

## Article of the Month – October 2010

### Missiological Observations in the OT (2) – Psalms

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In our new short series on Old Testament mission perspectives, we now look at the Psalms. It is not hard to spot missionary themes here – there are many – but ordering them logically is, because most Psalms are not written in story-form. To make these mission themes more visible, I use the ordering of the themes we discussed in Genesis, but with references rather than with descriptions, for brevity's sake.<sup>1</sup> One will not need much time to page through them, after which a thorough understanding of mission themes in

the Psalms remains. Putting the verses into the categories of the twelve themes is partly a matter of interpretation. There are some overlaps, especially between 5 & 11 and 9 & 11. Some have only one or a few references (e.g. 1, 2, 4, 6-8, 10 & 12); the remaining (3, 5, 9 & 11) have many. Not all Psalms contain verses that can be categorized under any of the themes, e.g. 1; 3; 15; 17; 19; 20; 23; 29; 35; 42; 43; 55; 61; 84; 88; 90; 93; 112; 120-124; 131 & 134. These are not 'un-missionary' but have a different emphasis. Another property of the book is its prophetic caliber, expressed mainly in its messianic<sup>2</sup> and apocalyptic<sup>3</sup> verses. Observing these provides us with missiological truths as well, because Christ Himself is the greatest Missionary.

Theme 1 (Who sends?) shows God, sending Jesus to be King (2:6); commissioning man to be steward over creation (8:6); calling David from behind the sheep (78:70) and installing him into office under divine protection (89:20-24). In 104:30a God sends His Spirit with creative power and in 105:17 & 20 He sends Joseph to Egypt. Sometimes the lines between David and his great Son Jesus are thin: in 89:25-29 we see a wider, Messianic perspective.

Theme 2 (To do what?) is seen in that Jesus and the Church are assigned to intercede for and rule over the nations (2:8,9; 18:43b) and in man's mandate of stewardship over the earth (8:6-8). Some texts remind us of the Great Commission: 9:11b; 71:15-18; 73:28b. The description of David's calling we see in 78:71,72 & 89:26; Joseph's in 105:19,21,22 and Israel's in 105:45 & 106:8. The Holy Spirit is sent on a renewal-mission (104:30b). Two general principles of working for the Lord become visible: 126:5,6 (sowing in tears, reaping with joy) and 127:1 (unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain).

Theme 3 (Man's sin problem) has many references: 2:2,3; 7:14-16; 10:2-11; 12:2; 14:1,3; 32:3,4; 36:1-4; 38:1-8; 40:12; 52:1-4; 53:1,3; 58:3-5; 64:3-6; 69:5; 73:6-11; 78:8-11,17-

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<sup>1</sup> Please accept my apologies for the many Scripture references within the text, instead of footnotes, just for once

<sup>2</sup> *Messianic* value is found in Ps. 2; 22; 40:6-10; 41:9; 45; 47:5; 55:1-5, 12-14; 56:5,6; 68:18; 69:8,9,21; 72; 80:17; 89:27-29; 102:21,22; 109:2-5; 110; 118:22,26 and 147:3

<sup>3</sup> *Apocalyptic* value is seen in Ps. 2:1-3; 46; 48:4-7; 75:2,3,8; 83:1-8; 96:13a; 102:16,26; 110:3a,5,6 and 144:4-8

19,32,36,37,40-43,56,57; 94:4-7; 106:6,7,13-18,21,22,24-27,29,32,33; 107:10-12,17,18; 119:133b; 130:3; 139:19-22; 140:1-5; 143:3.

Theme 4 (The origin of sin) can be seen in 109:6. An evil man is appointed as accuser. This reminds us of Satan, as he is described in Job 1 & 2, Zech. 3:1,2 and Rev. 12:9,10. It is the only Psalm verse where the veil surrounding the Evil One is lifted briefly.

Theme 5 (God's solution for the sin problem) gives us many references. Included are texts where sinners cry out to God for help, mercy, deliverance and justice: 2:10-12; 4:5 (+ Rom. 12:1); 6:9; 13:5; 14:5b; 16:11a; 25:7-11,15,19; 26:11b; 27:1a; 28:8; 30:8,10; 31:15,16; 32:5,6a; 34:22; 37:27,28a,39,40; 38:18; 41:4; 49:5a,15; 50:14,15,23; 51:1-17; 53:6; 54:1-4,7; 56:13; 60:4; 62:1,2,5-8; 65:3; 68:19,20; 69:13; 70:4; 74:12; 78:34,35,38a; 79:8,9; 80:3,7,19; 81:8-10,13,14,16; 82:3-5; 85:4-7,9; 90:14-16; 98:1; 99:8; 101:2-4; 103:3,4a,8-12; 106:3,23,30,31,44; 107:13,14,16,19,20; 116:8,16b; 118:14,21; 119 (almost complete); 128:1,4; 129:4; 130:7,8; 135:14; 138:7; 139:24; 140:6,7,12; 141:3-5,8,9; 142:5-7; 143:1,2,6-12; 144:10,11,15; 146:5; 147:11; 148:14 and 149:4. We see that God's solution for our sin problem becomes a reality when we cry out to Him and *choose to obey Him*.

Theme 6 (Man's solution for the sin problem) is seen in 33:16,17; 49:5b-9,12-14,20 and 52:7. But man's solutions are no solutions at all: *man cannot save himself*.

Theme 7 (God's covenant with the son of promise) can be found in 2:7b-9 (where rule over the nations is promised) and in 33:12 (Israel as heir among the nations). More general references are: 80:17; 89:30-34; 103:17,18; 106:45,46; and 111:5b,9. The Davidic covenant is referred to in 89:3,4,35-37 & 132:10-12,17,18; the Patriarchal covenant in 105:8-11,42.

Theme 8 (God's universalistic purpose): 33:11; 64:9,10; 65:2; 66:1,4; 96:1-3; 110:5; 145:18.

Theme 9 (the Nations) dominates. Included are texts about 'all the earth', 'all generations', etc. Israel is placed in contrast with the nations, first in blessing, later in being scattered among them (e.g. 44:2,11,14; 79:1-3). Verses about Gentile nations sometimes speak of blessings, sometimes of judgment. You can make out the distinctions by looking up: 2:1,2,8-10; 7:7,8a; 9:5,8; 18:47,49; 22:27,28,30,31; 24:1; 33:8,10; 44:2,11,14; 45:17; 46:10; 47:1-3,7-9; 48:10a; 49:1,2; 50:1,4; 56:7; 57:5,9,11; 59:13a; 60:7,8; 65:5b-8a; 66:8; 67 (complete); 68:31,32; 69:34; 72:8-11,17,19; 76:11b,12; 77:14b; 78:55; 79:1-3,6,10; 80:8; 82:8; 83:18; 86:9; 87:4-7; 94:10a; 96:1-3,7-10,13; 97:1,5b,6,9; 98:2-4,7b,9; 99:1,2; 100:1; 102:15,22; 105:1,6,44; 106:34,35,47; 107:3; 108:3,5,8,9; 110:5,6; 111:6; 113:3,4,6; 114:7; 115:2; 117:1; 118:10; 126:2b; 135:10-12; 136:17-22; 137:7; 138:4,5; 145:12; 148:11; 149:6-9; 150:6.

Theme 10 (the principle of Babel) is found in many verses that do not refer to Babylon itself (except for 137:8), but to all sorts of idolatry and rebellion. These are: 2:1-3 (a prophetic preview of apocalyptic Babylon in its worldwide rebellion, Rev. 17 & 18); Ps. 4:2b; 16:4; 78:58; 81:9; 96:5a; 97:7; 106:19,20,28,36-39; 115:4-8; 135:15-18.

Theme 11 (Forfeited salvation means judgment) is almost as well represented as Theme 5: 2:12; 5:10b; 9:15,17,19,20; 10:16; 11:6; 21:8-12; 28:4,5; 31:17b,18; 31:23; 34:16,21; 36:12; 37:1,2,9a,10,12,14,17,20,22b,28b,35,36,38; 39:11a; 50:16-22; 52:5; 53:5; 54:5; 56:7; 58:6-11; 59:5,8,12,13a; 63:9-11b; 64:7,8; 68:1,2,21,30; 69:27,28; 73:18-20,27; 74:1-9 (Israel's exile), 19,20a; 75:7; 78:21,22,30,31,33,44-51,59-64; 79:10b,12; 81:11,12,15; 82:2,7; 83:9-17;

92:6,7,9; 94:2,3,23; 95:8-11; 97:3; 101:5,7,8; 105:28-36; 106:40-43; 107:33,34; 110:5,6; 112:10; 119:21,118,119,155; 125:3,5; 129:5,6; 140:8-11; 141:6,7,10; 145:20b and 146:9b.

Theme 12 (the Brothers) is best seen in Ps. 133.