

Review of *Reading the Psalms as Scripture*

By James M. Hamilton Jr. & Matthew Damico

REVIEWED BY LAURENS PRUIS

Reading the Psalms as Scripture, by James M. Hamilton Jr. and Matthew Damico. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2024. \$19.99.

One only needs to look up the lyrics of the latest hits on the Spotify Top Charts to confirm that “bad worldviews produce bad art” (52). Most popular songs are simply another variation of the same song. It is a song that suckles love of the world and is set to the drumbeat of fleshly desires. After all, “we sing what we celebrate” (119). We recognize the melody of expressive individualism. Sexual desires reign supreme, and the pride of life is the highest aim. These songs reflect and reinforce who ‘we’ understand ourselves to be. It is the narrative of the negative world set to song, praising a path of life that ultimately leads to death. Yet, as with the Titanic, the orchestra continues to play in an attempt to calm the passengers, even as the ship is sinking.

The psalms, by contrast, “point us in an altogether different direction” (3). Set to the tune of God’s redemptive plan, the Psalter reflects and reinforces our identity as God’s people. It celebrates the good, the true, and the beautiful, while directing our praises toward God. In *Reading the Psalms as Scripture*,

James M. Hamilton Jr. and Matthew Damico invite readers to appreciate the artistic beauty of the Psalter and embrace its identity-shaping role for our lives. By unlocking the treasury of the psalms, this book aims to help Christians grasp who they are as God's people, as they sojourn as strangers through this world.

THE UNIFIED STORY OF THE PSALTER

Probably the most thought-provoking and transformative insight this book provides is that the Psalter is not just a random collection of individual poems but is a carefully arranged book that tells a story. This story is introduced by the 'prelude' of Psalms 1 and 2. Hamilton and Damico argue that these psalms "form the thematic backbone of the entire Psalter", as they introduce the two big ideas: "(1) Yahweh's word and (2) Yahweh's king, and how people respond to these two things determines everything" (22). The storyline can then be traced through the five books of the Psalter: from the life of the historical David retold in books one and two (Pss 1–41 and 42–72), the failure and collapse of the Davidic dynasty in book three (Pss 73–89), Moses' prophetic intercession for the Davidic covenant during the exile in book four (Pss 90–106), to the return from exile, the new exodus and the future conquest of the promised king from David's line in book five (Pss 107–150). As such, the Psalter captures Scripture's storyline in song. It is the melody of God's magnificent plan of redemption, culminating in the promised Messiah, Jesus, the Son of David.

For those skeptical of such ambitious claims, Hamilton and Damico's argument is not based on wishful thinking or creative projection. One does not have to squint at the evidence to see this grand narrative. They carefully examine the text, tracking with the "clues of coherence" that the psalms themselves provide. For example, they show how superscriptions allow readers to track the life of the historical David in books one and two, and how authorial attributions and repeated phrases provide structure to collections of Psalms (e.g., Pss 15–24; 32).

Besides helping readers to track with the meta-narrative of the Psalter, this book also explains simple poetic techniques employed by the psalmists. In chapter III, we are introduced to the beauty and exegetical benefit of recogniz-

ing and understanding parallelism, chiasm and the acrostic form. In so doing, the book helps readers meditate upon and appreciate the artistic beauty of individual psalms.

Furthermore, by reading the Psalms against the backdrop of Scripture (chapter V), considering how Messianic hope is woven typologically through the Psalter (chapter VI), and exploring how psalms are understood by later Old and New Testament authors (chapters VII and VIII), Hamilton and Damico help us align our understanding of the psalms with that of the inspired biblical authors. A central insight in this analysis is the argument that the psalms should be read typologically. Typology is defined as “God-ordained, author-intended historical correspondence and escalation in significance between people, events and institutions across the biblical storyline” (80). This typological reading helps us understand why David can describe his own experience in terms reminiscent of earlier figures in Scripture, while simultaneously prophetically foreshadowing the experiences of the Lord Jesus. In the words of the authors,

David was not predicting the future by looking through the corridor of time and announcing what would take place. Rather, he was predicting the future by rightly understanding the past, seeing how his own experience fit with the patterns of the past, contemplating how the promises spoke into the past and his own situation, and then speaking of himself so that what he said of his own experience recalled that of Joseph and Moses, even as it also generated expectation for more of the same in the future (87).

Such a typological reading, Hamilton and Damico argue, is essential for understanding how the psalms point us to their fulfillment in Christ.

AN INVITATION TO SING ALONG

Though this book is rich with exegetical insights on the Psalter, it by no means engages only the intellect. After all, biblical theology is for discipleship. This is captured well by Hamilton’s definition of biblical theology, the driving force behind this work. Biblical theology is the attempt “to understand and embrace the way the biblical authors understood the world, themselves, life,