

My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?

Psalm 22: 1-31

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning." A psalm of David.

DIG: What is David's basic struggle? What seems worse: God's distance or people's mocking? Where is David's faith in the midst of these struggles? What does he recall about ADONAI's past action that leads him to the words of verses 1 and 11? What is David's claim in verses 9-11? How is this true? How would you describe the mood shift between verses 1-21 and 22-31? What details of this psalm turn up in the crucifixion narrative? How does this help you to understand this psalm?

REFLECT: When you are stricken with grief, feeling abandoned even by God, how do you express yourself? At such times, what does it mean to you to know that Jesus felt the same way? Put verses 3-5 and verses 9-11 in your own words. If you were to host a feast for your King to celebrate His grace and mercy in your life, what one thing would you say? The author of Hebrews quotes verse 22, saying that Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers (Hebrews 2:11-12). Do you think of Messiah as your brother? What does that relationship mean to you?

The last four chapters of Second Samuel serve as an appendix to David's career. These events occurred earlier in the king's life but are presented here to show the other kinds of problems David had to face - famine and plague (Chapters 21 and 24) - the men David relied on to fight his battles (Chapter 23), and how the king learned to praise God through his trials (Chapter 22 and Psalm 22).

As David looked back on his life, there were times when he felt abandoned by God and surrounded by his enemies. He lamented about his tremendous suffering and desperate struggle with death, pleading with YHVH to deliver him from such a terrible fate. But at the end of his life David could see that his prayer had been answered, and he was able to declare wonderful news to the righteous of the TaNaKh and the Gentile nations.

The Gospel writers also saw connections between some of the words in this psalm (verses 1, 8, 16-18) and other events in the last days of Yeshua's life. Also Hebrews 2:12 quotes Psalm 22:22. Therefore, believers down through the ages have understood this psalm to point to the death of Messiah. This means that David used many poetic expressions to portray his immense suffering, but these poetic words became literally true of the suffering of Jesus Christ at the hands of His enemies. This is a psalm of the cross.

A. God's Abandonment, Rule and Praise of Isra'el: The fact that David opened this psalm by addressing YHVH so personally is extremely ironic. Although he *felt* abandoned, and although those around him thought he was abandoned - David still prayed. The lamp of faith had not been extinguished in the face of the LORD's silence. The prayer begins with a threefold cry to El and with three questions. **My God (My Father), my God (my Father), why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?** For David, these words were not a lapse of faith, or of a broken relationship, but a cry of disorientation as God built his character for future leadership as king. The strain of being hated and hunted was almost too much, and his faith was being stretched to its limits. God was there all the time. But it *seemed* to David like he had been forsaken.

On the cross Yeshua cried out in His native Aramaic: Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani? which means **My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me.** Jesus used David's same words, but there was a difference. Christ was abandoned. For the first and only time in all eternity, God the Father had turned His back on God the Son and the unity of the Trinity was broken. At that point, Yeshua uses, **My God, My God**, because He was no longer in a parental relationship with the Deity, but a judicial relationship because Jesus had become our sin sacrifice. God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (Second Corinthians 5:21). He was suffering the wrath of God (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lv - Jesus' Second Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of God Stage 19 - Christ's Fourth Words from the Cross**).

We know from this that our redemption was purchased at an awful cost. Jesus took on all the sins of the world, past, present and future in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness (First Peter 2:24). He cried out in agony as our sin and the separation from the Father took its toll on Him. **My God, I cry out by day** (being crucified at nine o'clock in the morning), **but you do not answer, by night** as the sun was darkened from noon until three o'clock in the afternoon (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lv - Jesus' Second Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of God Stage 18 - Darkness That Covers the Entire World**), but I find no rest. Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One; You are the one Isra'el praises. In You our ancestors put their trust; they trusted and You delivered them. To you they cried out and were saved; in You they trusted and were not put to shame (Psalm 22:1-5). Where are Your answers now? How those thoughts must have been upon Yeshua's heart as He hung between heaven and earth. It was God's holiness that had put Him on the cross and it was God's deliverance that would bring Him through. Yet, in the pain of Divine silence, the temptation was for those thoughts to become accusations, weapons against Ha'Shem. In that Messiah has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted (Heb. 2:18 ESV). The darkness of the Divine withdrawal was also Satan's final opportunity to tempt the Son of God.⁴⁸¹

B. Public Spectacle: God's distance was also an opportunity for human accusation. Suffering undercuts our self-esteem. So David had not only lost his sense of dignity, but he felt less than human. If David had trusted in the LORD, then why was he suffering? They conclude that either he had boasted of trusting in God but was hypocritical or that YHVH really didn't love him. The support of ADONAI's invisible hand *seemed* not to be there for David, and the mockers made the most of it.⁴⁸² **But I am a lowly worm, trodden under foot, treated with contempt, and not a man, scorned by everyone, despised by the people. All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads. "He trusts in ADONAI," they say, "let God rescue him, since He delights in him (Psalm 22:6-8).**

It is not difficult for us to see Yeshua hanging from the cross as we read these verses. **In a futile attempt to get Jesus to come down from the cross, the Jewish religious leaders quoted Psalm 22:8.** Some of them were so smug that they threw some scripture in His face. They said: He trusts in God? Let God rescue Him now if He wants Him, for He said: I am the Son of God (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lu - Jesus' First Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of Man Stage 12: The Sixth Mockery**).

C. God's Sovereignty: In reflecting on his own desperate situation, David turned his thoughts from the mockers around him to YHVH. The problem of suffering finds some solace in God's sovereignty and love for His own. From birth David had owed his life to God, and from birth ADONAI had been his covenantal God.⁴⁸³ **Yet You brought me out of the womb; You made me trust in You even at my mother's breast. From birth I was cast on you; from my mother's womb You have been my God. Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help (Psalm 22:9-11).**

Similarly, in the birth narratives of both Matthew and Luke there is a constant affirmation of the plan, providence, protection and power of ADONAI in Yeshua's coming into the world. The virgin birth is God's miraculous work (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Aq - The Birth of Jesus**). Beit-Lechem, the angels, the Shechinah glory, and the flight into Egypt are all part of God's sovereignty. In a very special way, YHVH took Jesus from Miryam's womb as His one and only Son (John 3:16). God the Son had experienced a oneness with God the Father from all eternity past. Therefore, Ha'Shem's distance, His silence, was overwhelming. And because He had become sin's sacrifice on our behalf, trouble was near and He had to bear the penalty for our sin alone. Hence, there was no one to help Him. Jesus certainly experienced this distress on the cross. For the one and only time in His life He was separated from God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

C. God's Protection: There were times in David's life when he felt the anguish of being hunted down by his enemies, who are portrayed by a number of metaphors. David compared his enemies to bulls. **Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan** (a district east of the Jordan known for its rich pasture and cattle) **encircle me.** Again, **roaring lions that tear their prey open their mouths wide** to spring against me. **I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted within me. My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; You lay me in the dust of death.** Every Jewish city had a **pack of hungry dogs**, howling at night, and devouring even dead bodies when **they** could get to them. So David compared those who surrounded **him** and wanted to kill **him** in this way. And just as the imagery of his enemies as **bulls** and **lions** evoked feelings of fear and powerlessness, so also the imagery of **dogs** created a picture of **dogs** viciously attacking **him**, gnawing at, and biting into **his hands and feet.** **Dogs surround me, a pack of villains encircles me; they pierce my hands and my feet** (Psalm 22:12-16).

David said: **All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me** (Psalm 22:17). The Ruach HaKodesh would look down the long road of history to see **Christ** being treated in the same brutal manner by the Romans that David ascribed to **himself** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Ls - Then They Brought Jesus to Golgotha, the Place of the Skull Stage 4 - The Arrival at Golgotha**). Moreover, David remembered that **his enemies divided his clothes among them and cast lots for his garment** (Psalm 22:18). As part of the shame of the cross, the Roman soldiers cast lots for the last piece of **Christ's** clothing (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lu - Jesus' First Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of Man Stage 8 - The Dividing Up of His Clothes**).

But suddenly David remembered his **God**, which evoked the memory of His promises to be near, to support His people, and to protect them from dangers. **But** the turning point, for both David and **Christ**, was when they said: **You, ADONAI, do not be far from me. You are my strength; come quickly to help me. Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs. Rescue me from the lion's' mouth; from the horns of the wild oxen** (and then the sudden, dramatic change back to Hebrew for the last word, a single Hebrew verb in the perfect tense: *anitani*) **You have answered Me** (Psalm 22:19-21). The work was done!

When He had received the drink, Jesus said in Aramaic: **It is finished** (John 19:30a). He said **"It" is finished, not "I" AM finished.** Jesus spoke in Aramaic, but the Bible is written in Greek and this is one word in Greek, *tetelestai*, and it is in the perfect tense, indicating a past, completed action, with continuing, and in this case,

permanent results. *Tetelestai* was a Greek word used in accounting. Archeologists found an enormous amount of invoices at a dig in Egypt. Many Jews had fled Jerusalem before the Roman destruction and settled in Alexandria. There they translated the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, the international language of the day. In Alexandria, Egypt, archeologists found a large quantity of invoices with *tetelestai*, written on clay tablets. In accounting terms, it means **paid in full**. In other words, what **Messiah** was saying, was that the price for sin had been **paid in full** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Lu - Jesus' First Three Hours on the Cross: The Wrath of Man Stage 23 - Christ's Sixth Words from the Cross**).

B. Public Praise: After David had been rescued, and his prayers had been answered, his mood changed: **I will decree Your name to my people; in the congregation of the righteous (which excludes the ungodly and the mockers) I will praise You. He encouraged the righteous of the TaNaKh to join in: You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere Him, all you descendants of Isra'el! For He has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one; He has not hidden His face from him but has listened to his cry for help (Psalm 22:22-24).** The doctrine of the Resurrection is not revealed here, but the theme is present. **God makes alive, God heals, God restores, God answers.** In His resurrection, **Yeshua** declared the mighty works of YHVH to His apostles. **He presented Himself alive after suffering by many infallible proofs (Acts 1:3).** The Savior's witness led to their worship, and the apostles praised, glorified and feared Him as they fell at His feet (Yochanan 20:28).⁴⁸⁴

A. God's Presence, Rule and Praise of Isra'el and the Gentile Nations: The poor will eat and be satisfied; those who seek YHVH will praise Him - may your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the Gentile nations will bow down before Him, for dominion belongs to ADONAI and He rules over the nations. All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before Him - those who cannot keep themselves alive. God's work of salvation will not only go out throughout the earth but will also be passed down from generation to generation. **Posterity will serve Him; and future generations will be told about YHVH. They will proclaim His righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn.** The righteousness of God is made clear in the psalms final line: **He has done it (Psalm 22:25-31)!** The universal application of this psalm can only find its fulfillment in the **One whose name is above every name; the One to whom every knee shall bow (Philippians 2:9b-10a).** But it not only points to **Messiah**, as we have proposed; it was on **Christ's** heart as He hung on the cross. He endured the silence of **Ha'Shem** in that awful moment knowing that His cry would be answered and that through His suffering the Gentile nations would be blessed. **Psalm 22** held Him in support in His hour of need, and it can hold us also. We will say with David and our Savior, **"You have answered Me."**⁴⁸⁵