BELLINGER BOOK REPORT

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May 23, 2023

INSIGHTS

In Bellinger's book *Reading and Studying the Book of Praises*, the reader will find a treasure trove of both information and insight. Bellinger takes a comprehensive, yet succinct approach to understanding, reading and studying the Psalms. He also breaks down several ways in which previous scholars have broken down the Psalter. He examines Hermann Gunkel and Sigmund Mowinkel more in depth than any other previous scholar, but he still delved into recent studies. He picks their theories, observations, and structures apart and pieces them back together in a modified and detailed way of his own. I personally appreciated his breakdown of these two men and his reasons for adjusting or adding to their work. In my limited "expertise", I found myself agreeing with him. Many of what he stated resonated with what I learned in class.

Throughout the entire book, starting with chapter 4, Bellinger brings to the fore the important ways of interpreting a Psalm as well as studying it and prepping it for a sermon. He lists out: Type and Structure, Setting, Study, Shaping, and Rhetoric as grids to look at for any Psalm type. He used this method for each of his chapters, breaking down example songs within this framework to show the reader how to do it on their own. I found this tremendously helpful.

In Chapter 8, Bellinger ties key elements we can look for in the Psalms. He lists: The Honest Dialogue of Faith, Worship, Praise, Pain, Hope, Justice, Community and Providence. He indicates that when we can exhume the key element from any individual Psalm, we can be well on our way to enforce the study structure mentioned above. When one can properly identify these key elements, the individual studying is well on their way to nailing down the focus of any given Psalm. I, again, found this extremely helpful. Those key elements are the heartbeat of the Psalms and help the one studying walk down a good trajectory. I find this can be discovered when one "sits with the Psalmist" as Dr. Emanuel encourages us to do. When we sit with the author and seek to see which element he is highlighting, when one digs into the Hebrew and commentaries, they can more readily understand the Psalm and deduce type, setting, structure, shaping and rhetoric. It is easy to see Bellinger do this throughout the book in retrospect, after one reads chapter 8 and goes back to previous chapters.

SUMMARY OF CHAPTERS

1. Getting started

   Within this chapter, Bellinger sets the reader up to understand several areas of import for reading the Psalms. He gives insights on the “Setting of the Psalter”, “Shape of the Psalter”, and “The Poetry of the Psalter”. He takes a 30,000 foot view of the entire Psalter in order to shape the thinking of the reader and gives the overview to better understand the rest of the book.

2. Lessons from the past

   In this chapter, Bellinger then begins to dig into early study of the Psalter done by Gunkel and Mowinckel. He looks at the dating of the Psalter and breaks it down by type and scholar. He then unpacks the more modern views being put forth on studying the Psalter.

3. Reding the Psalms

   This chapter starts the real meet of digging into individual Psalms, types and forms. He talks of literary study and offers 4 incredible questions to ask in order to sit with the Psalmist (see p. 37). When these questions are asked, it truly helps uncover the gems within a Psalm.

4. Psalms of Lament

   Bellinger then begins to break down individual Psalm types. He begins with Laments. He then utilizes his form of study: Type and Structure, Setting, Study, Shaping, and Rhetoric. He then lists out for the reader how to view all types of Laments and attach certain understanding of them: i.e. are they individual or communal to name just a few. Here he also integrates thoughts from Gunkel and Mowinckel to help see how and why they came to certain conclusions. He then takes a large amount of time to break down certain specific psalms to show how to do it on one’s own. I love how he did this, as it put into practice (on paper!) his form of study and it gives the reader a way forward on “how to do this”.

5. Psalms of Praise

   Bellinger utilizes the same ideas, structures and breakdowns mentioned in the synopsis of chapter 4, but now for Psalms of praise. Within this chapter, Bellinger breaks down the different types of

Psalms of Praise: Thanksgiving, Praise, Hymns and two categories: pleas and praise. This is extremely helpful as well as his breakdown of individual praise Psalms.

6. Royal Psalms

   Bellinger again follows his structure as mentioned above, but for royal psalms this time. For every chapter, he upfront lists the psalms that fall into this category, which helps the reader track where these certain types are found. He expertly (but not too headily) explains the royal psalms, where they fit and why they matter.

7. Wisdom Psalms

   Bellinger is committed to his form of study and again uses his grid to work through the wisdom psalms. He shows the reader once more how to break down specific psalms within this category through this framework.

8. The Psalms and faith

   As mentioned above, this chapter is a great wrap up of what was said in which Bellinger ties key elements we can look for in the Psalms. He lists: The Honest Dialogue of Faith, Worship, Praise, Pain, Hope, Justice, Community and Providence.

SERMON AID

This book is one of the best books I have read on the Psalms and each example he uses throughout the book helps the reader form a great sermon outline. I would say that any of his examples and outlines could easily become the shape of any given sermon on those specific Psalms. The breakdown and structure is so easy to use to help form and idea of where to take the sermon. Also, his close attention to detail and structured way of breaking down the psalms within their types gives any pastor or teacher a leg up on any other psalm as well, easily giving a handbook to breaking down a psalm and preaching it! His grid works perfectly for my own way of approaching exegetical sermons. I will be using this book in the years ahead as I develop sermon series around Psalms.