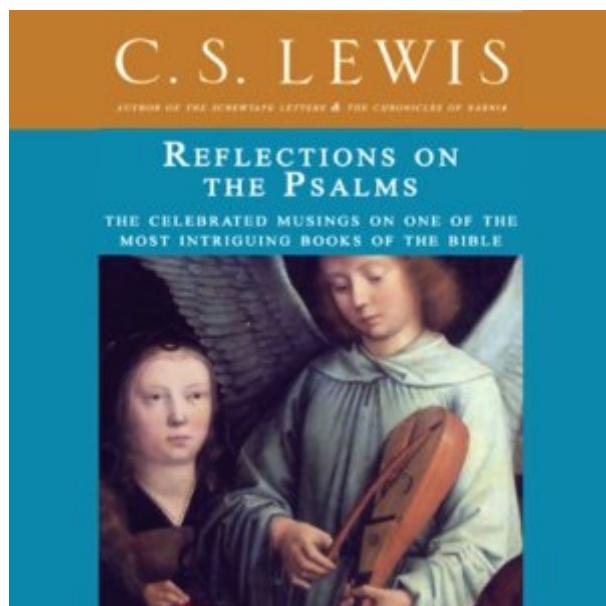


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Reflections On The Psalms



Synopsis

In one of his most enlightening works, C.S. Lewis shares his ruminations on both the form and the meaning of selected psalms. In the introduction he explains, "I write for the unlearned about things in which I am unlearned myself." Consequently, he takes on a tone of thoughtful collegiality as he writes on one of the Bible's most elusive books. Characteristically graceful and lucid, Lewis cautions us that the psalms were originally written as songs that should now be read in the spirit of lyric poetry rather than as doctrinal treatises or sermons. Drawing from daily life as well as the literary world, Lewis begins to reveal the mystery that often shrouds the psalms.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

It's a shame that so many of the people who enjoy Lewis's theological works never read his enlightening discussion of the Psalms. This book does not have the polemic approach of some of his other works. This is (by Lewis's own admission) not a work of scholarship, being more like one schoolboy comparing notes with another in describing the difficulties met and joys gained in reading the Psalms. Lewis notes that the Psalms are poems, intended to be sung, and not doctrinal treatises on which to base a system of theology. He selects various psalms for his discussions, enlightening them with his usual good sense, using illustrations from daily life and the literary world. Lewis's approach is far more helpful than most others who comment on the Psalms and should be read with interest by those familiar with this part of the Bible.

The first time I read this book, many years ago, I was bothered by what I took as Lewis'

disrespectful approach to the OT. One chapter of the book is called "Cursings," and in it Lewis forthrightly notes his initial impression that "the Jews are much more vindictive and vitriolic than the Pagans." While he finds something of great value (even refreshing) in their honest anger at injustice, (see Rene Girard's *The Scapegoat* for a fascinating perspective on violence and religion) some passages he still labels "diabolical." In the following chapter, "Death in the Psalms," Lewis frankly admits that most of the psalmists did not appear to know about heaven and hell. And in his chapter on "Scripture," he admits to the presence of "naivete, error, contradiction, even wickedness," in the OT. I did not like this. Nor did I know enough about nature poetry and paganism, monotheism in other cultures, or Mediterranean cultures, to appreciate all his insights. What I think I did appreciate, and still do, was the way in which Lewis explains the poetry of the Psalms, the "beauty of the Law," (as in Psalm 119), love of nature, "second meanings" in the Psalms, and most of all, the life-enhancing chapter called "A Word about Praising." John Piper developed this chapter into a whole theology. (See *Confessions of a Christian Hedonist*.) But the most poetic explanation lies here: "I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise . . . I had not noticed how the humblest, and at the same time the most balanced and capacious, minds, praised most, while cranks, misfits and malcontents praised least . . . Praise almost seems to be inner health made audible . . . The Psalmists in telling everyone to praise God are doing what all men do when they speak of what they care about." That chapter is one of the most enlightening and enchanting (in the literal sense) series of marks that have ever been made on paper, I think. Lewis works a powerful counter-spell to the curse of the reductionists, whom he soundly defeats in argument, re-enchanting the world with the glory of God. I see Lewis' idea confirmed every day -- when my children call me to see a funny scene in a cartoon, or a beautiful sea shell on the beach, for example. What I found on my first reading of this book remains with me, and grows as I learn more of life. I've also come to appreciate Lewis' take on Scripture, though I am not sure he is completely right. Lewis differs from both skeptic and inerracist in that he makes no a priori assumptions, either that there are no mistakes in Scripture, or that God cannot do miracles. This allows him to be frank and take a truly empirical approach. His conclusion is that the Bible is inspired not like the Koran is said to be, written word-for-word in heaven before time began, but as "the same sort of material as any other literature . . . taken into the service of God's word." Those who see only a human literature are like illiterates who see only ink blots on paper, and are unable to see a poem. Lewis also hints that the best pagan philosophy and poetry can be "taken up" into God's revelation in a similar, though less authoritative, manner. If all that gives you the impression that Lewis covers a lot of territory, with little detailed discussion of most individual psalms, that's true. Author, Jesus and the

Religions of Man

C.S. Lewis points out some very interesting facts and shows you his perspective on the psalms. He uses several different aspects to review such as their view of death, afterlife, suffering, etc. He points out that the Psalms are songs and should be interpreted with that fact in mind. That alone adds a new perspective to the Psalms. He also makes it clear that the Psalms are not necessarily to be viewed from a Christian perspective because the writers were not Christians. The only downside I can see in the book is C.S. Lewis' writing style. He supposes his readers know certain historical figures and are versed in numerous literary writings on certain subjects. If you are not a person who reads these types of things all the time it may come difficult for you. Either way you will still get something out of it. Many times Christians, such as myself, try to make something in the Bible what we want it to be, and I believe we have done that to the Psalms over and over again. Have a read!

This edition does a terrible disservice to CS Lewis. Please buy one of the other editions. This one is littered with typos that appear to result from unchecked automatic character recognition from a legit edition. It has no copyright notice, no identification of the publisher, no Library of Congress information, and no print edition data. Footnotes at the bottom of a page on the other edition have been streamed inline in this edition in the middle of the sentence that carries over to the next page! I'm going to recommend to to stop offering this bootlegged affront to CS Lewis's legacy.

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