

The Psalms, Essentials of Biblical Studies. By Keith Bodner. New York: Oxford University Press, 2024. xii + 187 pages. \$24.95 (paper).

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When teaching a course on the psalms in the college classroom or in graduate school, one is faced with the challenge of choosing an introductory text that is aligned with the course outcomes, readable for nonspecialists, and engaging to students. As one might expect from Keith Bodner, a prolific scholar holding PhD degrees in English Literature and Biblical Studies, his publication is readable and engaging, offering contemporary analogies (Broadway's *Hamilton*, for instance) to help students enter the world of a particular psalm or a suggested structure of the Psalter. In the introduction to the publication series, *Essentials of Biblical Studies*, Patricia Tull articulates the aim of the collection as providing "freestanding, relatively brief, accessibly written books," (xii). Bodner's contribution is exemplary in each case.

The Psalms includes chapters on "Entering the Psalms," "The Psalms in the Ancient Near East," "The Variety of the Psalms," "Israel's Story in the Psalms," "Psalm Titles and Collections," and "The Fivefold Symphony of the Psalter." Bodner balances excellent close readings of individual psalms with a desire to read the entire Hebrew Psalter as a book. Following Susan Gillingham, "Psalms 90–106: Book Four of a Five-Part Drama," *European Judaism* 48 (2015): 83–101, Bodner frames the monograph with the goal of reading the Psalter as a five-act performance. The reader is introduced to this concept on page 2 and subsequently reminded on pages 18, 21, 75, 138, 141, 150, 166, 170, and 171. Within this framing, Bodner introduces introductory matters and skilled close readings of individual psalms.

Building upon Gerald Wilson's *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985) and others, Bodner encourages readers to find a dramatic movement from crisis to celebration with "the recognition that the God who makes promises . . . to David that a descendent will always be on the throne of Israel. . . is worthy of praise in every season. . . [because] the journey of the Psalter leads the people of God away from misplaced confidence in human machinery and closer to the divine throne" (172). The strength of Bodner's treatment is in his demonstration that literarily informed close readings of the psalms can bring frozen text alive. The danger, in terms of an introductory text, is that the larger structural argument may appear more secure to nonspecialists than it is viewed within the scholarly community. Gillingham cautions that the five-part drama works only with the final form of the Masoretic Text. The Greek translation expands Davidic attributions, undercutting the argument and 11 QPs^a orders the psalms differently. Bodner does

surface these concerns, but unrelated to structure and in a way that could be veiled from non-specialists. Interpreting Psalm 3, a psalm with Davidic attribution, he writes, “However, because there is textual evidence superscriptions were more fluid and usually added later, many scholars dismiss the historical connections and in general do not subscribe to Davidic authorship” (121). Though helpfully suggesting superscriptions may provide a framing context for a later community to read the psalm considering what they know and imagine about David, the aforementioned phrasing regarding “historical connections” is unfortunate and potentially misleading to nonspecialists.

Bodner treats the royal psalms as content-bearing structural markers of the five-fold drama, providing the community “an alternative way of thinking about the monarchy” (50). While noting that some scholars see the movement of the Psalter toward assumed messianic readings of the royal psalms, he neglects to inform his readers of scholarly perspectives that textually locate demonstrable communalizations of the royal psalms that would also fit his overall dramatic discernment. The chapter on “The Psalms in the Ancient Near East” includes a clever presentation of the Canaanite origins of Psalm 29 as “backbeat,” but then suggests that the “backbeat” is polemical against Baal. This argument, underdeveloped in the book, could lead readers in the direction of cultural superiority rather than confluence.

Caveats noted, Bodner has produced an excellent and engaging introduction to the Hebrew psalms and Psalter for those most interested in its literary form and shaping. It is recommended for libraries and to be used in the classroom with an informed and guided perspective.

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Ancient Echoes: Refusing the Fear-Filled, Greed-Driven Toxicity of the Far Right.
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Without a doubt the world is in turmoil. In the United States, religion now intersects with politics to create an ever-growing Christian nationalism movement. Those who espouse this relatively new movement believe that American identity is inextricable from Christianity. This movement can be traced to the Christian right, a United States/American phenomenon, begun in the late