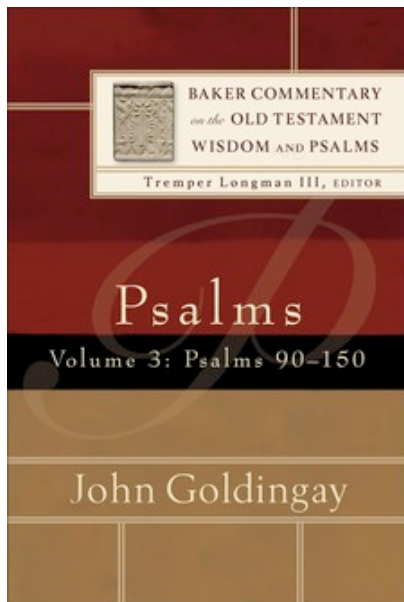


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Goldingay, John

Psalms, Volume 3: Psalms 90-150

Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms

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John Goldingay is David Allen Hubbard Professor of Old Testament at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. He has authored numerous books and articles and is perhaps best known for his three-volume Old Testament theology as well as his three-volume commentary on the book of Psalms, published as part of the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms.

What makes this series different from other commentary series is its treatment of just the wisdom books (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs) and the Book of Psalms. This allows the authors of the individual volumes, as Tremper Longman III, the general editor of the series, explains in the series preface, to shape their work to the unique character of this part of the biblical canon.

The primary focus of each commentary is the message of the specific book. This is due to the fact that the Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms has a particular audience in mind. Although scholars, pastors, students, and Bible-study leaders can all benefit from the series, it was written with ministers and seminary students in mind. Longman explains that they therefore decided to make the commentary accessible to nonscholars by leaving most of the technical debate and interaction with secondary literature to the footnotes, not because it is unimportant, but given the current state of

the church, laypeople will usually not regard such material as significant or to their benefit. The reader can therefore expect a scientific commentary, but one with a focus on the message of each psalm.

This, the third volume of Goldingay's commentary on the book of Psalms, covers books 4 and 5 of the Psalter. One problem in reviewing the third volume separately is that the author's introduction to all three volumes is only found in volume 1. There Goldingay presented his views on the nature of the Psalter, the setting of the psalms in ancient Israel's history and worship, the psalm headings, collections in the Psalter, the poetic characteristics of the psalms, their theology, and their use as a guidebook for spirituality. This means that in the third volume we are thrown straight into the commentary on Pss 90–150 without any explanation of the author's assumptions and priorities other than the two pages of preface.

In the preface Goldingay states that he differs from the approach in current Psalms research that focuses on the arrangement of the Psalter, believing that it involves "too much imagination in connecting too few dots" (11). His own viewpoint is that the primary focus of Psalms study needs to be the individual psalm. He also dismisses the redactional history of individual psalms, finding it speculative, preferring to focus on the psalms as we have them. Thus, the canonical and redactional study of the psalms is set aside. This, I think, is one of the weak points of this commentary. By dismissing these approaches, Goldingay totally ignores much of contemporary Psalms research. He is surely entitled to disagree with the findings of these approaches, but then one would have expected a more thorough discussion and debate with scholars doing research within this contemporary field of investigation.

The commentary itself is, as the previous two volumes, presented in an easy-to-read format. Each psalm is treated as an individual chapter with its own title, applicable to the specific psalm. Each psalm is then discussed under three main headings: "Translation"; "interpretation"; and "Theological Implications." Goldingay uses the Masoretic Text as the basis for his own translation of each psalm. Textual commentary on his translation is provided in footnotes. Some alternative readings of the text, based on the LXX or other versions are sometimes provided, but generally speaking Goldingay (to his credit) sticks with the Masoretic Text.

The section on interpretation follows the translation of the Hebrew text. The author provides a short introduction to the psalm, followed by a verse-by-verse analysis of each psalm. In this section he focuses on the meaning of each verse, including comments on the grammar, structure, stylistic features, historical setting, authorship, comments of other writers, and links with other psalms and other passages of Scripture.

In the last section of each chapter, Goldingay provides the reader with the theological implications of the specific psalm. Something that I appreciate about Goldingay's approach is that, although a committed Christian, he does not make himself guilty of a forced christological application of the psalms. To give one example of this approach, in the section on the theological implications of Ps 110, he writes: "The text's theological implications then do not lie in its application to Jesus; that is to ignore its meaning. Its application to Jesus is part of NT study. The question is, what did the Holy Spirit offer OT believers in this text?" (299). His understanding of the text is based primarily on the literary features of the text. The text itself provides the foundation of his understanding and interpretation of each psalm. This section can be very useful for anyone who wishes to preach on a specific psalm.

At the end of the book Goldingay gives a glossary of English words (marked * in the text of the book) where he gives the Hebrew words as well as a good, concise description of the term itself. Although this glossary is by no means exhaustive, it can be very helpful to readers who do not have knowledge of Hebrew. A bibliography, comprising more general works on the psalms is also included. Anyone wishing to do further research will find this helpful. The book finishes with indices of subjects, authors, and references to Scripture and other ancient writings (Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha, Dead Sea Scrolls, Babylonian Talmud, midrash, and Mishnah).

This third volume is a work of the highest quality. Goldingay has once again shown himself to be a scholar of high repute. He engages thoroughly with the Hebrew text and is not afraid to differ from other prominent scholars in the field, thereby offering a work of original thinking on the Psalms. He has shown once again that there really is no substitute for a comprehensive and meticulous analysis of the text. Pastors, students, and scholars will find it insightful and an excellent addition to an outstanding series. No one interested in preaching, teaching, or researching the Psalms can afford to be without it. I highly recommend it.