

Psalm 22

A Cry of Anguish and a Song of Praise.

For the choir director; upon Aijeleth Hashshahar. A Psalm of David.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.’
- 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.
- ¹¹ Be not far from me, for trouble is near;
For there is none to help.
- 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.
- 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.
- ¹⁶ For dogs have surrounded me;
A band of evildoers has encompassed me;
They pierced my hands and my feet.
- 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.
- 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.
- ²² I will tell of Your name to my brethren;
In the midst of the assembly I will praise You.

David the Psalmist: This Psalm is ascribed to David, the poet, singer, and king. King Saul and his supporters hunted David, to kill him. They chased David into the wilderness, where David slowly gathered those who supported him and trusted God and believed that he would one day ascend the throne.

v.1: David’s experience of God: While King Saul was on the throne, the prophet Samuel anointed David to be king, ‘the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David *from that day forward*’ (1 Sam. 16:13). Note that in Ps.22:24, David says God’s face is still favorably turned towards him, and he is confident of God’s presence (Ps.22:11, 19).

v.16: pierced hands and feet. Jewish law had a ceremony where a man could opt to become a ‘bondservant’ in another household by presenting his ear to be ‘pierced’ against the doorpost (Ex.21:6). David might be saying this ironically, to say he has become a refugee in enemy lands, and feels quite stuck there. For example, in 1 Sam.21:10 – 15, David went to the lands of Achish, king of Gath, where he pretended to be insane in order to disguise himself and survive.

David and Jesus, Pre-Enthronement: The poetry became prose and historical fact with Jesus: When Jesus presented himself as king (Mt.21:1 – 11), he was shoved out and given to Gentile enemies (Mt.27:11 – 54). Jesus’ hands and feet were pierced by Gentile enemies in his crucifixion. People mocked Jesus using the words of v.8, so Jesus responded by quoting v.1, and capturing the interpretation of their mockery.

- 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.
- 26 The afflicted will eat and be satisfied;
 Those who seek Him will praise the LORD.
 Let your heart live forever!
- 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.
- 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.
- 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
³⁰ To a people who will be born, that He has performed it.

Historical and Cultural Background

- *Hebrew Biblical Poetry*: These poets rhyme *concepts* more than *sounds*, where the rhyming goes from a general thought to a more specific one. That makes it nice for those of us who have to work from the English translation. Here's an example of a rhymed concept in v.2. Consider what the poet is saying by pairing these two lines:

O my God, I cry	by day,	but You do not answer;
And	by night,	but I have no rest.
- *David's Trust in God's Promise*: David knew that God defended the human leaders He appointed, and also was faithful to fulfill promises He made.
 - *God Defended Human Leaders He Appointed*: In Numbers 12, Aaron and Miriam criticized Moses unjustly, and God defended Moses. In Numbers 16, Korah led a faction in wholesale rebellion, and God used the earth to swallow them up.
 - *God Fulfilled His Promises*: In Genesis 1, God said, "Let there be light," and then, there was light. Then in Genesis 12, God made promises to His people, and called them to trust Him. For example, God promised Abraham and Sarah He would give them a son despite them being dead in a reproductive sense. In 1 Samuel 16, God through the prophet Samuel anointed David to be king. That was God's promise; David is trusting God to fulfill His word.

- i. David's particular vocation was to be the anointed king over a united Israel. Everyone knew that. The persecution against him wouldn't end until he either became king or was killed. It didn't end until he became king.
 - ii. Jesus's vocation was to be the final king, whose reign was over all. No one else could reclaim Adam's place. So no one could help Jesus but the Father and the Spirit. Our vocation is to be ambassadors and representatives of Jesus. But we have help: Jesus, his Spirit, his people.
 - d. Also, there are people who mock David and sneer at him, saying that he should call out to God for "deliverance/rescue" (v.8) but expecting God to do nothing, and for David's prayers to be futile.
 - e. But God enthrones and crowns those who trust Him. That was true with David. That was also true with Jesus, most of all. And as we desire Jesus and desire to trust Jesus, God will enthrone and crown us with Jesus (Eph.2:4 – 7).
- 5. In v.12 – 22, how does David portray himself like a vulnerable animal surrounded by vicious animals?
 - a. Illustration: In Florida, in November 2020, a man rescued his little dog from a small alligator. The alligator had caught the dog and dragged it underwater for a moment. The man rushed in and lifted the alligator up out of the water and pried the alligator's jaws open.
 - b. How does David describe his enemies as animals?
 - i. Bulls, strong bulls (v.12) who would stampede him, like how the wildebeests trampled Mufasa in *The Lion King*.
 - ii. Wide-mouthed, ravening lions (v.13) which would kill and feast on him.
 - iii. Dogs (v.16) closing in to scavenge the last meat from his bones, like vultures.
 - c. How does David describe his enemies in the human sense?
 - i. "A band of evildoers has encompassed me" (v.16b) seems to match the "strong bulls" that "encircled" him (v.12). "They pierced my hands and my feet" (v.16c) might match up with the imagery of the horns of bulls. But there is also the idea from Exodus 21:2 – 6 that someone who voluntarily becomes a servant of a household gets his ear pierced against the doorpost. David could have meant this to mean they overdo it by piercing his hands and feet and not just his ear, in order to make him submit to Gentile rule against his will.
 - ii. "I can count all my bones" (v.17) seems to match the ravenous lions (v.13) who would bite off huge chunks of flesh, exposing his bones.
 - iii. "They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (v.18) seems to match the dogs who take every scrap (v.16a).
 - iv. Notice in v.20 – 21 that David uses the imagery of animals again, in reverse order: "the power of the dog," "the lion's mouth," and "the horns of the wild oxen."
 - v. But in v.22, David is confident in God, that God will "help," "deliver," and "save" him. David is confident that he will stand among others to praise God.
 - d. Notice in v.14 – 15, David describes himself. He is falling apart! What does it mean that God wants us to express ourselves like this?
- 6. In v.23 – 31, how does David act like a worship leader?
 - a. In v.23, David calls people to "praise Him... glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him."
 - b. In v.24 and 26, David says what is true of God, because of His character, and trusts that this will be true of himself. It's powerful that David speaks in the past tense of God's deliverance, even while he speaks of his affliction and suffering in the present tense.
 - c. How about David's human enemies among the Gentiles?
 - i. Does David expect God to just totally destroy them? Like Friedrich Nietzsche believed that Judaism and Christianity was founded on resentment? No! Ultimately, David's heart has expanded.
 - ii. In v.27 – 28, David sees that God will extend His reign over all the nations, including those Gentiles who have made him suffer. He sees conversion to worship God as the ultimate way that God will deal with his human enemies.
 - d. What about those who have died? In v.29, David includes "all those who go down to the dust... he who cannot keep his soul alive" with those who live and feast: "All the prosperous of the earth." How could this be? David must have some sense that God will raise the dead, which was a hope in the Hebrew Scriptures because God made the creation good, and works to uphold that

goodness. Ultimately, Jesus would unite the material world to God in his own human body and through his own human body, so he could ultimately raise everyone (1 Cor.15).

- e. What legacy does David want to leave? In v.30 – 31, he looks ahead to “posterity” and “the coming generation.” They will declare God’s “righteousness,” because “God’s righteousness” is about God delivering those who call upon Him.
- f. So how does David want us to look at this period when we are anointed as God’s royalty in Jesus, but not fully enthroned and crowned? With patience. With honesty about how we feel totally vulnerable. With hope informed by God’s character and His past acts. And with hope that others will come to know Him and praise Him, too.
- g. Illustration: We find our comfort and strength in Jesus, the greater David, who was anointed to be king and then endured horrors before he was raised, enthroned, and crowned. Shortly after the butchery of the First World War, Edward Shillito captured these thoughts in his poem, *Jesus of the Scars*:

If we have never sought, we seek Thee now;
Thine eyes burn through the dark, our only stars;
We must have sight of thorn-pricks on Thy brow,
We must have Thee, O Jesus of the Scars.

The heavens frighten us; they are too calm;
In all the universe we have no place.
Our wounds are hurting us; where is the balm?
Lord Jesus, by Thy Scars, we claim Thy grace.

If, when the doors are shut, Thou drawest near,
Only reveal those hands, that side of Thine;
We know to-day what wounds are, have no fear,
Show us Thy Scars, we know the countersign.

The other gods were strong; but Thou wast weak;
They rode, but Thou didst stumble to a throne;
But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak,
And not a god has wounds, but Thou alone.

- 7. (optional) Didn't Jesus quote Psalm 22:1 from the cross? So isn't this Psalm a prophecy of Jesus?
 - a. Absolutely, but only because David's life between his anointing to be king and his enthronement as king was a “model” or “stage-setting” for Jesus' life between his anointing to be king and his enthronement as king. Jesus' anointing was his baptism (Mt.3:13 – 17; Lk.3:20 – 21). Jesus' enthronement was his ascension (Acts 1:1 – 11). So in that sense, Jesus used the entire pre-enthronement life of David as a prophecy of his own pre-enthronement life.
 - b. In fact, Jesus was on the cross already when his opponents mocked him by saying the very words of Psalm 22:8, “Let God deliver him, if He delights in him.” (Matthew 27:43) Jesus responded by quoting Psalm 22:1 to “capture” their mockery as part of his own narrative.
 - c. See my small group leader notes on Matthew 27:11 – 54, available here: www.anastasiscenter.org/bible-messiah-matthew.
 - d. See also my blog post on Jesus' cry: <https://www.anastasiscenterblog.org/my-god-my-god/post1>, which is part of a larger series on how Jesus engaged Psalm 22 and David's story.

Appendix A: They Pierced Him?

(discussion from <http://www.christiancourier.com/feature/december2001.htm>)

Old Testament scholars concede that most of the Hebrew texts available today read “lion,” rather than “pierced.” In some of these manuscripts “pierced” is a marginal note. On the other hand, there are Hebrew texts that read “pierced,” with “lion” in the margin. The same variance is reflected in English translations, except that the vast majority of the English versions retain “pierced” in the text, with “lion” relegated to the footnote in some instances (see ASV, RSV, NIV, ESV).

The two words are strikingly similar in appearance in the original Hebrew text. The only difference between the word translated “like a lion,” and the one rendered “they pierced” is in the length of the upright vowel stroke on the latter word. The two might easily be confused. Since the Hebrew had no written vowels – only vowel sounds – some think the confusion may have resulted from a misunderstanding in pronunciation. Craigie offers this view and says that the “like a lion” rendition “presents numerous problems and can scarcely be correct” (196). Even the very liberal Interpreter’s Bible, which repudiates the passage as being prophetic of the crucifixion of Christ, says that “like a lion” does not make sense in the context (Sclater, 120).

Brown, et al., represent the term in this fashion: “they have bored (dugged, hewn) my hands and my feet” (468). Professor Baigent of the West London Institute of Higher Education suggests that the standard Massorite Hebrew text, reflecting “like a lion,” “seems to be corrupt” (614). Numerous other scholars concur.

Ancient Versions

The ancient versions (translations of the Hebrew text into various languages) overwhelmingly support the reading “pierced.” This is the case in the Septuagint (Greek version), the Syriac, Vulgate, Arabic, and the Ethiopic. One must remember that the Massorite Hebrew text is from the second century A.D., while the Septuagint dates from the third century B.C. There is a very powerful point here, to which Kidner calls attention: “A strong argument in its [“pierced”] favor is that the LXX [Septuagint], compiled two centuries before the crucifixion, and therefore an unbiased witness, understood it so” (107).

So much for our critic’s assertion that “pierced” is a “fundamentalist Christian” contrivance!

There is another point worthy of consideration. In around A.D. 140, a scholar named Aquila, a native of Pontus, produced a Greek translation of the Old Testament, the design of which was to rival the Septuagint. Aquila was an apostate from Christianity who had converted to Judaism. In his translation he seems to have known nothing of the “like a lion” rendition (see Cook, IV, 223).

Supplementary Old Testament Support

It need hardly surprise us that the prophets would focus upon the manner of Jesus’ death inasmuch as the Savior had to die in some way by which his “blood” would be shed. The blood is the depository of “life” (Lev. 17:11). By our sins, we have forfeited the right to live (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). Accordingly, in the divine scheme of things, the Son of God was required to give his “life” (blood) if we were to live (Mt. 20:28; 26:28; Rom. 3:21-26) – which he voluntarily and lovingly did.

In view of this, consider two other Old Testament texts.

The prophet Isaiah declared: “But he was wounded [“pierced” – Delitzsch, II, 317-18] for our transgressions...” (53:5). Moreover, Zechariah announced, on behalf of the Messiah: “And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplication: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced” (12:10; cf. Jn. 19:37). As we shall note subsequently, the language of Psalm 22:16 is quite similar – but more specific even.

New Testament Evidence

The nail-pierced anklebone of a 1st century victim of crucifixion.

Though the New Testament does not directly quote Psalm 22:16, there is strong circumstantial evidence that the phrase in this passage previews the crucifixion, thus containing an allusion to the method of Jesus’ death.

Only the very obtuse, and those with them who deny the authority of the New Testament writers, resist the conclusion that Psalm 22 has, as its general thrust, the mission of the promised Messiah.

The narrative begins: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” – a question agonizingly framed by the Savior from the cross (Mt. 27:46; Mk. 15:34). The treatment afforded Christ during his trial/crucifixion is graphically portrayed in verse 7-8.

“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, Commit thyself unto Jehovah; let him deliver him...” (cf. Lk. 23:35; Mt. 27:39,43). Verse 18 depicts the soldiers gambling for the Lord’s clothes. “They part my garments among them, and upon my vesture do they cast lots” (cf. Mt. 27:35). It is in the midst of this context that the controversial statement is found: “They pierced my hands and my feet.”

Additionally, compare this sentence with the references in the New Testament to the wounds of the Savior’s hands and feet (Lk. 24:40; Jn. 20:25). The connection is too obvious to miss if the student is honest.

It is worthy of note that Tertullian (cir. A.D. 160-220), one of the post-apostolic “church fathers,” who had access to evidence older than we possess today, quoted from Psalm 22 in one of his five books, *Against Marcion*. In Book III, which is designed to argue the Messianic identity of Jesus based on Old Testament prophecy, Tertullian says that the Lord was “prophetically declaring his glory” when he said, “They pierced my hands and my feet” (Sect. XIX).

We do not hesitate to say, therefore, that the preponderance of the evidence lies with our common English versions. Psalm 22:16 is an explicit prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. As George Rawlinson, Professor of Ancient History at Oxford, noted: “There are no sufficient critical grounds for relinquishing” the view that “pierced” is the correct term of the text (153).