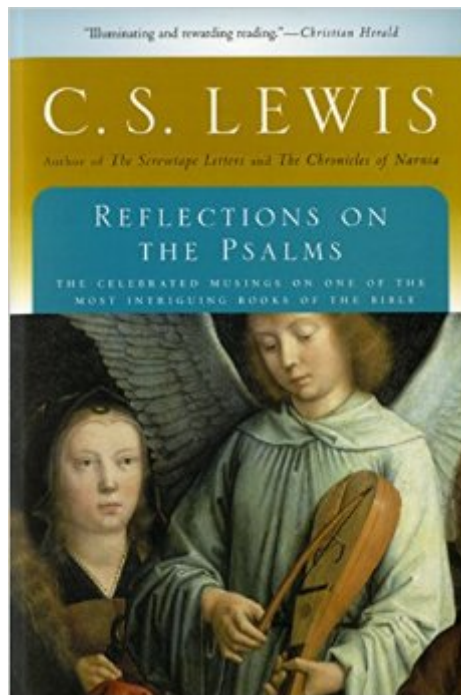


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Reflections On The Psalms (Harvest Book)



Synopsis

“We delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation.” • The Psalms were written as songs; we should read them as poetry, in the spirit of lyric, not as sermons or instructions. But they are also shrouded in mystery, and in this careful reading from one of our most trusted fellow travelers, C.S. Lewis helps us begin to reveal their meaning in our daily lives and in the world. Reflecting again and anew on these beloved passages, we can find both joy and difficulty, but also, always, real enlightenment and moments of transcendent grace. "This book may not tell the reader all he would like to know about the Psalms, but it will tell him a good deal he will not like to know about himself." • "Times Literary Supplement "[Lewis] . . . displays in this volume the same keen insight and gifted tongue that have made him one of the most highly respected essayists using the English language." • "Chicago Sunday Tribune "Full of illuminating observations." • "New York Times

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Customer Reviews

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.

In most, if not all, of Lewis' non-fiction works, he, at some point, refers and appeals to "real theologians", perhaps, in an attempt to distinguish the framework of his opinions, thoughts, and understanding from individuals that have been formally educated in theology. While Lewis certainly appeared to dedicate a great deal of his time to theology, he continually reminded readers that he was not a formally educated theologian, nor did he consider himself an expert. In Reflections on the Psalms, however, it can be recognized that his authoritative disclaimer is a little more direct, adamant, and deliberate than that which might be considered typical within his work. Having been written towards the end of his life and career, it almost appears as if Lewis is pleading with the reader to remove any preconceived perception of higher authority on the matter that he might maintain in one's mind. That is, it seems as if Lewis' purpose was genuinely that of sharing thoughts and resulting conclusions that he, as a layperson, had found himself reflecting upon. He goes so far as to compare this work with schoolmates sharing and comparing notes in an effort to better comprehend how a problem is worked out, as opposed to appealing to an instructor who might only offer a solution without ever actually explaining the intricacies of how a particular difficulty is overcome. Lewis claims that this work might be beneficial to the unlearned reader because he, considering himself equally unlearned in comparison to some, had only recently met these particular difficulties and, therefore, could still remember what it was like to not understand, in contrast to the expert that has known the answer for so long that they have forgotten the difficulty altogether.

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