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THE SUFFERING MESSIAH IN THE PSALMS

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Summary

An important component of the teaching of the Saviour Christ is linked to the Psalter. This aspect is highlighted in particular by the Emmaus episode (Lk 24:25-27) where Jesus speaks about the importance of the Christological reading of the Old Testament. In this context, the present research aims at analysing some of the prophetic and messianic texts of the Psalter that speak about the suffering of Ebed-Yahwe and finally to trace the reception of these passages in the New Testament.

Analysing the psalms is not easy because it raises many questions about the author, time, place, style or message of the psalms. Thus, we opted for this theme with the hope and conviction that this research will bring an addition to Romanian Old Testament biblical theology.

The elaboration of the paper will start from the idea of messianity in the Old Testament. The second chapter of our research will deal with another extremely important term in biblical theology, that of *Ebed-Yahwe*. The essence of the thesis then consists in the exegetical analysis of some psalms that speak prophetically about the suffering of the Messiah. Thus we will analyse key verses from Psalms 2, 21, 40, 68 and 88. The last chapter of our research will look at the reception of the passages dealt with in the New Testament. Both the Saviour and the Holy Apostles took verses from the psalms to prove that Jesus is the awaited Messiah. Psalm 21 and Psalm 68 are the most used psalms in the New Testament. The New Testament authors' use of these psalms shows the inestimable value of the Psalter and its importance in identifying the Messiah in history.

As a research method we will use diachronic or historical-critical exegesis. Each psalm analysed will have an overview. We will try to identify the author of the text, to establish the compartmentalisation of the psalm and to determine the historical period in which it was written. Each verse analysed will be approached from both a patristic and a Jewish perspective. The exegetical analysis of the key texts will combine the rigours of modern criticism with the spiritual perspective promoted by the interpretation of the Holy Fathers. Thus, each verse will contain an area of actualisation.

The overall object of this thesis is to demonstrate that Jesus is the prophesied Messiah. During the course of the thesis we will see how the Saviour Jesus Christ progressively and fully fulfils all the prophecies announced by the psalms analysed. The research is all the more important as there is no volume in the Romanian biblical space dedicated exclusively to this theme. With the help of the Holy Fathers, rabbis and modern biblical scholars, we will endeavour to shed light on the fact that Jesus Christ is the prophesied Messiah.

The novel element of the thesis is precisely the thematic of the work. The specialised Romanian biblical literature contains brief references regarding the analysis of the Psalms, which prophesy the suffering of the Messiah. The verses announcing the suffering of the Messiah have been dealt with before, but they constitute a small part of a wider research and not a subject in itself. We do not claim that our analysis is exhaustive, but we believe that it is a good starting point for future research in this area.

Christianity teaches that Jesus Christ is the expected Messiah for the salvation of the world. This is the teaching on which Christianity is based. For this reason, the term *Messiah* has received much attention throughout history. The term *Messiah* (In 1:41 and 4:25) translates as 'the anointed one' or 'Christ'. The term is used in the Old Testament only in connection with priests, prophets or kings who were anointed with oil at the time of their investiture. The anointing is thus the seen sign of the unseen divine anointing. An immediate consequence of anointing is the filling of the anointed one with the Spirit of God. Thus the anointed one will henceforth be protected by God and will have the mission of making God's will known in the world. The anointed one received from God grace, a special charism and power to lead the people (2 Kg 23:2). All the prophecies announcing the ministry of the "anointed one" speak of the major change he will bring about in the world. Wars will come to an end, cosmic peace will settle over the whole creation, animals that hitherto devoured each other will live together, the earth will give bountifully, Israel and Judah will be reunited, exiles will return home and people will live in harmony with one another. The anointed of the Lord is therefore, a chosen one of God who has the mission to bring peace between people and God's message on earth.

Another extremely important term is *Ebed-Yahwe*. "The 'servant' of the Lord, about whom countless Christian and Jewish interpreters have written, is identified in history with various characters. Some scholars identify Ebed Yahweh with a series of Old Testament prophets, others with the entire people of Israel, and others see him in certain passages of the psalms as our Lord Jesus Christ. This latter view is taken by the early Church, the Holy Fathers and the New Testament.

The Holy Fathers interpret the prophecies of the psalms in relation to Jesus and believe that Ebed- Yahweh is the Saviour Christ, the second Person of the Holy Trinity who became incarnate for the salvation of the world. He is the One who has fully fulfilled in Himself all the prophecies of the Old Testament. Meliton of Sardis considers that the sufferings of Old Testament figures such as Moses and Isaac are prefigures of the sufferings of Christ. The identification of the Lord Jesus with the suffering personage described in the psalms is not a product of modern research, but a perspective assumed by the Church since the beginning of Christianity. The suffering servant described in the psalms cannot be just any prophet, because no prophet has ever fulfilled all the prophecies mentioned in the psalms. The Lord Jesus Christ is the only One who fulfils in His Person all the prophecies of the psalmist David and of Scripture in general.

Although some interpretations link the prophecies about the *Servant of the Lord* to the fate of the entire people of Israel, most scholars confirm that these prophecies actually refer to Jesus the Messiah and not to the Jewish people in general. Some modern scholars have tried to identify the suffering character in the Psalms with a number of Old Testament characters such as Solomon, Zerubbabel, Josiah, Moses, Cyrus, Cyrus, Joachim, Jeremiah, Isaiah, David, etc., but none of these interpretations has gained sufficient ground. This is because none of the Old Testament characters fully fulfil the sufferings foretold by the messianic prophecies and moreover, some messianic prophecies appeared after the death of the persons invoked. The only honest and satisfactory interpretation is that proposed by Christianity. *The Servant of God* is Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the world, the second Person of the Holy Trinity.

The Christian vision of the Old Testament recognised in the Person of the Lord Jesus the suffering announced by the Old Testament texts. Ebed-Yahwe is Jesus Christ. This is generally confirmed by all the New Testament texts. His entire suffering has been foretold: the mockery, the torment, the cross, the nails, the dividing of garments, the watering with vinegar, the reproach, the shame and the shame, and the trial, are prophesied by the text of the Psalms and Isaiah.

The most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament is the Psalter. This important detail proves once again that the psalms speak prophetically about the birth, life, activity, suffering, death and resurrection of the Saviour Jesus Christ. This thesis aims to analyse some of the Messianic Psalms that prophesy the suffering, death and crucifixion of the Saviour Jesus Christ. To this end we will analyse key verses from Psalms 2, 21, 40, 68 and 88.

The first psalm analysed in the thesis is Psalm 2. Although the Fathers readily and unanimously identify the person described by the psalm with the prophesied Messiah, this has been disputed by rabbinic commentaries, which have seen him rather as Solomon, the Messiah who will destroy Gog and Magog or the kings who during the eschaton will oppose the Lord. Of course, these interpretations are far from the truth already revealed by the Apostles of the Saviour, who repeatedly quote Psalm 2, identifying the personage described in the text with Jesus.

Without exception, the Holy Fathers recognise that this psalm is dedicated to Messiah and not to David, and that it is a clear messianic prophecy. Christian tradition interprets the text in relation to the Birth, Baptism or suffering of Jesus. St Athanasius the Great considers that the Psalm announces "his bodily suffering". The prophesied events were fulfilled, and the text was assumed by the New Testament as proof of the divinity of the Saviour Jesus Christ.

The New Testament reception of the psalm reinforces the idea that the main character in the text is not King David but Jesus Christ. The evangelist Luke reinforces this point when he quotes the psalm in Acts chapter 4 (vs. 24-28), where the crowds gathered around Jesus' disciples are impressed by the way they managed to escape from the hands of the chief priests after healing a cripple. After this event, the disciples say a beautiful prayer that refers to the prophecies of Psalm 2 (vs. 1-2) - they recall the sufferings that Christ was to suffer and those who gathered against him. It is important to note that the early Christians were already familiar with this kind of interpretation of the psalm, which had most likely been realised earlier by one of the apostles.

The first verse of the psalm captures the author's astonishment at the desire of the wicked to rebel against the Lord and his Anointed One. Knowing God's unimaginable power, the psalmist saw from the beginning the futility and irrelevance of the evildoers' actions. The interrogative phrase 'why' expresses not only bewilderment and surprise, but also indignation at this foolish action, knowing full well that the king under God's protection is untouchable, unassailable.

The terms גוֹיִם (*goim*) - *Gentiles* and לְעַמִּים (*leummim*) - *peoples* are used by the author to identify the rebels and refer to the heathen, the inhabitants outside the land of Israel. The exegesis of the Fathers made a clear separation between the two terms. The noun 'Gentiles' makes a general reference to the Romans, the rulers of occupied Israel at the time of the Saviour, while the noun 'peoples' refers to the Jews opposed to the Lord, who gathered around the chief priests Anna and Caiaphas. The Jews, then, are as foolish and foolhardy as the Gentiles who rose up with war against the Israelite people under the protection of YHWH.

Once we have realised the futility of the rebellious actions of the wicked coalition, we can see against whom they direct their wickedness - 'against the Lord and against his anointed'. Viewed from a Christological perspective, the Holy Fathers see by the plural noun "kings", those who gathered against Jesus and crucified him. Herod the Great, Pilate, Herod the Tetrarch and the Pharisees are the "kings" and "chief captains" gathered against the Messiah.

The psalm literally presents David and allegorically Jesus Christ. The ancient rabbis saw this psalm as eminently Messianic, in contrast to more recent rabbis who have discarded this view.

With verse 4 begins the second section of the psalm. If the first three verses focused their attention on the rebels and their plans, the psalmist's attention now turns to God. The phrase "who dwells in the heavens" expresses the infinitely disproportionate balance of power between God and man. The distance between heaven and earth can be regarded as a tool by which we measure the difference in strength between man and God. The expression "he who sits" or "he who dwells" (in heaven) יושב *yosheb*) emphasises Yahweh's authority. Sitting on the throne is specific to one who has great power. In this case we speak of the One who has all power. The designation "Yahweh אדני" (*Adonai*) refers to the quality of ruler of the whole world.

The divine legitimacy of the newly anointed king over the Lord's people is revealed in verse 6. Though challenged by man, his government is sustained by divine power. The pronominal possessive phrase 'my king', present in the context of the enthronement, emphasises the intimate bond between Yahweh and the king. The verb נָסַךְ (*nasakh*) - "to pour", "to pour out", is rendered by the Septuagint translators as the Greek *καθίστημι*, meaning "to put", "to ordain". The anointing is the symbol seen by which the Lord chooses and strengthens the reign of the king over his people.

The psalm, interpreted in the context of its messianic dimension, makes an obvious reference to the Person of Meshiach. Although the people did not recognise the kingship of Jesus, there were nevertheless not a few who identified Jesus with the prophesied Messiah. The first to recognise his divinity were the Magi from the East, who brought gifts to the Child Jesus (cf. Mt 2:1-12; Lk 2:1-20). The verse must be understood in the context of Matthew 15:24. The King Jesus, anointed over Zion, is the same as the One who was sent to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel".

Verse 7 highlights once more the Messiahship of Psalm 2. By "You are my Son" the psalmist wishes to emphasise the divine sonship of the Messiah, pointing to his birth from the Father and his eternal life together with his Father.

Plsam 2, is a Messianic plsam that does not speak of David, but of the Messiah. David was not anointed king on Mount Zion but in Hebron, as the Book of Kings and the Paralipomena relate (2Kings 5:1-5; 1Pe 11:1-3). Nowhere is it stated that David reigned over Mount Zion.

The second psalm analysed in the thesis is Psalm 21. Next to Psalm 68, Psalm 21 is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. This detail shows the importance of the Psalter and the prophetic dimension of Psalm 21.

Psalm 21 is the first psalm to speak clearly of the Saviour's sufferings. It is a "psalm of afflictions" best known through its appropriation by the Lord Jesus. The Saviour remembered the content of this psalm when he was crucified on the cross. In those moments of excruciating agony, Jesus speaks the words of the first verse. This psalm describes the sufferings of the Messiah in vivid detail.

The psalm has indisputable evidence against those who deny the prophetic and messianic dimension of the text. David never had problems as great as those described in the psalm. Even the conflict he had with Saul, or the rebellion of Abesalom, does not rise to the level of the sufferings described in the psalm. The first impression the psalm gives you is that the text records the author's personal sufferings. However, Franz Delitzsch believes that history does not provide sufficient reason to believe that the sufferings mentioned in the text can be attributed to David.

The first verse of the psalm recounts the cry of a righteous man being persecuted by his enemies. The author appeals to God's mercy based on God's decisive interventions in the past. The prayer uttered in the first verse can only be the prayer of a faithful man who has a long and close relationship with God. The words of the first verse are spoken by the Saviour Christ on the cross, at the moment of his holy suffering, which proves the prophetic value of Psalm 21.

The defamation and mockery of the "servant" are announced in verses 6-8. Verse 6 compares the suffering of the psalmist to a worm. The comparison to the worm (*σκώληξ*) expresses the pitiable and pitiable state in which the author finds himself. Verse 6, also suggested by the text of Isaiah 53:2-3, describes in a prophetic sense the sufferings of the Saviour. The comparison with the worm emphasises the humility and humility of the Messiah. Jesus humbled himself, allowing himself to be mocked and humiliated by his people.

Verses 7 and 8 express how the enemies showed their contempt for Jesus. Jesus' mockery did not end with his crucifixion. The suffering continued after he was crucified. The people of Israel and the travellers who were passing by on that road stopped before the cross to mock Jesus. The people and the leaders looked at the crucified One, shaking their heads and despising Him.

The breaking of Jesus' hands and feet are prophesied by verse 18. St Athanasius the Great believes that this stich is to be understood in the context of the Lord's crucifixion. Christ, he says, suffered all this not for himself but for us.

Verse 19 is fulfilled concretely and fully in the New Testament in the Person of the Saviour Jesus Christ. Crucified, stretched on the cross, exhausted and humiliated, weak and weakened by fasting and beatings, Jesus was only skin and bone. He was so weak you could count every bone in his body. Yet, according to prophecy, not a bone was broken.

Verse 20 is the last verse analysed from Psalm 21. According to Maxim of Turin, the stich is understood in connection with Jesus. The garment is the symbol of the prophecies and texts of Scripture, and the soldiers who share them are the heretics. In the opinion of Saints Cyprian and Ephrem Sirulus, the loosely unbuttoned shirt is the image of faith, which the Apostles kept as a treasure of great price and guarded in its entirety. Léon-Dufour sees in Jesus' shirt a symbol of the Saviour's victory over death. Just as the tunic was not torn by the soldiers, neither was Jesus "torn" by crucifixion and death.

The third psalm analysed is Psalm 40. Psalm 40 is a psalm dominated by the author's cries of pain and his desire for revenge. Having been betrayed by someone close to him, the psalmist is deeply disappointed. The pious prayer of the man on his sickbed is accompanied by another person. This may be the hypocritical traitor described in the text, or a visitor, a singer from the temple, come to visit David.

Switching the discourse into the New Testament sphere, the king's heartache caused by the betrayal prefigures the pain in the Saviour's soul caused by the betrayal of the people whom his Father had guided and protected for thousands of years. From a historical point of view, the author describes in the psalm the suffering he goes through, but prophetically, the psalm describes the suffering endured by Messiah, the mocked and reviled. Bede the Venerable interprets this psalm in relation to Jesus. The traitor in the text is Judas and the betrayer is the Saviour Christ. Eusebius of Caesarea interprets the same. The text speaks of Jesus and his betrayer.

The first verse of Psalm 40 mentions the "poor". St Cyril of Alexandria interprets the term messianically. He says that all those who understand the poverty of Jesus are happy. We

call Jesus poor, because although he was rich, he "made poor" for us by his incarnation, so that we might become rich (2 Cor 8:9). The same is the interpretation of the Blessed Augustine or Theodoret of Cyrene. Jesus is the one who "made poor" for us, who walked the earth in poverty and had nowhere to lay his head.

If in the first verse King David speaks of the blessing that the lover of the poor will receive, now the king prays for the merciful one. He asks God to keep him, to keep him, to keep him alive and to keep him happy. The Psalmist asks the Lord to keep him who does good for many years, and to make him happy, not only in this world, but especially in the world to come. God is always merciful to the merciful. Yahweh does not merely keep things as they are, but transforms the fate of the doomed believer into joy. Conscious of this, the psalmist continues to pray fervently to Yahweh.

The third strophe is a fervent prayer of David to God. The psalmist asks for deliverance from sickness and strength for the lover of the poor. He asks for the lover of the poor to be merciful, like the once king Hezekiah. Analysed from a messianic perspective, verse 3 prophesies the suffering of the Saviour. The interpretation is confirmed by the New Testament. "The 'bed of pain' and the 'bed of sickness' (or 'bed of suffering') describe the state of the Saviour during his glorious Passion.

The chain of verses 7-8 is to be interpreted as a whole. Most exegetes comment on these verses together. Verses 7 and 8 come as an addition to verse 5 and restate the idea of betrayal, developing it.

The climax is described in verse 9. Most interpreters understand this to be a messianic stich. The verse is unanimously considered to be a prophecy related to the betrayal of Judah. The quotation of the psalm by Jesus Himself is clear evidence that this text is messianic. The traitor in the text is Judas. Judas is the "man of peace" with whom Jesus ate bread in peace and who ultimately betrayed.

The second most quoted psalm in the New Testament is Psalm 68. Psalm 68 is not a triumphal psalm, but a psalm of lamentation, lament and suffering. It is an individual lament, ending with a hymn of thanksgiving. The author laments his sins and invokes his faithfulness as the reason for God's saving intervention. What is striking is the generous passage of imprecations - prayers for the punishment of evildoers. The psalmist's prayer issues a series of powerful petitions addressed to YHWH. Overwhelmed, the author seeks help from the One to whom he has been faithful. The requests are based on his need for help and his faithfulness. The circumstances of the requests are not very clear because the author uses a variety of

images. However, it is certain that the psalmist is beset by enemies and needs God's help.

Psalm 68 is a messianic and prophetic text, similar in style to Psalm 21. The text of Psalm 68 prefigures the sufferings of the Saviour and the betrayal planned by Judas and the chief priests. The traitors have humiliated the Saviour by reproaching him. They gave him gall to eat and substituted vinegar for water. The quotation of the psalm by the authors of the New Testament attests to its Messiahship. The Holy Fathers interpret the psalm in the same messianic key. The text speaks prophetically of the Messiah, speaks in his name and describes the sufferings that Jesus was to undergo. The evangelists recorded in their writings how the psalm prefigures the Lord's sufferings.

Psalm 68 has been regarded by the whole Christian tradition as a prophetic and messianic psalm, speaking of the suffering, death and resurrection of Christ. A Christological reading of the psalm reveals that the Person referred to is Jesus Christ. The sufferings of the Saviour were merciless and the wickedness of the oppressors unrelenting. The climax is announced in verse 25. The scripture speaks of the 'gall' and 'vinegar' offered to Jesus. The meaning of the terms *רשׁ(rosh)* - *poison* and *חֹמֶץ(hōmeš)* - *vinegar* is still debated. However, the nouns show how Jesus was treated on the cross, with the New Testament authors making three different references to this episode.

The phrase "to my eating and to my thirst" are synonymous with the phrase "that I may eat and drink". The detail emphasises that Jesus thirsted and hungered. The saying shows the humanity of the Saviour, but also the wickedness of the persecutors. If the Jews had had a little kindness, they would have offered him a drink to comfort him a little in the last moments of his life. But honey and vinegar make up for food and drink.

The last psalm analysed in the thesis is Psalm 88. Psalm 88 is a reminder of God's promises to King David. The psalm speaks of a time in history when the tranquillity of the royal household was disturbed by a grave event. The misfortune was so great that it prompted the writing of this text.

For most exegetes, the psalm has a rich messianic content. The psalm reinforces the idea of messianic expectations and fulfilment of promises in the Messiah. This state of expectation extended all the way to Christ. The king alluded to in the text cannot be precisely identified, but the Messianic-kingly air leads us to think of the prophesied Messiah King. Theodoret of Cyrus believes that the psalm prophesies the Birth, the Kingdom and the sufferings that Jesus will endure for the salvation of the world.

The rhetorical questions with which verse 45 begins can be understood as the pivot point for the whole psalm and are uttered in order to emphasise the pain the author is going through. The author's confusion arises from the contrast between the promise and the failure of reality. The temporal conjunction *ἕως* seems deliberately left unfinalised to reinforce the idea of continued suffering. The adverb-preposition *héos* - "until", "until what", "until when", has the meaning of continuity, perpetuity. *ἕως* expresses an action that does not end, that has no end.

Blessed Augustine believes that the promises made by God to David and not yet fulfilled seem to put an end to a plan of salvation of the world through Christ, a plan which is only just beginning. He is the only man who can live and "not see death". Although Jesus died, he rose on the third day. He is the only one who delivered His soul from the hand of hell.

The last two verses of the psalm positioned before the final doxology also prophesy the suffering of the Messiah. The Messiah will bear the reproach "in his bosom", "from many nations". The phrase "I bear it in my bosom" refers to the love with which Christ carried us all in his bosom, like a mother holding her children in her arms.

St Jerome interprets this psalm in a messianic key and identifies the cry and the bitterness gathered in the soul with the sufferings inflicted by the Sadducees and Pharisees on the Lord Jesus Christ. Verses 49-50 make reference to the reproach with which the enemies hated the "footsteps of the Anointed One." "The 'reproach' is borne 'in the bosom' by the Anointed Lord, the Saviour Christ, on behalf of all mankind.

The last chapter of the thesis traces the reception of the passages analysed in the New Testament. The sighting of the betrayer, the troubling of the chief of the people and the damnation of Jesus, the reproach, the mocking of the crowd, the piercing of hands and feet, the pouring out of vinegar, the parting of the garments, the last words of Jesus and death, are all prophesied in the Psalter and taken up by the authors of the New Testament.

In conclusion, a Christological reading of the Old Testament is vital for every Christian. This approach to Holy Scripture helps us to know the Messiah through the messianic prophecies and to recognise him in history, where he descended by incarnation. The importance of this kind of understanding of Scripture is confirmed by Christ in the Emmaus episode.

Old Testament Messianism is an extremely attractive and vast theme. The theme of the Suffering Messiah in the Book of Psalms, remains an ideal area for further research. The entire Psalter prophesies the life of the Saviour from Birth to Death, Resurrection and

Ascension. The suffering of the Messiah, prophesied in the Psalter, is a theme that deserves more attention from biblical scholars. We hope that the enthusiasm that led us to write this thesis will inspire other scholars to analyse similar themes, to the glory of God.

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