

This Poor Man Called
STORIES AND SONGS OF DAVID
VOLUME 2

Dave Barker has a unique, engaging way of applying the rich theology of the Psalms to the harsh realities of life. His course on the Psalms has been a favourite of students at Heritage Theological Seminary for years. In *This Poor Man Called* you will discover why.

RICK REED

President, Heritage College and Seminary, Cambridge, ON

Busy teaching pastors are forever on the lookout for practical tools that will assist in the weekly task of sermon preparation. The two volumes of *This Poor Man Called* represent a fresh approach to both the Psalms and the narratives that form the background of these songs of King David. This format provides a powerful and profound look at the Scriptures in their full context. The opening narratives, careful exegesis and helpful application sections all contribute to making this a valued resource for any preacher, teacher or student of the Word. No doubt, this material will find its way into many pulpits and thus impact the lives of all who will hear God's Word preached from these passages. And it will do so because these volumes are far more than mere academic material. The content flows from the life of a man I have known for almost four decades, who always presented his lectures with unfailing conviction and who has now provided us with this impassioned work. David Barker is no mere professor or author, but is himself, "a man after God's own heart."

TODD DUGARD

Lead Pastor, Harvest Bible Chapel, Barrie, ON

For those unable to personally sit under the teaching of Dr. David Barker, this second volume of *This Poor Man Called* is the next best thing, as its contents feature Dave's rich, insightful thoughts on the Word in writing.

TIM RODDICK

Pastor, Calvary Baptist Church, Pembroke, ON

This is both a practical and a powerful little book. Dave Barker brings stories from the Bible into dynamic interaction with what it is to be human: they function both as a medium for meaning and as a way of being. Each chapter operates as a stand-alone study, and yet together they show us the warp and woof of God's work in our lives. Erudite and yet engagingly readable, Barker sets story back in its rightful place within the centre of spirituality, and in doing so, gives God's people a new song.

CAROLYN WEBER

Professor at New College, Franklin, Tennessee, USA, and award-winning author of *Surprised by Oxford*

Over the last two decades I've had the privilege to call David Barker my pastor, professor, mentor and friend. His passion for the Lord, his Word and specifically the Psalms has left an indelible mark on my soul and my ministry. I am overjoyed to see that many others will be similarly impacted through these volumes. With exegetical precision, storytelling creativity and pastoral care, Barker brings the Psalms to life in a fresh way that stirs the heart, strengthens the mind and—most importantly—exalts Christ, our glorious King!

ALLAN SELF

Lead Pastor, Bethel Baptist Church, Strathroy, ON

Having known Dave Barker as a very close friend now for over three decades and having heard him speak on many occasions on his beloved Psalms, I am thrilled to see this two-volume work reaching many who have not had either the privilege of his friendship or that of hearing him. His love for Scripture, his careful exegesis of the Old Testament and his passion for God and his truth—key hallmarks of Dave's life—are abundantly evident here. May God use these pages powerfully for the glory of his Name and the good of his people.

MICHAEL AZAD A.G. HAYKIN

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DAVID G. BARKER



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This Poor Man Called: Stories and Songs of David
Volume 2
David G. Barker

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To Lorraine,
a true '*ezer kenegdo* in all the fullness
of what that phrase means.

And further,
to my esteemed colleague and friend,
Dr. Stanley K. Fowler.

At the time of writing and publishing these essays he has been
silenced in both voice and written word by a debilitating stroke.
The loss to the church and world is immeasurable.

This latest chapter of his life story has prompted songs and
prayers of deep lament, along with songs and prayers of trust and
hope in our loving God, everything the stories and songs under
study here embrace.

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FOREWORD

I met Dave Barker in the mid-70s at Grace Theological Seminary in Indiana. It didn't take long for us to realize we were kindred spirits. We enjoyed studying the Old Testament in depth, with the goal of someday teaching its wonders to Christ's church and those training to be pastors. Following seminary, Dave and I went our separate ways. Dave has faithfully served the Lord at Heritage for over four decades. I just completed my fourth decade of service at Dallas Theological Seminary. Dave and I have enjoyed catching up when we meet at the annual conference of the Evangelical Theological Society. It was special for me to serve as the external dissertation examiner for Dave's son Joel, as he was completing his doctoral studies at McMaster Divinity College.

A few summers ago, Dave and I reunited at Elim Lodge Christian Resort and Conference Centre in Buckhorn, Ontario, through our mutual friend David Rivers, who was serving as director at Elim. When he discovered Dave and I had been seminary classmates, he invited us to team teach a series on King David. (Lots of "Davids" were involved in this!) Each day during the week-long conference, I focused on events from the life of David recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel, while Dave did expositions of Davidic psalms that originated in those events. It worked well, and I'm delighted

our joint venture served as the impetus for this two-volume work.

During that week at Elim, I was impressed not only with Dave's expositional gifts, but also his pastor's heart. In addition to our teaching sessions, we both wanted to minister in other ways to folks who were visiting Elim that week. The Lord gave us that opportunity. A young man who had recently trusted Jesus as his Saviour was seeking to find his way as he embarked on his journey of faith. Dave and I spent time with him, offering counsel and prayer. I saw Dave's pastoral heart that week, both inside and outside the pulpit.

I see that same pastoral heart shining in this book. Dave is concerned that readers ask themselves three questions when they study Scripture:

1. What do we learn about God?
2. What do we learn about ourselves as the people of God?
3. What do we learn about the world?

These are fundamental questions we should always ask as we read the Bible. In this book, you will find a reliable guide to answering those questions.

Dave's strategy in this book is brilliant and superbly executed. He retells the biblical story in an engaging manner that will transport you back into the event so that you can see, hear, smell and feel what is happening. The style is creative, yet solidly rooted in the biblical text, so that its authoritative principles emerge. Dave's approach resonates with me. Every Wednesday night my grandsons, ages six and four, stay overnight with my wife Deb and me. Before bed I tell them a Bible story, frequently taken from the accounts of David and his mighty men. I use the same techniques Dave employs, and watch with delight as they experience the wonder of God's work in history as if they are there in that long ago time and place. Why shouldn't we adults experience that same kind of wonder as we engage the biblical stories? Dave helps us do that. The value of the approach is it helps the lesson stick, so we can more readily become doers, not just hearers, of the written Word.

Dave's expositions of the accompanying psalms display his expertise as an interpreter, not to mention his great love for these inspired prayers and the God to whom they are addressed. He has

a God-given ability to make the meaning of the text clear and relevant. As Dave helps me connect to David's prayer, I come away from these expositions knowing what God expects from me and motivated to obey his will.

Thanks, Dave, for writing this book. I'm sure the Lord will use it to help God's people grow in their love for his written Word and in their commitment to serve the Son of David, the *living* Word.

Robert B. Chisholm, Jr.

Chair and Senior Professor of Old Testament Studies

Dallas Theological Seminary, Texas

January 25, 2022

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I am grateful for the opportunities to preach the Psalms in a number of churches and try out the idea of combining story and song in sermon form. Special thanks to Ed Fontaine who allowed me to do a summer series in his church using some of the chapters in the book as sermons.

Thank you to David Rivers for inviting me to come as a speaker several times to Elim Lodge Christian Resort and Conference Centre, as well as to John Friesen who also had me come and speak at Muskoka Bible Centre on several occasions. These were places where I honed my expositions of a number of psalms.

Special thanks to Robert Chisholm for writing the Foreword. Thank you, Bob, for your kind words. It was very special to spend

time with you at Elim. Your storytelling about David sparked this whole project.

I wish to thank Heritage College & Seminary which has allowed me to teach the Book of Psalms for over twenty years now. The psalter has become the heartbeat of my personal and communal spirituality. As I teach the book year after year, the voices of the psalms become even more deeply embedded in my life. I trust the same is true for the students who pass through my classroom.

A special thank you goes to Michael Haykin who has relentlessly encouraged me to continue with this project and gave me the opportunity to publish with the newly formed Heritage Seminary Press, an imprint of H&E Publishing.

Thank you to Janice Van Eck and the staff at H&E Publishing who actually got this work into a publishable form.

Finally, I am deeply grateful to my wife Lorraine, whose love and support over almost five decades of marriage has made it possible to meet the demands of both a pastoral ministry and an academic career.

INTRODUCTION

I wrote a fairly lengthy Introduction in Volume 1 of *This Poor Man Called*. The reader is encouraged to go back and read that Introduction before proceeding into the following chapters in Volume 2. To follow is an abbreviated version of what I wrote in the original Introduction.

Genesis of this project

Stories and songs of David the Israelite king, the sweet singer of Israel.

The genesis of this project originated in a shared speaking engagement with Dr. Robert Chisholm from Dallas Seminary at Elim Lodge Christian Resort and Conference Centre near Peterborough, Ontario. This project continued to be developed at a seniors' retreat at Muskoka Bible Centre near Huntsville, Ontario, which was then followed by a summer speaking engagement at Springvale Baptist Church in Stouffville, Ontario.

The result is this collection of nine stories and psalms/songs of David.¹ We decided to publish them in two smaller volumes, the

¹ Originally I chose nine psalms of David with titles. However, in this second volume I have added two further psalms with titles referring to the same event. Hence there are nine chapters but chapters 5 and 8 have two psalm expositions based on the same story.

first with a full Introduction, a Prologue containing the opening story of David being anointed as king, followed by the first four stories and songs. The second volume includes five more stories and songs, ending with Psalm 18 paralleled in 2 Samuel 22 as an Epilogue. The second volume also includes an Appendix containing an essay on imprecations in the psalms that I have published elsewhere² and has been reprinted with permission in this book.

The goals of this collection include: (1) to hear the stories of David in a living storytelling fashion; (2) to reacquaint readers with the place and value of storytelling as a means to communicate truth about God, ourselves as the people of God and the world; (3) to provide a popular but serious exposition of selected psalms; (4) to engage the titles in the psalms; and (5) to bring these psalms to life by recounting the stories that prompted or came to serve as backdrops for these psalms.

Story

A well-known rabbinic saying states, “God made people because he loves stories.” Who doesn’t like a good story well told? The power of story is captured in the Canadian icon Stuart McLean, Canada’s storyteller. Week after week on Sunday afternoons he told stories about a fictional couple named Dave and Morley along with their children, Stephanie and Sam, their dog Arthur, and a variety friends and neighbours on the CBC program *The Vinyl Cafe*. My colleague, Marianne Vanderboom, wrote an insightful blog that captures the heart and beauty of McLean’s stories. But she also points us to the place story has in the sacred Scriptures and in our lives. I included that essay in the Introduction to Volume 1.

Sidney Greidanus noted correctly that “of all the biblical genres of literature, narrative may be described as the central, foundational, all-encompassing genre of the Bible.”³ Almost forty percent of the Bible is narrative. When we read or hear a story we share the

² David G. Barker, “The Church and Imprecations in the Psalms: The Place of the Call to Curse in the Life of the Church Today,” in *Ecclesia Semper Reformanda Est—The Church Is Always Reforming: A Festschrift on Ecclesiology in Honour of Stanley K. Fowler*, eds. David G. Barker, Michael A.G. Haykin, Barry H. Howson (Kitchener: Joshua Press, 2016), 65–87.

³ Sidney Greidanus, *The Modern Preacher and the Ancient Text: Interpreting and Preaching Biblical Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 188.

experience and enter into the story, listening and watching with tension and anticipation of how it is all going to turn out. It is usually the stories in the Bible that we remember best.

Song

Along with storytelling, songs and music have been a core part of cultures and societies from the beginning of time. Twice in the Epistles the apostle Paul instructs the church to sing “psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” (Eph 5:19; Col 3:16).⁴ Music was considered crucial in the worship life of the church. There are reasons for this. First, music and song allow serious theological truth to be put into a memorable form as poetry that can be remembered and sung.

Second, music and song allow the breadth of life—its pain and its blessing—to be articulated in a way that is artistic and meaningful. Third, it brings people together and gives them a common voice of joy, lament, protest, trust and adoration of God. Finally, it engages the aesthetic. It brings richness and beauty into the life of the singers and hearers of music who are image-bearers of God, who in turn is a God of beauty and creativity.

While the references to psalms by Paul to the Ephesian and Colossian churches may not be limited to the Book of Psalms, it is certainly inclusive of that book. There are good reasons for including the Book of Psalms in the worship life of the church. First, the psalms articulate a theology of God that is almost incomparable to anything else in the Bible. Second, the Book of Psalms uniquely gives voice to the people of God in addressing God. Third, the variety of psalms gives us the full range of responses to life with its joys and celebrations as well as its pain and losses. J. Todd Billings writes:

Rather than being one-dimensional, our affections need to become agile and multidimensional through being reshaped by God through the Psalms. Let us grieve and protest and trust and praise together before the Lord. The Psalms give us a way to pray in many keys, major and minor, while directing us to the source of true hope: the Lord and his promises.⁵

⁴ All Scripture citations are from the 2011 edition of the NIV.

⁵ J. Todd Billings, *Rejoicing in Lament: Wrestling with Incurable Cancer & Life in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015), 40.

Psalm titles

The exposition of each of the eleven psalms in these volumes is based on the title that heads the psalm. One hundred and sixteen of the 150 psalms in our English Bibles have a title or superscription. While some have questioned the authenticity and reliability of the titles, recent studies have affirmed their reliability, and they need to be recognized as giving us helpful information about authorship, situation of the psalmist, musical notations and more. Hence, in this study we affirm the Davidic authorship of the psalms that have his name ascribed to him in the title. This study also reads the historical references in the titles as authoritative for understanding the situation behind the psalm.

These volumes are a selection of eleven psalms all ascribed to David and follow in chronological order the historical references in the titles to the events in David's life recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. I retell the story in my own words, sometimes using the voice of another character in the story (eg. one of David's men in the cave when David had the chance to kill Saul) or the voice of David himself. I have worked hard at getting at the theological and prophetic centre of the story as recorded in Samuel and 1 Chronicles, but I have brought a creative twist to the retold story.

The story then leads into a verse-by-verse exposition of the psalm(s). There are some introductory notes and then a statement of the point or message of the psalm. The exposition of the psalm follows an expository outline grounded in the stated point and seeks to stay deeply embedded in the actual text of the psalm.

At the end of each story and song essay, I conclude with asking three questions: What do we learn about God? What do we learn about ourselves as the people of God? and What do we learn about the world? I believe the Bible is asking these three basic questions in seeking to shape a theocentric and biblical worldview. Each chapter concludes with a final word, perhaps the lyrics to a hymn or a final quote from someone.

Moving forward

What will we find in this study? First, we will find a theology of God as sovereign and King. Second, we will find that all of life is lived in the presence of God. The prophetic narrator is careful to tell every story in concert with the approval or disapproval of

God. Sometimes it is subtle and has to be thought through carefully as to which response of God is in play. Other times it is explicit and we find words like “favour” (eg. Samuel in 1 Sam 2:26) or “rejected” (eg. Saul in 1 Sam 15:26). Third, we learn that life and the life of worship are an interactive dynamic of despair and hope, failure and success, sin and forgiveness (with consequences).

So, how to do we learn to use these songs and stories in guiding our pilgrimages of faith and hope? First, read the stories, and read them *as* stories. We need to read seeing the beginning, middle and end of the story.

Then, second, what about the psalms? We learn to speak them in the way children learn to speak with their parents. We speak what we read and hear. Yes, we can refine our understanding by learning the categories and structures of psalms, but we first learn the freedom of responding to our heavenly King in the midst of our story with the full breadth of feeling and emotion. When we do this, we will find we are praying and worshipping the God and King of our salvation revealed in Jesus Christ more than we know, and our lives will be truly God/Christ-centred and life-filled.⁶

Each chapter is intended to be a stand-alone study. As a result, while there will be some references to earlier material there is also some repetition of ideas and observations in the psalm expositions. This is because most of the psalms under study are lament psalms, and so express similar thoughts as David brings the lyrics of these passionate songs into his life of pain, penitence and hope. But I wanted each psalm to stand on its own in exposition and so allow the voice of the psalm, even though that same voice is heard in other psalms, to be heard in the psalm under study.

⁶ These thoughts emerge from comments made by Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (New York: HarperCollins, 1989), 35–43.