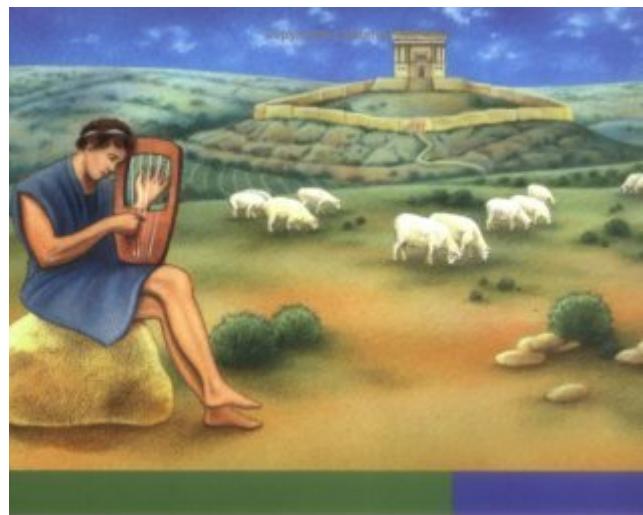


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How To Read The Psalms (How To Read Series)



HOW TO READ
THE PSALMS
TREMPER LONGMAN III

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Synopsis

The Psalms possess an enduring fascination for us. For frankness, directness, intensity and intimacy, they are unrivaled in all of Scripture. Somehow the psalmists seem to have anticipated all our awe, desires and frustrations. No wonder Christians have used the Psalms in worship from the earliest times to the present. Yet the Psalms cause us difficulties when we look at them closely. Their poetry is unfamiliar in form. Many images they use are foreign to us today. And the psalmists sometimes express thoughts that seem unworthy of Scripture. Tremper Longman gives us the kind of help we need to overcome the distance between the psalmists' world and ours. He explains the various kinds of psalms, the way they were used in Hebrew worship and their relationship to the rest of the Old Testament. Then he looks at how Christians can appropriate their message and insights today. Turning to the art of Old Testament poetry, he explains the use of parallelism and imagery. Step-by-step suggestions for interpreting the psalms on our own are followed by exercises for further study and reflection. Also included is a helpful guide to commentaries on the Psalms. Here is a book for all those who long to better understand these mirrors of the soul.

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Customer Reviews

How to Read the Psalms by Tremper Longman III is a helpful and accessible guide for pastors, students, and lay persons desiring to study the Psalms. The book, divided into three parts, begins with an invitation to study the Psalms. Recalling Calvin's words that the Psalms are "an anatomy of all the parts of the soul," Longman urges us to read the Psalms, because they "appeal to the whole person . . . they inform our intellect, arouse our emotions, direct our wills, and stimulate our imaginations." Part one of the book focuses on "The Psalms Then and Now." The first chapter discusses the genres of the Psalms, dividing the psalms into seven types: the hymn, the lament, thanksgiving psalms, psalms of confidence, psalms of remembrance, wisdom psalms, and kingship (or royal) psalms. Chapter two examines the origin, development and use of the Psalms, including some helpful reflection on the titles, authorship, and historical events behind some of the psalms. Chapter three investigates key Old Testament themes (covenant, law, kingship, blessing and curse, forgiveness etc.) with the assertion that the Psalms are "the heart of the Old Testament," a "microcosm" of the Old Testament's message and theology. Chapter four, on the other hand, focuses on "a Christian reading of the Psalms," thoughtfully exploring how the Psalms relate to Jesus. Longman concludes, that "two errors need to be avoided. The first is that we neglect a psalm's original setting . . . the second . . . is to miss the anticipation, the expectation of the Psalms." The fifth chapter is my favorite: "The Psalms: Mirror of the Soul." In this chapter, Longman discusses how the Psalms function in our lives to inform our intellect, arouse our emotions, and direct our wills.

'How to Read the Psalms' by Professor of Biblical Studies, Tremper Longman III is possibly just a bit misnamed, in that it may be more properly be called 'How to Study the Psalms' or 'How to Understand the Psalms'. With that and one other minor caveat, I consider this a superior book for introducing lay Bible readers to one of the most important books of the Old Testament. I devalue the book's proper title only because it does not mention the classic 'lectio divina' method of reading scripture, which is more appropriate to the Psalms than to virtually any other book of either Testament. I repeat the fact that this is a book for lay readers. It is fine for solitary reading, but with its exercises and references, it is also excellent for a lay Bible study class of between 10 and 12 weeks or over a two week period as an 'Adult Vacation Bible School'. The book is divided into three parts, dealing with 1) the Psalms' genres, how they were used in their original settings, and how they may be used today; 2) the poetic elements of the Psalms, primarily their use of parallelism and imagery (metaphor and simile); and a study of three basically different types of Psalms. While this is

a book for lay readers, it makes very few compromises. It is not a 'Psalms for Dummies'. Often, references are made to the difficulties in translating Hebrew words used in the Psalms. For someone just beginning to come to grips with New Testament Greek, this is a challenge; however none of the author's points rely on any knowledge of Hebrew whatsoever. The author's comments for further reading are excellent, as far as they go for a book published in 1988.

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