

Ash, Christopher. *The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary*. 4 vols. Wheaton: Crossway, 2024. 2,346pp. + 311pp. (back matter).

At \$150, Christopher Ash's four-volume commentary on the Psalms is hardly an impulse buy; at 2,657 pages, it is hardly a source of quick answers. The poor or rushed reader might wish for Derek Kidner again. But this new set is entirely worthy of the cost both in dollars and in time because it offers more than mere comments—it offers an entire method of reading the Psalms.

After serving as a church planter in Little Shelford, UK, Ash is now resident author at Tyndale House. His other books include a commentary on Job (2014), *Zeal Without Burnout* (2016), and a number of practical counseling books. But the Psalms have been a recurring theme in his writing, including a work on Psalm 119 for teachers and readers (2011), *Psalms for You* (2020), *Teaching Psalms* (2021), and a Psalms Bible study (2025). The present commentary (2024) may be rightly viewed as his climactic work thus far.

The organization is clear enough. Volume 1 (427 pages) is prolegomena, setting out Ash's vision for the Psalms; each of the subsequent three volumes cover fifty psalms (750 pages each). The central thesis of volume 1 and therefore the entire set is that "the Psalms are essential to the life of the Christian church and that Christ is central to the Psalms" (1:xiii). Ash argues that Ephesians 5:18–20 mandates and guides our regular use of the Psalms (vol. 1, Introduction), and he shows how the Psalms cry out for fulfillment (ch. 1). Chapter 2 is arguably the most important chapter for Ash's Christocentric reading by tracing "how the New Testament understands the Psalms in their relationship to Jesus Christ" (57). Part 2 examines the Psalms in light of worship (ch. 4), prophecy (ch. 5), prayer and praise (ch. 6), Christology (ch. 7), and the righteous (ch. 8), and it includes a focus on the penitential (ch. 9) and imprecatory (ch. 10) psalms. The final section of volume 1 traces how the Psalms have been interpreted historically (chs. 11–12) from the Patristic Era (ch. 13) through Medieval (ch. 14), Renaissance and Reformation eras (ch. 15) to the present (ch. 16). There is also a helpful argument for singing the Psalms (Conclusion) and a vigorous case that "the superscriptions are faithful to the original authorship and historical origins of a psalm and are thus significant for interpretation" (300, Appendix 1).

Ash's program for reading the Psalms in light of Christ is persuasive but at times exorbitant. The history of interpretation brings both argumentative heft and a raft of problems. The weight of data from the NT's use of the OT is inescapable, and even readers who are familiar with the Psalms will discover many new and rich connections from this survey. Ash maintains that "it is absolutely *always* the case when a text of Israel's Scripture is quoted in the New Testament that the writers, guided by the Holy Spirit, open up to us the true, the full and the original meaning of the text" (47). And yet he also believes that the pattern of intertextuality leads us to look for a "messianic maximum" (51, quoting Dale Brueggemann). This seems like an invitation to excess.

All of these patterns can be seen in the commentary of volumes 2–4. Each psalm begins with several opening quotes from historical commentators. "Orientation" places the psalm in the context of history, the canon, and its arrangement within the collection of the Psalms, emphasizing links through quotations, allusions, or echoes. This is followed by "The Text," discussing structure, the

superscription, and each stanza. These comments are not overwhelmingly technical. Most exegesis that depends on Hebrew is restricted to the footnotes, and the bulk of the comments are accessible to English readers. Nor are the comments highly engaged with literary analysis as in Goldingay (2006–2008). Ash is clearly aware of the underlying linguistic details but chooses to focus on canonical links, tracing the conceptual flow and theology. The writing throughout is concise, clear, and enjoyable to read, making it useful for scholars, preachers, or devotional readers. “Reflection and Response” offers five to ten unstructured devotional or practical applications. This section includes highlights from historical commentators and never failed to yield multiple insights that enriched my preaching and challenged my life.

One of the greatest strengths of these commentaries is that the Psalms are not isolated to the OT context or offered as a literary masterpiece without practical application. This is because Ash does not view Christocentric links as a later step to be extended after we have already finished our exegesis in the original context. His readings are canonical from the very beginning. And yet, in nearly every psalm, I also found myself troubled that his approach extended too far. Should we read the waters of Psalm 22:2 as “an image of cleaning and of the Spirit of God” and the food as “an image of the word of God” given to us throughout all seasons of life (2:269)? Is Psalm 125 speaking “God’s promises to a mixed church, in which wheat and weeds grow together” (4:381)? Is “the primary reference of [Psalm 126] to the church” (4:399)? Reading the Psalms Christocentrically is a badly needed corrective, but Ash’s comments too often lose the first horizon. Ash is also inclined towards chiasm, but the recognition of such structure is not always persuasive, such as in Psalm 122 (4:353).

This commentary quickly became my favorite resource on the Psalms, particularly when paired with Craigie (WBC, 2004) for technical details and Goldingay (2006–2008) for literary analysis. Ash completes the exegetical process, offering exactly the canonical, theological, and Christocentric context that these works badly lacked. Besides the ways that volume 1 challenged my entire approach to the Psalms, I most often benefitted in the commentary from the “Orientation” sections and “Reflection and Response.” I rarely completed a psalm without encountering comments that overread the canonical links, nor did I complete a psalm without being profoundly enriched and helped. I would caution readers from relying on Ash alone for their interpretive approach, while also maintaining that these are the single most helpful volumes in my library on the Psalms.

Crossway has formatted the books beautifully, making them a delight to read. Considering the quality of the binding, a slipcase might have been a nice improvement. But at \$38 per beautiful hardback volume, this set is already an excellent value. Every student of the Psalms will be richly rewarded by carefully and attentively consulting this excellent work.

Joel Arnold

President & Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology | Foundation Baptist College