

# Reflections on the Nations in the Psalms



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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.

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