

PSALM 22

THE CRUCIFIXION OF CHRIST

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INTRODUCTION: Where do we turn in the Word of God to find the most accurate and detailed description of Christ's crucifixion? Not one of the gospels, but Psalm 22. The facts of the crucifixion are recorded in all 4 Gospels, but it is only in Psalm 22 that we are allowed to penetrate our Lord's innermost thoughts. Psalm 22 is written in the first person, describing the crucifixion from the unique perspective of the Lord Jesus as He hung on the cross; Hebrews 2:12 quotation of Psalm 22:22 must silence any objection that this psalm refers to Christ. Penned by David, this psalm was written 1,000 years before the event it describes in minute detail.

While many of the psalms of David are written from the context of his personal experiences, Bible students have searched in vain for any event in his life that could have given rise to Psalm 22. Certainly, David was never abandoned by God, nor did he die in the manner described in this psalm. The only explanation is that the persecution described by David in poetic hyperbole was to be literally fulfilled in the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ. Note that the one persecuted in this psalm makes no confession of sin, nor any imprecatory calls for his persecutors to be cursed; both of these are atypical of King David, but fit perfectly with a fulfillment in Christ.

It is the belief of many (e.g., Spurgeon, McGee, Clough) that while on the cross the Lord Jesus actually quoted Psalm 22 in its entirety. In its 31 verses there are 33 prophecies (according to Hebrew Christian commentator Max Isaac Reich), all fulfilled at the cross. The first and last words of Christ on the cross were the first and last verses of this psalm; by doing this Christ himself points us to this psalm. All 7 last sayings of Christ on the cross are found here, either explicitly or implied (see chart at end of notes).

What is amazing is that Jews could read this psalm, much less hear it recited from the cross by the Lord, and not recognize that Jesus was their-anticipated Messiah. Because of its obvious implications, Isaiah 53 is omitted from Sabbath readings in the synagogue; likewise, Psalm 22 is avoided. Only explanation for this is that the Jews have been supernaturally blinded (Lk19:42-44; Rom11:25).

CHRIST FORSAKEN BY GOD

- [1] The only time in the recorded life of Christ that He refers to His Father as "God" was from the cross. Believers have the promise to NEVER be forsaken by God (Heb13:5). But on the Cross, Christ WAS forsaken by God. He had to be!, because that is the punishment sin demands.

Why did the Lord Jesus offer no defense at His trial before Pilate? Because there was no defense He could make. Though Himself innocent, by "being made sin for us" (2Cor5:21) he became GUILTY.

No man on earth, no matter how vile, yet knows what it means to be forsaken by God, but Christ was forsaken by God when He took our sins upon Himself on the cross.

[2] By "night season" could be a reference to the Lord's petitions in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt26:36-39), or to the 3 hours of supernatural darkness while on the cross (Matt27:45); this midday darkness could not have been an eclipse since Christ was crucified on Passover, which being on the 14th of Nisan (Lev23:5) occurs 14 days after the new moon (i.e., Passover is at the time of the full moon) making a solar eclipse astronomically impossible.

[3] Why does God not hear the cries of His Son? Because the Lord is holy. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look upon iniquity" (Hab1:13). He who had from eternity past been in perfect communion with the Father was now separated from Him because of our sin.

That Christ "inhabitest the praises of Israel" is a promise made also to the Church, that "where two or three are gathered together in [Christ's] name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt18:20).

[5] God's previous deliverance and mercy extended to the fathers (i.e., Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) was possible only because of His anticipation of Christ's vicarious and propitiatory work for them on the cross (Rom3:25-26); thus, no deliverance is possible for Christ.

[6] "I am a worm". With the sin of the world upon Him, Christ has become the lowest creature on earth.

Interestingly, the Hebrew word "worm" used here refers specifically to the *coccus* worm, which by crushing produced a scarlet discharge that was used as a dye; in fact, it was used to dye the curtains in the Tabernacle scarlet red. This Hebrew word is translated many times in the O.T. as *scarlet*. "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isa1:18).

CHRIST ON THE CROSS

[8] Those at the foot of the cross mocked Him (Matt27:43). Of the Pharisees it was said, "And sitting down they watched Him there" (Matt27:36). That probably included Saul of Tarsus (Paul). Sadistically, they took pleasure in His suffering. And yet Jesus prayed, "Father, forgive them: for they know not what they do", thus identifying their crucifixion of Him as a *sin of ignorance* (which under the Law was forgivable; Lev4:2-3).

The centurion in charge of the crucifixion certainly was forgiven, for at the foot of the cross "he glorified God, saying, certainly this was a righteous man" (Lk23:47); one of the thieves was saved; and a whole company of the ultra-legalist Pharisees including Saul of Tarsus was saved. What is interesting is that there is no Biblical record of any of the liberal Sadducees ever being converted.

[10] Here it is anticipated that the Lord sees His mother with John, standing below Him. It's as if the Lord has a flashback to His supernatural conception, His infancy, and His human mother. John's Gospel records that on the cross, Christ remembered His mother; "Woman, behold thy son... Behold thy mother" (Jn19:26-27).

[12] The reference here to the fact that "strong bulls of Bashan have beset me around" implies the presence of a demonic horde at the events leading up to the crucifixion (Lk22:53). Bashan was the lush and fertile land to the east of the Jordan river that was particularly demon-infested (Deut3:13); the King of Bashan was Og, himself a Rephaim (Deut3:11).

[13] The reference to a "roaring lion" may well refer to Satan's personal presence at the cross (1Pet5:8).

[14] Here begins a description of death by crucifixion that is uncanny in its accuracy and detail, especially considering the fact that crucifixion as a form of execution was unknown when this psalm was written.

Many misconceptions persist regarding crucifixion; the nails were put through the wrists (not the hands), there were no ropes tied to the arms, there was no ledge on which to sit. Since no vital organs are pierced, suffering goes on for days (as long as 8 days according to Josephus) with death coming as a result of exposure/exhaustion/suffocation; the legs were often broken to hasten death by suffocation. Recall that Pilate was amazed at the report that Christ had died already (Mk15:44), as death after a mere 6 hours on the cross would be most unusual. Jesus said, "I lay down my life... no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself" (Jn10:17-18).

"I am poured out like water"—the profuse perspiration of a struggling and dying man in the afternoon sun.

"All my bones are out of joint"—as a man loses blood, his strength ebbs from him. The bones of his upper body slip out of joint under the severe pressure, if they were not dislocated already by the jarring of the initial drop of the cross into the earth.

"My heart is like wax"—the testimony of John's that both blood and water poured from his pierced side indicates that his heart had ruptured (Jn19:34). Interestingly, wine used at the Passover feast (i.e., last supper) is for an unknown reason specified to be mixed with warm water.

[15] With perspiration pouring from his body, he suffers the agony of thirst. Those beneath the cross hear Him say, "I thirst" (Jn19:38).

[16] In Hebrew, the word for "dogs" and "Gentiles" (i.e., Romans) is the same. The piercing of the hands and feet are unique to crucifixion. The Romans did not invent crucifixion, rather the Persians, though even they did not rise to prominence till ~500 years after David. Recall, the official form of capital punishment in Israel was stoning.

- [17] Christ is crucified naked. The first Adam was provided coats of skin by God to cover his nakedness; the last Adam had every garment stripped from His body.

It's difficult for us to fathom the depth of humiliation in hanging naked on the cross. Christ was crucified naked, that we might be clothed in His righteousness.

- [18] "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture". Here, *vesture* refers to the Lord's seamless coat (Jn19:23), which was unusual and of great value. Joseph's coat of "many colors" (Gen37:3) given to him by his father was probably a seamless coat (Hebrew word uncertain, as noted in most study Bibles; "coat of many colors" is from LXX translation). Joseph was given this valuable coat by a father that loved him more than all others; Jesus likewise possessed a valuable coat (its origin is not stated). That He was loved by His Father is confirmed by a voice from heaven on two different occasions, His baptism and transfiguration (Matt3:17,17:5).

This issue of Jesus' garments must be important, as it is almost the only specific detail of the cross recorded in ALL 4 gospels (Matt27:35; Mk15:24; Lk23:34; Jn19:23-24). These few items of clothing were the only personal possessions the Lord (maker of Heaven and earth!) owned during His life on earth. Even these were stripped from Him. What He had taught by precept, Jesus also illustrated by example, "Lay not up for yourselves treasure upon earth" (Matt6:19).

- [20] KJV "darling" obscures the force of this phrase. In LXX, the word is *monogenes*, "one-of-a-kind" or "only begotten" (Cp. Jn3:16). The same word used to describe Isaac in Genesis 22:2 is translated "only son".

The Lord's petition for God to "deliver my soul" will come, not in deliverance from this trial which will result in His death, but in His resurrection (Ps16:10).

- [21] Here, Jesus cries to God for deliverance in death; He is saying, "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk23:46).

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST AND ITS RESULTS

- [22] In this verse, the psalm flashes ahead from the crucifixion to the RESURRECTION. With this verse in mind, picture Peter standing in the midst of the Sanhedrin, comprised of both Pharisees and Sadducees, declaring to them, "There is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Act4:12).

Here is the first occurrence of the word "praise" (Heb., *halel*) in the Book of Psalms, used in the context of the resurrection of Christ!

- [26] "They shall praise the Lord that seek him; your heart shall live forever". Who was it that sought the Lord at the cross? A thief. To him the Lord said, "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise"

(Lk23:43). To a man who even by the world's standards deserved death, Jesus promised eternal life.

[28] Speaks of the millennium, when "the government shall be upon His shoulder" (Isa9:6). As "governor among the nations", Christ will be more than just King of Israel (Lk1:32-33), but also King of kings and Lord of lords (1Tim6:15; Rev19:16).

[31] "They shall declare his righteousness to a people that shall be born..." This includes us. Notice that it is HIS righteousness that is declared (Rom3:25-26); "all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags" (Isa64:6).

"That he hath done this"—in Hebrew literally "finished" (as in 2Chr4:11), and translated in the Greek NT by *tetelestai*, "IT IS FINISHED", or even "PAID IN FULL". The last verse of this psalm is the last word uttered by Christ on the cross (Jn19:30).

When Christ died on the cross, our redemption became a completed package (Col2:13-15). This is what we mean by the "finished work of Christ".

THE SEVEN SAYINGS OF CHRIST FROM THE CROSS FOUND IN PSALM 22

GOSPEL RECORD	PSALM 22
"My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" (Matt27:46)	v1
"Father, forgive them... they know not what they do." (Lk23:34)	v8
"Woman, behold thy son... behold thy mother." (Jn19:26-27)	v10
"I thirst." (Jn19:38)	v15
"Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." (Lk23:46)	v21
"Today, thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." (Lk23:43)	v26
"It is finished." (Jn19:30)	v31