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**Book Report on Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook by Futato**

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**I have read this book in its entirety**

**Seven Points to Take Away**

1. I had been thinking for quite a long while that rhyming was also a very important part of most of the psalms because they were poems. I thought so because I grew up in the Chinese culture and rhyming is a very important part of Chinese poems. Therefore, I used to think that Chinese Christians missed a lot of good stuff in the Hebrew poems like Psalms. This book tells me that rhyming is not an important part of the psalms and I feel happy about that because I actually can benefit from the psalms (through appreciating the imageries and the parallel patterns) to an extent greater than that I thought I could.
2. Before reading this book, I knew that the basic unit of a psalm is a bi-colon. Oftentimes I spent quite much time figuring out the how the meaning of the first colon differs from that of the second one. Sometimes the difference is quite convincing but other times it is not. The book has given me quite a comprehensive view on this. Now I know the parallel lines can be ‘synonymous’ or ‘antithetic’ or ‘synthetic’. The ‘new understanding’ is also of help to me in many cases: ‘Parallelism is the art of saying something similar in both cola but with a difference added in the second colon’. However, I still need to remind myself that I do not need to waste time (many Chinese readers do) trying to figure out what the ‘difference added in the second colon’. It is not sinful just to think that maybe they are synonymous. Actually I think realizing the synonymous nature of the two colons can help us identify the true essence of the bi-colon. For example, “the righteous will flourish like a palm tree; they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon”. The focus should not be on the unique nature of the palm tree and then an added unique nature of the cedar. The focus should be on the similarity, i.e. strength and beauty. The message is: ‘the righteous will be strong and beautiful’.
3. The book of Psalms was substantially in the form as we know it by the end of the fourth century B.C., the time as the writing of other books like Ezra and Chronicles which stressed the rediscovery of the importance of studying the Law of the Lord or the Law of Moses. As the introductory Psalm 1 also stresses the importance of meditating on the Law of the Lord, so it is logical that the Psalms are meant to be a tool for instructions (it is also new to me that we can translate the word Torah as ‘instructions’ though the Jews tended to translate it as Law). This realization has given me a new value in reading and using the Psalms in my service in the church. I am glad that Futato has systematically shown us how to use the Psalms in the instructions of happiness and holiness.
4. This book also presents the fact that Psalm 2 is also an introductory text to the whole book of Psalms. Since Psalm 2 presents an eschatological hope that our King is coming and so the whole book of Psalms can also be used to preach the prophetic messages about our King, i.e. ‘our God is the King’, ‘our King is coming’, and ‘our King will crush the evil nations’. Actually I do not know any other books in the Bible that has repeated so many times that all nations and all peoples have to praise the Lord. This is eye-opening for me. If we have to preach the eschatological hope of the Kingdom of God subduing all nations, preaching the Psalms is a must.
5. I have been aware of the presence of ‘refuge’ language in Psalms but I have not done any comprehensive study of that. This book lists 11 other words to paint the picture of God as refuge to alert us to the pervasiveness of the refuge metaphors. And then the author immediately shows the inter-connectedness of theme of Kingship and theme of Refuge, e.g. psalm 46 vs psalm 47 and psalm 93 vs psalm 94. I have got an imagery of how the Kingdom of God will develop. Probably the whole world will undergo greater and greater turmoil as a result of human sins and the judgment of the Lord. Those countries which take refuge in the Lord are those who align themselves with the Kingdom of God. Over the last two thousand years, many people have already taken refuge in the Lord and I believe the Kingdom of God has already taken in many new members. If we consider all the many tribulations that many Christians have already gone through, we can be sure that the Kingdom of God is now very substantive.
6. The fact that the theme of ‘the nations will be blessed’ is found throughout book 2 to book 5 and in the final Doxology from psalm 146-150. However, this theme is not evident in book 1 which is mainly composed of psalms of lamentation. Indeed oftentimes I have found that many Christians are fond of reading the Psalms of lamentation. When reading those verses in any other psalms that speak to the truth that the nations will be blessed, our echo is not so strong. The vision seems far-fetched. Our lives have come down with a lot of weaknesses and sorrows. How can we praise the Lord for ‘the nations will be blessed’? However, the organization of the book of Psalms has spoken something. Sorrows and pains that we are experiencing now are somehow ‘connected’ to the future goal which is at the heart of the Lord, i.e. blessing all nations. WE need to preach on that and encourage us all to praise the Lord for that.
7. The fact that Psalm 14 and Psalm 53 are basically the same psalm but they appear in different books of the Psalms. It seems to be a very strong case to prove that on two different occasions the same psalm was adopted for use for a certain purpose. This fact has encouraged me to think that the original meaning of a psalm is important. However, the purpose of the editor to include a psalm in a certain book is equally important. I wish that the M. Div. program had included the training of the use of Psalms in discharging pastoral duties. Unfortunately, right now the study of Psalms is just an optional course.

**Five Questions Generated by My Reading**

1. In Psalm 72, the messianic king portrayed is supposed to be King Solomon. However, the editor should have been aware that the performance of Solomon did not measure up to the expectations people have for the Messiah. Does it mean that the Jews at that time believed the psalm had been written prophetically to point to the future coming Messiah?
2. If the answer to the above question is ‘yes’, is it safe to assume that the compilation of the other psalms into the Book of Psalms basically followed the same logic?
3. Our instructor Ray Lubeck is drilling us over and over again in wrestling with the proper translation of the superscriptions. Should they be translated as ‘for the music director’ or ‘for the end times’, or ‘for the conquering ruler’? I was wondering why this book had not discussed more about this. There was only a short paragraph which says the LXX mistranslated some superscriptions as ‘to the end.’ But why wrong? I think this issue is important. ‘For the music director’ does not make much sense to me.
4. This book has pointed out that the claimed contexts of some psalms are not quite consistent with the known narratives as revealed in other historical books, e.g. psalm 3 vs 2 Samuel 18:5. The author points out that it is actually difficult to decide on the contexts of most psalms. Then the author used this fact to argue for the timelessness of the book of psalms. Is it also logical to think that David wrote the psalm at a certain time of his life but he wrote it as a prophet to talk about the things of Christ that would come to pass? I wonder why this book does not touch on the possibility that David was a prophet (Acts 2:30).
5. Why did the author not discuss more substantively how Jesus, his disciples and the N.T. as a whole viewed the Psalms? It does seem very obvious that they took the whole book of Psalms as the prophetic texts for things about the Messiah. They did it in a matter-of-fact manner.