

Incarnation: Seeing the Psalms (Part 2)

The Transplanted Tree

- The Theology of **Imagery**
- So much of this the Psalms do through the power of imagery – through simile and metaphor.
- Good similes and metaphors reveal a new network of associations, a new vision, the birth of a new understanding.
 - Images speak more fully and profoundly to us by stirring our emotions.
 - **Simile** and **Metaphor** help to communicate deep truths in a way that can't be exhaustively explained through precise language (e.g. the nature of God).
- Imagery calls on the work of **Imagination** – thinking and meditating more deeply on truth.”
- **Incarnational Language** is the language of Scripture, and nowhere is this more readily seen than in the images of the Psalter.
 - *Incarnation*: “the word made flesh”

Seeing the Psalms Through Metaphor and Simile

- The Metaphor of Refuge & Protection
- The Metaphor of Pathway
- The Imagery of the Transplanted Tree
- The Metaphor of Light
- The Metaphor of Water
- Animals as Similes and Metaphors
- Other Imagery

The Transplanted Tree

Blessed is the person who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked,
Nor stand in the path of sinners,
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
² But his delight is in the Law of the Lord,
And on His Law he meditates day and night.
³ He will be like a tree planted by streams of water,
Which yields its fruit in its season,
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does, he prospers.
⁴ The wicked are not so,
But they are like chaff which the wind blows away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
⁶ For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the wicked will perish.

Psalm 1

Psalms 1 is the entry point to the Psalter, and sets the tone of the entire book.

- With its fivefold division, the book of Psalms reflects the Pentateuch (Torah)
- The central metaphor is a Tree: The Righteous Individual
- Secondary metaphor is chaff: The Wicked

The contrast between the righteous and the wicked is one of motion, or the lack thereof, and of connection.

The Tree

Planted
Rooted & Productive
Life

The Chaff

Blown Away by the Wind
Perishes
Death

The Water

Nourishing Word of God (Torah)

The Tree of Life

- The Psalmist's Image borrows from the long history of this metaphor, all the way back to Eden (the archetype of the Temple), and in the prophetic imagery.

Ezekiel 31:1-9

'Whom are you like in your greatness?

³ Behold, Assyria was a cedar in Lebanon

With beautiful branches and forest shade,

And very high,

And its top was among the clouds.

⁴ The waters made it grow, the deep made it high.

With its rivers it continually extended all around its planting place,

And sent out its channels to all the trees of the field.

⁵ Therefore its height was loftier than all the trees of the field

And its boughs became many and its branches long

Because of many waters as it spread them out.

⁶ All the birds of the sky nested in its twigs,

And under its branches all the animals of the field gave birth,

And all great nations lived under its shade.

⁷ So it was beautiful in its greatness, in the length of its branches;

For its roots extended to many waters.

⁸ The cedars in God's garden could not match it;

The junipers could not compare with its branches,

And the plane trees could not match its branches.

No tree in God's garden could compare with it in its beauty.

⁹ I made it beautiful with the multitude of its branches,

And all the trees of Eden, which were in the garden of God, were jealous of it.

Ezekiel 47:12

And by the river on its bank, on one side and on the other, will grow all *kinds of trees* for food. Their leaves will not wither and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month because their **water flows from the sanctuary**, and their fruit will be for food and their leaves for healing."

It is no accident that the Psalter is introduced with the image of the Tree – the metaphor of blessing in the Garden of God.

The Metaphor Developed in Psalms and Throughout the Rest of Scripture

Psalm 92:12-15

NOTES:

The righteous person will flourish like the palm tree,

He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon.

¹³ Planted in the house of the Lord,

They will flourish in the courtyards of our God.

¹⁴ They will still yield fruit in advanced age;

They will be full of sap and very green,

¹⁵ To declare that the Lord is just;

He is my rock, and there is no malice in Him.

Psalm 52:8-9

But as for me, I am like a green olive tree in the house of God;

I trust in the faithfulness of God forever and ever.

⁹ I will praise You forever, because You have done *it*,

And I will wait on Your name, for *it is good*,

in the presence of Your godly ones.

Psalms 80:8-11

You removed a vine from Egypt;

You drove out the nations and planted it.

⁹ You cleared *the ground* before it,

And it took deep root and filled the land.

¹⁰ The mountains were covered with its shadow,

And the cedars of God with its branches.

¹¹ It was sending out its branches to the sea...

Isaiah 41:18-20

I will open rivers on the bare heights,

And springs in the midst of the valleys;

I will make the wilderness a pool of water,

And the dry land fountains of water.

¹⁹ I will put the cedar in the wilderness,

The acacia, the myrtle, and the olive tree;

I will place the juniper in the desert,

Together with the elm tree and the cypress,

²⁰ So that they may see and recognize,

And consider and gain insight as well,

That the hand of the Lord has done this,

And the Holy One of Israel has created it.

Proverbs 3:13,18

Blessed is a person who finds wisdom...
She is a tree of life to those who take hold of her,
And happy are those who hold on to her.

NOTES:

Proverbs 11:30

The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,
And one who is wise gains souls.

Proverbs 13:12

Hope deferred makes the heart sick,
But desire fulfilled is a tree of life.

Proverbs 15:4

A soothing tongue is a tree of life,
But perversion in it crushes the spirit.

Revelation 22:1-5

And he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal,
coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ²in the middle of its street.
On either side of the river *was* the tree of life, bearing twelve *kinds of* fruit,
yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree *were* for
the healing of the nations. ³There will no longer be any curse; and the throne
of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him;
⁴they will see His face, and His name *will be* on their foreheads.
⁵And there will no longer be *any* night; and they will not have need of the light
of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illuminate them;
and they will reign forever and ever.

The Other Tree of Death

Genesis 2:15-17; 3:6-8

Then the Lord God took the human and put him into the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. The Lord God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may surely eat; but from the tree of knowing good and bad you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable to make *one* wise, she took some of its fruit and ate; and she also gave *some* to her husband with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked... and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

- The trees are metaphors of the human condition; eternal life is a gift available to us, but in order to receive it, we have to refuse to live by our own wisdom.
 - Spiritual and Physical Death enter into the world NOT from God but from humans who have taken the knowledge of good and evil into their own hands (Genesis 3 & 4).