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"MY WORDS ARE LOVELY"

Studies in the Rhetoric of the Psalms

edited by

Robert L. Foster
and
David M. Howard, Jr.



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CONTENTS

Preface	vii
Editors' Acknowledgments	ix
Abbreviations	xi
List of Contributors	xiii

Part I

THEORETICAL AND THEMATIC CONSIDERATIONS IN THE RHETORIC OF THE PSALMS

"THE ALTAR OF CERTITUDE": REFLECTIONS ON "SETTING" AND RHETORICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE PSALMS Rolf Jacobson	3
PERSUADING THE ONE AND ONLY GOD TO INTERVENE Dale Patrick and Kenneth Diable	19
RAPID CHANGE OF MOOD: ORACLES OF SALVATION, CERTAINTY OF A HEARING, OR RHETORICAL PLAY? LeAnn Snow Flesher	33
GROWLING DOGS AND THIRSTY DEER: USES OF ANIMAL IMAGERY IN PSALMIC RHETORIC J. Kenneth Kuntz	46
"NIGHT TO NIGHT," "DEEP TO DEEP": THE DISCOURSE OF CREATION IN THE PSALMS William P. Brown	63
TOPOI OF PRAISE IN THE CALL TO PRAISE PSALMS: TOWARD A THEOLOGY OF THE BOOK OF PSALMS Robert L. Foster	75

Part II

CASE STUDIES IN THE RHETORIC OF THE PSALMS

"YET THOU HAST MADE HIM LITTLE LESS THAN GOD": READING PSALM 8 FROM A BODILY PERSPECTIVE Johan H. Coetzee	91
PSALM 33 AND THE CREATION RHETORIC OF A TORAH PSALM Diane Jacobson	107
PSALM 44: O GOD, WHY DO YOU HIDE YOUR FACE? Nancy L. deClaissé-Walford	121
PSALM 88 AND THE RHETORIC OF LAMENT David M. Howard, Jr.	132
PSALM 102: LAMENT AND THEOLOGY IN AN EXILIC SETTING W. H. Bellinger, Jr.	147
THE RHETORIC OF TWO NARRATIVE PSALMS 105 AND 106 Thomas H. Olbricht	156
WHY IS PSALM 147 STILL "CATCHY"? H. Viviers	171
Index of References	187
Index of Authors	197

PREFACE

As the authors of *The Postmodern Bible* end their chapter on rhetorical criticism, they write, "The jury is still out, therefore, on just how successful and profitable the application of rhetorical theory has become in the rebirth of rhetorical criticism in biblical interpretation."¹ Part of their concern is the seemingly uncritical adaptation of various rhetorical theories without the interpreters' awareness of their own rhetorical situation and aims and how these influence the use of rhetorical theories.

We, the editors, share this concern, and the present volume is an attempt to recapture what has been central to the study of rhetoric since at least the time of Aristotle, namely, a focus on the means of persuasion in a discourse. Already in 1994, David Howard had noted a contrary tendency in rhetorical-critical approaches in Old Testament studies, which tended to focus primarily on stylistics, and he called for a return to a focus on the persuasive aims of a text.² A decade later, Robert Foster had come to a similar conclusion as he observed rhetorical-critical studies of the prophets and the Psalms. This volume is a product of our dissatisfaction with the prevailing state of affairs and a reflection of our mutual interest in Psalms study.

The scope of the essays has not been limited to a particular rhetorical method,³ and so readers will note a variety of approaches to the Psalms, from discussions using classical rhetorical categories to use of modern cognitive science. What ties these essays together is an interest in determining the persuasive aim of the psalms/psalmists. The essays in Part I of this volume address either overarching methodological concerns or discuss topics of broad interest (e.g. lament). Part II consists of essays treating the rhetorical effect of one or two individual psalms.

In his lead essay, Rolf Jacobson urges that "Rhetorical analysts of the Psalms should pay attention to their own rhetorical situations and aims and *weigh those when considering how to imagine the rhetorical situation of a psalm*" (p. 18 [emphasis his]). Our hope is that all the essays here will stimulate further study of the Psalms with rhetorical analysis as the basic approach. It seems to us that

1. The Bible and Culture Collective, *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 184.

2. David M. Howard, Jr., "Rhetorical Criticism in Old Testament Studies," *BBR* 4 (1994): 87-104. See also Dale Patrick and Allen Scult, "Rhetoric and Ideology: A Debate within Biblical Scholarship over the Import of Persuasion," in *Rhetorical Interpretation of Scripture* (ed. Stanley E. Porter and Dennis L. Stamps; JSNTSup 180; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 63-83.

3. Which is a major concern of the authors of *The Postmodern Bible*, 183-85.