 reaffirmed. God's choice of David and his successors is reaffirmed in Ps 132:11. So too is the election of Zion as God's dwelling place in several of the Songs of Ascent (e.g. 122, 125, 132). The third theme of the attack on Jerusalem and the Davidic king is not forgotten either, as in the most poignant of psalms 137.

However though when the Psalter was compiled, the Jews had only seen a partial answer to their prayers through Cyrus' conquest of Babylon, they still looked for the LORD's anointed to conquer their foes. Psalm 110 declares:

'Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies your footstool.  
'The LORD is at your right hand;  
he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.  
He will execute judgement among the nations,  
filling them with corpses.' (110:1, 5-6).

Psalm 118 is a thanksgiving uttered by the hoped for king entering Jerusalem in triumph. While Psalm 144 is a prayer by David for deliverance 'from the hand of foreigners, whose mouths speak lies and whose right hand is a right hand of falsehood.' (vv. 7-8) While the last-but-one psalm pictures God's warriors celebrating God's victory over the powers of evil, the nations that oppose God's rule.

But this is not the Psalter's last word on the nations. The psalms still hope that nations and their leaders will as a result of his people's vindication join in God's praise. Ps 148 bids all mankind (including the nations) join in praising him, and the Psalter's very last word is:

Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. (150: 6)

## Notes

[1] Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, p.87.

[2] Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter*, p.87.

[3] Verse 12 is a bit problematic with its advice to kiss the son, 'son' being an Aramaic word. So a conjectural ehthat the kings of the nations are being addressed in the lingua franca of the time, i.e. in Aramaic. Whatever the correct reading, it is clear that the kings are being challenged to submit to both the LORD and his anointed king in Jerusalem.

[4] Kirkpatrick, p.32.

[5] Vesco, pp.203-4.

[6] Delitzsch, *I*, p.324.

[7] Kirkpatrick, p.122.

[8] Norbert Lohfink and Erich Zenger, *Der Gott Israels und die Völker*, p.83.

[9] Kirkpatrick, p.236.



- [10] The Hebrew of 47:9a is literally 'the princes of the peoples have gathered, people of the God of Abraham. The second phrase, 'people...Abraham' seems to be in apposition to 'the princes of the peoples', hence ESV inserts 'as'.
- [11] Kirkpatrick, p.375.
- [12] Hossfeld and Zenger, p.385.
- [13] Kirkpatrick, pp.518-9.
- [14] Lohfink and Zenger, p.150.
- [15] Lohfink and Zenger, p.161.
- [16] Hossfeld and Zenger, p.466.
- [17] Hossfeld and Zenger, p. 497.

[<back to top>](#)

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# The Nations in the Psalms and the Psalms in the Nations – a response



Author: Tim Davy, Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission, Redcliffe College.

Since I was in my early teens I've been aware of the close connection between the book of Psalms and mission. When I was about 14 my Dad went on a short-term trip with our church to visit some congregations in Ghana. His returning flight into Heathrow was flight number 117 and, knowing there were 150 psalms and being *that* kind of a kid, I wondered what Psalm 117 had to say:

- <sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, all you nations;  
extol him, all you peoples.
- <sup>2</sup> For great is his love toward us,  
and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.  
Praise the LORD. (NIV)

So I had always known that the nations feature in the Psalms, but over the years became increasingly aware of the tensions and complexities concerning the theme.

I would like to thank Gordon for such a stimulating, constructive and clear assessment of the role of the nations in the Psalms. I am sure, like me, many gathered here are grateful for the way you have unravelled what can seem like a very complex set of relationships between God, Israel and the nations.

In particular we are grateful for the journey on which you have taken us through the book of Psalms, modelling so well how we might approach a theme in the psalter canonically.

In my presentation on the Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission I outlined our passion for understanding both mission in the Bible (of which these relationships between God, Israel and the nations are a part), and the Bible in mission.

Having been treated to such a helpful exploration of The Nations in the Psalms, I would now like to ask the question, 'What is the role of the Psalms in the Nations?'

## The Bible as product and record of mission

In recent scholarship on the Bible and Mission, and particularly the method of reading the Bible through the lens of mission, as Chris Wright highlighted in our lecture last year, writers refer to the Bible as a product, record and tool of mission.

I would want to suggest that Gordon has illustrated in very helpful ways how the individual Psalms and the Psalter as a whole have emerged from and been shaped by what many would call missional concerns...

- the viability of the people of God in the midst of threatening circumstances;
- God's purposes for humanity and creation;
- The establishment of the kingdom of God in the world;
- Israel's attempts to deal with their encounters with non-Israelite cultures and worldviews.

We have also seen tonight how the Psalter describes some of the ways in which the people of Israel outlined a vision for the nations to come before God in worship and, may we say it, be reconciled with him. This is also closely tied to their future vision of a new David, who of course the New Testament writers understood as referring to Jesus Christ, the one in whom God's mission reaches its climax and fulfilment.

### **But what of the psalms as a tool of mission?**

Here I would suggest a couple of pointers and would invite thoughts and suggestions as well.

Firstly, the psalms have always functioned to shape the people of God as we participate in God's mission. This is true whatever the context you are living and working in. But I think the psalms do something spectacular in this regard. They help us to pray, to pray our true selves and to pray beyond ourselves to those in our own community or elsewhere in the world.

This is how Ian Stackhouse puts it in his book, *The Day is Yours* (see his chapter on Praying the Psalms in this issue of Encounters):

Sometimes when I am praying a psalm a face will appear; someone for whom this Psalm describes actual experience. Other times the words of the Psalm sound for all the world like the latest news bulletin from Kosovo, or the Congo, and so, in a strange way, the ancient liturgy helps me to be more up-to-date than I would otherwise be. Precisely because the world hasn't changed much, and human experience is awful a lot of the time, praying the Psalms, far from representing a retreat into private interiority, is an advance onto the concourse of life. (from *The Day is Yours: Slow Spirituality in a Fast-Moving World*, Paternoster Press, p.95)

I had the pleasure this year of supervising an undergraduate dissertation that looked at the phenomenon of missionary attrition; that is, when cross-cultural workers leave earlier than intended, often (but not always) because of stress and burnout. And what did he recommend as a solution (or at least part of a wider solution)?

Mission agencies should help their personnel learn the language of lament found in the psalms so that they can be real with God and process the whole of their experiences before God.

A second way in which the psalms have been an effective tool of mission is in paving the way to a receptive hearing of the good news of Jesus. Where so many different ideas abound about the nature of God and his engagement with humanity one starting point that some cross-cultural workers use is to read Psalm 139 with their friends. *This* is the God we are talking about, they might say. He knows us profoundly and intimately. And of course this may be just as useful an approach within the UK as in other cultures.

[<back to top>](#)

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# Psalms 1-2 as an Introduction to Reading the Psalms Missionally



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When read together, Pss 1—2 serve as a hermeneutical introduction to the Psalter. This is an emerging consensus among Psalter scholars. In this essay, I will explore the implications of this insight for a missional reading of the Psalter. A missional reading of Scripture is one that recognizes and privileges *God's mission (missio Dei)* as the interpretive key to understanding the Bible. [1] The Psalter serves as the prayer book for God's people who exist as a community called to reflect and embody God's character for the sake of the nations.

## Reading Psalms One and Two

The literary shape of these psalms invites us to read Psalms 1—2 together as a literary unit. Psalm 1 begins and Psalm 2 ends with a blessed/happy statement: *Happy is the man...* (1:1) and *Happy are all who find refuge in him* (2:12). These statements form an *inclusio* or bracket around the unit. Moreover, unlike virtually all psalms in Books I—III, both Psalms 1 and 2 are untitled. Lastly, there is a movement from the particular to the universal in these psalms. Psalm 1 focuses on the "Happy man" or "Happy person" [2] whereas Psalm 2 closes with a universal affirmation, "Happy are *all* who find refuge in him." These features serve to bind the opening two psalms to one another.

Psalms 1 and 2 introduce two themes that are paramount for understanding the Psalter as a whole: Scripture and Kingship. Psalm 1 opens the Psalter by pointing to the Scriptures as the only sure guide to life. The "Law of the Lord" serves as a constant companion that shapes the "happy one" into a person who will prosper. The prosperity envisioned in Psalm 1 is the successful fulfillment of God's work in the world. The tree imagery and the summative statement "all that he does will prosper" in verse three are rooted in allusions to Jer 17:5—8, Ezek 47:12 and Gen 39:3, 23. [3] Verse three is not promising a prosperity in which hardship and suffering are absent. Rather it understands success in terms of the fulfillment of God's will and mission. McCann aptly writes, "The point of the simile is *not* that the righteous will not suffer, but rather that the righteous will always have in God a reliable resource to face and endure life's worst." [4] Scripture nourishes and shapes its readers for a life lived for God. Verse six affirms that the Lord "knows" such persons in the sense of "maintains relationship" or "watches over."

Psalm two follows up by proclaiming the reign of God over the nations through the king whom he installs in Zion. If Psalm 1 secures the individual through God's gift of the Scriptures, then Psalm two secures the community of God's people in the midst of the nations. The nations may not support the mission of God in the world and indeed may move to oppose it actively (2:1—3). Psalm two recognizes the violence and rebellion present in the world. The rulers of the earth often stand against the purposes of God. But from the beginning, the Psalter declares to God's people that the nations stand under the authority of God and of God's anointed one (2:4—9). Moreover despite the presence of active opposition, God invites all nations and kings to find their true calling in the service of God's mission (2:10—12).

## Missional Reflection on Pss 1—2

What is the effect on the reader of the Psalter of such an introduction? This is the key question in a missional hermeneutic. The goal of interpretation is the *conversion* of the reader/hearer to the perspective of the text. This includes both Christ—followers and those who are still pre—Christian. A missional reading invites us to ask questions such as these: What sort of person does this text assume that I am? What would my life look like if I embodied the words of this psalm? To what mission is this passage calling me to give my life? In short, a missional reading helps us to hear Scripture's call to (re)align ourselves with the ethos and purposes of God's kingdom. [5] This perspective is critical for learning to proclaim the Gospel in our pre (or post)—Christian context. If we read only from the perspective of the Church, we are forgetting about those on the outside; if we read only from the perspective of non—Christians, we miss the call to realign that the Scriptures continually pronounce to believers. Instead, what is needed is a reading of Scripture that speaks *human*. Such a reading calls insiders to the Gospel to realign themselves with God's missional work in the world and invites outsiders to align their lives with God's mission in the world.

When read together, the initial two psalms prepare the reader of the Psalter for a journey through the Psalter and through life. These psalms...

### 1) Shape a person with Scripture

Psalm 1 is audacious in its emphasis on a steady and consistent diet of Scripture. It affirms such a lifestyle to be the key to a life of faithful obedience in engaging the world with the Gospel. Don't miss a key implication of Psalm 1's extolling a devotion to Torah: *We are invited to read and pray the Psalms as God's authoritative Scripture*. Individual psalms are not merely praises and prayers from God's people to the Lord. They are the word of God for us and to us. The Psalter is our missional prayer book whose goal is to mold us into persons who truly reflect God's good news for the world. This emphasis is restated in Ps 19 and most emphatically in Ps 119. Living as God's missional community for the sake of the world requires a map to serve as a sure guide. The Psalter opens with a poignant reminder of God's gift of the Scriptures. As you read through the Psalter, allow each text to shape you by asking: *How do I need to change in order to pray this psalm and mean it?*

### 2) Point to the security of the future through God's Kingdom

A missional reading recognizes that Psalm two is a word of encouragement, security and hope to God's people. It assures God's people of the LORD's sovereignty over the geo—political realm. Nations and rulers may rage openly against God and attempt to thwart God's aims, but such schemes and intrigues will not prove to be the final verdict over Creation. God's people are invited to live with the *end* in mind. The present may be bleak. The raging of the nations may be intimidating and frightening, but rebellion and darkness will not be the final verdict of history. Thus, God's people can give themselves to daring and bold lives of advancing God's kingdom through following the lead of God's anointed one. The New Testament clearly sees Jesus as the fulfillment of Psalm 2's vision for God's Son and ruler. [6] Thus, Psalm two calls its hearers to (re)align their lives around the prerogatives of Jesus who clearly called his followers to follow him into the world on mission (Matt 4:18—22; 16:24; 28:18—20). Live confidently in the world and be fully engaged in God's mission because the future is firmly in the hands of the LORD. Ask: *How does this text call our community of faith to live differently in light of God's future?*

### 3) Prepare the hearer/reader/prayer for the challenges of living as God's people in the world

The orienting effect of Pss 1—2 is critical for the formation of a missional people. The life of faith is risky and full of challenges. The Psalter affirms this beginning with Psalm 3 and

consistently thereafter through the first 89 psalms in which the reader is confronted by lament after lament in which God's people find themselves surrounded by enemies, afflicted with illness, isolated from one another, and even feeling abandoned by God. [7] Brueggemann in his work on the Psalms argues for a two-fold movement in the Psalter: 1) a move from settled orientation to an unsettled disorientation and 2) a movement from this disoriented state into a new orientation. [8] Brueggemann's work is helpful because it takes seriously the overarching shape of the Psalter. [9] If one reads or prays through the Book of Psalms, he or she embarks on a journey through the vicissitudes of life. Yet the Psalter is not arranged haphazardly. It is designed to mold God's people into people who can serve as a missional people regardless of the external circumstances (good or ill) in which they find themselves. By orienting the reader of the Psalter around the themes of Scripture and God's Kingship, Psalms 1—2 prepare the reader for the disorientation that God's people face in the midst of lament and for the reorientation found in Psalms 90—150 in which the Psalter moves toward the symphony of praise of Psalms 146—150. If themes of lament dominate the initial 90 psalms, the last 60 psalms emphasize God's reign, thanksgiving for God's salvation, and the unadulterated praise of God. [10] Reflect: *How do these texts prepare us for living out God's witness in the world?*

#### 4) Serve as an invitation to the nations

A missional approach to the Bible is not complete until it has assessed how a text can be communicated as good news to the world. This point was emphasized last year in my Psalms exegesis course at Asbury Theological Seminary (Orlando, FL). While studying Psalm two, a student asked, "Wow, what would it be like to hear this text if we were one of the nations rather than as part of God's people?" I stopped class immediately and replied, "You've just asked one of the most important questions that a student has ever raised."

In our 21<sup>st</sup> century context, it is crucial for Christ-followers to always read the Bible on behalf of the world. Within the Church, we have a tendency to read the Scriptures only from the perspective of *insiders*. Many preachers and teachers routinely rage and rail against those outside of the walls of the Church. Yet how does such talk serve to advance the Gospel in our day? How does an insider versus outsider mentality help outsiders to become insiders? How would such an approach help to illumine the missional message of Psalm 2?

This text bears witness that the current reality in which the nations are at times in open hostility to the mission of God is not the final word. Yes, this text describes God's response as scoffing (v. 4). This posturing is part of the encouragement for God's people to persevere. But verses 9—12 serve an important missional function. They are an invitation to the rulers of the nations to recognize and submit to the sovereignty of God. This may sound triumphalistic and militaristic, but the concluding beatitude subverts any such misreading: *Blessed/Happy/Fortunate are all who take refuge in him* (v. 12c). This text ends with a profound hope for the world. Even the nations who may openly rage against God may enter into the privileged state of blessing. Thus, Psalm 2 is not anti-outsider nor simply an imperialistic declaration of the LORD's sovereignty. It does not imagine a conquest of the nations by *human* hands. Rather it is an invitation to the world to enter into a new status as members of God's people. It is significant that the Psalter ends with a similar hope. Psalm 148:11—13 is an invitation to the rulers and people of the nations to join in the praise of God. Psalm 150:6 offers the broadest of all calls to worship: *Let everything that has breath praise the Lord*. Reflect: *What is the Gospel message in this text? What invitation does it extend to an outsider to the Gospel?*



## Conclusion:

Psalms 1—2 thus prepare us for our journey through the Psalter. There will be hymns of praise and laments of utter desperation that follow. There will be songs of thanksgiving and psalms of trust and instruction. But Psalms 1—2 ground us as God's missional people by focusing on the need for our continual realignment with Scripture as we engage the world as God's missional people in the assurance that God's ultimate victory is assured and that the final word will be a symphony of praise of the Living Lord in which all creation is invited to participate (Pss 146—150, esp. 150:6).

## Notes

- [1] Christopher J. H. Wright, *Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downer's Grove: IVP Academic, 2006), 29—69. See also Brian D. Russell, "What is a Missional Hermeneutic?" *Catalyst: Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives for United Methodist Seminarians* 36.4 (2010): 1.
- [2] Heb 'ish is male—gender specific. In the context of the psalter as a whole (as well as the Bible as a whole), there is no reason to restrict the implications of Psalm one to only males.
- [3] Brian D. Russell, "Psalm One as an Interpreter of Scripture" *Irish Biblical Studies* 26 (2005): 170—93.
- [4] J. Clinton McCann, Jr., "'The Way of the Righteous' in the Psalms" in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation* (ed. William P. Brown; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 137.
- [5] This call is summarized in the initial preaching of Jesus (Matt 4:17 cf. Mark 1:14—15).
- [6] Matt 3:17, 17:5; Mark 1:11, 9:7; Luke 3:22, 9:35; John 1:49; Php 2:11; Heb 1:2; Rev 2:26—27, 12:5, and 19:15.
- [7] The vast majority of psalms in Books I—III (Pss 1—89) are laments. Laments are psalms in which the psalmist cries to God for help. Although they are less frequent in Books IV—V (Pss 90—150), laments are the most common type of psalm in the Psalter as a whole.
- [8] Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 19—23 and 38—39.
- [9] Those interested in this dimension of Psalter study may want to explore the following resources: James L. Mays, *The Lord Reigns: A Theological Handbook to the Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994) and J. Clinton McCann, *A Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993).
- [10] There are of course a number of laments sprinkled into Pss 90—150, but the percentage is notably lower. 17 of the 60 psalms of Pss 90—150 are laments. This contrasts with Pss 1—89 where 54 of 89 are laments.

[<back to top>](#)

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# Reflections on the Nations in the Psalms



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Author: Eddie Arthur is Executive Director at Wycliffe Bible Translators UK.

Circumstances prevented me from actually attending the lecture, but I have thoroughly enjoyed both reading the transcript and listening to the lecture as an MP3 recording. I was fascinated by the insights into the Psalms that emerged from the canonical approach. It left me with a great deal to reflect on and I look forward to being able to give some time to studying the Psalms in the light of what I learned. However, I also found myself wondering how I should apply what I learned in my own context. While I dabble in Biblical studies and theology, I am at heart and by calling a missionary, a practitioner.

One thing that particularly struck me in the lecture was the idea of reading Psalm 23 in a broader canonical context. In the particular nation where I currently find myself, England, Psalm 23 is one of the very few portions of Scripture which would be recognised by the non-churchgoing population. At those points where Christianity impinges on modern life; funerals and weddings, Psalm 23 will often be chosen as a reading or perhaps as a hymn. The words, redolent of a quieter, calmer rural existence are attractive in our frenetic city based age. The religious sentiment can be read in a non-threatening semi-deist fashion which is comforting but doesn't actually make any demands on the hearer.

This raises the difficult and delicate question of how to encourage people to experience the real comfort which comes from a covenant relationship with Israel's God, rather than the artificial comfort which comes from a sentimental reading of the text.

Perhaps a canonical reading of the Psalms may provide us with a creative way to sensitively address this subject, Prof. Wenham's reservations about Lohfink's approach, notwithstanding.

I wonder if there is a place for a little booklet based on Psalms 22-24 which could be given to people who ask for Psalm 23 to be used at funerals or weddings. The booklet could include the text of the Psalms, perhaps in both the AV and the Message, and a little bit of explanation.

The booklet could start off by explaining that Psalm 23 doesn't just sit on its own, but is actually part of a wider context. It could then take a look at Psalm 22, in particular highlighting the Messianic aspect that Jesus was involved in life on the earth and suffered and died. Psalm 23 could then be presented as the benefits that come from a real relationship with the suffering God, before going on to look at how Psalm 24 describes how one can come into that relationship.

Sensitively written, a little book of this sort might be a useful tool for a Pastor. If not, there may be other creative ways that we can apply a canonical reading of the Psalms in the real life situations that we face as we read the Psalms among the nations.

[<back to top>](#)

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# The Nations in Isaiah 40-55

## A response to Gordon Wenham's The Nations in the Psalms



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We are grateful to Gordon for opening up an understanding of the various ways in which 'the nations' function in the Psalms, particularly read through the lens of Psalms 1 and especially 2, from the assumed perspective of the post exilic editors. He highlights 5 themes which he finds in Psalm 2 and then traces how these recur throughout the Psalter. These five themes are

6. The divine choice of David as king. See v. 7
7. The choice of Jerusalem or Zion as God's dwelling place. v. 6
8. The attack of the nations on the Davidic king in Jerusalem. vv. 1-3
9. The defeat of the nations. vv. 8-9
10. The invitation to the nations to serve the LORD. vv. 11-12

This paper looks (very briefly!) at the treatment of 'The Nations' in Isaiah 40-55. The reason for doing this [1] is to compare and contrast this with the views reflected in the psalms, not least because the context for these chapters is usually considered to be that of Israel *before* the return from Babylon. So they give us an insight as to how these themes were being utilised prior to the psalms editors' work. Equally important, however, these chapters, embedded in the Isaiah manuscript, indicate both an awareness of the 'Jerusalem' theology as outlined in the five points above and also a keen awareness of psalm-like materials more generally. So both with respect to theological motifs and also liturgical resources there is much similarity between Isaiah 40-55 and the psalms. Yet there is a key historical contextual difference from within the exile or beyond exile.

As the five points centre around the David king, our entry point will be Isaiah 55:4-5

See, I made him [that is David] a witness to the peoples,  
A leader and commander for the peoples.  
See, you shall call nations that you do not know,  
and nations that do not know you shall run to you,  
because of the Lord you God, the Holy One of Israel,  
for he has glorified you. (All quotations are from the NRSV)

Although this does not apparently make reference to points 2-4 above, 4 may well be included in the concept 'he has glorified you'. This relates to God restoring the exiles, which involves the defeat of Babylon by Cyrus, and of course, before this, the defeat of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. 52:3-6 refer to the oppression of Israel by Egypt and Assyria (interestingly not Babylon!) and the following verses talk about the restoration of Jerusalem (i.e. point 2). Such restoration, and also the deliverance from Babylon with the permission to return to Jerusalem by Cyrus, could well be understood as the historical ways in which Israel was 'glorified' by God.

There are many fascinating points we could make about these verses, but two must suffice. First we note that Israel is not directly involved in the destruction of the nations – David does

not rule over them but for them (does this reflect the historical process of Cyrus defeating Babylon?) and Israel does not even withstand them from Jerusalem let alone defeat them militarily but 'calls to them' – invites them. Secondly this call goes to 'nations they do not know' – so does this mean that their national enemies are not included in this generous offer? Perhaps it should be read more along the lines of 'even nations you do not know' (see for the inclusion of Egypt and Assyria in Isaiah 19:18-24. This is an amazing passage but one which does follow the defeat of Egypt. Note also references to the ends of the earth/coastlands – Isaiah 42:10-13; 43:6; 45:22; 48:20; 49:6.

This approach of 'calling to the nations' concurs with the mission given to the servant in Isaiah 49. Here the servant (Israel) calls to the nations (verses 1-2). Here too is recounted the Servant's mission

It is too light a thing that you should be my servant

To raise up the tribes of Jacob...

I will give you as a light to the nations,

that my salvation may reach the end of the earth. (Verse 6; see also 42:6)

There is a reference to Kings and princes humbling themselves, but also the lament of Zion that God hasn't bothered with her! (Verses 7, 14). The response to this is that the nations will be involved in this restoration process.

It seems as though these chapters are dealing with a double focus (Babylonian exiles and Jerusalem) and seeking to show how God's historical actions integrate them.

One of the strong and recurring emphases in the psalms is the attack on the king or Jerusalem and the defeat of these nations. There are remnants of these motifs in say Isaiah 45:14-16, 20-21) but the military attack/defeat motif appears to be transferred from the nations themselves to their idols, as in Isaiah 46, and rather than military force, irony becomes the main weapon (see also 44:9-20). The main exception to this though is chapter 47 where Babylon is described in her defeated, abject state and this is God taking vengeance (see verses 3-4 and compare 48:14). This was required by the historical events of Babylon being defeated by Cyrus.

## Conclusion

Gordon's paper showed us that the psalms, while they may relate to the five point thematic structure of psalm 2, rarely include all the elements and certainly when read as a whole in their canonical order do not reflect a linear picture. Inherent in them is an apparent contradiction that the nations are both the focus of God's destructive anger and also are allowed, invited, called to join Israel in worshipping him.

Looking briefly into Isaiah chapters 40-55 offers perhaps three further insights. Before the return of the exiles the prophet needed to address two foci at once. In addition to Jerusalem there was Babylon, for as Ezekiel indicates God's locus for salvation had moved to Babylon. Although Jerusalem could never be forgotten.

Secondly, elements of the complex pattern witnessed within the psalms can be glimpsed within these chapters, but, apart from Babylon itself, the emphasis has shifted to the redemptive opportunities for the nations.

Thirdly, the animosity against 'the nations' seems now to have been deflected towards their idols.

This suggests that in post-exilic times, while the psalm editors could include or keep those materials which indicated military aggression against Jerusalem and then by God against those who had carried out the attacks, in reality their emphasis is likely to have been the inclusive one, the nations are invited (or even commanded) to join the covenant or at least worship God.

All of this material may well reflect the historic experiences of Israel (sometime particular nations were the cause of her misery, sometimes those nations shared in her misery and sometimes (as in David's times) Israel may have 'ruled' some of the nations). So her changing historical experiences are reflected in the different aspects of the psalms' themes, as they are more specifically in Isaiah 40-55 with the defeat of Babylon by Cyrus and the freedom to return to Israel. But equally, and in the end more importantly, it is the dynamic of Israel's God to bless the nations through Israel (see Genesis 12:1-3), that is the guiding motif. It is this 'eschatological confidence' which frees Israel to welcome the nations into the worship of her God.

## Notes

[1] There is an insightful over-view of the nations in Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, Fortress Press 1997, pages 492 – 527, but remarkably little attention is given to these Isaianic chapters.

[<back to top>](#)

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## Introduction and Background

The following is a summary of my undergraduate dissertation, which sought to understand the missional implications of the Psalms of Lament, exploring their significance in relation to the phenomenon of missionary attrition.

Lament can be seen clearly in the 'secular' world through songs, poems, literature and theatre but there is little evidence they are of any significance within the Church and more specifically within mission organisations in the 21st Century. Laments are found throughout Scripture and other Ancient Near Eastern writings, highlighting their importance as a means of communicating with God. The book of Psalms is full of laments and have much to offer mission organisations and the Church as a way of expressing our deepest emotions to God. Bullock (2001, p138) notes, 'while the boldness and naked honesty of the psalmist may shock us, this attitude is nevertheless instructive for our own spiritual lives. We sometimes hold back too much from God'.

## Attrition

The focus of the study primarily emphasised attrition within mission organisations. However it must be understood that this phenomenon is not limited to mission, but can also be observed in secular organisations (Taylor, 1997, p6). Guthrie (2000, p36) backs this up by noting, 'Businesses sending workers overseas in today's global economy are finding increasing reluctance on the part of their employees to work in other countries'.

In response to this Taylor (1997, p20) questions whether attrition is problematic within mission, or whether it is a natural part of life, a process of 'normal learning and maturation'. Nevertheless, research such as ReMAP [1] and ReMAPII [2] expound the parameters of attrition, correlating statistical evidence and identifying reasons why people leave the mission field.

## Traversing the contextual terrain

It is imperative to establish how something as ancient as a Psalm of Lament can have an impact on life in the 21st century. This is not to say that the Psalms of Lament are suitable in every situation. However, establishing and using the tools associated in lament may display the potential to alleviate the sense of despondency related to attrition. This is visible by acknowledging that throughout history songs, hymns, poems and psalms have played a significant role in developing spirituality and worship (Westermann, 1981, p36-51). On the one hand, it is widely recognised that laments have lost their place within Western Christian worship (Gillingham, 2008, p2). On the other hand, they have remained in many forms within Western secular society, through the media of song lyrics, poetry, theatre and the arts. An ever changing commentary on the emotional psyche of our society. Watts (1997, p252) commenting on the psychological function of human emotions writes that, 'emotions are functional in that they allow people to appraise situations very rapidly and to switch into a different and more adaptive mode of responding'.

The Psalms of Lament speak into, and out of, the darker side of life's emotions, inviting us to 'enter the pain of our hurt without apology or compromise' (Allender and Longman III, 1994,



p36), therefore enabling the reader to respond appropriately. This is what the ancients established by integrating the Psalms of Lament into the worship of YHWH.

## **Psalms of Lament**

Laments are interwoven throughout the book of Psalms, as well as the rest of Scripture. The Psalms of Lament follow a general form or pattern; they **Address God, Lament, Turn towards God, Petition God** and, finally, establish a **Vow of Praise and Thanksgiving**. That said, they do not always strictly adhere to the above pattern, as has been observed by Gunkel, Westermann and others. Nevertheless, not abiding by strict patterns seems to reflect the unevenness of our lives and relationships, or as Peterson (cited in Goldingay, 2006, p67) writes, “‘Since life does not come to us in neat categories, neither does prayer’”. Psalmic language has been described as ‘open and metaphorical’, therefore it remains alive in addressing new challenges (Anderson, 2000, p73). This interpretive perspective enables greater freedom in applying the psalms to contemporary situations.

The exegesis in my dissertation established and explained how Psalm 13 is a paradigm of lament, demonstrating how it encompasses the majority of the above pattern. This Psalm explicitly exudes **pain, anguish** and **torment** within the quartet of rhetorical questions to YHWH. Goldingay (2006, p205) notes that it is the cry of the desperate, those who feel YHWH is withholding or hiding His face. However, the ‘intimate’ relationship that Broyles (1999, p85) illustrates, between the worshippers and YHWH, supports and gives licence to the Psalmist’s approach of boldness and frankness towards a Holy God. The exegesis further establishes the role of **petition** within the prayer. This is the Psalmist’s use of direct engagement, trying to apply pressure on YHWH, reminding Him of His covenant, commitment and obligation to those who call upon His name.

Finally this section wrestled with the paradox of **Praise** within **Lament**, establishing how Anderson (2000, p60) can write, ‘Laments are really expressions of praise, offered in a minor key in the confidence that Yahweh is faithful’. Concluding that this ‘minor key’ represents only one configuration in the multi-faceted arrangement of the orchestral movement called the Psalms.

## **Evaluating a mission organisation**

This dissertation established an understanding of the phenomenon of missionary attrition and the presence of lament within the psyche of secular Western society, which means that lament is certainly not alien to Western Christians. Having then set out a deeper comprehension of lament, I was then able to examine and evaluate a specific Mission Organisation, discerning whether an understanding of lament was present within its member care literature.

In researching this organisation’s literature, it was acknowledged that it promotes ‘preventative member care’, and in doing so it has established a high member retention rate. However, it still suffers from attrition. In linking certain types of attrition with despondency, their literature shows no significant attempt to incorporate the tools of biblical lament in stopping this haemorrhage of people. Therefore, establishing the tools of Psalmic Lament within a member care package is a plausible issue to consider. Nevertheless, I would also recommend that further research be carried out on a missional reading of the Psalms of Praise, Psalms of Thanksgiving or even the Book of Lamentations, to establish if they could have a significant impact on Missionary attrition.

## Notes

[1] 'Reducing Missionary Attrition Project' - a study undertaken by the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission establishing how many missionaries return home, their reasons for returning and to explore possible solutions. This survey was carried out in fourteen different countries, each have a sizable overseas mission force (Blöecher cited in Hay et al., 2007, p9-22).

[2] 'Retaining Missionary Agencies Practice' - a further study undertaken by the World Evangelical Alliance Mission Commission to establish "Best agency Practices" to contribute to missionary retention', 'promote these "good practices" in the global missions community', and provide tools for mission agencies to strengthen missionary retention'. The survey was carried out in twenty-two different countries who each have a sizable missions force. (Lim, cited in Hay et al. 2007, p24-25).

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[<back to top>](#)

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# A Missional Reading of Psalm 47

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## Literary Structure and Setting – A Response to the Action of God

The psalm appears to have been composed as a response to a specific salvific action by YHWH on behalf of the nation of Israel. Commentators are divided as to the *sitz im leben* ('setting in life'), suggesting the need for balance between historic, cultic and eschatological interpretations. In post-exilic times the psalm was incorporated into the autumn celebration of *Rosh ha-Shanah*, [1] and today in the celebration of Christ's ascension.

"From the first word to the last, this (*psalm*) communicates the excitement and jubilation of an enthronement; and the king is God himself." [2]

The literary structure consists of two divisions, each beginning with a call to praise (vv. 1, 6), followed by the 'content of praise' (vv. 2-5, 7-9). [3] The figure of speech is one of progressive parallelism, the comparison revealing "a striking progressive unfolding of the divine plan of salvation." [4]

According to Cohen, the use of numerical devices combines to reinforce the theme of Yahweh's reign over the whole earth and accordingly over all nations. YHWH is found exactly in the centre of the psalm (v. 5), placing the covenantal name of God at the centre of all things; the name *Elohim* occurs seven times, the significant number suggesting wholeness and completeness. [5]

## The Call to Praise – The Worship of God

The psalmist rejoices in the great works of YHWH on Israel's behalf, [6] calling the *ammim* to acknowledge His sovereignty in worship (vv. 1, 6), [7] a grand vision anticipating v. 9. This distinctive call addresses not only Israel, but also *the conquered nations*, [8] now concurrent vassals to Israel's God, the Great King. [9] The song speaks of a relationship with YHWH that is utterly trustworthy in the face of every threat; the deep conviction growing out of specific salvific experiences - a *confession of faith* in the indestructible rule of God, [10] who is exalted over the whole earth – that is to be celebrated.

## The Awesome God of Israel – The Power of God

The psalm portrays the power struggle between YHWH and the nations who are in conflict with God's purposes. Through the action of YHWH in the history of Israel, the nations of the world are confronted with the awesome power of the living God of Israel. Unlike parochial 'gods' - limited by some imagined cultural or geographic boundary – the God of Israel is superior, unlimited in power and authority. None are able to withstand his might or thwart his purposes. [11]

As a result of the awesome revelation of power, YHWH is to be feared (v. 2), *yare*. [12] The psalmist's statement may allude to a desired response of allegiance to the LORD Most High – a turning from evil, [13] forsaking impotent idols and worthless 'gods.' [14] Fear of the Lord is a common response to the miraculous deeds accomplished through YHWH and His *chosen vessels*, which reveal the power of the 'invading' kingdom of God throughout history. [15]

### *The LORD Most High – The Reign of God*

The universal sovereignty of YHWH is reason for praise, [16] and allegiance, not simply because he is 'awesome,' but because he is *Yahweh 'Elyôn* (v. 2), the Most High, the legitimate ruler of both cosmic and earthly realms. [17] The title 'great king (v. 2), so arrogantly assumed by the Assyrian king, really belongs to YHWH, [18] who occupies an undisputed throne (vv. 7, 8), and whose decrees, acts, and commands are holiness itself. [19]

The significance of the Name of God lies in its intrinsic description of the character and identity of the unseen God – *incrementally revealed* throughout history. [20] The *final revelation* of God is understood in the *Name of Jesus*; He is *Kurios*, the King of kings, and Lord of lords. There is no other name proclaimed under heaven through which salvation is mediated - at His name every knee shall bow. [21]

The motif of the reign of God is reinforced in v. 5. 'Ascent' implies the 'descent' of YHWH [22] into the historic context of Israel as a "manifestation of what is going on behind and above the chaos of history." [23] Triumph over the nations and their gods provides evidence of YHWH's supreme authority to administer the affairs of men and nations, calling all to obedience. [24] Like a triumphant conqueror YHWH 'ascends' His throne amid acclamations of praise and sound of the *sofar*. [25]

The 'reign of God' signifies both the *efficacy* and the *effects* of God, both purposive power and historical results of God's activity over time." [26]

Similarly, the incarnation, resurrection and ascension of Christ parallels this scene, as Jesus enters human history to bring salvation to mankind, ascending triumphantly, having disarmed powers and principalities. [27] Eschatologically, in the context of 1 Thes 4:16, YHWH in Christ will 'descend' with a shout, and 'ascend' with His people in the final procession of victory over death. Thus Evans argues convincingly for the use of Ps 47:6 as the background to 1 Thes 4:16, using Jewish and patristic exegesis. [28]

### *The Election of Israel – The People of God*

The emphasis of vv. 3-4 is on the *sovereign action* of YHWH. The nation of Israel was *chosen* as God's *cegulla* [29] a treasured possession, selected at birth, before any possible accrual of merit – a peculiar *election* of grace – because of God's *love* and *oath* to the forefathers, and God's *universal purpose* to bless the nations.

"The Lord has made a place for his people among the nations, so that the nations may be included among his people." [30]

The 'dialectic of majesty and mercy' [31] are seen in God's sovereign rule, encompassing both the general governance of the nations and His special commitment to Israel. The two are always in tension, never resolved. [32] Israel was called as a prophetic sign of both blessing and judgment, [33] a mediator of the righteousness of YHWH, whose salvific acts were testimony that Israel's redemption had its source in the honour of YHWH Himself. [34]

YHWH's kingship not only analysed all human exercise of power, but provided the authorisation for the peculiar vision of political authority held in Israel. [35] The zenith of Israel's social, political and religious existence occurred during the reigns of David and Solomon, [36] reflecting the wisdom and righteousness of the God of the nation. Thus, rulers of the heathen nations were drawn to Israel to experience the greatness of the kingdom, [37] which foreshadowed the eschatological reign of Christ – characterised by righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

### *The Place of the Nations – The Salvation of God*

The place of the nations is majestically contrasted in vv. 3 and 9. As sovereign ruler over mankind, YHWH uses the nations according to His purposes, [38] later punishing them for their ill treatment of His chosen people, [39] forcing them to submit under the feet of their conquerors (v. 3). [40] The singer's prophetic words engender hope and faith in YHWH's merciful intervention in the affairs of the world, echoing down the corridors of history, where past present and future merge in the eschatological fulfilment of his promises of gentile salvation. [41]

The final verse (v. 9) contains a remarkable change, the climax being similar to Ps 46:10, above and beyond 46:9 - it is the point to which everything moves. The insignia of pomp, the emblems of rank, and the weapons of war, [42] are now portrayed as paying homage to the sovereignty of YHWH. [43]

The nations - the former enemies of Israel - are remarkably transformed and incorporated *into* the people of God. [44]

Today we see how this prophetic scene is accomplished through the sovereign intervention of YHWH in Christ, who has again forced the submission of the powers, [45] which would thwart His eternal plan for the people from every tribe tongue and nation. [46] United as one, the 'new ethnic,' [47] is characterised, not by racial or national identity, but by righteousness, joyful worship and willing [48] submission to the God of Abraham. When every knee bows, God is exalted. [49]

### *Further Missiological Reflections – The Mission of God*

Historic progression determines the mission function of God's people. The mercy of God was revealed at the Fall of man - the dawning of *Heilsgeschichte* ('salvation history'). Subsequently, the Creator inaugurated a new era in Abraham, who would be heir to the world, through his seed. [50] As the *children of Abraham*, Israel was called to 'live' the miracle of its existence as a light of revelation to the gentiles, [51] sustained by YHWH, *l'shem shamayim*, for the sake of heaven, without regard for the effect – a passive, centripetal, witness. [52]

The historical 'Christ Event' marked a decisive change in mission to the Gentiles. In a sense, the *ekklesia* inherits and continues the mediatory function of Israel as priest, prophet and king [53] - sustained by the power of God - yet now actively sent into the nations to *proclaim* the fulfilment of the promise to Abraham. [54]

Despite initial resistance, [55] the apostolic ministry of the restored nation is a pledge that 'eschatology is in the process of being realised.' [56] If at first sight, the mission of the NT seems centrifugal; it is so in order to become centripetal [57] - an ingathering of the heathen into the kingdom, from the four corners of the world. The result of this centrifugal movement is a universal regrouping of mankind, [58] no longer focussed on Jerusalem, but on the person of Christ. [59]

The NT writers substantiate the psalmist's portrayal of the dependency of mission on the hidden activity of God within His people.

"The evangelisation of the world is not merely a matter of words or deeds: it is a matter of presence – *the presence of the People of God in the midst of mankind and the presence of God in the midst of His people.* [60]

Truly, "The power of mission is worship." [61]

## Notes

- [1] Mays: 187.
- [2] Kidner: 177, cf Rogerson & McKay: 222. This psalm is linked with the so-called Enthronement Psalms 93, 96-99, although there is much debate as to whether they were composed for a pre-exilic annual festival which dramatised God's power over his foes and his kingship over creation. (Refer varied works by Mowinckel and Gunkel).
- [3] Du Preez: 312 separates vs. 9 into two verses; Anderson: 360 is similar in his analysis of the psalm.
- [4] Du Preez: 317.
- [5] Cohen quoted by Du Preez: 311.
- [6] 1 Chron 29:10ff.
- [7] This does not appear to be an overt call when seen in the context of the rest of the psalm, although there may have been people from foreign nations present on the occasion cf Ps 66:1ff; 117.
- [8] So Craigie: 347; Du Preez: 312; Brueggemann, 1984: 149; Kidner: 177; Leupold: 369 propose that *peoples* include both Israel and the nations.
- [9] In the context of the terms of the covenant-treaty context of Israel's faith; cf Hittite monarch was also addressed as *great king* in vassal treaties.
- [10] Du Preez:319 (cf Ps 65:5; Isa 33:22).
- [11] Isa 14:27; 45:7; Jer 10:10.
- [12] Used to denote the quality of God, which inspires fear and terror in YHWH's enemies (Anderson: 468).
- [13] Prov 3:7; 8:13; 45:9.
- [14] Isa 40:18ff; 46:1ff; Jer 10:3ff; 16:20f; Hab 2:18ff.
- [15] Especially in the ministry of Jesus and His disciples Matt 14:26; Mk 5:33; Lk 8:25; Ac 5:5,11.
- [16] Brueggemann, 1984: 149; Du Preez: 312.
- [17] This combination of names is commonly found in psalms 42-83 (the 'Elohistic Psalter'), seen by some as the replacement of foreign gods by YHWH (cf Isa 45:14; Jer 10:10; Mal 1:14).
- [18] Du Preez: 313, (Isa 36:4ff).
- [19] Spurgeon: 354.
- [20] Ex 6:3, cf Heb 1:2.
- [21] Ac 4:12; Phil 2:9-11.
- [22] The idea of YHWH's intervention in the earthly domain is often conveyed by the word *descend* (Cohen: 147), as in Gen 11:5,7; Ex 19:18ff; Prov 30:4; Is 31:4.
- [23] Mays: 187.
- [24] Isa 45:21f, cf. Ac 17:30.
- [25] Trumpets are an integral part of the worship of Israel - associated with the assembly before the Lord (Num 10:2ff); before battle as a reminder to the Lord (Num 10:9); before the celebration of feasts (Num 10:10); at the commemoration of atonement (Lev 23:24ff; 25:9f).
- [26] Johnson: 130.
- [27] Col 2:15; Eph 1:19ff.
- [28] Evans: 242-246 notes that seven of the nine words of the LXX Ps 46:6 are found in I Thes 4:16.
- [29] Ex. 6:6-7; 19:5; Deut. 4:20; 7:6; 10:15; 14:2; 26:18; 27:9; 29:1,12ff.
- [30] Mays: 186
- [31] Brueggemann, 1988: 65.
- [32] Brueggemann, 1984: 150.
- [33] The heathen nations recognised the sinfulness of Israel through the judgments of their God (Deut 29:24ff; 2Chron 29:8).
- [34] Martin-Achard: 15; cf Isa 43:7; 48:9,11; Ezek 20:9,14,22; cf Eph 12.
- [35] Brueggemann, 1984: 151.
- [36] Both David and Solomon sat upon the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem (1Chron 28:5; 29:23; 2Chron 9:8).
- [37] 2 Chron 9:1,5-6,8,23.
- [38] Isa 44:28; Hab 1:5,11; 3:16.
- [39] Jer 25:12f.
- [40] The metaphor of subjugation, 'beneath our feet' arose from the symbolic practice of victory, wherein, as the final act of humiliation, the victor stood with his foot on the neck of the conquered foe, (Josh 10:24; 1Ki 5:3; cf Rom 16:20; 1Cor 15:25,27; Eph 1:22; Heb 1:13; 2:8).
- [41] Isa 19:22ff; 56:6ff; 60:3ff; Mic 7:12; Zech 2:11; 8:22f.
- [42] Translated as 'rulers of the earth' in LXX, refer Anderson: 366.
- [43] Spurgeon: 355 (cf Isa 66:18,20,23).
- [44] In the Hebrew, there is no linking word between the phrases 'the princes of the peoples,' and 'the people of the God of Abraham,' The idea of the nations gathering as the people of God is favoured by Cohen: 148; Du Preez: 316-317, Keil & Delitzsch: 100; Kidner: 178; Leupold: 372; and Rogerson & McKay: 223.
- [45] Eph 1:22.
- [46] Eph 1:4f; 1Pe 1:18ff; Rev 13:8; 17:8.
- [47] Eph 2:14f.
- [48] Rather than *princes* or *leaders*, Leupold: 373 translates *nadib* as 'willing ones' according to the primal meaning of the Hebrew word. Refer also Harris, Archer and Waltke, *TWOT*, Chicago, Moody, 1980, p.1302.
- [49] Isa 45:23f; Heb 1:13; 2:8; Rom 16:20; 1Cor 15:24ff, with Rev 7:9ff; 5:13.
- [50] Gen 22:18; Rom 4:13; Gal 3:16.
- [51] This was not clearly delineated to the nation until the time of the prophet Isaiah (Isa 49:3).
- [52] Polish: 166.
- [53] Martin-Achard:77.
- [54] Matt 28:18ff, Lk 24:47 with Isa 44:1-5; Gal 3:29; Eph 3:6; Ac 2:39.
- [55] Jewish exclusiveness caused resistance to the salvific purposes of God, Jonah 1:1f; 3:1f; Lk 4:28; Ac 11:17f.
- [56] J Jeremias, quoted by Martin-Achard: 77.



[57] J J Von Allmen, quoted by Martin-Achard: 78.

[58] Eph 2:13ff.

[59] Walker sees Jesus speech in Mk 13 as the symbolic watershed of mission, from a centripetal into centrifugal dynamic - of the 'flight from the temple' 13:14 and the ingathering of the elect from the ends of the earth 13:27. Jesus becomes the new focus of the nation, in every respect the fulfilment (Walker: 9).

[60] Martin-Achard: 78.

[61] Piper: 30.

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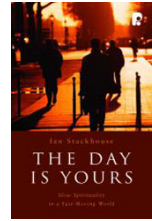
[<back to top>](#)

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# Praying the Psalms



Author: Revd Dr Ian Stackhouse is Senior Pastor at Guildford Baptist Church (also known as Millmead). This article is an excerpt from his book *The Day is Yours: Slow Spirituality in a Fast-Moving World* and is reproduced with kind permission by the author and Paternoster Press (an imprint of Authentic Media).

*Blessed is the man  
Who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,  
or stand in the way of sinners,  
or sit in the sear of mockers.  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And on his law he meditates day and night.* [1]

Having considered the rhythm of a day, it occurs to me that something needs to be said at this point – by way of an excurses – about the Psalms and their place in a rhythm of prayer. This book is peppered with psalms because for me the Psalms form the basis of my daily prayer, and have done so for many years: ‘Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice,’ says the Psalmist. [2] And for me, as for many others, this crying out in distress has more often than not been through the primal language of the Psalms themselves. We have other ways of praying, of course: the Lord’s prayer, praying in tongues, silent prayer, centring prayer, the Jesus prayer, Ignatian prayer. All of these are important and necessary. [3] I have written elsewhere about the importance of recovering the Lord’s prayer for Christian discipleship. But when it comes to daily prayer, the book of Psalms is invariably where a day begins for me, in the classical Benedictine five psalms as day, making a hundred and fifty psalms a month cycle. [4]

The monthly journey through the Psalms is an interesting one. Having prayed them for nearly ten years now there is definitely more of an order to them than first meets the eye. It is not a systematic theology; that much is clear. But neither are the Psalms completely random in their arrangement. Certain themes cluster in particular places; certain words recur again and again. The journey from Psalm 1 to Psalm 150 is *the* original odyssey: from the safety of a world where the righteous flourish and the wicked perish, [5] to a world where the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer, [6] and all the way through to a world where, whatever our experience of life, however unjust life has been, all ends in praise. [7] To pray the Psalms over a month is to embrace the whole gamut of human experience. As Calvin put it in a preface to his commentary: the Psalms are ‘an anatomy of all parts of the soul’. [8]

## Learning the Grammar of Faith

Coming from a tradition where extempore prayer was the norm, praying the Psalms in a daily cycle of five psalms a day was strange at first. It didn’t seem like prayer. In fact, in the early days of trying to pray the Psalms I would read a psalm out loud (a practice which I would encourage, incidentally), and then, since prayer and psalmody were, at that time, two quite different things in my mind, I would pray about something else other than the psalm. Having persisted off and on for ten years, however, and having eventually realised that simply muttering the words is actually a legitimate way of praying, the practice of praying the psalm is now part of my body clock, as they say – part of the bio-rhythm of my day. Waking up to whatever five psalms are before me is like waking up to greet old friends. I have been here before. I have heard these words already. Their familiarity is a comfort to my soul, and a relief from having to find the right words.

Not that prayer should never be extempore. Crying out from the heart is the very essence of prayer. In fact one of the spin-offs of praying the Psalms is that at any point the one praying can wander off with a word, or a sentence, and never actually finish the psalm. But always the psalm is there to tutor us in what to say, and how to say it. As Peterson says, with reference to the Psalms: 'Liturgy defends us against the commonest diseases of prayer: the tyranny of our emotions, the isolationism of our pride.' I would add to that: liturgy delivers us from the burden of intimacy which is so much a part of my tradition. Though I am all for intimacy, to set out to be intimate in prayer is like the way we set out to have a great worship experience. It ruins it. Intimacy happens best when we give ourselves unselfconsciously to the steps by which it may happen or it may not. As Peterson continues: 'Liturgy pulls us out of the tiresome business of looking after ourselves and into the exhilarating enterprise of seeing and participating in what God is doing.' [9]

We might balk at his approach. Surely prayer is about what I am feeling. True. But many times we don't know what we feel and we don't know what to pray. We need words, even as other times we need to pray with groans that words cannot express (I am one of those who think that when Paul talks about praying 'with groans that words cannot express' he is referring to the gift of tongues). And what the Psalms provide us with are words to answer God with. That we don't identify with the particular mood of the psalm for that day, as is often the case, is not a problem according to this tradition of praying. Prayer is not in the first instance about my feelings anyway. I may identify with it, I may not. It doesn't matter. The point of liturgy, as Heschel reportedly said to his congregation on one occasion, was not to express what they felt; rather it was to learn what the liturgy expressed.

In a strange and paradoxical way, this liturgical rhythm of prayer, far from suppressing the emotions, in fact liberates them. As Kathleen Norris remarks, following her year-long exposure to the Psalms in a Benedictine monastery: 'To your surprise you find that the Psalms do not deny your feelings, but allow you to reflect on them, right in front of God and everyone.' [10] The reason for this is simple. As the British Benedictine Sebastian Moore reminds us, 'God behaves in the Psalms in ways that he is not allowed to behave in systematic theology.' [11] Our emotions are allowed to run wild. For those of us reared in the language of sentimental niceness on the one hand, and theological correctness on the other, the Psalms tutor us in a language that is far more daring. Without betraying the core of Israel's faith, the Psalms say it straight. They say our anger, just as they say our thanks. They say our sin, just as they say our wonder. They say our doubts, just as they say our faith. What the Psalms provide us with is a way to be human even as they provide a way to be holy. The one implies the other.

It is no surprise to me, therefore, that people instinctively turn to the Psalms when they are suffering. How many times have I been aware as a pastor of how critical the Psalms have become for someone going through treatment for a cancer, another facing a bereavement, another off work with stress, still another waiting for an unfaithful spouse to return? Each one of them testifies to the relevance of these ancient words; for what the Psalms do is transfer us from the flatness, dishonesty and inadequacy of so much of our modern speech and into the ancient and extreme world of praise and lament, with all the ambiguity that living at the extreme implies.

For instance, sometimes the depression never lifts, as in Psalm 88. Elsewhere, especially towards the end of the psalter, it seems as if the praise is overdone. For someone going through hard times, those Hallelujah Psalms sound like the shrill voice of a TV evangelist. But always the Psalms insist on raw words and images – nothing trite. Through the Psalms our laments are dragged from despair into hope; likewise, they usher us into our praises by declaring our grief. They provide us with a grammar of faith and a way of living one day at a time. For a generation that is desperate for roots, praying the Psalms puts one in touch with the deep bedrock of the earth. It centres our prayers in the answers of the people of God.

When in 1978 Anatoly Sharansky was convicted on charges of treason and spying for the United States, ending up in a Siberian labour camp for nine years after sixteen months of incarceration, it is significant that he pleaded with the authorities not to strip him of his book of Psalms. [12] In truth, he was in the process of rediscovering his Jewish roots, hence the Psalms. But that is the point isn't it? Praying the Psalms puts us in the company of the ancient people of God, the Ancient of Days himself, who at his most critical hour gushed forth the words of a Psalm. It was in his blood. 'My God my God why have you forsaken me' was not Jesus proof-texting from the cross, but the heartfelt cry of a man steeped in the Psalms. [13] In fact, every time I get to that Psalm, on the fifth day of the month, I pause. It is like a station of the cross. To know that we are praying the same words of Jesus from the cross is to anchor our ordinary lives at the centre of all things: in the love of God.

All the Psalms, Christological or otherwise, have this same effect. Before the world gets its teeth into us, the Psalms do their own work of slowing us down, getting us to see 'heaven in ordinarie'. [14] Instead of bringing God into our world, the Psalms invite us into their world: a world of salvation, grace, trust, thanksgiving, lament, and praise. As Sharansky himself said to his friend Mendelevich during a snatch of a conversation in the prison: 'I have a Passover Haggadah. I'm reading it. It helps me to learn the language. I already know the Psalms that are found there. It strengthens my soul because I learn from the faith and heroism of King David. What a wonderful man. And he is held in this stinking prison!' [15]

When I pray the Psalms the whole company of saints is there with me: those who have gone before and those who are going now. Furthermore, even if I don't feel what the Psalmist is going through, you can bet that someone else in the community of faith is. Even if I wake up joyful, for a change, and can't hack why the Psalmist is so downcast – 'why are so you downcast, I my soul?' [16] – the simple act of praying the Psalm reminds me that I am part of a community in which at any one time there are people grieving even as I am rejoicing. Conversely, while I am grieving, there are others who are rejoicing. Praying the Psalms tutors us in this community awareness.

Sometimes when I am praying a psalm a face will appear; someone for whom this Psalm describes actual experience. Other times the words of the Psalm sound for all the world like the latest news bulletin from Kosovo, or the Congo, and so, in a strange way, the ancient liturgy helps me to be more up-to-date than I would otherwise be. Precisely because the world hasn't changed much, and human experience is awful a lot of the time, praying the Psalms, far from representing a retreat into private interiority, is an advance onto the concourse of life.

## Bedside Prayers

It has been a common practice over the years to attach the book of Psalms to a pocket version of the New Testament. I guess the idea is that the Psalms are so universally popular and so commonly prayed that they are an essential companion to the gospel story. I have one of these versions myself and take it with me on most of my hospital visits. And there are no prizes for guessing which of the Psalms are most often read at the bedside. After years of doing this I can testify first-hand to the power of these ancient words. Reading Psalm 139 at the graveside of a person who died by suicide convinced me long ago that what the church needs in its public ministry, not to mention its public worship, is the gravitas of these ancient prayers: prayers where the words are weighty enough to hold us, cavernous enough for us to hide in.

In that sense they need no explanation. As C.S. Lewis noted in his *Reflections on the Psalms*: 'no historical readjustment is required. We are in the world we know.' [17] They simply need to be heard. 'Sing to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs,' says the apostle Paul, [18] precisely because this is what the Psalms were meant for. They both

tutor and guide us. Sung in the morning they set my bearings for the day to come; sung in the midst of a busy day, they slow us down, sung in the evening they the whole of the day into the light of God's presence.

Again, this is not the only way to pray. There are times when I haven't prayed the Psalms at all. But always the Psalms are there. Once prayed, the Psalms become part of our muttering life. We carry them round with us, in the pockets of our unconscious. So even when my mind has gone, and even when I cannot even remember my name, at the very deepest place of my identity the Psalms keep me rooted: in God, in place and in people.

In the film *The Elephant Man*, [19] set in the late nineteenth century, and cleverly filmed in black and white for effect, we see this power of psalmody to do this protective work wonderfully illustrated in the person of John Merrick, a circus freak taken into medical care by Treves, a doctor played by Anthony Hopkins. Though his colleagues are sceptical, Treves is convinced that the monstrous figure before him is indeed a human being, though goodness knows what trauma he has been through. He never says a word. He just stares blankly into space, thus confirming to all who examine him he is nothing more than an imbecile. If only Treves can get him to speak. Then, just as he is about to give up and consign his philanthropic project to the dust-heap, the Elephant Man speaks. What he utters in that first sentence explains why he has survived all those years. In the most polite English accent, and quoting from the King James, of course, he calls forth from deep within him the word that has kept him:

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.  
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:  
he leadeth me beside the still waters.  
He restoreth my soul:  
he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.  
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil:  
for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.  
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:  
thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.  
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:  
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever. [20]

## Notes

[1] Psalm 1.

[2] Psalm 55:17.

[3] See R. Foster, *Prayer* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992).

[4] For a good introduction to Benedictine spirituality see E. de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St Benedict* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1999).

[5] Psalm 1.

[6] Psalm 73.

[7] Psalm 150. For an introduction and way into praying the Psalms see E.H. Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), and W. Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984). With typical originality and audacity Brueggemann classifies the Psalms along the lines of Psalms of Orientation, Psalms of Disorientation, Psalms of Reorientation. The Psalms account for both the wintry and the sunny seasons of our life.

[8] J. Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949), 1, xxxvii.

[9] E.H. Peterson, *Answering God*, 91.

[10] Norris, *The Cloister Walk*, 92.

[11] *Ibid.*, 91.

[12] M. Gilbert, *Sharansky: Hero of our Time* (London: Penguin, 1987), 348-351.

[13] Psalm 22:1.

[14] Herbert, 'Prayer' (I), *Selected Poems*, 15.

[15] Gilbert, *Sharansky*, 333.

[16] Psalm 42:5.

[17] Quoted in *The Psalms with commentary by Kathleen Norris* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997), ix.

[18] Colossians 3:16.

[19] *The Elephant Man*, produced by Jonathan Sanger, directed by David Lynch, Warner Brothers, 1980.

[20] Psalm 23.

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# Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Global-local Perspective

by Al Tizon.



Review by Rev Dr Darrell Jackson, Lecturer in European Studies and Director of Nova Research Centre, Redcliffe College.

In this well crafted book, Al Tizon provides what will surely become a definitive account of the history and contemporary development of mission as transformation. His account is set out in four sections, intended to introduce transformation missiology, describe its historical development, outline its biblical-theological parameters, demonstrate its global and local character, and suggest a way of understanding the way in which the local and global inform one other to produce four 'glocal' dimensions of a transformation missiology.

Tizon expertly tells the story of the emerging strands of a missiology that crystallised in the 'Radical Discipleship' response to the Lausanne World Conference in 1974 and gained greater clarity with the Wheaton '85 *Statement on Transformation*. The story of transformation missiology is then told as a story with multiple centres, including the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, Regnum Publications, and the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians.

In Part Two, eight global dimensions of mission as transformation are discussed with reference to a biblical and theological discussion of the kingdom of God. Carefully trying to avoid readings 'from above', Tizon stresses the way in which multiple socio-cultural perspectives have informed the transformationist reading of the relevant biblical passages. He explicitly rejects any limited mono-cultural reading of the text, calling instead for a 'priesthood of all cultures' approach that requires theologians from all cultures to contribute to an intercultural hermeneutics of the kingdom.

Tizon's Filipino heritage becomes obvious in his reflection on local dimensions of transformation missiology in a concise account of Filipino missiology in Part Three, framed largely with reference to kingdom mission in the post-colonial context of the Philippines. Students in a hurry to get to the conclusion should avoid the temptation to skip over this chapter. It is central to Tizon's methodology.

This becomes clear in Part Four where he locates mission as transformation at the dynamic intersection of the global and the local. He achieves this through a thoughtful synthesis of Vinay Samuel's eight dimensions of a global transformation missiology and nine dimensions of its Filipino equivalent. What emerges is an outline of four dimensions of a 'glocal' missiology: orthodox and contextual; incarnational dialogue; post-colonial reconciliation; and collaborative action. The consequence of this insight is a 'positive universality through difference' in which the local creates and gives authority to the global, whilst the global informs the local and lends authenticity to it.

The book has few flaws but one of the more significant left me disappointed rather than critical. I would have liked Tizon to have paid greater attention to offering a clearer rationale for the manner in which he derives his four glocal dimensions of transformation. How he derives these from the interplay of the eight global and nine local dimensions is not made very clear in his text and yet this is central to the book. For others interested in a similar quest, there is also probably scope here for further exploration of these four dimensions with reference to a multiplicity of other local contexts.

That said, this is a must-read for any missiologist trying to understand a missiology of transformation and essential reading for anybody who considers themselves to be committed

to an orthodox and contextualised missiology that emphasises dialogue, reconciliation, and collaboration.

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[<back to top>](#)

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# Understanding and Using the Bible

edited by Christopher J.H. Wright and Jonathan Lamb



Review by Tim Davy, Lecturer in Biblical Studies and Director of the Centre for the Study of Bible and Mission, Redcliffe College.

SPCK's International Study Guides are aimed primarily at Christians who are engaged in training for ministry, and for whom English is not their first language. *Understanding and Using the Bible* is a new volume within this series that gives an introduction to the nature of Scripture, and how we might engage with it in a variety of contexts.

The book is in two parts. Part one 'Understanding the Bible' focuses on the nature the Bible with three chapters by Wright on understanding the Bible 'as the word of God', 'as the words of human authors', and 'as a whole'. Part two deals with a range of themes centred around the use of the Bible. Issues include using the Bible in one's devotional life (Jonathan Lamb); in evangelism (Ajith Fernando); in groups (Catharine Padilla); in the context of Islam (Ida Glaser); in oral cultures (Steve Evans); with women (Emily Onyango); in the family (Anthony and King Lang Loke); and in preaching (Jonathan Lamb).

Although edited by two Brits (Chris Wright and Jonathan Lamb) five out of the nine contributors are non-Westerners.

*Understanding and Using the Bible* is a very good introductory book for those wanting to receive a grounding in the nature of the Bible and how it might be used in a variety of settings. The first section gives a very solid foundation that is then built on to deal with a stimulating range of topics. It is written in an accessible way which fulfils its aim to be readable for those whose first language isn't English. The content itself is very helpful, combining a fascinating breadth but also significant content. In addition it is very practical, both in the chapters themselves and also in the study suggestions that are also included.

Although it could certainly be read profitably by people on their own I am sure that this book will bear most fruit when read in community.

Finally, I hope that being aimed at those whose first language isn't English does not put off those for whom English is their primary language. There is much to appreciate in this book that will benefit all who read it.

Buy *Understanding and Using the Bible* from [St Andrew's Bookshop](#)

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