

The Church of the Servant King

Prophecy Series (Proph13C_Prophecy in Job and the Psalms)

Psalm 22

Introduction

In this Psalm, David is inspired by the Holy Spirit to record the distress of his physical suffering and the Lord's deliverance with words that describe the suffering that Jesus (David's ultimate descendant) experienced upon the Cross. David's descriptions found fulfillment in Christ and, in some cases, the very words David wrote would be uttered by Jesus Himself. In an amazing display of God's providential workings in the life of His Own, God weaves thread after thread of evidence of His omniscience, veracity, and sovereignty into the tapestry of human history so that Scripture can be clearly seen to be the Word of God. One thousand years before Jesus would suffer and die on a Cross, His death and resurrection were predicted through the writing of His great ancestor, David. The Psalm is clearly Messianic since the writer to the Hebrews quoted Psalm 22:22 in Hebrews 2:12 as the words of Jesus.¹ The words of David in Psalm 22:22 become the words of Jesus, the Messiah, in Hebrews 2:12.

For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying: '*I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You.*' (Heb 2:11-12)

The Psalm is split into two major sections that are divided by David's statement in verse 21c that God has answered. The first major section consists of verses 1-21b and contains an alternating combination of laments, confessions of trust, and petitions so typical of a lament Psalm.² The second major section consists of verses 22-31 and is a series of vows of praise and prophetic utterances regarding the enemies of David and His ultimate descendant, Jesus.³

Section 1 – Lament, Trust, & Petition (Psalm 22:1-21b)

In verses 1 & 2, David opens the psalm with a profound expression of lament in which he expresses his pain and the seeming lack of response on God's part to his predicament. These verses are typical of the "I am hurting" and "you are not helping" pattern found in lament psalms.⁴ The omniscient Holy Spirit Who inspired David to use these words knew that they would be the very words that Jesus would utter as He cried out to God on the Cross as recorded in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34. Were it not for the fact that the remainder of the psalm contains several other phrases that clearly pre-figure certain aspects of the crucifixion of Christ, we could be more likely to conclude that Jesus was merely quoting Psalm 22:1 while on the Cross. I prefer to believe that these verses reflect a combination of both views and that "Jesus repeated the words of Psalm 22:1 to express His agony and to emphasize the prophetic connection between Himself and the psalm."⁵

¹ Mark H. Heinemann, "An Exposition of Psalm 22." *Bibliotheca Sacra* (July, 1990), 286.

² Ronald B. Allen, *And I Will Praise Him* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1992), 34-37.

³ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁵ Heinemann, *An Exposition of Psalm 22*, 289.

Another observation based upon verse 1 is that for the first time, the word “far” is used in the Psalm. This word is repeated in verses 11 and 19 so as to develop one of the themes of the Psalm. David is using this word to help “...communicate his total aloneness and helplessness in the face of the threat of death.”⁶

Verse 2 has two *synthetically parallel* lines in which the second line develops the thought of the first line by using the phrases “by day” and “by night” to convey the meaning of “continually.”⁷ In other words, David’s lament is that he has continually cried out to God, but God seems so far away as David goes through this suffering alone without the comfort that only the Lord can provide in such circumstances.

In verses 3 & 4, the reader can almost sense the battle that was taking place in David’s soul as he begins to move from the emotional outcry in verses 1 & 2 to the construction of a case based upon past experiences of the Lord’s deliverance. It is this reconstruction of facts in David’s soul that forms the confession of trust that is also typical of a lament Psalm.⁸ David’s logic is that just as God has been faithful to previous generations of His Own, so He will be faithful to deliver David. This confession of trust begins to comfort David’s troubled soul as David recognizes that there is a basis for the praises that have been lifted up to Yahweh, i.e. the fact that the Lord had delivered.

In verses 4 & 5, David repeats the word “You” and the idea of trust followed by deliverance in a *synonymously parallel* construction to build the figurative throne of praise on which the Lord sits.⁹

In verses 6-8, the battle continues to wage in David’s soul as he acknowledges his unworthiness. His lament continues with the “they are winning” pattern also typical of lament psalms.¹⁰ David faces the same doubts we do in times of pressure just when we begin to gain some comfort in the battle that rages in our souls between trust and fear, between reliance on God’s provision and reliance upon our own resources. We, like David, suddenly question whether God will deliver this time. After all, next to God Himself, it is only each individual that can begin to comprehend one’s own unworthiness. As was the case with David, so is the case with the humble man who acknowledges his low status before the Lord and possibly wonders why God would bother. The battle rages in David’s soul as he evaluates the words of his accusers and fear and defeat become a distinct possibility if the assessment of his accusers is indeed correct.

However, in verse 8, David provides the motivation that underlies the petition to come, i.e. it is the Lord’s reputation that is at issue for his persecutors know that it is the Lord in Whom David trusts. The “motivational motif” is designed to compel the Lord to vindicate His name.¹¹ David is making the case that the Lord’s name and character is at issue, not himself. His

⁶ Ibid., 289.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Allen, *And I Will Praise Him*, 36.

⁹ Heinemann, *An Exposition of Psalm 22*, 290.

¹⁰ Allen, *And I Will Praise Him*, 35.

¹¹ Ibid., 37.

accusers knew that David claimed to have a close relationship with the Lord. This claim by Jesus was derided by the mockers at the foot of the cross (Matt. 27:43). Once again, the omniscient Holy Spirit knew that these words would find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ as He hung on the Cross and endured the abuse of unbelievers (Matthew 27:27-31, 39-44).

In verses 9-10, David once again returns to the construction of a case based upon past experiences of the Lord's actions in his life. Once again (as in verses 3 & 4), David forms the basis for a confession of trust. David recounts his life of trust in the Lord from a time as early as he can remember using his birth to emphasize the point. Images of his mother and the birth experience are abundant to point to the special nature of the relationship with God that he claimed. No mention of an earthly father is made because David is picturing God as his Father.¹² Why would the Holy Spirit lead David to choose such words in the context of so many other obvious references to the Messiah? The answer is that verses 9-10 are prophetic of Jesus in the same way that Isaiah 49:1b and 5a describe the special nature of the Messiah to God the Father.

The Lord has called Me from the womb; from the matrix of My mother He has made mention of My name...And now the Lord says, Who formed Me from the womb to be His Servant. (Isa. 49:1b & 5a)

Verses 9 & 10 display a chiasmic or mirror symmetry. Verse 10 is almost a mirror image of verse 9. Verse 9 speaks of God, the belly, an action done to the psalmist, and the place of the action.¹³ Verse 10 reverses the order demonstrating the genius of David used by the Holy Spirit. The structure would look something like this:

<u>Verse 9</u>	<u>Speaks of</u>	<u>Verse 10</u>	<u>Speaks of</u>
But You [God] took Me out	God	I was cast upon You	place of action
from the womb [birth]	the belly	from birth	action to psalmist
You made Me trust	action to psalmist	from My mother's womb	the belly
upon my mother's breasts	place of action	You My God	God

In verse 11, David petitions the Lord using imperative language. This too is typical of the lament psalm.¹⁴ He will repeat this petition in verses 19-21 to emphasize his dependence upon the Lord. The question of verse 1 has become a prayer in verse 11.

In verses 12-18, David describes his enemies and the physical and closely related emotional distress he was experiencing as he returns to phrases of lament. His enemies are described in terms of animals that had the capacity to destroy a man, i.e. bulls, lions, and dogs. His distress is so great that the terms he uses to describe his torment is nothing short of amazing as the Holy Spirit inspired him with words that would be so descriptive of Jesus' death on the Cross. Many Pre-Christian era (i.e. Age of Israel) believers may have viewed this passage as an obscure, figurative expression, which was perhaps attributed to poetic license.¹⁵

The descriptions contained in verse 14 fit well with the "exhaustion, stretching, suffocation, and circulatory stoppage that occur during crucifixion."¹⁶ In verse 15, David states

¹² Heinemann, *An Exposition of Psalm 22*, 293.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 292.

¹⁴ Allen, *And I Will Praise Him*, 37.

¹⁵ Heinemann, *An Exposition of Psalm 22*, 297.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 303.

that his tongue clings to his jaws. In similar fashion, Jesus stated “I thirst” while on the Cross (John 19:28). In verse 16, David uses a figure of speech that his enemies had “pierced his hands and feet.” If anyone has any doubts about whether Psalm 22 is prophetic of Jesus’ death, they should now be dispelled. Verse 18 contains yet another prophetic statement that was fulfilled so accurately in Christ’s death, i.e. “they divide my garments among them” (see Matthew 27:35).

In verses 19-21, David again petitions the Lord in strong, imperative language to help, deliver, and save. The psalm pivots on verse 21c in which David records the fact that God has answered. So, in this first section of the psalm, we see the following pattern:

- Lament (verses 1 & 2)
- Confession of Trust (verses 3-4)
- Lament (verses 6-8)
- Confession of Trust (verses 9-10)
- Petition (verse 11)
- Lament (verses 12-18)
- Petition (verses 19-21b)
- Pivot phrase (verse 21c)

Is Psalm 22 indeed prophetic? If so, did David realize the prophetic nature of what he wrote? Is what David wrote limited to or extended beyond his own experience? Some have claimed that the early church merely saw the connection and incorporated Psalm 22 into the passion story.¹⁷ Others have stated that his contemporaries would have understood David’s use of figurative language to merely describe some terrible suffering he was experiencing so we should merely place ourselves in their shoes to understand how the passage was meant to be read. However, I believe that the following points support a case for a reading of this Psalm in a typico-prophetic manner, i.e. David as a prophetic type of Christ Who is the anti-type.¹⁸

- It is unlikely that Psalm 22 refers to some otherwise unrecorded incident in David’s life based upon David’s stature in the Old Testament and the grave nature of the experience he described.¹⁹
- Verses 16 and 18 describe some very strange experiences by David if they are not figurative in nature.
- David clearly transcends his own experiences in the last section of the psalm (verses 22-31) by stating that all the earth would praise God for what He had done.²⁰
- 1 Peter 1:10-12 seems to indicate that the prophets who predicted the sufferings of Christ were aware that they were doing so.²¹
- In Acts 2:30-31, Peter indicates that David was aware that he was prophesying in Psalm 16:10 when he predicted the resurrection of Christ.²²
- Both Peter and Jesus quote Psalm 110:1 in a manner that clearly indicates that David knew he was prophesying (see Acts 2:34-35; Matt. 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43).²³

¹⁷ Ibid., 300.

¹⁸ F. Delitzsch, *The Psalms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 69.

¹⁹ Heinemann, *An Exposition of Psalm 22*, 300.

²⁰ Ibid., 301.

²¹ Ibid., 302.

²² Ibid., 302.

- On other occasions, David knowingly prophesied regarding his descendants in the distant future (2 Sam. 7:19; Psa. 89:29, 36).²⁴

Section 2 – Praise & Prophetic Statements (Psalm 22:22-31)

Once a believer has experienced the deliverance of the Lord, praise is the natural result. In verses 22-24, David praises the Lord for answering his petitions and expresses his willingness to proclaim praise to the Lord among other believers in the “great assembly” at the temple (verse 25). Public praise has the result of encouraging others to trust the Lord and praise Him also (verses 22 & 23). The total absence of sympathizers in the first part of the psalm emphasized David’s lonely predicament. However, this second section of the psalm contains frequent references to fellowship in the assembly of other believers, first to fellow Israelites (v. 23) and then to Gentiles (v. 27).

The vows to which David refers in verse 25 probably relate to the thank-offering mentioned in Leviticus 7:11-13. If one had vowed some service to God and had received an answer to prayer, the law encouraged the fulfillment of the vow with a sacrifice to be followed by a feast which might last as long as two days (Lev. 7:16).²⁵

Whereas the first section of this Psalm was primarily a lamentation and contained very poignant references to events surrounding the death of our Lord, this second section contains direct references to the Millennial reign of Christ after His triumph over His enemies. Verse 26 contains Messianic overtones in that the antitype of David, i.e. Jesus, will invite believers to His banquet table and give them eternal blessings (Matt. 22:1-14 & Rev. 19:9).²⁶ In verses 27 & 28, David not only describes how the story of His deliverance provides a witness to surrounding nations, but he is guided by the Holy Spirit to choose words that will only find their ultimate fulfillment in the Messianic reign of Jesus on this earth. Only in the Millennium will “all the ends of the world” and “all the families of the nations” (verse 27) turn to the Lord and worship before Him. Only in the Messianic reign of Jesus will there be a literal fulfillment of verse 28 in which the Lord rules over the nations in which there is “wide-spread Gentile submission to the authority of Christ.”²⁷

Conclusion

David as a prophet per Acts 2:30 is one of the first in a series of prophets to prophesy in detail about the future theocratic kingdom ruled by his Messianic descendant. Later prophets would expound in greater detail regarding this Messianic kingdom mostly as an encouragement to those who would survive the judgement that they foretold. After the departure of the Shekinah Glory from the temple described by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 8:4; 9:3; 10:4; 10:18; 11:22, 23) and the beginning of the time of Gentile domination over Israel, a major theme of the prophets message was the future theocratic kingdom.²⁸

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 305.

²⁶ Ibid., 306.

²⁷ J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come, A Study in Biblical Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), 484.

²⁸ Ibid., 442.

One principle that emerges from such a study of Psalm 22 is that believers are sometimes called upon to trust that God has heard them even though it seems as if He is silent. God is not limited in his response to this time space dimension in which we live. Sometimes the answers will occur in a future generation or in eternity. The Messianic reign of Christ will fulfill the hope of Israel in a period of human history even future to us. Many of the injustices that believers have faced and will endure will not be answered fully until eternity. Nevertheless, we, like David, must cling to what we know and the deliverance we have experienced in our lives (perceived sometimes only through the eyes of a faithful walk) and know that the Lord will vindicate Himself and those who have trusted in Him. To me, this is the essence of praise before men.