

# The Psalms – Key to the New Testament?

by

Stephen Voorwinde

## Introduction

This morning I have set myself a very ambitious assignment:  
Are the Psalms the key to the New Testament?  
How could we possibly know?  
What method would we use to find out?

In an effort to answer this question I undertook a project that I had never attempted before, and which I would heartily recommend to all of you. If you would like to do it, you can use the *Index of Quotations* and *Index of Allusions and Verbal Parallels* found in the back of the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*.<sup>1</sup>

The method is somewhat unusual for someone who is into the NT as much as I am. My habit had always been to read from the NT back to the Old. I have often done what I had told my students to do, and that is whenever you are reading the NT and come across an OT quote, then go back into the OT passage and read the quote in its original context. You will find the NT writers to be faithful to that original context and they will probably be developing it in new ways.<sup>2</sup> Seldom is comparing Scripture with Scripture more fruitful than this. The NT quote is often the tip of the iceberg. Often entire contexts are being transposed.<sup>3</sup> OT and NT passages illumine one

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Aland et al. eds., *The Greek New Testament* (fourth revised edition; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998), 887-901.

<sup>2</sup> Richard T. France, *Jesus and the Old Testament: His Application of Old Testament Passages to Himself and His Mission* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1971), 224-225, traces the creativity of the New Testament writers back to Jesus himself: "In him we move from shadows to reality; in him God's purposes are fulfilled at last, and all that now remains is the working out of this fulfilment to its final consummation. Thus Jesus' use of the Old Testament falls into a single coherent scheme, with himself as the focus. . . . The school in which the writers of the early church learned to use the Old Testament was that of Jesus."

<sup>3</sup> C. H. Dodd, *According to the Scriptures: The Sub-Structure of New Testament Theology* (London: Nisbet, 1952), 126, identified a certain method of biblical study that became part of the equipment of the early Christian evangelists and teachers:

another in sometimes amazing ways. For example, at the end of 1 Peter 2 you find references to Isaiah 53. Peter is encouraging servants who are suffering. What better model to hold up to them than that of *the* Suffering Servant. That's what happens when you start with the NT and work back.

But the approach of this exercise was different. This time I took the OT and worked forward. I looked at each Psalm and saw how it was used in the NT.<sup>4</sup> Then I discovered something that I had never seen before. I captured something of the excitement of the NT writers as they saw the Psalms being fulfilled. Again and again the lights must have gone on in their minds. The Psalms which they knew and loved and had sung in the synagogue since childhood suddenly took wings. In Christ they assumed dimensions they had never had before. These old words suddenly took on new meaning. In the early church there must have been "aha" experiences all over the place:

"Look at the ways this Psalm applies today!"

"In Jesus it all comes together in such remarkable ways."

"I can see now what I never saw before."

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"This method, included, first, the *selection* of certain large sections of the Old Testament scriptures, especially from Isaiah, Jeremiah and certain minor prophets, and from the Psalms. These sections were understood as *wholes*, and particular verses or sentences were quoted from them rather as pointers to the whole context than as constituting testimonies in and for themselves."

<sup>4</sup> In the following discussion it will become clear that such "use" is multi-faceted. It includes quotations, allusions, parallels and echoes as well as type-antitype relationships. This widespread usage immediately raises the larger hermeneutical question over which conservative scholarship is still divided. The issue has been well highlighted by Scott A. Swanson, "Can We Reproduce the Exegesis of the New Testament? Why Are We Still Asking?" *Trinity Journal* 17 (1996): 67: "The disagreement is between those who insist that the NT correctly grasps the human authorial intention strictly according to grammatical-historical exegesis, and those who see the NT as correctly identifying the divine author's intention, in the light of further revelation (thus the 'fuller sense' or 'canonical interpretation.')" The current article is sympathetic to the former school of thought and feels the force of Swanson's argument that, in the light of such passages as Acts 2:30-31 and 1 Peter 1:10-12, the human OT authors had a greater eschatological and messianic understanding than is commonly supposed. However, the NT writers at times interpret OT passages in ways that outstrip even the most generous definitions of grammatical-historical exegesis. Their methodology is perhaps best described as "grammatical-historical plus" (to borrow a term from E. E. Ellis). The elusive "plus" is often, but not always, accounted for both by developments in redemptive-history and by the NT author's recognition of fulfilment taking place in Christ.

“All those promises that went into eclipse when David’s house went off into exile, they have been ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ.”

The illumination of the Holy Spirit is always a profoundly exciting experience, but for those early believers after Pentecost it must have been something else!

It’s impossible to say exactly, but scholars estimate that about 10% of the NT is taken from the Old.<sup>5</sup> That’s quotations, allusions and verbal parallels. About 4.4% of the NT text quotes the Old. This amounts to approximately 300 quotations.<sup>6</sup> But the sources are not spread evenly throughout the OT. Over a quarter of the quotations (79 in all) are from the Psalms. In second place is Isaiah with a total of 66 quotations. So these two books account for almost half the number of quotations.

According to the Bible Societies’ *Greek New Testament*<sup>7</sup> there are a further 333 allusions to the Psalms in the NT – in addition to the quotations. If that estimate is anywhere near accurate, the NT refers back to the Psalms over 400 times! The language of the NT is simply saturated with the Psalter.

But just because the NT refers back to the Psalms so often, does that mean that the Psalms are the key to the NT? For the purpose of the exercise let me change the metaphor somewhat. The Psalms provide the prism or the lenses through which the NT writers viewed the life and ministry of Jesus. They were also the lenses and the prism through which Jesus viewed his own ministry.<sup>8</sup> Let’s put this hypothesis to the test. To do that I would like us to look fairly closely at three representative Psalms:

1. Psalm 2 (to which the NT refers to very frequently),
2. Psalm 8 (to which the NT refers moderately frequently),

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<sup>5</sup> Thus Roger Nicole, “The New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” in G. K. Beale (ed.), *Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 14.

<sup>6</sup> Nicole, “New Testament Use,” 13, concludes that “a very conservative count discloses unquestionably at least 295 separate references to the Old Testament. These occupy some 352 verses of the New Testament, or more than 4.4 percent. Therefore one verse in 22.5 verses of the New Testament is a quotation.”

<sup>7</sup> Aland, *Greek New Testament*, 895-896.

<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that they were the *only* lens or prism thus employed. There are other images outside the Psalms (such as the passover lamb and the brazen serpent) that are definitive of Jesus. It is possible that there are so many Psalm quotations and allusions because the Psalms provide little in the way of literary context and are therefore so malleable and can easily be reapplied to a NT setting.

3. Psalm 80 (which the NT never quotes and to which it never clearly alludes).<sup>9</sup>

## Psalm 2

This is a royal Psalm. According to the NIV Study Bible, “It was originally composed for the coronation of Davidic kings, in the light of the Lord’s covenant with David (see 2 Sam 7).”<sup>10</sup> A closer reading, particularly of vv. 7-9, however, would suggest that it recalls such an occasion during a subsequent time of trouble.<sup>11</sup> Some conservative scholars, such as Hengstenberg, thought it was too great for Israel’s kings and saw it as purely messianic.<sup>12</sup> While it is true that this Psalm is prophetic, and when it was adopted into the canon in the post-exilic period there was no Davidic king, it should not be loosed completely from its historical moorings. Therefore the more nuanced comments by Craigie have merit:

Although the word rendered ‘anointed’ is the form from which comes the English title *Messiah* (derived from the Hebrew), the presence of the word in 2:2 does not necessarily mean that the psalm was initially *messianic*. Here, the reference to the term in the context of the psalm’s initial use is simply to the *human* king, for whom the coronation was conducted . . . It was only from a more distant perspective in history that the messianic implications of the psalm could be discerned.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> In Aland, *Greek New Testament*, 887-888, 895-896, the following data are presented: (a) Psalm 2 is quoted 4x and is alluded to 14x; (b) Psalm 8 is quoted 3x and alluded to once; (c) Psalm 80 is neither quoted nor alluded to.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Barker (ed.), *The NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 787.

<sup>11</sup> Thus Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 50.

<sup>12</sup> E. W. Hengstenberg, *Commentary on the Psalms* (three volumes; Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Mack Publishing Company, n.d.), 1:13: “There are the clearest grounds for asserting, that by the King, the Anointed, or Son of God, no other can be understood than the Messias.”

<sup>13</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Word Biblical Commentary; volume 19; Waco: Word, 1983), 66.

This does not imply that the NT writers were mistaken in applying this Psalm to the Messiah, it simply means that we should not rush into messianic implications before the OT background is fully taken into account. When this is done it soon becomes apparent that this Psalm is firmly anchored in the covenant. Again Craigie is worth quoting:

The divine words which the king declares are words pertaining to the royal covenant. At the heart of the covenant is the concept of *sonship*; the human partner in the covenant is *son* of the covenant God, who is *father*. This covenant principle of sonship is part of the Sinai Covenant between God and Israel. The covenant God cares for Israel as a father cares for his son (Deut 1:31) and God disciplines Israel as a father disciplines a son (Deut 8:5).<sup>14</sup>

This covenant between God as Father and Israel as son is later narrowed down in the Davidic covenant to the relationship between God and the king. In the context of this covenant the king as the representative of the nation becomes the son of Yahweh (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 89:26). Although the Davidic covenant was eternal, the coronation of a new Davidic king provided the opportunity for the renewal of that covenant. Hence God's words to the newly crowned king, "You are my son" (v. 7), indicate a renewal of the relationship between God and the house of David. The ultimate renewal of this covenant of course occurs in the anointing of Jesus Christ. In him the kingdom of David is gloriously restored and re-established and God's promises to the house of David find their ultimate fulfillment. As we shall see, this note of fulfillment is struck with particular force in the Synoptic Gospels where the kingdom theme plays such a dominant role. Just as the Davidic king could be addressed by God as his son, so King Jesus can now even more appropriately be designated as the Son of God. As such it is more a title of royalty than of divinity.

With its background in the Davidic covenant, the theme of the Psalm is relatively easy to figure out: **Yahweh establishes the eternal reign of his anointed despite the opposition of kings and nations.**

It is certainly one of the most structured Psalms in the Psalter. It has four stanzas, each with a change of scene:

### 1. Haughty men plot (vv.1-3)

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<sup>14</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 67.

2. The Lord mocks (vv.4-6)
3. The anointed proclaims (vv.7-9)
4. Mighty men are charged (vv.10-12).

### **Haughty Men Plot:**

<sup>1</sup> *Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?*  
<sup>2</sup> *The kings of the earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather together  
against the LORD  
and against his Anointed One.*  
<sup>3</sup> *“Let us break their chains,” they say,  
“and throw off their fetters.”<sup>15</sup>*

### **The Lord Mocks:**

<sup>4</sup> *The One enthroned in heaven laughs;  
the Lord scoffs at them.*  
<sup>5</sup> *Then he rebukes them in his anger  
and terrifies them in his wrath, saying,*  
<sup>6</sup> *“I have installed my King  
on Zion, my holy hill.”*

### **The Anointed Proclaims:**

<sup>7</sup> *I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:  
He said to me, “You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.*  
<sup>8</sup> *Ask of me,  
and I will make the nations your inheritance,  
the ends of the earth your possession.*  
<sup>9</sup> *You will rule them with an iron scepter;  
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.”*

### **Mighty Men are Charged:**

<sup>10</sup> *Therefore, you kings, be wise;  
be warned, you rulers of the earth.*  
<sup>11</sup> *Serve the LORD with fear  
and rejoice with trembling.*

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<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise indicated Scripture quotations are from the NIV.

<sup>12</sup> *Kiss the Son, lest he be angry  
and you be destroyed in your way,  
for his wrath can flare up in a moment.  
Blessed are all who take refuge in him.*

We begin our investigation of this Psalm in the middle, with verse 7, one of the most quoted verses in the NT:<sup>16</sup>

<sup>7</sup> *I will proclaim the decree of the LORD:  
He said to me, “You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.”*

In the NT when did the Lord (Yahweh) say this to the Son? Each of the Synoptic Gospels lists two occasions where this occurs, but in neither case is this Psalm quoted precisely. The first occasion is of course at Jesus’ baptism. In Mark’s Gospel the account reads as follows:

<sup>9</sup> *At that time Jesus came from Nazareth in Galilee and was baptized by John in the Jordan.* <sup>10</sup> *As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.* <sup>11</sup> *And a voice came from heaven: “**You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.**”*

Notice the difference:

The Psalm says: ***You are my Son; today I have become your Father.***

The voice from heaven says: ***You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.***

Why the difference? Because this is not a simple quotation. It is a merged quotation. It combines Psalm 2:7 with the introduction to Isaiah’s first Servant Song, Isa 42:1:

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold,  
my chosen one in whom I delight;  
I will put my Spirit on him  
and he will bring justice to the nations.*

So when Jesus is baptized, when he is anointed by the Spirit, then he begins his task as the Anointed One, as the Messiah or the Christ. At his baptism

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<sup>16</sup> See Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5.

he is anointed into the dual role of the royal Son and the chosen Servant. In the OT it was Israel, and specifically the king of Israel, who was the son of Yahweh (Exod 4:22; 2 Sam 7:14). Hence as God's beloved Son, Jesus is also Israel's anointed king. But in a veiled way he is also introduced as the Servant of the Lord. This is of course the very same Servant who will later become the suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. So at his baptism Jesus is declared to be both the king of Israel and the Servant of the Lord.

But this is not the only time this declaration is made. There is another occasion in the Synoptics. God not only declares Jesus to be his Son at his baptism, but also at the Transfiguration. This time it is not a voice speaking out of heaven but a voice speaking out of a cloud. Now each of the Synoptics records the saying a little differently:

Mark 9:7: *This is my Son whom I love. Listen to him!*

This basic declaration is elaborated in different ways by Matthew and Luke:

Matthew 17:5: *This is my Son, whom I love; **with him I am well pleased.** Listen to him!*

Luke 9:35: *This is my Son, **whom I have chosen**; listen to him!*

Do you notice what all three accounts are doing here? Each couches the saying in the language of Psalm 2:7 and Isa 42:1. He is the Son whom God loves, whom he has chosen, and with whom he is well pleased. In other words, this Son is again the Servant. The baptismal declaration has been repeated. But there is more: "Listen to him!" "Listen to him!" "Listen to him!" And what precisely are they to listen to? Once they come down from the Mount of Transfiguration there can be no doubt what God meant. Three times Jesus predicts his passion (Mark 8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34 par.). Three times Jesus predicts that he must fulfil the role not only of the royal Son, but also of the suffering Servant. And do they listen to him? No! The prediction falls on deaf ears. They could cope with Jesus being the triumphant Messiah. But when it comes to the Suffering Servant, they have no ears to hear and they cannot take it in.

So we have Psalm 2:7 strongly alluded to at both Jesus' baptism and his transfiguration. On both occasions he is declared to be Israel's anointed king. But there is more. The best is yet to come!

Paul quotes this verse in his first recorded sermon, to the synagogue at Pisidian Antioch in Acts 13. A key point that he is establishing for his mainly Jewish audience is the resurrection of Jesus:

<sup>32</sup> *We tell you the good news: What God promised our fathers* <sup>33</sup> *he has fulfilled for us, their children, by raising up Jesus. As it is written in the second Psalm:*

***“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.”***

So for Paul Psalm 2:7 was finally fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus.<sup>17</sup> The writer to the Hebrews adds further perspective to the picture. He quotes the verse twice – first in 1:5, then in 5:5:

<sup>5</sup> *For to which of the angels did God ever say,*

***“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.”?***

And again:

<sup>4</sup> *No one takes this honor (of being high priest) upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was.* <sup>5</sup> *So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him,*

***“You are my Son;  
today I have become your Father.”***

So for the writer to the Hebrews when was this Psalm ultimately fulfilled? How does he define the “today” of Psalm 2:6? The overall context from the letter makes it clear that the writer is thinking of the exaltation of Jesus. The stage is set in 1:4: “*After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.*”

All of this seems to leave us with a problem. When does Psalm 2:7 reach its fulfilment in Jesus? When is it “today”?

Commenting on Hebrews 1:5, Philip Hughes gives an overview of the history of interpretation of the verse and then concludes:

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<sup>17</sup> As we have seen earlier, there were of course earlier fulfilments, i.e. every time a Davidic king was crowned. These multiple, interim and partial fulfilments culminate in Christ.

To sum up, we may say that at every moment of his earthly mission the incarnate Messiah is the Son beloved and accepted by the Father, but that the “day” spoken of here, on which he is said to have been begotten by God, is the day of his glorious victory and vindication, the day also which, for the purposes of our author’s argument here, establishes for all to see his absolute superiority to all angels. This “day” belongs, in the first place, to the event of the resurrection, but it extends also to the ascension of Christ and his glorification at the right hand of the divine majesty. In other words, resurrection, ascension, and glorification should be viewed as forming a unity, each one contributing to the exaltation of the Son to the transcendental heights of power and dignity.<sup>18</sup>

Craigie has reached a similar conclusion:

The interpretation of Ps 2 as messianic in conjunction with Jesus involves a great insight into the nature of the entire ministry of Jesus. The psalm is a coronation psalm and its interpretation with respect to Jesus is indicative of the coronation of Jesus within the kingdom of God. Whereas the coronation of the Davidic king took place on one day, there is a sense in which the coronation of Jesus took place throughout his ministry.<sup>19</sup>

According to the Synoptics it took place at his baptism and transfiguration.

According to Paul it took place at his resurrection.

According to the letter to the Hebrews it took place at his ascension and glorification.

This perspective also helps us to appreciate the fulfilment of the rest of the Psalm:

Think of **verse 8**:

<sup>8</sup> *Ask of me,  
and I will make **the nations** your inheritance,  
**the ends of the earth** your possession.*

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<sup>18</sup> Philip E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 55.

<sup>19</sup> Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 69.

Nowhere in the NT are we actually told that Jesus ever made this request, and yet there are strong hints that he did. Where might these might be found? What was the last command that he gave to his disciples? It was the Great Commission! Think of the wording of the Psalm and these last words of Jesus. The connection is unmistakable:

*I will make the **nations** your inheritance*, says the Psalm.  
*Go and make disciples of all **nations***, says Jesus (Matt 28:19).

. . . ***the ends of the earth** your possession*, says the Psalm.  
*You shall be my witnesses . . . to **the ends of the earth***, says Jesus (Acts 1:8).

You will notice that when Jesus spoke these words, it was after the resurrection. Because of his exaltation, the Great Commission is possible. What amazing vistas of Jesus' kingship suddenly open up before us! The nations are his inheritance and the ends of the earth are his possession.

But does this make everybody happy? Do all the nations gladly submit to King Jesus? Of course the answer is no, and that takes all the way back to verses 1-3:

<sup>1</sup> *Why do the nations conspire  
and the peoples plot in vain?*  
<sup>2</sup> *The kings of the earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather together  
against the LORD  
and against his Anointed One.*  
<sup>3</sup> *“Let us break their chains,” they say,  
“and throw off their fetters.”*

When you look at the OT scene it becomes difficult to identify these words with any concrete historical situation.<sup>20</sup> In the NT the Psalm is applied to various situations.<sup>21</sup> After Peter and John have been threatened by the

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 65-66: “Although it is possible to seek an historical background to the rebellious nations (e.g. in the reign of King Solomon), the psalmist is not necessarily referring to any particular event in history. The language reflects primarily all – or any – nations that do not acknowledge the primacy of Israel’s God, and therefore of Israel’s king.”

<sup>21</sup> Clearly there is more than a single fulfilment of this Psalm in either the OT or the NT context.

Sanhedrin for preaching the resurrection, the story in Acts 4 continues:

<sup>23</sup> *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.* <sup>24</sup> *When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.* <sup>25</sup> *You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:*

***'Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?***

***<sup>26</sup> The kings of the earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather together  
against the Lord  
and against his Anointed One.'***

<sup>27</sup> *Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.* <sup>28</sup> *They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.* <sup>29</sup> *Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.* <sup>30</sup> *Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus."*

So when did the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? Although a specific OT application is difficult to identify with any degree of certainty, this raging and plotting definitely happened at the trial and crucifixion of Jesus. That's when an unlikely coalition between Jews and Gentiles, and an unholy alliance between Herod and Pontius Pilate, were struck. But that was not the only time it happened. The early church sees the same rebellion against the kingship of Jesus in the threats of the Sanhedrin. Just as God had dealt with rebellion the first time by raising Jesus from the dead, so now he does it in a very different way:

*After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:31)*

Come what may, Jesus rules in the midst of his enemies, as Psalm 2:9 makes clear:

***You will rule them with an iron scepter;  
you will dash them to pieces like pottery.***

The scope of Christ's rule, and the opposition to that rule, are immeasurably enlarged when we get to the Book of Revelation. It has some allusions to this verse that are hard to miss. While Acts sees the rule and the rebellion against it played out in the city of Jerusalem, in Revelation the stage is the world itself. In Revelation 12 the seer is given a vision of a woman clothed in the sun:

*She gave birth to a son, a male child, **who will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.** And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. (Rev. 12:5).*

Notice again that the exaltation of Christ is in view – the child was snatched up to God and his throne. It is the ascended Christ who rules the nations with an iron sceptre. But again the nations are unhappy and rebel against his righteous rule. This leads to a final showdown. This is when Psalm 2 reaches its ultimate fulfilment, in Rev. 19:11-21, where Jesus is the Rider on the White Horse:

*<sup>11</sup> I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. <sup>12</sup> His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. <sup>13</sup> He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. <sup>14</sup> The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. <sup>15</sup> Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. **“He will rule them with an iron scepter.”** He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. <sup>16</sup> On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written:*

#### **KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.**

*<sup>17</sup> And I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, “Come, gather together for the great supper of God, <sup>18</sup> so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.”*

*<sup>19</sup> Then I saw the beast and the kings of the earth and their armies gathered together to make war against the rider on the horse and his army. <sup>20</sup> But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery*

*lake of burning sulphur. <sup>21</sup> The rest of them were killed with the sword that came out of the mouth of the rider on the horse, and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh.*

Now Jesus is the undisputed ruler of the nations. He holds absolute sway over the ends of the earth. But he does not do so alone. Note the promise that he makes to the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:26-27). Here the Psalm is further adapted and interpreted to also apply to the Church. Hence the NT does not apply the Psalm only to Jesus. Christ shares his rule with his people:

*To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations—*

*<sup>27</sup> “He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery”— just as I have received authority from my Father”*

So when you read the NT through the lenses of Psalm 2 you get a panoramic view of the person and ministry of Jesus. Throughout the NT this Psalm is given a christological interpretation. In fact, for the NT writers it would seem to map out the Messiah’s career (although not in chronological order) from his baptism to his ultimate triumph:

- He is declared to be God’s Son at his baptism and this is reaffirmed at the Transfiguration.
- Opposition to him crystallises with his suffering and death.
- His sonship is further demonstrated in his resurrection, ascension, and glorification at the right hand of the Father.
- Opposition to his rule continues in the persecution of the church and comes to a head in the ultimate showdown with the beast and his armies.
- In the end he triumphs over all his enemies and his rule is unchallenged and he shares it with those who overcome with him.

In this Psalm we find the ideal imagery to describe the triumph of King Jesus. We can understand why the first Jewish Christians found in it the perfect parallel with which to illustrate the rule and kingdom of Jesus. The scope of his kingdom, the breadth of his rule, and his unassailable might are seldom illustrated as vividly as they are here. Psalm 2 is a prism

through which Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, Paul and the writer to the Hebrews view the person of Jesus. For them he is none other than the ultimate Anointed One, the perfect King in Zion.

## **Psalm 8**

In this Psalm David speaks of the heavens, the moon and the stars, but says nothing about the sun. He seems to be contemplating the wonder of the night sky. Perhaps his experience was not dissimilar to my own when I first visited the Australian Outback. My wife and I were on the way to the mining town of Broken Hill in New South Wales when we were overtaken by nightfall. We stopped the car along the side of the road. There were no city lights, no other cars, no clouds and no moon. As we looked up we saw one vast array of stars stretching from one horizon to another. It was as though one huge Milky Way filled the heavens. This sight must have been similar to the one contemplated in Psalm 2:

*O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

*You have set your glory  
above the heavens.*

<sup>2</sup> *From the lips of children and infants  
you have ordained praise  
because of your enemies,  
to silence the foe and the avenger.*

<sup>3</sup> *When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,*

<sup>4</sup> *what is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?*

<sup>5</sup> *You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings  
and crowned him with glory and honor.*

<sup>6</sup> *You made him ruler over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under his feet:*

<sup>7</sup> *all flocks and herds,  
and the beasts of the field,*

<sup>8</sup> *the birds of the air,  
and the fish of the sea,  
all that swim the paths of the seas.*

<sup>9</sup> *O LORD, our Lord,  
how majestic is your name in all the earth!*

Before we look at the NT use of this Psalm, let me say a little about the structure and the theme:

**Poetic Structure:** In vv. 1 and 9 we have an inclusio, i.e. the Psalm ends in the same way that it began: *O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.* The Psalm therefore begins and ends with God. He provides the framework for everything in between.

But there is more. In the Hebrew there is a connection between “*how majestic*” in vv. 1& 9 and “*What is man?*” in v. 4. *How* and *what* both translate the Hebrew word *mah*. So there is a link between the majesty of God and the consideration of man. Moreover, because of its connections with the first and last verses through the word *mah*, the first line of v. 4 serves as the centre of the Psalm, i.e. *What is man that you are mindful of him?*<sup>22</sup> As Harry Uprichard has observed:

Man is so small in all this creation. He is infinitesimal, a mere speck on a speck. This grips David’s mind. How does God even notice man among all the things he has created? What moves God to care for man in his littleness amid all the largeness of his creation? For God to notice man is remarkable; that he should care for him, incomprehensible.<sup>23</sup>

As we look at the Psalm in further detail we can discern a clear and convincing outline. The Psalm is about God (vv. 1-2), creation (v. 3), man (vv. 4-6), creation again in vv. 7-8, and finally about God again in v. 9. Man is seen therefore as the centre and climax of God’s creation, and his kingship is encompassed by God’s kingship.

**Theme:** Several possibilities have been suggested:

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. *NIV Study Bible*, 791: “This literary device – of placing a key thematic line at the very center of the psalm – was frequently used (see notes on 8:4; 21:7; 23:4; 34:8-14; 42:8; 47:5-6; 48:8; 54:4; 71:14; 74:12; 76:7; 82:5a; 86:9; 92:8; 97:7; 113:5; 138:4-5; 141:5).”

<sup>23</sup> Harry Uprichard, *A Son is Promised: Christ in the Psalms* (Darlington, Co. Durham: Evangelical Press, 1994), 30.

(i) “The greatness of God in the greatness of man” (Hengstenberg);<sup>24</sup>

(ii) “Man, the crown of creation” (Kidner),<sup>25</sup>

(iii) “mankind, a paradox” (NBC);<sup>26</sup>

(iv) my own suggestion would be: “Praise for the greatness of God and amazement at the smallness, yet significance, of man.”

Armed with these perspectives let’s now go to the New Testament and see how this Psalm is used.

The first verse to be quoted is verse 2:

*From the lips of children and infants  
you have ordained praise  
because of your enemies,  
to silence the foe and the avenger.*

The one quoting this verse is Jesus himself. He does it in the context of the temple cleansing in Matthew’s Gospel. It is found only in Matthew’s account (21:12-17), but notice how Jesus uses it:

*The blind and the lame came to him at the temple, and he healed them.  
<sup>15</sup> But when the chief priests and the teachers of the law saw the  
wonderful things he did and the children shouting in the temple area,  
“Hosanna to the Son of David,” they were indignant.*

*<sup>16</sup> “Do you hear what these children are saying?” they asked him.  
“Yes,” replied Jesus, “have you never read,*

***“From the lips of children and infants  
you have ordained praise?”***

This is a very significant quote. My OT colleague, Alastair McEwen, drew my attention to it several years ago when he pointed out that this quote is as important for what it leaves out as for what it includes. Jesus expected that his opponents would know this Psalm. If they did they would have picked up the point immediately. What did Jesus leave out?<sup>27</sup> “... *because of your*

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<sup>24</sup> Hengstenberg, *Psalms* 1:125.

<sup>25</sup> Kidner, *Psalms* 1-72, 66.

<sup>26</sup> D. Guthrie et al. (eds.), *The New Bible Commentary* (revised edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 455.

<sup>27</sup> The incident comes in a chapter where Jesus seems to be teaching by implication on more than one occasion. In vv. 23-27 it would appear that Jesus is not simply side-stepping the question of authority posed by the elders and the chief priests in

*enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.”* But notice what part of the Psalm it is that Jesus is quoting. It comes from the first section that is about God!<sup>28</sup> So with one masterful stroke of a quote he tells them who he is and who they are. He is God and they are God’s enemies!<sup>29</sup>

The next verses to be quoted are the section about man in verses 4-6. This is how they are rendered in Hebrews 2:6-8:

*It is not to angels that he has subjected the world to come, about which we are speaking. <sup>6</sup> But there is a place where someone has testified:*

***“What is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?***

***<sup>7</sup> You made him a little  
lower than the angels;***

***you crowned him with glory and honor  
<sup>8</sup> and put everything under his feet.”<sup>30</sup>***

But then the writer goes on to explain the quotation. Clearly he sees more than the Psalmist would have seen when he wrote:

*In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject*

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v. 23. Had they believed John the Baptist (as Jesus is suggesting that they should), their question would have been more than answered. Likewise in the parable of the wicked tenants Jesus is not accusing them directly of plotting his death, but the implication is clear enough – “they knew he was talking about them” (v. 45).

<sup>28</sup> It is probably also significant that Jesus has just been healing the blind and the lame. In the OT such healing activity is the prerogative of Yahweh, e.g. *[T]he LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down* (Psalm 146:8; cf. 145:14). Moreover, these healings are also foretold as occurring in the messianic era: *Then will the eyes of the blind be opened . . . Then will the lame leap like a deer* (Isa 35:5-6). Matthew calls these healings *wonderful things* (θαυμάσια), a term only used here in the NT, but found frequently in the LXX, especially in the Psalms, to refer to the marvellous deeds of God (e.g. Psalm 9:1; 26:7; 40:5).

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, 109-110: “In his rebuke to the authorities, he brought out the inherent contrast in the original psalm; the children take the *name* upon their lips (interpreting *Son of David*, from the perspective of the early church, as a messianic title), but the authorities are indignant and complain – in effect, they are the foes and the avengers of the psalm. But, as in the psalm, it is the children who have the truer perception, not the arrogant enemies.”

<sup>30</sup> In Hebrews the OT quotations are from the LXX rather than from the Hebrew. Never in this epistle does a quotation agree with the Hebrew against the LXX. In this instance the quote matches the LXX word for word.

*to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. <sup>9</sup> But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.*

In Psalm 8 the writer was reflecting on a creation theme. He stands in awe of God's majesty as the Creator. He also echoes Genesis in describing man's dignified role in that creation. However, as the writer to the Hebrews argues, man's position of authority in that creation has *not yet* been fully restored. The only man who currently exercises that kind of lordship is Jesus Christ. The author of Hebrews sees a christological fulfilment which is clear from redemptive history, but may not have been clear to the Psalmist. Dominion is now fully exercised by Jesus, not yet by us. In Psalm 2 Jesus fulfils the promises to David. Here the vistas are even larger. He restores humanity's position in creation, the mandate given in Genesis 1.

In verse 6 of the Psalm it says: *You put everything under his feet.*

Paul quotes this in 1 Corinthians 15:

*<sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death. <sup>27</sup> For he **“has put everything under his feet.”** Now when it says that “everything” has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. <sup>28</sup> When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.*

Here Jesus is seen very much in his role as the last Adam. He regains the dominion that Adam lost and then obediently subjects himself to the Father in a way that Adam did not. The already-not-yet tension can be found here too, but not in the same way as in Hebrews. There the subjection to Christ is already and the subjection to humanity is not yet. Here the already is subjection to Christ in principle, and the not yet is the subjection to Christ in reality. While the dominion of Christ is established in his resurrection and ascension, it is not fully realised till the general resurrection when death has finally been abolished.

Psalm 8 is used in fascinating ways in the NT. Different parts are quoted so as to highlight both Jesus' divinity and his humanity. Matthew emphasised Jesus' divinity when he cleansed the temple. The writer to the Hebrews quoted the very same Psalm to prove Jesus' true humanity. For Paul Jesus is the last Adam in whom man's forfeited dominion will

ultimately be restored.

So the NT has mined this Psalm. Here is the OT's loftiest anthropology and the NT uses it to establish its own rich and robust Christology:

- Jesus is identified as God (Matthew).
- He has won back the dominion which Adam lost at the fall (1 Corinthians).
- He restores humanity to its intended glory and honour (Hebrews).

### **Psalm 80<sup>31</sup>**

The setting for this Psalm was most probably the fall of Samaria in the eighth century BC. All the tribes that are mentioned in this Psalm belonged to the northern kingdom of Israel. The disaster to which the Psalm refers was therefore most likely the destruction of that kingdom by Assyria from 745 to 722 BC. The Psalm is a corporate lament. It puzzles rather than confesses. How could God possibly devastate his own people? Perhaps the Psalm was a prayer of Judah for Israel. Another possibility could be that it is a prayer of those who have managed to survive the Assyrian onslaught.

The Psalm is punctuated by a plea that is voiced with ever increasing intensity in vv. 3, 7 and 19. Notice how God is addressed in each case, and notice too how this refrain recalls the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:24-26:

Verse 3:

*Restore us, **O God**;  
make your face shine upon us,  
that we may be saved.*

Verse 7:

*Restore us, **O God Almighty**;  
make your face shine upon us,  
that we may be saved.*

Verse 19:

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<sup>31</sup> Here I am indebted to the insights of O. Palmer Robertson who lectured on this Psalm at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia.

*Restore us, O LORD God Almighty;  
make your face shine upon us,  
that we may be saved.*

The repetition and intensification is very effective. This refrain also divides the Psalm very neatly into three stanzas:

- (a) the call (vv. 1-3);
- (b) the cause (vv. 4-7);
- (c) the context (vv. 8-19).

The context can be divided into two further sub-sections:

- (i) past history (vv. 8-13), and
- (ii) present hope (vv. 14-19). Notice the marker again in v. 14, where God is addressed as “O God Almighty”.

As you read the Psalm you will not detect any NT quotations or allusions or even much in the way of verbal parallels. Yet this Psalm is deeply christological and provides themes and motifs that will be developed in great detail in the NT:

Verses 1-3 **The Call** on God with a heartfelt plea:

*Hear us, O Shepherd of Israel,  
you who lead Joseph like a flock;  
you who sit enthroned between the cherubim, shine forth  
before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.  
Awaken your might;  
come and save us.*

<sup>3</sup>*Restore us, O God;  
make your face shine upon us,  
that we may be saved.*

Verses 4-7 **The Cause** for the Psalmist’s plea:

<sup>4</sup>*O LORD God Almighty,  
how long will your anger smolder  
against the prayers of your people?*  
<sup>5</sup>*You have fed them with the bread of tears;  
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.*  
<sup>6</sup>*You have made us a source of contention to our neighbors,*

*and our enemies mock us.*

<sup>7</sup> *Restore us, O God Almighty;*  
*make your face shine upon us,*  
*that we may be saved.*

Verses 18-19 **The Context** for the plea to God (vv. 8-19):

(i) **The Past History** of Israel (vv. 8-13):

<sup>8</sup> *You brought a vine out of Egypt;*  
*you drove out the nations and planted it.*

<sup>9</sup> *You cleared the ground for it,*  
*and it took root and filled the land.*

<sup>10</sup> *The mountains were covered with its shade,*  
*the mighty cedars with its branches.*

<sup>11</sup> *It sent out its boughs to the Sea,*  
*its shoots as far as the River.*

<sup>12</sup> *Why have you broken down its walls*  
*so that all who pass by pick its grapes?*

<sup>13</sup> *Boars from the forest ravage it*  
*and the creatures of the field feed on it.*

(ii) **The Present Hope** (vv. 14-19):

<sup>14</sup> *Return to us, O God Almighty!*  
*Look down from heaven and see!*  
*Watch over this vine,*

<sup>15</sup> *the root your right hand has planted,*  
*the son you have raised up for yourself.*

<sup>16</sup> *Your vine is cut down, it is burned with fire;*  
*at your rebuke your people perish.*

<sup>17</sup> *Let your hand rest on the man at your right hand,*  
*the son of man you have raised up for yourself.*

<sup>18</sup> *Then we will not turn away from you;*  
*revive us, and we will call on your name.*

<sup>19</sup> *Restore us, O LORD God Almighty;*  
*make your face shine upon us,*  
*that we may be saved.*

There are three NT themes and motifs that immediately stand out in this Psalm – *the Shepherd, the vine and the son of man*.<sup>32</sup> This makes the theme of this Psalm decidedly christocentric or, more precisely, “christotelic”<sup>33</sup>:

***Pray for God’s right hand man who saves his suffering people in himself!***

At this point it would be tempting for us to draw lines directly to Jesus and to declare that as God’s right hand man he is the shepherd, the vine and the son of man. But if we take that short-cut we lose so much. Before we move ahead into the NT, let’s look further back into the OT. It will give us a depth of perspective that we would otherwise miss completely.

There are some references in the opening verses that are the key to the Psalm as a whole. Notice that God is addressed initially as the *Shepherd of Israel who leads Joseph like a flock*. Then in verse 2 he is called to stir up his power before *Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh*. Do you get the picture? The focus is on Joseph and his sons Ephraim and Manasseh and his full brother Benjamin. Once we identify this connection we can see where the Psalmist’s pleas are coming from. This prayer is made in the light of the promises God made through Jacob for his son, Joseph, and his grandsons, Ephraim and Manasseh. These promises form the basis for this prayer and for its symbolism. Earlier revelation informs later revelation. In Genesis 48:15-20 Jacob blesses Joseph with these words:

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<sup>32</sup> The point is elaborated by C. H. Dodd, “The Old Testament in the New,” in G. K. Beale (ed.), *The Right Doctrine from the Wrong Texts? Essays on the Use of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 173: “The eightieth Psalm describes, in the kaleidoscopic imagery of oriental poetry, the fortunes of God’s people in prosperity and adversity. They are the vine which he brought out of Egypt and planted. For a while it flourished, but then wild beasts entered the vineyard and reavaged it. ‘Look down from heaven,’ the poet prays, ‘and visit this vine.’ But then the imagery changes: ‘Let thy hand be upon the man of thy right hand, the Son of Man whom thou hast made strong for thyself.’ Here again, though the psalm is never expressly quoted, it has clearly supplied much of the standing imagery of the New Testament.”

<sup>33</sup> This term was coined by Peter Enns, “Apostolic Hermeneutics and an Evangelical Doctrine of Scripture: Moving Beyond a Modernist Impasse,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 65 (2003): 277: “I prefer this over ‘Christological’ or ‘Christocentric’ since these are susceptible to a point of view that I am not advocating here, namely, the effort to ‘see Christ’ in every, or nearly every, OT passage. To see Christ as the driving force behind apostolic hermeneutics is not to flatten out what the OT says on its own. Rather it is to see that, for the church, the OT does not exist on its own, in isolation from the completion of the OT story in the death and resurrection of Christ.”

*“May the God before whom my fathers  
Abraham and Isaac walked,  
**the God who has been my shepherd**  
all my life to this day,  
<sup>16</sup> the Angel who has delivered me from all harm  
—may he bless these boys.  
May they be called by my name  
and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,  
and may they increase greatly  
upon the earth.”*

<sup>17</sup> *When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim’s head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father’s hand to move it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. <sup>18</sup> Joseph said to him, “No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.”*

<sup>19</sup> *But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and **his descendants will become a group of nations.**” <sup>20</sup> He blessed them that day and said,*

*“In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing:  
‘May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.’”  
So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.*

Then in the next chapter Jacob prophesied over each of his twelve sons. But there are two that stand out. The prophecies concerning them are far more extensive than the others. They are Judah and Joseph. Genesis 49:22-26 contains the prophecy that Jacob pronounces over Joseph. Notice again the similarities with Psalm 80:

<sup>22</sup> *“**Joseph is a fruitful vine,  
a fruitful vine near a spring,  
whose branches climb over a wall.***  
<sup>23</sup> *With bitterness archers attacked him;  
they shot at him with hostility.*  
<sup>24</sup> *But his bow remained steady,  
his strong arms stayed limber,  
because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob,  
because of **the Shepherd**, the Rock of Israel,  
<sup>25</sup> because of your father’s God, who helps you,  
because of the Almighty, who blesses you  
with blessings of the heavens above,  
blessings of the deep that lies below,  
blessings of the breast and womb.*  
<sup>26</sup> *Your father’s blessings are greater*

*than the blessings of the ancient mountains,  
than the bounty of  
the age-old hills.  
Let all these rest on the head of Joseph,  
on the brow of the prince among his brothers.*

Moses pronounces similar blessings on Joseph in Deut. 33:13-17:

*“May the LORD bless his land  
with the precious dew from heaven above  
and with the deep waters that lie below;  
<sup>14</sup> with the best the sun brings forth  
and the finest the moon can yield;  
<sup>15</sup> with the choicest gifts of the ancient mountains  
and the **fruitfulness** of the everlasting hills;  
<sup>16</sup> with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness  
and the favor of him who dwelt in the burning bush.  
Let all these rest on the head of Joseph,  
on the brow of the prince among his brothers.  
<sup>17</sup> In majesty he is like a firstborn bull;  
his horns are the horns of a wild ox.  
With them he will gore the nations,  
even those at the ends of the earth.  
Such are the **ten thousands** of Ephraim;  
such are the **thousands** of Manasseh.”*

If these blessings form the background to the Psalm, you can understand the lament. What happened to all the blessings promised to Joseph? These lavish promises made to Joseph and his descendants, have they now come to this? What are you doing, God? You were his Shepherd all the way back there in Genesis. What’s gone wrong? Have you abandoned your flock? Once the Genesis and Deuteronomy background is recognised the tone of the Psalm is so much more understandable. To all intents and purposes God has gone back on his word. This Psalm is drawing on themes that go back deeply in the history of redemption.

Once we appreciate the background that this Psalm has in the writings of Moses, we also discover several relevant features in the way these writings portray Joseph:

- (a) **Joseph is the one who is especially loved and especially hated** (Gen. 37:3-5). As Rachel’s elder son he was his father’s favourite. At the same time he was despised and persecuted by his older brothers.

- (b) **Joseph is also especially humbled and especially exalted.** He goes down to the pit, down to Egypt, and down to prison. But then Pharaoh places him *over* all the land of Egypt (Gen 41:41; cf. Psalm 105:17-22). This is also the case with his descendants. Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom of Israel, was of the tribe of Ephraim.
- (c) **Joseph is also especially fruitful.** This is so in the fact that he is a fruitful vine and his land is blessed. But this fruitfulness is particularly evident in his numerous offspring. Joseph means “he adds” (Gen 30:24), and God certainly added numerous offspring to Joseph. When they enter the promised land under Joshua the descendants of Joseph receive a double portion (Josh 17:14-18). In the eschatological division of the land Joseph again receives two portions (Ezek 47:13-14). In his blessing on Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob had declared: *And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth* (Gen 48:16).

But now in Psalm 80 all of this is under threat. Joseph is again especially hated and especially humiliated and his fruitfulness is being stripped away. All the earlier promises of God are in jeopardy. Hence the earnestness of this prayer. Remember the refrain: *Restore! Restore! Restore!* When does that restoration come? When will those promises through Jacob and Moses finally be realised? When is the prayer of Psalm 80 answered?

The northern kingdom did not return from exile in the way that Judah did. Hence this Psalm was directly fulfilled in Jesus Christ. **He was God’s right hand man who saves his suffering people in himself:**

- Like Joseph, he was especially loved and especially hated. He was loved by his Father and hated by his own people.
- Like Joseph, he was especially humiliated and especially exalted. He was humiliated in his death and exalted in his resurrection.
- Like Joseph, he was particularly fruitful. Who can number his descendants?

These themes come through particularly in the major motifs that we have detected in this Psalm:

- (a) With more than a hint of divinity Jesus can claim emphatically: *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep* (John 10:10). If Jesus is thinking at all of Psalm 80 (or Psalm 23) he is consciously identifying himself with Yahweh. In the OT God was the shepherd of his people. Here it is Jesus. It is an arresting image,

because he is at the same time the one who lays down his life for the sheep. Paradoxically it is through his death that they have abundant life – the kind of life that was promised to Joseph and his descendants.

- (b) Jesus is also the true **vine** (John 15:1). He was all that Israel was meant to be but failed to be. Like Joseph, this vine promises to be very fruitful. Jesus is the true vine. In the OT the vine was often a symbol for Israel. Interestingly all the OT passages which use this symbol regard Israel as faithless or as the object of severe punishment. Israel is the degenerate vine (Isa 5:1-7; Jer 2:21; Ezek 15:1-8; 17:1-10; Hos 10:1-2). Jesus, in contrast, is the true vine. He incorporates the true Israel and we are in him. All true believers abide in him. Therefore he is more fruitful than Joseph and his branches cover the earth.
- (c) Jesus is not only the good shepherd and the true vine, he is also **the son of man** whom God has raised up. This is the most common title that Jesus uses for himself. It is his favourite self-designation. He uses it more than eighty times. According to George Ladd there are three main uses of this term:
  - (i) the earthly son of man (as in Psalm 8),
  - (ii) the apocalyptic son of man (as in Dan. 7:13),
  - (iii) the suffering son of man.<sup>34</sup>

The third of these Ladd sees as coming out of Isaiah 53 and he identifies the Son of man with the suffering Servant.<sup>35</sup> This use, however, could also have come out of Psalm 80. In Psalm 80 God's suffering people are called Joseph. They are his descendants. Their tears are their food and drink. They resemble their forefather who in the Genesis account we find weeping no less than seven times. The son of man in this Psalm also recalls Joseph. In the OT there are two kingly figures – Judah and Joseph. Each foreshadows Christ in different ways. Judah symbolises eternal kingship. Joseph is the suffering sovereign who comes to lordship through humiliation. Jesus is both. He is the answer to the Psalmist's prayer. He is God's right hand man who saves his suffering people in himself. But he is more than that. He is also the divine shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

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<sup>34</sup> George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (revised edition; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 148-149.

<sup>35</sup> Ladd, *Theology*, 154.

Psalm 80 is a majestic Psalm. The Psalmist is pleading with God on the basis of the promises he has made through Jacob and Moses. It all seems to have come to nothing. Where are the blessings now? Where are the promises? Where are the descendants? In Christ we know the answers to these questions. Because God's right hand man has come, and has suffered and been exalted, God did keep his promises to Joseph. We are among the many descendants. The vine has revived and we are the branches.

## Conclusion

Relating the Psalms to the New Testament can be hard work. It is particularly hard in a case like Psalm 80 where there are no direct quotes to go by. But this is a job that we have to do if we are to preach the Gospel from the Psalms. The rewards that come from this kind of work will hopefully be obvious. Think of the perspectives and depth it has given to the person of Christ:

1. From Psalm 2 Jesus is the Davidic king who rules over the nations.
2. From Psalm 8 Jesus is both true God and true man. Praise is ascribed to him as God and he regains the dominion that Adam lost.
3. From Psalm 80 Jesus is the suffering sovereign in whom the promises to Joseph are ultimately fulfilled.<sup>36</sup>

So are the Psalms the key to the New Testament? Perhaps that would be too grand a claim. From these three representative Psalms, however, it is clear that quotations, allusions, typology, imagery and echoes from the Psalms resound throughout the NT. Many of the NT writers had been steeped and saturated in the Psalter since childhood. It is only natural that they should turn to it as a prism through which to view the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. The Psalms add greater depth and perspective to the NT picture of Jesus. They help us to grasp more fully all that God intended to do for and among his people.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> These three Psalms eloquently illustrate Dodd's claim in "The Old Testament in the New," 180, that "the New Testament doctrine of the person of Christ depends for its richness and depth, almost for its intelligibility, upon the inseparable fusion of two figures of prophecy: the leader and sovereign over God's people, and the 'inclusive representative,' or embodiment, of that people, and indeed, in the last resort, of redeemed humanity as a whole."

<sup>37</sup> In this respect the Psalms are, of course, not unique. Although the NT writers mine the Psalms for their references more than they do any other OT book, the Psalms are in this respect still representative of the OT as a whole.