

# The Great Psalm of Messiah

**Psalm 22:1**      *To the choirmaster: according to The Doe of the Dawn. A Psalm of David.*  
(Targum)      *For Praise; concerning the strength of the regular morning sacrifice. A Psalm of David*  
(LXX)      *For the end, concerning the morning aid, a Psalm of David.*

**My God, my God**, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

<sup>2</sup> O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.

<sup>3</sup> Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.

<sup>4</sup> In you our fathers trusted; they trusted, and you delivered them.

<sup>5</sup> To you they cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

<sup>6</sup> But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

<sup>7</sup> All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

<sup>8</sup> "He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!"

<sup>9</sup> Yet you are he who took me from the womb; you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.

<sup>10</sup> On you was I cast from my birth, and from my mother's womb you have been **my God**.

<sup>11</sup> Be not far from me, for trouble is near, and there is none to help.

<sup>12</sup> Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

<sup>13</sup> they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion.

<sup>14</sup> I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast;

<sup>15</sup> my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death.

<sup>16</sup> For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have **pierced** my hands and feet--

<sup>17</sup> I can count all my bones-- they stare and gloat over me;

<sup>18</sup> they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.

<sup>19</sup> But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my **help**, come quickly to my aid!

<sup>20</sup> Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog!

<sup>21</sup> Save me from the mouth of the lion! You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!

<sup>22</sup> I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

<sup>23</sup> You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

<sup>24</sup> For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him.

<sup>25</sup> From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him.

<sup>26</sup> The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever!

<sup>27</sup> All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you.

<sup>28</sup> For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations.

<sup>29</sup> All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship; before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could not keep himself alive.

<sup>30</sup> Posterity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;

<sup>31</sup> they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it."

## Psalm 22

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# A Struggling Faith

RECENTLY A FRIEND OF MINE wrote me to say he wants to talk. He's been struggling lately, and I think this is something that virtually every Christians deals with at some point—perhaps even many points—in their life. “What’s going on?” I asked. “Everything. Death. Money. Assurance. Fear. I don’t recall feeling this way this down for so long as this last month or so. What if I die now? My kids wouldn’t understand. What if their mom’s cancer were to come back again? What will I do when I’m out of a job come this Friday?”

It’s very tempting to hear someone talk to you like this and move immediately to “good theology” to help them “fix it.” I don’t doubt that when any of us struggle with things like this that we are not thinking properly. Fact is, we almost certainly are not. And it is good to get our minds

fixed again on the things that we (especially) Reformed Christians know are so helpful to counteract these kinds of emotions: God's sovereignty, his control over all things, his being changeless and impervious to the things that cause us so much consternation and therefore someone we can trust, and so on.

It is perhaps even more tempting to just leave it there, to not really enter into the struggles that the person is having. That's messy and we love to avoid the messy things in life. Fixing it rather than entering into it with them is what we want to do. **But it isn't always what God does with us.** This is one of the reason why we love the Psalms. They don't treat us like machines to be fixed, but as complex living breathing feeling organisms that God has created in his image. He allows us to go through the process of the emotions, though he wants us to deal with them properly. The psalmists realize that the answer to life's problems are not merely mental, but spiritual and even relational as well. These problems arise not merely that we don't think properly, but that we live in a fallen world and are ourselves sinners who are in desperate need of being reconciled to a holy God through the good news of Jesus Christ by his grace

alone.

## A Psalmist's Lamentation

Thus, we find many psalms that are classified as “lament” psalms. In fact, the majority of the psalms in Book 1 are lament psalms and we have seen many of them in our study already. Much of Psalm 22 certainly fits that description as its theme deals with suffering and waiting for deliverance.

Let's briefly look at the structure of the psalm. It is characterized by the numbers 3, 5, 7, and 10. It has **three stanzas**, each of which is **ten verses** long (**vv. 1-10, 12-21, 22-31**).<sup>1</sup> The first and last stanza each contain two units of five verses (**1-5, 6-10** and **22-26, 27-31**), while the middle stanza has a lament of seven verses (**12-18**) and a petition of three (**19-21**). The first stanza begins and ends with “**my God**.” The second stanza is filled with animals as metaphors. It ends in death and a prayer for salvation. The final stanza

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<sup>1</sup> Vs. 11 is a linking verse between the first and second stanzas. See “Psalm 22: Prophetic Psalm of Christ's Passion,” in **Bruce K. Waltke**, James M. Houston, and Erika Moore, *The Psalms as Christian Worship: A Historical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), 397.

begins with hope for the future and becomes a vision of the worldwide dominion of the king. There is also a probable **chiasm** in the Psalm, making the prayer for help the center of the song:

- A:** A cry for help: no answer (1-2)
- B:** Israel (3-5)
- C:** Personal (an “I/me” section; 6-11)
- D:** Bulls, lion, bones (12-15)
- E:** Dogs, ‘pierce’, bones (16-18)
- F:** **A prayer for God’s help (19)**
- E’:** – , sword, dog (20)
- D’:** – , lion, oxen (21)
- C’:** Personal (an “I/me” section; 22)
- B’:** Israel-Nations (23-31a)
- A’:** Cried for help: heard (31b)

Psalm 22 is “**A Psalm of David.**” David wrote the Psalm. Don’t move past this too quickly this time around. David is the king of Israel and he lived approximately 1,000 B.C. Why is that important? Because of the way the song unfolds.

He sings in the first person, “**My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day,**

but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest” (Ps 22:1-2). We don’t have an exact situation in his life by which we may think more specifically about his lament. But we do have his profound feelings of abandonment that have arisen because of them.

Like my friend, the king of Israel is troubled. He is at a crisis. He is crying out almost shocking words to many people. “How could he dare think such things. God doesn’t abandon the ones he loves,” someone might think. “Why doesn’t he just use good theology and get his act together?” But no. David doesn’t say he *feels* forsaken. He says that God *has forsaken* him. How are we to think about words like this?

Perhaps our Confession can help us. In its chapters on *Perseverance of the Saints* and *Assurance* we read:

In various ways—the temptations of Satan and of the world, the striving of indwelling sin to get the upper hand, the neglect of the means appointed for their preservation—saints may fall into fearful sins, and may even continue in them for a time. In this way they incur God's displeasure, grieve His Holy Spirit, do injury to their graces, diminish their comforts, experience hardness

of heart and accusations of conscience, hurt and scandalize others, and bring God's chastisements on themselves. Yet being saints their repentance will be renewed, and through faith they will be preserved in Christ Jesus to the end.

(LBC 17.3)<sup>2</sup>

And again:

True believers may find that their assurance of salvation fluctuates; sometimes more, sometimes less. They may prove neglectful in preserving it, as for example, if they give way to some particular sin that wounds their conscience and grieves the Spirit; or a strong temptation may suddenly spring upon them; or God may see fit to withdraw 'the light of His countenance' and cause darkness to envelop them, a course He sometimes takes even with those who fear His name. Yet, whatever happens, certain things inevitably remain with them—the new nature which is born of God, the life of faith, the love of Christ and the brethren, sincerity of heart and

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<sup>2</sup> This is the Carey Publications, "A Faith to Confess," a modern English translation of the 1689 London Baptist Confession.



conscience of duty—and by reason of these and through the work carried on by the Spirit within them, the assurance of salvation may in due time be revived. In the meantime the same influences preserve them from utter despair.

(LBC 18.4)

Basically, what David is describing is what a friend of mine calls “**situational forsaking**.” It isn’t absolute forsaking, as if somehow God is no longer his God or that he has lost his salvation. The rest of the song won’t allow either of those options. For later the Psalmist admits he “**trusts in the LORD**” (Ps 22:8), “**you have been my God**” (10), and in the transition verse asks God, “**Be not far from me**” (11). Throughout the song, though God is “**far from saving me**,” he still continues to hope saying, “**Save me from the mouth of the lion**” (21) and so on. So it would be foolish to turn these words of David into some kind of theology that God might utterly abandon those whom he has chosen to be saved.

It isn’t possible to know what David is thinking about in his own life with certainty that brought him such angst that

he would pray something like this. Perhaps it was when the LORD took his child from him after he sinned with [Bathsheba](#). Maybe it was the time when he was forced by [Absalom](#) to leave Jerusalem in the attempted coup of his own son. Or how about one of those hundreds of lonely nights he spent in a cave or under a tree hiding from the murderous [Saul](#) in the wilderness of Israel. Or maybe it was something very different like when everything was going swimmingly and he had everything he wanted, including his friend's wife in that year he spent [hiding his sin](#) from God and he wasted away on the inside. Any of these, perhaps all of these could have been the occasion for these feelings of despair. God knows he along with us have many times in our lives when we are tempted to feel and say these very words.

But beloved, try as we would to find the occasion in David's life in order to figure out if his circumstance is like enough to ours that we could feel like the king would sympathize with us in our groaning, at the end of the day, though David wrote these words and surely prayed them out of his own life situation, we have in Psalm 22 something infinitely more mysterious and wonderful and terrible and important here. For most of you know that there is one

person and one occasion in the life of someone who lived 1,000 years after David did that we know for certain were on his lips in his moment of greatest trial.

It was about **the ninth hour** of that Dark Friday morning. We call it Dark Friday because in the previous three hours though it was midmorning, darkness was over all the land (**Mat 27:45**). Then suddenly, his groan went out. Jesus cried with a loud voice in Aramaic, saying, “*Eli, Eli lema sabachthani?*” that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” (46).<sup>3</sup> **Psalm 22:1**. Why did Jesus say this? They bystanders were confused as many of them thought he was calling for Elijah (47). But the reality was, Jesus Christ had become the incarnate Psalmist who now sang from the utter depths of his despair. “*Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger?*” (**Lam 1:12** KJV). What servant ever suffered so unjustly?

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<sup>3</sup> This is the Aramaic of the Hebrew: *'Eli, 'Eli, lama 'azabatani*.

## Who is Psalm 22 About?

Here now, I want to take you deeper into **the reasons why Jesus prayed the first words of Psalm 22** which were to become some of the last of his life before death. Many people throughout the centuries have not understood what you are about to hear. The Jews hardly used Psalm 22 at all in the writings that we have from them prior to the coming of Jesus.<sup>4</sup> But then suddenly, that all changed when Christians began to use this Psalm, making it in fact the most quoted Psalm in the NT. Suddenly, they began to see this psalm as a prophecy of none other than **Esther**.<sup>5</sup> Why? It is almost certainly because they couldn't accept what the Christians were saying. It was, to be blunt, to incredible, to perfect, to impossible to believe. But they needed an answer to combat the obvious.

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<sup>4</sup> I found essentially one oblique possible reference in the extant three volumes of OT Pseudepigrapha (including the Charlesworth and Bauckham edition). This is T. Sol. 6:8 which is very likely a Christian redaction, as it mentions Emmanouel who is called an "angel" but also "The Almighty God" and "the one who descends from the heights" who forces Beelzebul to swear by the name "elo-i" ("my God").

<sup>5</sup> **Esther M. Menn**, "No Ordinary Lament: Relecture and the Identity of the Distressed in Psalm 22," *HTR* 93, no. 4 (2000): 301–41. **Waltke** writes, "For example, Esther begins with three long days of fasting and praying, which the *midrash* correlates with the three cries of the Psalmist, "My God," "My God," and then the third day, "why have you forsaken me?" (Esther 4:16; 4:1). When Esther enters daringly into the inner court to confront the king, her prayer is "save me from the sword, my soul from the hand of the dog" (Ps. 22:20)."

Just now, I want to go back to [the superscription](#). Psalm 22 is not *merely*, “[A Psalm of David](#)” (as for instance Psalm 15 has it). He tells us that it was [written for a specific reason](#). Not a specific situation in his own life, but a specific reason outside of his personal life. “[To the choirmaster: According to The Doe of the Dawn](#)” as the ESV translates it. Many modern commentaries will tell you that “The Doe of the Dawn” was the name of a well known [tune](#) or an [instrument](#). But look. These words put a fragile doe in the midst of roaring lions, encircling bulls and hungry dogs being hounded quite literally to death in the rest of the Psalm. This seems to make the Doe [an individual](#) rather than a tune.

But “doe” is not the only way to translate this. The words are *Ayelet HaShachar*. The first word is directly related to [vs. 19’s “help”](#) or in the NIV “[strength](#).” That word is *ayalooti* (compare אֵילוּת and אֵילָה). This is the only time it appears in the entire Bible. And, this word appears in the dead center of the poem right between the all the animals on either side. Coincidence? Perhaps this is why the LXX translates it not as “doe of the dawn” but the “morning *aid*,” where aid and help are synonyms.

Superscription vs. 1	"The Doe of the Dawn" = "The Morning <i>Aid</i> " (' <i>ayelet</i> )
Vs. 19 (center of poem)	"O you my <i>help/strength</i> " (' <i>eyelut</i> )

Then there is that word "Morning." The word *HaShachar* is found in **Isaiah 14:12**, "son of the dawn" who is called the "morning star." It is a title for Satan, only he is the great usurper, the one who wants to be God. It just so happens that the Hebrew NT uses it to translate the one who is God, Jesus the "morning star" (**Rev 22:16**).<sup>6</sup> Finally, the Aramaic Targum, which remember is the language Jesus spoke which means he was almost certainly familiar with it, reads, "For Praise; concerning the strength of the regular morning sacrifice." What was Jesus doing that morning when he was on that cross? Offering The Sacrifice. In all of this, don't forget that the LXX does not have "the choirmaster," but "The End."

I'm making a big deal of this because I want you to know that this Psalm was always intended to be Messianic. Listen to John Gill. Having just said he thinks the superscription

<sup>6</sup> Sadly, Calvin poo-poops the idea that it should translated as morning star, even though he knows full well that those who do this see the Psalm as Christological, as he himself as least in some places also does. Helpful on this was Geoff Barnard, *Face to Face* (Tsur Tsina Publication, 2016), 142-43.

describes the content of the song (and I agree), he asks, “But who should be designed hereby is the question?” **Esther?** “There is not one word in the psalm that agrees with her and some are manifestly spoken of a man, and not a woman.” **David?** “The disjuncting the bones of this person, the piercing his hands and feet, parting his garments, and casting lots on his vesture ... were never fulfilled in him.” **The congregation of Israel?** “It is plain that a single person is spoken of throughout, and he is manifestly distinguished from others, from his brethren, from the congregation, from the seed of Jacob and Israel.” “Indeed,” along with the whole choir of the Christian faithful throughout all the long centuries since the Lord died, “no other than the Messiah can be meant, and of this there ought to be no doubt with Christians.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> **John Gill**, *An Exposition of the Old Testament*, vol. 3, The Baptist Commentary Series (London: Mathews and Leigh, 1810), 615. **Going Deeper:** Gill continues, “The Jews themselves sometimes say, that by *Aijeleth Shabar* is meant the Shechinah, or the divine Majesty; and in what way soever these words are rendered, they agree with Christ: he is the antitype of *the daily morning-sacrifice*, the Lamb of God, who continually takes away the sin of the world; and very fitly is he so called in the title of a psalm which speaks so much of his sufferings and death, which are a propitiatory sacrifice for the sins of his people; he is the bright and *morning-star*, Rev. 22:16. the day-spring from on high, the sun of righteousness, and light of the world: he had *morning-help* in his very infancy, when his life was sought for by Herod; and had early and seasonable help and assistance in the acceptable time, and in the day of salvation, and early in the morning was he raised from the dead, and had glory given him: but as the words are better rendered *the morning-bind*, this suits with Christ, who is frequently compared to a roe or a young hart, Cant. 2:9, 17 and 8:14 and he may be compared to a *bind* for its lovingness to its mate and

I have a book called *Old Testament Quotations and Allusions in the New Testament*. It is a pretty exhaustive volume. I use it regularly and rarely do I find something it has not already seen. It usually takes an OT verse and puts the NT counterpart side by side. But with Psalm 22 it is different. What does it do with this Psalm? It quotes **1 Peter 1:11**, “... inquiring what person or time the Spirit of Christ in them was indicating when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the subsequent glories.” And for the OT counterpart? It has *the entire Psalm!*

**Justin Martyr** (my favorite Early Church Father), in his

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young, Prov. 5:19. the love of Christ to his church and people being very strong and affectionate, and passing knowledge; and also for its loveliness and goodness, Gen. 49:21. Christ being exceeding amiable and lovely, and fairer than the children of men; likewise for its gentleness and harmlessness, Christ being meek and lowly, holy and harmless; and for its antipathy to serpents, there being an enmity between Christ, the seed of the woman, and the serpent and his seed; for its being hunted by dogs, as Christ was by Herod, by the Scribes and Pharisees, by Judas, and the hand of soldiers; see ver. 16 of this psalm; for its being fit for food, Deut. 14:5 and as it is said to be the fitter for being hunted, Christ's flesh being meat indeed, and the more suitable to faith, as being sacrificed for us; and for its long life it is said to have, Christ, though once dead, being alive again, and living for evermore; to which may be added its great swiftness, expressive of the readiness of Christ to comply with his father's proposals and do his will; to come into this world in the fullness of time, and set about the work he came to do; to deliver up himself into the hands of his enemies, and lay down his life for his people; and of his haste to help them in distress, and visit them with his gracious presence, and to appear a second time to them unto salvation. He may be called the hind of *the morning*, looking lovely and beautiful as the morning, and swift and cheerful as the hind when it rises from its rest, and runs its course; or because of his being hunted in the morning of his infancy by Herod; or because it was early in the morning the chief priests consulted to take away his life; and as early also he rose from the dead, when God made his feet like hinds' feet, and set him on his high places, Psal. 18:33.”



*Dialogue* with the Jew Trypho (perhaps the first Apologetics book in Christian history) writes, “When they nailed Him to the cross they did indeed pierce His hands and feet, and they who crucified Him divided His garments among themselves, each casting lots for the garment he chose. You are indeed blind when you deny that the above-quoted Psalm (22) was spoken of Christ, for you fail to see that no one among your people who was ever called King even had his hands and feet pierced while alive, and died by this mystery (that is, of the cross), except this Jesus only. Permit me to quote that whole Psalm...” (Justin, *Dialogue* 97-98). He then goes on to give a verse by verse commentary of the entire Psalm and how it is a prophecy of Jesus Christ.

Before we get into all of this, permit me one more quote. Bruce Waltke in his presentation of this Psalm begins by saying, “Psalm 22 provides an example of how many modern commentators have distanced themselves from the tradition of the Christian Fathers. The spectrum has widened to include both Jewish and Christian commentators who have embraced secularism and those whose religious faith has been trumped by the authority of

the academy.”<sup>8</sup> I want to say this kindly but firmly. There are reasons the church is in such dire straights in our day. It is because we have abandoned the words of our Savior sometimes in belief, often in practice. The whole Scripture is about him, and if preachers refuse to preach Christ from the totality of the Bible, there will never again be a Reformation of the church.

But why wouldn't we want to? Especially when we see what lies uncovered before our very eyes this Lord's day morning as we celebrate his resurrection from the dead? Beloved, come now and consider the unfathomable power of God to know the future, to tell us about it not in riddles but in plain words, and to bring it to pass that exactly what he said 1,000 years before it would happen would take place exactly the way he said it would. This is the way **the first words of the song** are interpreted by the first Christians. This is why our Lord said them on the cross. This is the way the entirety of this most amazing oracle forces you to come to this singular truth: If what the NT says about Jesus happened, then Psalm 22 is the nail in the coffin to all who would deny that Jesus Christ is God Almighty. There can be

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<sup>8</sup> Waltke, 376.

no firmer ground for belief than trusting what was written 1,000 years ahead of time, spoken by The **Word** Himself, inspired by the **Holy Spirit**, planned and brought to pass exactly as written by the **Father**. And therefore, especially with its ending, there can be only one response from every man, woman, and child within the sound of my voice: Repent and believe the good news, turn from your sins, and bow before the living Lord.

## **The Birth, Sufferings, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus Christ**

### *Knowledge Ahead of Time*

Rather than thinking of **Psalm 22:1** as the beginning of the Psalm, think of it for the time being as **the climax of the Psalm's fulfillment**. For this is how the Gospel's treat it. As we move through the passage, we will consider the many points of connection that it has with the Lord Jesus.

First, an interesting comment from Justin as he uses the LXX in his proof to Trypho that Jesus suffered willingly. **Vs. 2** in the Hebrew says, “**O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer, and by night, but I find no rest.**” This fits

exactly with the last night of our Lord who went into the Garden to pray and was so troubled that he shed as it were bloody sweat he was in so much distress. However, the LXX says, “... by night and it is not for want of understanding in me.”<sup>9</sup> Justin says that our Lord wrote these words in the Psalm to offset any kind of slander that he did not know what he was about to do. It was not from a lack of understanding in him, as if it caught him all by surprise. Rather, the folly was in those who refuse to believe that He was the Christ, and therefore put him to death thinking that he would remain dead.

### *Hope through the Suffering*

As the Psalm continues, it begins speaking about the Israelites “**trusting**” in God and God delivering them. “**Trust**” (*batach/elpisan*) appears four times in the first stanza (4x2, 5, 9). It is a very important word. It isn’t the normal word for faith, but rather for **hope**. In the midst of the horror, in the midst of what feels like betrayal, as God seems to be forsaking—you hope. Our fathers hoped, and you

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<sup>9</sup> This is curious. Brenton LXX, Lehman LXX and NETS LXX all translate it as “**there is nothing for my folly (anoian).**” But using the same word, both translations I have of Justin’s Dialogue translate *anioan* as “**understanding.**” This has to be because of the context in Justin.

delivered them. What an important thing this is right up front, for the singer of the Psalm has hope in the midst of his feelings!

This trust begins with his admission that **God is holy**, and enthroned on the praises of Israel (**Ps 22:3**). This is a statement of faith in the midst of feelings that betray him. This faith is well placed, because they hoped in God and he delivered them (**4-5**). They were not put to shame. What a great comfort this is to any Christian going through such emotions. Rely on what has already happened to get you through what has not yet come to pass in your own future.

### *Response of the People*

Suddenly, he turns inward. “**But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by mankind and despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they wag their heads” (**Ps 22:6-7**). David? Maybe. Kind of. One the amazing things about the Gospels is how often they use the OT without actually saying they are quoting it. They just weave it into the narrative. Matthew does this here with Jesus. “**And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads” (**Matt 27:39**). Justin, “**He foretold what would******

clearly take place and happen to Him. For He is everywhere a reproach to us who believe in Him, and He is the outcast of the people, for He was cast out in disgrace by your people, and He endured all the indignities which you directed toward Him.” He forces Trypho to internalize and to make personal the rejection of Jesus. All must do this, for we all put him to death. Perhaps in the light of death we are to understand the use of the “worm,” a dehumanized insect creature that lives below the ground. It is a perfect metaphor.

“He trusts in the LORD; let him deliver him; let him rescue him, for he delights in him!” (Ps 22:8). Matthew again, “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him” (Matt 27:42). Those there that day wagged their heads, curled their lips in scorn, turned up their noses, and sarcastically uttered the words of the Psalm at God in the flesh.

### *Humanity and Safety*

Vv. 9-10 moves us back in time. They talk about how he was taken from the womb and made to trust in God even as an infant. We need to see the humanity of this person. The

humanity of Christ is fundamental to everything we believe. The words, “**You made me trust**” can be translated as, “**you kept me safe**” (NRS). This is all in accordance with the **prophecy**. For Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit (**Matt 1:20**) and set apart for God at birth. But then, Herod sought to kill him. And in a dream Joseph was told “**Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you**” (**Matt 2:13**). As Justin says, His time to die was not in infancy, and God kept him safe even from his earliest days to fulfill the prophecy.

### *Earthly and Heavenly Rulers*

**Vs. 12** takes us from Herod through his many dangers during his ministry and finally brings us back to the crucifixion. It talks about bulls and lions. “**Many bulls encompass me; strong bulls of Bashan surround me; they open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion**” (**Ps 22:12-13**). A little later dogs and oxen are added (**16**). Here is that image of the doe surrounded by wild animals that seek to tear it pieces.

These animals are clearly **representative**. They stand for rulers. These rulers are both earthly and heavenly. On the

earthly side we have connections such as the word “surround” which is the root for a synagogue, which made it easy for the Church to see this as Jewish rulers going after Jesus.<sup>10</sup> Justin calls them calves with horns predestined for perdition.

As for the supernatural, this is where the “bulls of Bashan” come into play. As Heiser says, “Bashan carries a lot of theological baggage. It was the Old Testament version of the gates of hell, the gateway to the underworld realm of the dead. It was known as ‘the place of the serpent’ outside the Bible. It’s associated with Mount Hermon, the place where Jews believed the rebellious sons of God from Genesis 6:1–4 descended. Simply put, if you wanted to conjure up images of the demonic and death, you’d refer to Bashan ... It is also quite possible that the cows of Bashan are the deities themselves in the form of the idols ... The implication is that Jesus, at the moment of agony and death, was surrounded by

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<sup>10</sup> See for example, Rivka Ulmer, “Psalm 22 in Pesiqta Rabbati: The Suffering of the Jewish Messiah and Jesus,” in *The Jewish Jesus Revelation, Reflection, Reclamation* (Purdue University Press: 2011), 109-11 [106-28]. [http://www.bibleinterp.com/PDFs/Psalm\\_22.pdf](http://www.bibleinterp.com/PDFs/Psalm_22.pdf). Also Philip Nel, “Animal Imagery in Psalm 22,” *Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages* 31 (2005): 75-88. Ulmer notices how in the Talmud (Megillah 15b, an Esther midrash) kinds are called dogs, bulls, and lions. But also notes how the descendants of Haman are “strong bulls of Bashan.”



the ‘bulls of Bashan’—demonic *elohim* who had been the foes of Yahweh and his children for millennia.”<sup>11</sup>

The Psalm calls them all a “horde of evildoers” (16). If you want a perfect illustration of this, read or watch the death scene of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, as the Great Lion is surrounded by the half-breed minotaurs, satyrs, ogres, hags, and other creatures of the night as they mockingly, horrifyingly put him to death. For when he was killed, it was the rulers of heaven and earth that were conspiring, each in their own realm, each for their own reasons, to stop the Son of God. They plan was to die by crucifixion. This is what the Psalm now foretells.

## *Crucifixion*

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast; my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks

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<sup>11</sup> **Michael S. Heiser**, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, First Edition. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 289–291. **Going Deeper:** There is a “giant” genealogy in the Bible that stretches from one end of the OT to the other. It goes like this: Nephilim (Gen 6) to a specific tribe called Amalekites (Gen 14, Ex 17) to King Agag (1Sam 15:8; Num 24:7) to Haman (Esther 3:1). You can read all about the amazing giant undercurrent in the book of Esther in my book on giants. Demons were universally viewed to have been the disembodied souls of the giants when they departed from physical life on this earth. I do not believe it is an accident that they used this language to describe the descendants of Haman (see note 10).

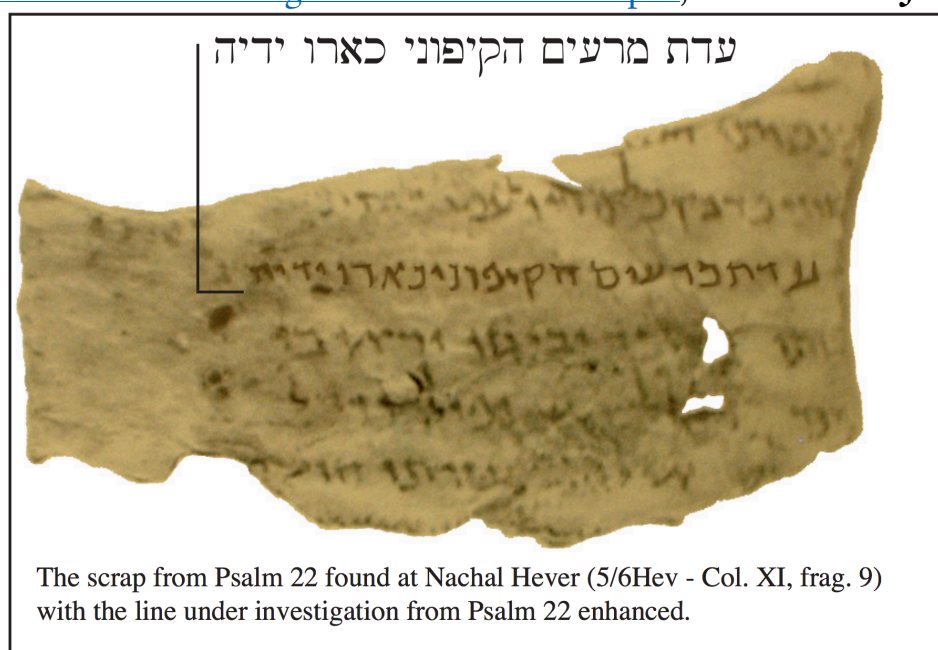
to my jaws; you lay me in the dust of death. For dogs encompass me; a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet” (14-16). Let’s stop here. The language of the first two verses does not describe anything we know about David or any other king of Israel. It does match symbolically what happens when someone is crucified. Part of it fits with the night before when as Justin puts it “the power of God’s might word ... was stopped like a full and mighty fountain whose waters have been suddenly shut off, when He remained silent and would no longer answer His accusers before Pilate.”

Crucifixion gets nailed down in the language “they have pierced my hands and feet.” This is what they did to Jesus to put him on the cross. Zechariah also predicted this, “They will look on Me whom they have pierced” (Zech 12:10). It is important to know that this language in the Psalm is one of the most disputed texts in the entire OT. For it has also been interpreted as “biting my hands and feet like a lion” (Psalm Targum). The problem is a misreading of the original text such that a vav ( ו ) was mistaken for a yod ( י ). Compare: *ka’ari* -- כַּאֲרִי (lion) and *ka’aru* -- כַּאֲרוּ (dig/pierce). Given new evidence from the Dead Sea, the original reading

was “pierced,”<sup>12</sup> as the LXX and NT translate it. Besides, it would do no good to use the Psalm as a prophecy if you have to change the word! It happened as was written as the disciples themselves saw when he appeared to them showing his hands and feet (Luke 24:40; cf. John 20:20; Col 2:14).

“I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots” (Ps 22:17-18). “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do,” Jesus said. “And they cast lots to divide his garments. And the people stood by,

<sup>12</sup> Those who opt for the anti-piercing reading “lion” (though this itself is fascinating in light of the Lion of Judah), will say that all the Hebrew texts we have clearly show a yod. But recently, a scrap from the DSS showed a vav. See Tim Hegg, “Psalm 22:16 – ‘Like a Lion’ or ‘They Pierced’?” *Studies in the Biblical Text*, <http://www.torahresource.com/EnglishArticles/Ps22.16.pdf>, last accessed Jan 5, 2017.



watching, but the rulers scoffed at him, saying, ‘He saved others; let him save himself, if he is the Christ of God, his Chosen One!’ (Luke 23:34). If you read Luke here, he simply weaves the Psalm into the story such that if you don’t know the Psalm you won’t realize that this is prophecy being fulfilled. So John tells you explicitly, “This was to fulfill the Scripture which says, ‘They divided my garments among them’” (John 19:24).

Here then is the climax of the first half of the Psalm and, like we see in the Gospels, it clearly concludes in death. “You lay me in the dust of death.” At this moment, we see the great hope of Jesus coming forth in his final prayer which is perhaps summarized in those famous words, “It is finished.” Psalm 22:19, “But you, O LORD, do not be far off! O you my help, come quickly to my aid!” As the doe lay dying from the ravenous jaws of wild animals, just as the Father himself had forsaken him, the Doe cries out for Strength. “Don’t let it be forever!”

### *Resurrection*

“Deliver my soul from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dog!” (20). Is the Psalmist praying not to

die? “Save me from the mouth of the lion!” Like Daniel who was not actually eaten alive? “You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!” (the LXX reads Unicorn). All the early Fathers including Justin, Irenaeus, and Tertullian tell us that there are five extremities of the Cross. Four we know about (top, bottom, right, left). The fifth was a “horn” in the middle upon which the person being crucified rested, or as Justin says, “rode.” The horn of the unicorn on the cross!

Whatever you think of that interpretation, what has happened is that suddenly the Psalm has moved from death to life. This is made certain by **Psalm 22:22**. “I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will praise you.” Hebrews now quotes this exact verse ... for the living Christ (**Heb 2:12**). Hebrews is telling you that Jesus is singing this Psalm as the one who has now conquered death. All of this was cryptic and hidden deliberately by the Son of God himself when he originally gave the words to David, until all the events should come to pass so that they might not understand and thereby not put him to death. But here they are in all their glory so that we might see that he knew exactly what was going to happen to him. And now

he sings of the deliverance to all of his chosen people so that they might hear and believe and be saved.

### *Nations Come*

And who are these people? The Psalm now ends with the Messianic rule of the nations, just as Psalm 2 has already predicted. It begins in **Israel**. “You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him, and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!” (Ps 22:23). Do you hear how it is no longer “I,” but “him?” David has moved completely out of the picture.

“For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted, and he has not hidden his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him” (24). Resurrection. Jesus was raised from the dead!

“From you comes my praise in the great congregation; my vows I will perform before those who fear him” (25). **David** sees himself not as the Suffering Servant, but as one of us, in the congregation, in the church. The LXX translates congregation (*qahal*) as *ekklesia* throughout this section! As one of the saints, David will now bow prostrate to the true King of kings, his Lord and his God. This is his

vow. This is his worship. “The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever!” (26).

It moves then to the rest of **the world**. “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before you” (27). When they hear of the exact fulfillment of this song in the historical life of a man from Galilee, they will sit in silence, in complete shock, and then they will turn to him. They will turn and they will worship, for only a God could write this, and only a God could go through this. And yet, he is also a man. A suffering man who underwent such horrors for you and for me.

“For kingship belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations” (28). “LORD” here *has to be the Son*, for he is the King of kings. He rules the nations with a rod of iron (Rev 19:15; cf. Ps 2:9). And he will get his reward—all those who have been given to him by his Father from every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation. “All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship before him shall bow all who go down to the dust, even the one who could

not keep himself alive” (Ps 22:29). Every knee will bow (Php 2:10). Some by force. Others by conversion and grace.

“Prosperity shall serve him; it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation” (30). “They shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn, that he has done it” (31). Has the world in 2,000 years ever been without this message? No, but it has been, is being, and will be told by all those who love the Son of God throughout the four corners of the earth until he should return in glory riding his white horse as he comes to judge the living and the dead. The testimony is the Psalm, it is the prophecy, it is the history, it is the fulfillment, it is the good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Let all generations praise his name. Let every person who hears this word serve the living Christ.

## Hope in the Midst of Being Forsaken

It is very difficult for us to wrap our minds around the horror of all this. And The emotional impact of it can only be truly had by moving outside of yourself and considering what he did for you as witnessed in Psalm 22. But beloved, consider just three things from the Psalm as we conclude.



**Vs. 29**, he will cause even those who cannot keep themselves alive to worship him. These are the people who, like my friend at the beginning of the sermon, are struggling in their faith. They have faith, but God seems to far away from them. They can relate to the Psalm on a personal level, and know the feeling of being forsaken. But they worship, because they realize that this is not just about God hearing them, it is about God becoming one of us. It is about God knowing what it is like to be forsaken by God. It is about God suffering in human flesh. It is about God crying out, God dying on the cross, God singing the song, so that we don't have to, so that like him, we can be heard because we put our trust in him. He will not forsake you forever, beloved. For he has not forsaken the Son of God.

Second and like it, **vs. 26**, “**The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied ... may your hearts live forever.**” Jesus offers life everlasting to you when you eat of his flesh and drink of his blood, and come into union with him who shed it for you. God does not leave us afflicted forever, but grants life to his children who call upon his Name. May your hearts live forever.

Finally, **vs. 5**. “**In you they hoped and were not put to**

shame.” That was in the Old. How much more in the New? The Apostle takes the words and in a climactic vision of theology says, “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Rom 5:1-6). To be justified, to not have your sins counted against you, not because of what you have done, but precisely because what you have done is wicked, this is the height of all grace. And such a hope does not put us to shame, because this was the whole point of his coming. It was why he died. It was why he wrote this song.