

IV. Interpreting the Psalms

(This material ties in closely with the foregoing as the method of study is vital in interpretation. But in this section we bring in background materials and ideals that supplement the method of study previously noted.)

A. Understand the literary character

Be sure you understand the materials on pages 14-16 of these notes. Identify all the literary features of the psalm (if it is a long psalm you may have to work it in segments). Know the meaning of every word used and look for structural relationships.

A certain amount of intuition is needed in this area along with an active but not demanding imagination. Some student will see only clouds in the sky..others will see paintings, animals, etc. I am not trying to suggest that we glamorize the psalms with a lot of our own ideas but the fact is a survey of the literary character is often helped or hindered by the poetic disposition of the student. The major factors include student interest, powers of observation, creative sense, and the ability to apply patient continuance of effort over the long haul.

This, of course, is why it is important one do one's own work. It is easy to borrow the results of others and never quite know what they mean or how they should be used.

So look hard at the text. Don't be reluctant to go to a dictionary or a Bible encyclopaedia for something you do not understand. Use the commentaries after you have finished your own analysis but these other tools may be needed to help you get there.

B. Seek the Historical Background

It is not always easy to find but note these items:

1. The word originated historically.
2. In the time of its origination it spoke to its own day with significance and understanding. It may well have had a prophetic significance also but its message had a relevance then which will help us understand the point and direction of teaching.
3. If no historical item is made explicit, look for

3
10
101
7