

Psalms

Psalms of Complaint

Interpreting the Text:

Pick a Psalm from the 'complaint' category to look at. The psalms of "individual complaint" are: Psalm 3, 5–7, 13, 17, 22, 25–28, 32, 38, 39, 42, 43, 51, 54–57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69–71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, and 140–43. The psalms of "communal complaint" are: 44, 74, 79, 80, 83, and 89.

1. How is metaphor used in this complaint psalm?
2. Theologians discuss "providence," which explains how God acts in the world (or doesn't). If we only read the psalms of lament, what understanding of providence would we have?

Applying the Text:

1. What does it say about human life that so many of the psalms consist of complaint and lament?
2. Some say that the psalms of lament give us permission to voice our anger at God. Have you ever used the Psalms to explore anger or frustration with God? Do you think that is an appropriate use of the Psalms?
3. The psalms are specific in many ways but not about the contexts in which they are meant to be used. How does the lack of specificity affect how we use them liturgically or individually? How would you use a psalm of complaint, either in individual prayer or communal worship?
4. What would it look like to write a new psalm of complaint or lament? What kinds of topics would you write about?