

Abraham Kuruvilla. *Psalms 1–44: A Theological Commentary for Preachers*. Cascade, 2024. 342 pages. \$34.

This work is one of three volumes Abraham Kuruvilla has written on the Psalms (the others are divided as *Psalms 45–100* and *Psalms 101–150*). This work adds to the lineup of his *Theological Commentaries for Preachers* series published with Cascade, which includes titles such as *Genesis*, *Judges*, and *Ephesians*. These commentaries demonstrate and apply the hermeneutical and homiletical methods Kuruvilla articulates in earlier works. Those unfamiliar with his homiletical oeuvre may consult *Privilege the Text!* (Moody, 2013), *A Manual for Preaching* (Baker, 2019), or his essay “Christiconic View” in *Homiletics and Hermeneutics: Four Views on Preaching Today*, ed. Scott M. Gibson and Matthew D. Kim (Baker, 2018).

In the introduction, he describes a Christiconic homiletic. Kuruvilla claims that Jesus Christ perfectly fulfills not simply *Scripture*, but *every pericope* of Scripture. The theology of each pericope, therefore, projects “what it means to be more like Christ” (2). He writes that “the goal of preaching is to bring to bear divine guidelines for life from the biblical text upon the situations of the congregation, to align the community of God to the will of God for the glory of God” (1). Thus, “pericopal theology tells us *what* Christ looks like” and “application in sermons directs us to *how* we can look more like him” (3; emphasis original). This is the function of preaching, which shapes Kuruvilla’s reading of Scripture and is on display throughout this volume.

Kuruvilla treats each psalm (except Psalms 42–43) in its own chapter. Following a brief introductory comment, the author offers his own translation of the Masoretic Text. He then presents a table illustrating the psalm’s structure, followed by a statement of the psalm’s “Theological Focus” to help readers synthesize and grasp what the psalm says about God and the people of God. The bulk of each chapter is the “Commentary” section, where the author guides readers through the text. Such analysis is a strength of the book, and much space is devoted to discussing the meaning of words and syntax. Each chapter concludes with a sermon map, which offers a preachable outline based on the psalm.

The primary merits of the commentary include its study of the text and language. Also, the book is easy to read, and the divisions and tables make it accessible, something especially of value for introductory readers. The book can be set within an evangelical context and may be best appreciated by evangelical readers. Such a context is where Kuruvilla has done the majority of his teaching—he taught at Dallas Theological Seminary and now teaches at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The perspectives of the work often assume evangelical understandings of the text. Readers outside this tradition will benefit from the work but may feel frustrated by questions unasked and angles unexplored.

In the preface, Kuruvilla shares that he wrote this book because he “recognized that my homiletics students needed help of a kind hard to find in standard commentaries on the Psalms” (ix). Such an impulse can be commended: to serve students and those who endeavor to proclaim the word. Yet I found it curious that he rarely interacts with texts in homiletics. The primary exceptions are his own works and a smattering of historical voices (e.g., Augustine, Jerome, Spurgeon). The work would have been greatly improved by engagement with homiletical scholarship on the Psalms, such as Dave Bland and David Fleer’s *Performing the Psalms* (2005), Ellen Davis’s *Wondrous Depth: Preaching the Old Testament* (2005), James L. Mays’s *Preaching and Teaching the Psalms* (2006), or J. Clinton McCann and James Howell’s classic edited volume, *Preaching the Psalms* (2001). Many other resources could be added to this list,

including essays and, of course, commentaries. This is not to say that the work is poorly researched, only that for a commentary “for preachers,” the failure to engage (or even to mention) other homiletical works on the Psalms appears to be a glaring omission.

Many readers will appreciate this work, especially those in evangelical contexts and those who are favorably disposed toward Kuruvilla’s hermeneutical and homiletical methods. It contributes to the library of resources to which Christian preachers may turn for help in preaching the Psalms. Such scholarship is to be commended, since Christians and congregations need—now, as ever—the grammar of faith that the Psalms provide.

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