

The Passion in Prophecy

The Message of Psalm 22



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"We have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place" ([2 Peter 1:19](#))

There are many reasons to study Bible prophecy. One of the most important is that it validates Jesus as God in the flesh.

There are over 300 prophecies concerning the First Coming of the Messiah in the Hebrew Scriptures. One hundred and eight of these are separate and distinct. The odds of only seven being fulfilled accidentally in the life of one person are 1 in 1017 or one in one hundred quadrillion. All 108 — not just 7 — were fulfilled in the life of Jesus.

Bible prophecy also helps us to better understand Jesus — to understand who He was and what He did.

One of the most remarkable prophecies about the Messiah is contained in Psalm 22. This psalm was written by David ben Jesse one thousand years before the birth of Jesus (see the superscription of Psalm 22).

A Cry of Desperation

1 My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?
Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.

2 O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer;
And by night, but I have no rest.

The psalm begins with an agonizing cry of despair. David cries out: "Where are You, God?" He bemoans the fact that although he has been seeking the Lord's help both day and night, all he has received in response is silence.

Have you ever had that experience? If you pray regularly, you have. It happens because God answers prayers in three ways — Yes, No, and Wait. Yes and no we can deal with. It is the waiting that wears on our nerves. We usually desire instant gratification rather than God's will in His perfect timing.

David had experienced this feeling before. An example can be found in [Psalm 6:6-7](#):

6 I am weary with my sighing;
Every night I make my bed swim,
I dissolve my couch with my tears.

7 My eye has wasted away with grief;
It has become old because of all my adversaries.

This type of statement is not evidence of a loss of faith. The psalmist would not even bother to cry out to God if he had lost his faith. It is more an expression of impatience and a verbalization of a sense of desperation.

A Reaffirmation of Faith

In fact, after issuing his cry of despair, David immediately reaffirms his faith in God. He reminds himself of God's faithfulness:

3 Yet You are holy,
O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel.

4 In You our fathers trusted;
They trusted and You delivered them.

5 To You they cried out, and were delivered;
In You they trusted, and were not disappointed.

As if to preserve his sanity in the midst of his suffering, the psalmist reminds himself of God's faithfulness in responding to the desperate needs of his forefathers.

A Mystery

Now, it is one thing for David to cry out to God in desperation in his frail humanity, but how can the fact be explained that Jesus, the Son of God, exclaimed the same plaintive cry while hanging on the cross?

"About the ninth hour [3 p.m.] Jesus cried out in a loud voice saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" ([Matthew 27:46](#))

Again, how can such words coming from the mouth of the Son of God be explained? I believe, as with David, this expression was not related to a loss of faith. Rather, it was a desperate cry of inexpressible agony and lament over the separation from God the Father that Jesus experienced on the Cross.

Spiritual Suffering

You see, the greatest suffering that Jesus experienced in His passion was not physical or emotional — it was spiritual.

Think of it — He had experienced eternally a perfect fellowship of love with God the Father. Then, suddenly, that sweet communion was broken because your sins and mine were placed on Jesus, and the wrath of God, which we deserve, was poured out on the Son. Here's how the apostle Paul put it in [2 Corinthians 5:21](#), "He [God the Father] made Him [the Son] who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Again, for one brief moment the perfect fellowship between Father and Son was broken because our sins were placed on Jesus — and the holiness of God cannot countenance sin. God the Father had to turn His back on His Son, prompting Jesus to cry out from the depths of His soul: "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

Physical and Emotional Suffering

At verse 6 of Psalm 22 the psalmist shifts from the Messiah's spiritual suffering to His physical and emotional distress.

6 But I am a worm and not a man,
A reproach of men and despised by the people.

7 All who see me sneer at me;
They separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying,

8 "Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him;
Let Him rescue him, because He delights in him."

The Hebrew word translated "worm" in verse 6 is *tola*, the word for crimson or scarlet. It is also a word for a certain type of worm. In this context it is most likely referring to the bloody red condition of the Messiah after His flogging — when He would have been so mutilated and swollen that He would no longer even resemble a man and would be an object of derision.

So, this passage describes the intense physical suffering of the Messiah combined with the emotional suffering He would experience as onlookers sneered at Him and cried out caustic taunts.

We find the fulfillment of this prophecy in [Matthew 27:39-42](#):

39 And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him [Jesus on the Cross], wagging their heads,

40 and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

41 In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him, and saying,

42 "He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him."

Another Affirmation of Faith

Once again, in verses 9 through 10 of Psalm 22, the psalmist has the Messiah reaffirming His faith in the midst of His intense sufferings.

9 Yet, You are He who brought me forth from the womb;
You made me trust when upon my mother's breasts.

10 Upon You I was cast from birth;
You have been my God from my mother's womb.

This reaffirmation of faith is an incredible act of will, and it is an example for all of us. Our tendency is to wallow in self-pity when the going gets tough. David refuses to do this. He takes the opportunity to reaffirm his faith and indicates prophetically that the Messiah will do the same in the midst of His passion.

Tough Faith

It reminds me of the tough faith of Paul. When he was in prison in Rome, awaiting execution, he wrote: "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" ([Philippians 4:4](#)). He proceeded to urge his fellow believers to "be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God" ([Philippians 4:6](#)). He then revealed the secret of his positive attitude in the midst of suffering: "I can do all things through Him [Jesus] who strengthens me" ([Philippians 4:13](#)).

In other words, Paul was saying that we should keep our eyes focused on the Lord rather than our troubles, and "the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" ([Philippians 4:7](#)).

Another great example of tough faith can be found in the life of the Old Testament prophet, Jeremiah. He prophesied that if the Jewish people did not repent, their nation would be destroyed. He lived to see his prophecies come true.

When the siege of Jerusalem had been completed by the Babylonians, Jeremiah walked through the streets writing a funeral lament in which he vividly described the physical destruction and human carnage that surrounded him. That lament constitutes the book of Lamentations.

In the middle of his lament, as if to preserve his sanity, the prophet suddenly stops weeping and vocalizes one of the greatest statements of tough faith recorded anywhere in the Bible ([Lamentations 3:21-24](#) RSV):

21 This I recall to mind,
Therefore I have hope.

22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
His mercies never come to an end.

23 They are new every morning.
Great is Your faithfulness.

24 "The Lord is my portion," says my soul.
"Therefore, I will hope in Him."

Emotional Suffering

With verse 11 of Psalm 22 the psalmist returns to the Messiah's emotional suffering:

11 Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is none to help.

This is a prophecy concerning the solitude the Messiah would experience in His passion. He would suffer emotionally from His desertion by all His disciples.

The fulfillment of this prophecy is recorded in [Matthew 26: 47,49-50,56b](#):

47 While He [Jesus] was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs...

49 Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him.

50 And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

56... Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

More Spiritual Suffering

At verse 12 of Psalm 22 the focus shifts back to the Messiah's spiritual suffering:

12 Many bulls have surrounded me;
Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me.

13 They open wide their mouth at me,
As a ravening and a roaring lion.

I believe this is a prophecy that the Messiah in His passion would be surrounded by demonic hordes gloating over his approaching death. In the New Testament, Peter describes Satan as "a roaring lion seeking someone to devour" ([1 Peter 5:8](#)).

Although there is no recorded fulfillment of this prophecy in the New Testament, I have no doubt that it happened. The people who were witnesses of the crucifixion could not see the demons with their physical eyes. But Jesus, with His spiritual eyes could undoubtedly see them as they danced around the Cross and gloated over their "victory" in orchestrating the murder of God's Son.

The Physical Suffering Intensifies

At verse 14 the psalmist begins to describe the Messiah's physical suffering in gory detail:

14 I am poured out like water,
And all my bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It is melted within me.

15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And my tongue cleaves to my jaws;
And You lay me in the dust of death.

His bones are out of joint. He is suffering from extreme thirst. His heart is stressed to the point of bursting. Death hovers about Him.

Here's how the Gospel of Mark describes the suffering of Jesus ([Mark 15:15-17,19](#)):

15 ...after having Jesus scourged, he [Pilate] delivered Him to be crucified.

16 And the soldiers took Him away...

17 They dressed Him up in purple, and after twisting a crown of thorns, they put it on Him...

19 They kept beating His head with a reed, and spitting on Him...

John in his gospel adds that Jesus suffered extreme thirst while he was hanging on the cross, and when He cried out, "I am thirsty," the soldiers taunted Him by putting a sponge to His mouth that was full of sour wine ([John 19:28-29](#)).

The Method of Execution

When we come to verse 16 of Psalm 22, we encounter one of the most remarkable prophecies in the Hebrew Scriptures:

16 For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and feet.

Keep in mind that these words were written 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus. That means they were also written 700 years before the Romans refined crucifixion as a method of execution. Yet, by inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David prophesied that the Messiah would die by having His hands and feet pierced!

The Jewish method of execution at the time David wrote the psalm was by stoning. This was still true a thousand years later when Jesus lived. But the Jews had lost the power of implementing capital punishment under Roman rule, so they turned Jesus over to the Roman authorities when they decided He should be executed.

All four of the gospel stories record the execution of Jesus by crucifixion. The Gospel of Mark describes it succinctly as follows ([Mark 15:22,24](#)):

22 Then they brought Him to the place Golgotha, which is translated, Place of a Skull...

24 And they crucified Him...

A Final Comment About Suffering

The prophet concludes his observations about the suffering of the Messiah in verses 17 and 18:

17 I can count all my bones.
They look, they stare at me;

18 They divide my garments among them,
And for my clothing they cast lots.

All the Messiah's rib bones are laid bare as He gasps for air while hanging on the execution stake. And the emotional suffering continues as no one shows any compassion. Instead, while His life ebbs away, those carrying out the cruelty pass the time by gambling for His clothing!

Matthew describes the fulfillment of this prophecy in this manner ([Matthew 27:35](#)):

35 And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots.

A Final Prayer

In verses 19—21 of Psalm 22, the psalmist records a final prayer uttered by the Messiah. It is a plea for deliverance from Satan:

19 But You, O Lord, be not far off;
O You, my help, hasten to my assistance.

20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
My only life from the power of the dog.

21 Save me from the lion's mouth;
From the horns of the wild oxen You answer me.

None of the Gospels record Jesus uttering such a prayer on the Cross, but undoubtedly He must have done so, perhaps silently or in a whisper.

In the prayer, the Messiah affirms that God the Father is near to Him, although He seems distant because He cannot countenance the sin that the Messiah must bear. He ends the prayer by asking for deliverance from Satan (the lion) and his demonic hordes (the wild oxen).

The Greatest Miracle of History

Between verses 21 and 22 of Psalm 22 the greatest miracle in history occurs — the resurrection of the Messiah.

The event is not specifically stated, but it is certainly inferred. Verse 21 ends with a prayer for deliverance from Satan's attack. Verse 22 begins with a song of celebration, thanking God for answering the prayer:

22 I will tell of Your name to my brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.

23 You who fear the Lord, praise Him;
All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him,
And stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel.

24 For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted;
Nor has he hidden His face from him;
But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.

25 From You comes my praise in the great assembly;
I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him.

The most direct prophecy concerning the Resurrection in the Old Testament is found in [Psalm 16:10](#) where David wrote: "You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; neither will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay."

In the New Testament, Jesus repeatedly told His disciples that He would be killed and resurrected. It was one of His most frequently stated prophecies. For example, in [Matthew 17:22-23](#) He is quoted as saying: "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day."

Luke records the fulfillment of these resurrection prophecies in the following way ([Luke 24:1-7](#)):

1 But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they [a group of women] came to the tomb bringing spices which they had prepared.

2 And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb,

3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

4 While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing;

5 and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, "Why do you seek the living One among the dead?"

6 "He is not here, but He has risen. Remember how He spoke to you while He was still in Galilee,

7 saying that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again."

The Blessings of the Passion

The last six verses of Psalm 22 give us a summary of the glorious consequences of the Cross.

The first is salvation for all who put their faith and trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior:

26 The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied;
Those who seek Him will praise the Lord,
Let your heart live forever!

The apostle Peter sums up the meaning of this verse in [1 Peter 2:24](#), "He Himself [Jesus] bore our sins in His body on the cross, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."

The second consequence of the Cross that is mentioned in Psalm 22 is that the obedience of Jesus in submitting to the humiliation of the Cross will result in His glorification before all the nations of the earth when He returns to reign over the world:

27 All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, And all the families of the nations will worship before You.

28 For the kingdom is the Lord's,
And He rules over the nations.

When that glorious reign begins, all the Redeemed will be prospered, while those who are damned by their unbelief will bow before Him and confess Him as King of kings and Lord of lords before being consigned to Hell:

29 All the prosperous of the earth will eat and worship,
All those who go down to the dust will bow before Him,
Even he who cannot keep his soul alive.

Isaiah states that "every knee will bow, every tongue will confess" that Jesus Christ is Lord. This is affirmed in [Romans 14:11](#) and [Philippians 2:10-11](#).

Think of it — a day will come when Hitler and Stalin will bow and confess the lordship of Jesus, as will Madeline Murray O'Hare, Charles Darwin, and ever other nefarious person who has ever lived. But it will have no impact upon their eternal destiny. Only those who make that confession in this life will receive the blessing of having their "hearts live forever" ([Psalm 22:26](#)).

The final consequence of the Cross that is mentioned in Psalm 22 is that during the millennial reign of Jesus, the Redeemed (who will be in glorified bodies) will teach those who are born during that time of the righteousness of Jesus and of the all—sufficiency of His sacrifice on the Cross:

30 Posterity will serve Him;
It will be told of the Lord to the coming generation.

31 They will come and will declare His righteousness
To a people who will be born, that He has performed it.

A Fascinating Possibility

Notice again the last phrase of Psalm 22: "He has performed it." Literally, in the Hebrew, it says, "It is finished."

This fact has prompted some scholars to theorize that as Jesus hung on the Cross, He quite likely quoted all of Psalm 22, beginning with the words, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" and ending with the words, "It is finished." The witnesses then simply wrote down the opening and closing words which were recorded in the Gospels (see [Matthew 27:46](#) and [John 19:30](#)).

A Certainty That Poses a Crucial Question

One thing is certain — the fulfillment of all the prophecies of Psalm 22 in the life of Jesus confirms Him to have been the promised Messiah.

This fact raises a crucial question — the most important question of your life: "Who is Jesus to you?"

When Jesus was tried by the Roman authorities, the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, asked the assembled mob, "What shall I do with this Jesus who is called the Messiah?" ([Matthew 27:22](#)).

This is the most important question in the universe. So, let me put Pilate's question to you: "What will you do with Jesus?"

Will you accept Him as Lord and Savior, as did the thief on the cross ([Luke 23:39—43](#)). If so, then you will receive the same promise as did the thief: "You shall be with Me in Paradise" ([Luke 23:43](#)).

Or, will you wash your hands of Jesus, as did Pilate? ([Matthew 27:24](#)). If so, then your destiny will be one of eternal separation from God in Hell ([John 3:16](#) and [Matthew 10:28](#)).

Your eternal destiny — Heaven or Hell — depends upon your answer to one question: "Who do you say that Jesus is?"

An Illustration

I'd like to close with an illustration of the significance of what Jesus did for us on the Cross.

In pioneer days, when wagon trains were crossing this nation to California, there were many things that the wagon masters feared — things such as dried up water holes, Indian attacks, plagues, and blizzards. One of the most fearsome sights was an approaching prairie fire.

In the plains of Kansas the prairie grass would often stand nearly three feet high, and when it was dry it could burn very rapidly. Prairie fires, often started by a lightning strike, could travel as fast as 50 miles an hour, depending upon the winds.

Consequently, when smoke was spotted on the horizon, the wagon master knew he had only minutes to prepare for the protection of his wagon train.

As fearsome and dangerous as the fires were, there is no recorded instance of a wagon train being destroyed by one. The reason is that there was a very proven way to protect the wagons.

What the wagon master would do is quickly start a fire on the opposite side of the train from where the prairie fire was approaching. When the fire had burned away enough, the wagons would then be formed in a circle in the burned out area. When the prairie fire reached them, it would simply burn around them and go on its way.

How does this story relate to the Cross? When Jesus was hanging on the Cross, all the sins that you and I have ever committed and ever will commit were placed upon Jesus, and the wrath that we deserve was poured out on Him.

When you place your faith in Him, you step into the area where the wrath of God has already fallen, and you become immune to the wrath that is to come.

The Bible says that every person on planet earth is under either the wrath of God or the grace of God because those are the two ways in which God deals with sin ([John 3:36](#)). Are you under wrath or grace? You can move from wrath to grace by putting your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior. Do it today. Do not delay.

What a glorious Savior we have!