

An Exposition of Psalm 22

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"Extraordinary" is the word for Psalm 22. The craftsmanship of its poetry, the boldness of its images, and the sweep of its historical scope all contribute to this impression. But the most striking thing about Psalm 22 is its messianic character. God inspired David to write in such a way that certain aspects of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ were clearly prefigured: His perplexed cry, "My God, my God"¹ (v. 1; see Mark 15:34), the mockings of the onlookers (Ps. 22:6-8; see Matt. 27:39-43), the piercing of His hands and feet (Ps. 22:16, see John 20:24-27), and the casting of lots for His garments (Ps. 22:18; see John 19:24). The fact that the writer to the Hebrews quoted Psalm 22:22 in Hebrews 2:12 as the words of Jesus certainly validates the view that the psalm is messianic.

In the course of studying the psalm, the messianic aspect must be kept in mind. A number of intriguing questions arise. What experiences was David describing? In what ways do his descriptions go beyond his own experience, if any? Did he knowingly prophesy?

But in seeking to answer these questions, it is important to note that the psalm has a message in itself for both the readers of that day and those of the present. This message is summarized in Psalm 22:24: "For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and He has not hidden His face from him; but when he cried to Him, He heard." Despite his feelings of being forsaken by God and man, and despite his terrible sufferings at the hands of his enemies, David kept praying in faith down to the last moment, and ul-

¹ All Scripture quotations (other than from Ps. 22, which is translated by the writer) are from the New International Version.

timately found that God had heard his cries for help and had answered him. The messianic aspect serves to underline this theme in that Jesus Christ became the ultimate example of this kind of faith under similar circumstances.

Psalm 22 has three virtually equal parts.² The first section (vv. 1-10) is David's introductory address.³ Faced with severe trials, he answered his doubts about God's care by remembering God's past faithfulness to his believing forefathers and to himself. As he moved through the four small groups of poetic lines in this section, he told God about his tremendous inner battle with doubt. This conflict is reflected by the alternation between his describing the rejection he felt from God in the present, and his pointing out that God had faithfully cared for his forefathers and for him in the past.

In the second section (vv. 11-21), David kept asking God for deliverance from his trials until he got an answer. This section includes three parts: his introductory petition, his lament, and his primary petition followed by God's answer. The two petitions bracket the lament, in which David described his suffering at the hands of his inhuman enemies. But this psalm is not just about suffering; it also tells of victory. After stating at the end of the second section, "You have heard me," he launched into a third section (vv. 22-31), one of praise. Having once again experienced God's care in the midst of trials, David publicly praised Him. In the first part of this section, he

² This view of the psalm's structure is based on two observations: (1) the sections are easily differentiated by their content; and (2) each of the three sections is delimited by the use of a repeated word or phrase (vv. 1-10, "my God"; vv. 11-21, "far"; vv. 22-32, "I will tell" and "They will declare") that brackets the section at the beginning and end. Using W. G. E. Watson's terms, "my God" would be classified as an "envelope figure," "far" as a "refrain," and the last device as "distant parallelism." But Watson admits that these closely related types of poetic tools are not always easy to distinguish from one another. In Psalm 22 all three of these devices function like envelope figures which, according to Kessler's definition (quoted by Watson), work "to frame a unit; to stabilize the material enclosed; to emphasize by repetition and to establish rhetorical connection of the intervening material" (W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* [Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1984], pp. 282-86). See note 5 below for a good alternate view of the structure.

³ Claus Westermann (following Hermann Gunkel, *Die Psalmen* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1926], p. 90) categorizes this psalm as an individual lament. As such, it contains the typical elements in almost the typical order: introductory address, lament, petition (in this psalm, split into two parts, an introductory petition before the lament and the primary petition after the lament), confidence of being heard (in this psalm taking the place of the confession of confidence usually found after the lament, and consisting of one phrase at the end of v. 21), and praise (including both the vow of praise, vv. 22, 25; declarative praise, v. 24; and the two elements usually found in the praise categories, call to praise, v. 23; and descriptive praise, v. 28). Westermann writes, "This is the basic structure, but it never becomes a rigid pattern! The possibilities for variation are exceptionally abundant." His terminology is used in part in the outline presented here (Claus Westermann, *Lob and Klage in den Psalmen*, 6th ed. [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1983], pp. 48-51, 118-19).

praised the Lord and exhorted his fellow believing Israelites to do the same. In the second part, he predicted that God would be worshiped by all nations and proclaimed by future generations.

Introductory Address (vv. 1-10)

In his introductory address David, faced with severe trials, answered his doubts about God's care by remembering God's faithfulness to his believing forefathers and to himself.⁴

- 1 My God, my God, why have You forsaken me? Why are You so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?
- 2 O my God, I cry out by day, and You do not answer, and at night, but I have no rest.
- 3 But You are holy, 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 ashamed.
- 6 But I am a worm, and not a man; a reproach of men and despised by the people.
- 7 All who see me mock me; they sneer, shaking their heads:
- 8 "Commit yourself to the LORD! Let Him rescue him--let Him deliver him, since He delights in him."
- 9 Yet You took me out of the womb, causing me to trust upon my mother's breasts.
- 10 From birth I was cast upon You; from my mother's womb You have been my God.

SINCE GOD APPARENTLY DID NOT RESPOND TO HIS CONTINUAL PLEAS FOR HELP, DAVID ASKED GOD WHY HE HAD FORSAKEN HIM (vv. 1-2)

The wrenching cry "My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" is one of the most striking opening lines in the Psalms. David's emotional pain is emphasized by the twofold repetition of "My God," and yet the threefold repetition of the possessive suffix "my" in the first two verses also emphasizes that he was clinging to his relationship to God as his last hope in the face of despair. This is the hope to which he returned at the close of this 10-verse section.

Jesus cried out these words when He died on the cross (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). He must have read this psalm many times, already having at age 12 extensive knowledge of the Scriptures (Luke

⁴ The superscription reads, "For the director of music: to the tune of 'The Doe of the Morning.' A psalm of David." Though the significance of this superscription is unknown, it probably refers to either the tune or the content of the psalm. It could also possibly be translated "On the help at daybreak." See Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 19 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), p. 196, and Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), pp. 41-42.

2:46-47). It seems logical to deduce that on the cross Jesus repeated the words of Psalm 22:1 to express His agony and to emphasize the prophetic connection between Himself and the psalm.

In the second half of verse 1 a key word "far" is used for the first time in the psalm.⁵ "Far" also occurs in verse 11 ("Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help") and in verse 19 in the final petition for help.⁶ The repetition of key words or phrases is sometimes used in the Psalms to develop important themes.⁷ The concept of being far from God is used in this psalm to help communicate David's total aloneness and helplessness in the face of the threat of death. By contrast, he associated the nearness of God with rescue from his enemies, almost as if to say, "If God is near, then He will do what is right and all will be well."

Verse 2 has two synthetically parallel lines that form a merism in which "by day" and "by night" together convey the meaning "continually." To complete the parallel, the last phrase (lit., "and silence is not to me") is translated "and I have no rest," in this case, the rest from anxiety that would come if God answered him.⁸

DAVID ACKNOWLEDGED THAT GOD IS HOLY AND NEVER BETRAYED HIS BELIEVING FOREFATHERS' TRUST (vv. 3-5)

The words "But You" (waw adversative) that begin verse 3 mark a strong contrast between what David has just told God about how he felt and the reminder he was now going to give God about what kind of God he knew Him to be. Perhaps he was reminding himself as well in an attempt to control his strong feelings.

⁵ N. H. Ridderbos maintains that "far" is a structural key that divides verses 1-21, what he calls the "lament song" section of the psalm, into three parts (1-10, 11-18, 19-21). This approach has the appeal of having a simple structural key and a good fit with Westermann's typical individual lament structure. This is fine as far as it goes, but the problem is that the repeated "far" does not mark off the obvious break between verse 21 and 22 and so is better seen as functioning as a catchword that links just the first two major sections (*Die Psalmen* [Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1972], pp. 185-89; cf. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p. 288).

⁶ The fact that "far" is used in verses 11 and 19 to describe God's relationship to the psalmist supports the NIV translation of the second half of verse 1: "Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning?" instead of the rendering of the NASB--"Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning"--which emphasizes the relationship between the psalmist's prayer and his deliverance. See J. A. Alexander, *The Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1975), pp. 98-99.

⁷ The use of "far" corresponds to what Robert Alter calls "anaphora," defined as "the rhetorically emphatic reiteration of a single word or brief phrase, in itself not a syntactically complete unit" (*The Art of Biblical Poetry* [New York: Basic Books, 1985], p. 64).

⁸ This phrase could also be translated "[I] am not silent" (NIV). The language used here produces an ironic play on words in which the psalmist stated that he had no "silence" as he complained about God's silence.

The psalmist told God He is holy, meaning separate, or set apart.⁹ Perhaps his idea was, "Because You are holy (i.e., set apart from sin) I know You would never break your covenant with me by suddenly abandoning me."¹⁰ But this notion of God's being set apart is clarified by the second half of the line, "You who are enthroned [lit., "sitting"] upon the praises of Israel." That is, God is set apart and distinct from all others in that He has faithfully delivered God-fearing Israelites of days gone by. He has been greatly praised for this, and these praises form, in a figurative sense, a throne on which God sits as King.¹¹ Later David added to this his own praise of God in Psalm 22:22-26 and celebrated the kingship of the Lord in the verses following that (vv. 27-31).

In the spirit of this concept, in verses 4 and 5 David built a three-line "throne" of synonymously parallel expressions of praise for coming to the aid of his believing forefathers. He emphasized the idea that God comes to the aid of those who trust Him. The repetition of "but You" (v. 3), "in You" (v. 4), "to You," and "in You" (v. 5), as well as the threefold repetition of the idea of trust followed by deliverance, also conveys the psalmist's point.

If the last word in verse 5 is translated "ashamed," rather than "disappointed" (NASB, NIV), the important contrast that connects verses 3-5 with verses 6-8 is established.¹² David used this figurative language (metonymy of effect and understatement) instead of simply repeating "deliver" again so that he could more directly contrast the faith-victories of his forefathers with the shame he presently felt as he was mocked for trusting God in the face of his own apparent faith-defeat. This shame is described in the next three verses.

⁹ See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), s.v. "שִׁדְדָה," p. 872.

¹⁰ J. J. S. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (1878; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1966, p. 240). It could also be asserted that the psalmist mentioned God's holiness at this point in order to explain God's silence--the idea being that David's sinfulness was the cause of the problem. But this view is rejected because (1) elsewhere in the Psalms, David was open and honest about personal sin when that was his problem (Pss. 32, 38, 51, etc.), yet there is no confession of sin in Psalm 22; and (2) the silence of God is only temporary and God in fact did hear his cry (vv. 21, 24).

¹¹ A. F. Kirkpatrick believes this may be a figurative adaptation of the idea of God being enthroned between the cherubim on the ark of the covenant (Exod. 25:22), as directly rectly expressed in Psalms 80:1 and 99:1 (*The Book of Psalms* [1902; reprint, Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982], p. 116).

¹² Charles A. Briggs, *The Book of the Psalms*, *The International Critical Commentary*, 2 vols. (1906; reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1969), p. 194. See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*; s.v. p. 101, which lists the basic meaning of the root as "be ashamed."

DAVID, HOWEVER, FELT SUBHUMAN BECAUSE PEOPLE WERE MOCKING HIM FOR TRUSTING GOD (vv. 6-8)

Another contrastive *waw* and emphatic pronoun ("But I . . .") introduce a second small section in which David described to God his feelings of rejection. He felt shame, the shame of being mocked for his seemingly futile cries to God. He felt like a "worm," a subhuman who was not in the same category as his forefathers. Besides feeling ignored by God, he was also rejected by men. He was a "reproach" and "despised." In verse 7 David intensified the word picture of the mockery: they "mock," "sneer,"¹³ and were "shaking their heads." Then in verse 8 he told the Lord specifically what they were saying.

The first word of verse 8 is translated as an imperative: "Commit yourself to the Lord."¹⁴ This first clause should be understood as an ironic, mocking charge to the helpless psalmist. The rest of the verse, with all its pronouns in the third person, can be seen as the mockers' cynical comments to one another in David's hearing. The phrase, "since [ָׁ taken causally] He delights in him," implies that the mockers were aware that he claimed to have a close, positive relationship with the Lord. From the New Testament perspective one can see a close resemblance between what David described and what happened to Jesus. This claim by Jesus of a special relationship to God was derided by the mockers at the foot of the cross (Matt. 27:43, "for he said, 'I am the Son of God'"). It is this close relationship that David held up to God in the last of the four small parts of this section.

NEVERTHELESS DAVID POINTED OUT TO GOD THAT HE HAD BEEN DAVID'S GOD SINCE BIRTH (vv. 9-10)

David repeated the ָׁ that began the ironic last phrase of the last section, but now gave it an adversative sense and tied to it another emphatic pronoun--"Yet You. . ."¹⁵ In this way he rebounded from the mockers' questioning of his relationship to God into a rebuttal in which he insisted that he had always had the closest possi-

¹³ Literally, "separate the lip." This is taken as a description of a sneering facial expression, but it could also describe the movement of lips in (insulting) speech, as the NIV translates it: "hurl insults."

¹⁴ See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. "לָּא," p. 165. Proverbs 16:3 has the identical construction.

¹⁵ See E. Kautzsch, *Gesenins' Hebrew Grammar*, 2d Eng. ed. by A. E. Cowley (1910; reprint, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974), p. 500, §163b. This translation assumes that follows a negation virtually contained in the previous sentence in the form of an ironic expression "since He delights in him." Another option would be to take it emphatically as "indeed" (cf. Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989], p. 665, sec. 39.3.4e).

ble relationship to God. The idea that this relationship was of the longest possible standing is strongly emphasized by the fourfold repetition of birth images ("out of the womb," "upon my mother's breasts," "from birth," and "from my mother's womb").

The relationship of a believer to God has roots that go back before birth. David wrote in Psalm 139:13, "You knit me together in my mother's womb." Paul wrote in Ephesians 1, "For he chose us in him [i.e., Christ] before the creation of the world" (v. 4), and "in love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ" (v. 5). He did not predestine believers to adoption and then knit them in the womb only to abandon them later (cf. Job 10:8-12).

The poetry in verses 9-10 is intricate, as the diagram below shows.¹⁶

Verse 9	Verse 10
a . Yet <i>You</i> took me out	d. upon <i>You</i>
b. from the <i>belly</i> (בֶּטֶן)	c. <i>I</i> was cast from the <i>womb</i>
c. causing <i>me</i> to trust	b. from the <i>belly</i> (בֶּטֶן) of my
(מִבְּטְיָחִי)	mother
d. upon my mother's breasts	a. <i>You</i> are my God

Verse 10 is a mirror image of verse 9. Verse 9 talks about God, then the belly, then an action done to the psalmist, and then the place of the action, and verse 10 exactly reverses this order.¹⁷ The two middle half-lines in both verses are linked by poetic devices--in verse 9 by a type of rhyme between the Hebrew roots in "belly" and "causing me to trust,"¹⁸ and in verse 10 by the synonymy between "belly" and "womb." The reference to "my God" at the end of verse 10 points back to the opening words of verse 1. Neither God's silence nor men's mockings could shake David's conviction that the Lord was still his God.

David answered the sneers of the mockers. Did they question whether God delighted in him? God personally took him from the womb and caused him to rest on his mother's breasts. Did they laugh as they told him to commit himself to (lit., "roll onto") God? He was cast on his God from the beginning.

The idea in verse 9 that God took David from the womb can be understood in the sense that God superintended the birth process. But what does it mean that God caused him to trust on the breasts of

¹⁶ The translation in this diagram is literal in order to show the relationships between the words more clearly.

¹⁷ This technique is called chiasmus or mirror symmetry (Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, p. 203).

¹⁸ This is called paronomasia (ibid., p. 242).

his mother? The NIV renders "trust in you, even at, implying that somehow even as a little baby David trusted God. Nowhere in the Bible is there any solid evidence of a baby being able to have faith. Therefore it seems best to take this as meaning that God made him feel secure with his mother when he was a baby.¹⁹ David added that he had been cast on the Lord from birth and from that time on He had been his God. In other words God had watched over him all his life. He claimed a special relationship with God.

In verses 9-10 images of the psalmist's mother abound, but no mention is made of the father. Why? Because David was picturing God as his Father. It is interesting to note with regard to the messianic aspect of this psalm that the Prophet Isaiah used remarkably similar imagery to describe the Messiah's relationship to Yahweh. He reported the Messiah as saying, "Before I was born the LORD called me; from my birth he has made mention of my name. . . . And now the LORD says--he who formed me in the womb to be his servant" (Isa. 49:1, 5).²⁰

Despite his difficult situation, David clung to God, displaying in his life, in the words of C. S. Lewis, "the union of total privation with total adherence to God, to a God who makes no response, simply because of what God is."²¹ He then turned his attention once more to describing his situation to God and asking for His help.

Petition (vv. 11-21)

In this next section David kept asking God for deliverance from his trials until he got an answer.

11 Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one 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 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 palate; and You lay me in the dust of death.

16 For dogs have surrounded me; a band of evildoers has encircled me; They are piercing my hands and my feet.

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

18 They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

¹⁹ Alexander, *The Psalms*, p. 101; Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I, 1-50*, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1966), p. 739.

²⁰ In this regard it is interesting to note that David anticipated Isaiah's descriptions of the Suffering Servant in Isaiah 42:1-4; 49:1-6; and 52:13-53:12 (cf. James L. Mays, "Prayer and Christology: Psalm 22 as Perspective on the Passion," *Theology Today* 42 [October 1985]: 329).

²¹ *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1958), p. 127.

- 19 But You, O LORD, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me.
- 20 Deliver my life from the sword, my only life from the power of the dogs.
- 21 Rescue me from the lion's mouth; and from the horns of the wild oxen You have heard me.

INTRODUCTORY PETITION: DAVID ASKED GOD TO BE CLOSE BECAUSE HE WAS IN TROUBLE AND HAD NO ONE TO HELP HIM (v. 11)

This verse has the poetic structure of a tricolon (2+2+2) with the last two cola functioning as causal clauses. Such structure gives the verse special emphasis.²²

Exegetes are divided as to whether verse 11 belongs with verse 10 (NIV, Alexander, Anderson, Delitzsch, Gunkel) or 12 (NASB, Briggs, Kirkpatrick, Perowne, Ridderbos) or alone (Craigie). Given the tight alternating four-piece structure of verses 1-10, it is better to leave verse 11 standing alone or connect it with verse 12 as an introductory petition leading into (and delimiting, together with the repeated refrain in vv. 19-21-see note 2) the lament section.

The question of verse 1 now becomes a prayer, and this is a sign of faith.²³ In this brief prayer David asked for nearness and not rescue, perhaps because the dangers he faced had yet to be described.

LAMENT: DAVID DESCRIBED FOR GOD HIS ENEMIES AND THE EXTREME SUFFERING THEY WERE INFLICTING ON HIM (vv. 12-18)

David described his enemies surrounding him as being like strong, ravenous animals (vv. 12-13). The bulls were from Bashan, an area of the Jordan known for its fertile pastures suited for raising strong animals (cf. Amos 4:1).²⁴ There were many of them, he said, and they encircled him, so the odds were overwhelming and he was in a vulnerable position. Furthermore they were poised for attack. Like hungry lions they opened their mouths wide and roared.

David described his physical suffering (vv. 14-15). He described his suffering in graphic language that spoke of a total ("all my bones") loss of control. The images of poured-out water and dislocated bones seem to describe his loss of physical strength, while the melted heart of wax seems to describe his loss of emotional strength.²⁵ However, these could all be figures of great fear and loss of emo-

²² Ridderbos, *Die Psalmen*, p. 191.

²³ Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 118.

²⁴ Cf. A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, 2 vols., New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1972), 1:189.

²⁵ In Joshua 7:5 the almost identical figure is used when the Israelites were defeated at Ai: "the hearts of the people melted and became like water."

tional strength.²⁶ The concept of physical dryness is conveyed by the figure of the potsherd and David's description of his tongue sticking to the inside of his mouth. All his vital fluids were draining away, and with them, his strength. Again, these could refer to great fear that makes one feel weak and makes the mouth dry.

In other psalms emotional suffering is described in physical terms. For example in Psalm 102, the psalmist, suffering from what seems to be primarily emotional distress, nevertheless wrote using physical images: "my bones burn like glowing embers" (v. 3), "my heart is blighted and withered like grass" (v. 4), "because of my loud groaning, I am reduced to skin and bones" (v. 5), and "I wither away like grass" (v. 11).

Of course the obvious problem is that emotional and physical distress are not easily separated. Psychosomatic medicine has arisen out of the discovery that stress causes physical problems. And the psalmists sometimes did not give detailed information about the source of their problems. For example in Psalm 116:3 the psalmist wrote, "The cords of death entangled me, the anguish of the grave came upon me; I was overcome by trouble and sorrow." The psalm itself gives no clues as to what his trouble was and whether he faced emotional stress or physical problems or a combination of the two.

In Psalm 22, however, the context of violence leads one to conclude that David was describing both emotional and physical suffering. He was being threatened by evil men who acted like wild beasts. They are described as encircling David (vv. 12, 16), piercing his hands and feet (v. 16), casting lots for his clothing (v. 18), threatening him with the sword and attacking him like dogs (v. 20), and threatening to tear him like lions and gore him like wild oxen (v. 21). He clearly expected to die (v. 15).

Some have supposed that sickness is being described here.²⁷ But Kidner writes, "While verses 14, 15, taken alone, could describe merely a desperate illness, the context is of collective animosity and the symptoms could be those of Christ's scourging and crucifixion; in fact verses 16-18 had to wait for that event to unfold their meaning with any clarity."²⁸

Ridderbos notes that after 15b the parallel structure of the verse ends, and the last clause ("And You lay me in the dust of death") is a monocolon "after-beat."²⁹ As such it has a special emphasis appro-

²⁶ Cf. Briggs, *The Book of the Psalms*, pp. 195-96.

²⁷ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, pp. 198-200.

²⁸ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, p. 107.

²⁹ *Die Psalmen*, pp. 13, 191.

priate to the content; David clearly believed that he would die.³⁰

David further described his helplessness as he was mistreated by his inhuman enemies (vv. 16-18). Dogs are the third type of animal used to characterize David's enemies, chosen no doubt because they were so looked down on in the ancient Near East.³¹ This image emphasizes the cruel, filthy nature of those who surrounded him. Next he dropped the figurative language and called his enemies "a band of evildoers." They were not only his enemies; as doers of evil they were also enemies of God. The idea of being surrounded is repeated from verse 12 to emphasize the precariousness of his position.

The poetic arrangement emphasizes the last phrase of verse 16. The first two parts of this tricolon (3+3+3) are parallel, but the last one stands apart, highlighting its unusual statement: "They are piercing my hands and my feet."³² This is a striking prefiguring of

³⁰ Briggs notes that the phrase "the dust of death" is "especially appropriate . . . to the previous context, the dry, brittle potsherd . . . and also the conception of death as a return of the body to dust, Gn. 3:19" (*The Book of Psalms*, p. 196).

³¹ Cf. A. Cohen, *The Psalms* (London: Soncino Press, 1974), p. 63. Psalm 59 is another example of the use of this image in which David characterized Saul's men, sent to kill David, as a pack of dogs.

³² This passage is disputed. Perowne writes: "There is scarcely any passage of the Old Testament, the true reading and interpretation of which have given rise to so much discussion" (*The Book of Psalms*, p. 246). The Masoretic Text says, "like a lion my hands and my feet," with no verb. If this is the correct reading, it requires that a verb be supplied or understood. One option (Option A) is that there originally was a verb which was subsequently lost through scribal error. Cohen, for example, suggests that the original text "may have had both a verb and like a lion which were very similar in spelling" (*The Psalms*, p. 64). The verb then must have been accidentally omitted through haplography, in which "two identical or similar letters, groups of letters, or words are found together in an immediate sequence, and one of them is omitted by error" (Ernst Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. Erroll F. Rhodes [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979], p. 107). With this option, a second textual corruption at this same place must be postulated to account for the Septuagint reading. Another option (option B) is that the phrase never had a verb. Ellipsis of the verb is not uncommon in Hebrew poetry, both in the Psalms and in other poetic sections of the Old Testament (cf. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*, p. 7, and Michael O'Connor, *Hebrew Verse Structure* [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1980], pp. 122-29, for more on "verb gapping" [O'Connor's term]). With this technique the verb preceding or (rarely) following does duty for two (and occasionally three) cola or lines. Psalm 22:2 is an example: "O my God, I cry out by day, and You do not answer, and [I cry out] at night, but I have no rest."

This hypothesis then suggests that the verb "encircled" would do duty for the second and third cola of verse 16 as follows: "For dogs have surrounded me; a band of i(evildoers has encircled me; like a lion [they have encircled] my hands and my feet." A variation of this option is Cohen's idea that a verb of being and a preposition should be supplied--"are at" (*The Psalms*, p. 64). Under Option B the reading in the Septuagint would be accounted for by some sort of textual corruption.

The biggest problem with both of the above options is that the use of leads one to expect a comparison between what David's enemies were doing and what a lion might be expected to do. But what would a lion be doing to a victim's hands and feet? Dogs may be expected to snap at one's hands and feet, but a big cat "stalks its prey to a point

what happened to Jesus when He was crucified. Pre-Christian readers must have thought it an obscure figurative expression, which they perhaps attributed to poetic license.³³

"I can count all my bones" is a poetic way of saying the psalmist

as close as allowed by available cover, then closes the final distance by a leap or a short dash.... If overtaken the prey is thrown down and dispatched with a deep bite, usually in the neck" (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Carnivora," by Howard J. Stains [professor of zoology at Southern Illinois University]).

Option C is that the Septuagint reading is the correct one: "they are piercing my hands and my feet." This view holds that the Septuagint (using the verb ὀρύσσω, "to dig, bore through") represents a superior text that was corrupted to the Masoretic Text reading either by (a) a scribal error in which קָאָרוּ ("they are piercing," assuming the root כָּוַר "bore, dig, hew" [*Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. "כָּוַר," by R. Laird Harris, 1:4351 or root קָרַח "to dig" [mentioned as an option but not chosen by Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 196]) was changed to קָאָרִי ("like a lion"); or (b) a scribal error in which the pointing was altered, changing a participle "piercing" (which would have been the only occurrence in the Old Testament) into a noun with a prefixed "like a lion" (Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, pp. 246-47). The אָ may be explained as an ancient *mater lectionis*.

In favor of Option A or B are the following arguments: (1) lions are mentioned elsewhere in the psalm; (2) the Gospels do not cite or apply this verse (which seems strange if it so strikingly prefigures the piercing of Jesus' hands and feet); (3) "piercing" in the Septuagint goes too far beyond David's experience and is too striking a "prophecy" (suspicion of later textual corruption by Christians); and (4) most Hebrew manuscripts have "like a lion." The following points argue for adopting the translation "they are piercing" (Option C): (1) the Masoretic Text reading is awkward, for unlike other verb ellipsis situations in Hebrew poetry, the relationship between the subject "lion" and the objects "my hands and my feet" is not easily explainable (Gunkel states bluntly, "the lion does not 'encircle' the 'hands and feet' of his victim" [*Die Psalmen*, p. 96]) and therefore can be suspected of being corrupted; (2) two Hebrew manuscripts do attest to the Septuagint reading (Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 246), (3) elsewhere the Messiah is pictured as pierced (Isa. 53:5; Zech. 12:10); (4) point number 2 above in favor of options A and B is an argument from silence, and (5) point number 3 above in favor of options A and B begs the question, does not acknowledge that intentional corruption could be argued from either side, and fails to take into account the pre-Christian origin of the Septuagint.

This is a complicated textual problem. The lack of sense (there is no logical relationship between a lion and the psalmist's hands and feet) of the Masoretic Text reading makes it doubtful that this is a case of verb ellipsis, thus making Option B unlikely. For Option A one must postulate two corruptions at the same place, making it a less likely option than the other two. On the other hand the unique verbal form and the obscure meaning (now no longer obscure) of the Septuagint reading make it a good candidate for an intentional emendation according to the canon of textual criticism that says that the more difficult reading (in the sense of using rare words or more complicated constructions; cf. Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, p. 109) is the more likely one. Taking the third option, only one corruption need be postulated. Adding to this the fact that reasonable solutions have been proposed for how the original text represented by the Septuagint reading could have been corrupted to the Masoretic Text reading, it seems best to adopt the translation "they are piercing."

³³ Even if one holds to the reading, "like a lion my hands and my feet," the prefiguring is only weakened in its directness; it is not disposed of entirely. It is important to note that there would still be a strong correspondence between David's enemies doing

was exposed and his flesh emaciated. It seems logical to conclude that he was as close to death as one could be and still be alive. Meanwhile his enemies watched him dying, dividing up his clothing. This shows that in their minds his death was a foregone conclusion. Here again is an amazing correspondence between the experience of David and that of Jesus Christ.

PRIMARY PETITION: DAVID ONCE AGAIN ASKED GOD TO DELIVER HIM, AND GOD ANSWERED HIM (vv. 19-21)

David asked God to deliver him (vv. 19-21a). This section begins with an adversative "But You" as David looked away from his enemies and back to God. Once again he picked up the catchword "far" (compare vv. 1, 11), which ties together the first two-thirds of the psalm. He repeated and expanded the petition of verse 11, thus bracketing the middle section of the psalm at the beginning and end. Having described his helplessness and total loss of strength, he now called on God, his Strength, to help him. On the brink of death ("come quickly"), he petitioned God to save him.

David here exemplified praying with perseverance. The account of his praying for his first child by Bathsheba illustrates the same point (2 Sam. 12:16-23). There we see him praying that the child would be spared, seemingly against all hope, right up until the child died. This is the same lesson taught by the parable of the Widow and the Unjust Judge in Luke 18, as Jesus stated it, "that they [the disciples] should always pray and not give up" (Luke 18:1).

At this point, David used the poetic device of repeating in reverse order the figurative designations he used for his enemies in verses 12-13, and 16.

Verses 12-13, 16	Verses 20-21a, b
a . bulls	d. (sword)
b. lion's mouth	c. dogs
c. dogs	b. lion's mouth
d. band of evildoers	a. (wild oxen)

The chiasmus is not perfect, though "sword" could serve as a metonymy of adjunct for "band of evildoers" and "wild oxen" is very close to "bulls."³⁴ This device serves to tie this petition closely to the description of trouble in the preceding verses (vv. 12-18). The "sword" here is a symbol of a violent end (at the hand of another man).³⁵ "My only life" is literally "my only one," referring to "the

something harmful to his hands and feet and the fact that Jesus' enemies did something harmful to His hands and feet when they crucified Him. The connection and thus the prefiguring remains intact because of the specific and unusual mention of David's hands and feet.

³⁴ It may be that "sword" and "wild oxen" are used as figures because they correlate to the previous designations and at the same time develop further the intensity of the feeling of danger (the band now has swords, and the bulls are now wild).

³⁵ *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. **נֶפֶשׁ**, by R. Laird Harris, 1:320.

one unique and priceless possession which can never be replaced." 36

God answered him (v. 21b). The phrase "from the horns" may refer to the place from which the prayer proceeded, and the place to which the answer came "to the soul in the midst of its uttermost distresses."³⁷ Kirkpatrick comments on verse 21b, "A singularly bold and forcible construction. We expect a second imperative, repeating the prayer for deliverance."³⁸ Instead a perfect tense is used: "You have heard me."³⁹ David finally received an answer from God, and the implication (from the fact that he was praising God in vv. 22-31) is that he had been delivered from death at the last possible moment.

But why did David not state what God did? David wrote that God heard (vv. 21, 24) and later (v. 31) that He did it. After such a vivid description of David's problems, bringing the readers' emotional focus to a white-hot point as he reached the brink of death, one would expect more than a one-word reference to the mighty deliverance that God accomplished for him. One possible reason for this brevity is that in the individual lament psalms, the psalmist usually voiced only the confidence that he had been heard, without giving details about the victory God accomplished on his behalf.⁴⁰

Looking back from the present, it is clear, as stated at the outset of this article, that there are several points of correspondence between David's experiences as he described them in this psalm and the record in the New Testament Gospels of the crucifixion of the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Some expositors deny that there is any correspondence.⁴¹ Others, such as Westermann, see the connection, but

³⁶ Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, p. 402; cf. the identical usage in Psalm 35:17.

³⁷ Alexander, *The Psalms*, p. 104; Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 243.

³⁸ Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 120.

³⁹ Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 200; Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 243. This phrase "You have heard me" translates one Hebrew word.

⁴⁰ Westermann, *Lob and Klage in dem Psalmen*, pp. 49-50. Another reason may be that the lack of explanation concerning the nature of the psalmist's deliverance conceals the reality that the answer to the prayers of David's antitype (see discussion of typology following this note), the Messiah, would not be rescue, but resurrection. For the present-day Christian reader, then, the brief notice "You have heard me," followed by a distinct break in the psalm (without a description or at least a notice that he was saved from death), fits perfectly with the fact that Jesus accepted the Father's answer that He must die for the sins of the world. Jesus' response was "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46) and "It is finished" (John 19:30), and He died. He was not delivered from the sword, the dogs, the lion's mouth, and the horns of the wild oxen. Thus the lack of detail allows the passage to fit the situation of both type and antitype.

⁴¹ Cohen writes (unconvincingly), "A Christological intention has long been read into this Psalm, but modern Christian exegetes are agreed that it describes a situation then existing and does not anticipate an event in the future" (*The Psalms*, p. 61).

deny that it is prophetic, claiming that the primitive church saw the connection and incorporated Psalm 22 in the passion story.⁴² It is beyond the scope of this article to critique thoroughly the philology and theology that underlies such denials. But it must be said that in Acts 2:25-36, for example, Peter was convinced that David was a prophet through whom God predicted the future. Commenting on what David wrote in Psalm 16, Peter said, "Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ" (Acts 2:31). And in his first letter Peter wrote, "Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you" (1 Pet. 1:10-12).

Even if one accepts the historical reliability of both Testaments and the possibility of predictive prophecy, further questions present themselves in the case of Psalm 22. First, are David's descriptions of suffering limited to or extended beyond his own experience?

Though David was once threatened by stoning (1 Sam. 30:6), the details of the experience he described in Psalm 22 do not literally correspond to any one recorded incident in his life. It could be that David described some unrecorded incident in his life. But that seems highly unlikely. Such an incident would surely have been recorded, given the stature of David in the Old Testament and the grave nature of the experience he described.

A second view is that the descriptions that seem to go beyond David's experience could be attributed to the use of figurative language. He obviously used figurative language in the psalm. For example he called himself a "worm" (v. 6), and he described his enemies in figurative terms, comparing them to bulls, lions, and dogs. And as noted above, it is often difficult to determine whether his descriptions of suffering refer to emotional suffering, physical suffering, or both. In addition when one looks closely at the parts of the first two sections of the psalm (vv. 1-21) in which David clearly used language directly, that is, without figurative meaning, very little seems to go beyond David's experience, as seen in the following statements:

⁴² See Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Stricture, Content and Message*, trans. R. Gehrke (1967; reprint, Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), pp. 128-29; also Mays, "Prayer and Christology: Psalm 22 as Perspective on the Passion," pp. 322-23.

"My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?" (v. 1).

"O my God, I cry out . . . and You do not answer . . . I have no rest" (v. 2).

"But You are holy" (v. 3).

"In You our fathers trusted; they trusted and You delivered them" (v. 4).

"To You they cried out, and were delivered; in You they trusted and were not ashamed" (v. 5).

"But I am . . . despised by the people" (v. 6).

"All who see me mock me ... shaking their heads" (v. 7).

"Commit yourself to the LORD! Let Him rescue him--let Him deliver him, since He delights in him" (v. 8).

"Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help" (v.11).

"My tongue cleaves to my palate" (v. 15).

"A band of evildoers has encircled me [?]" (v. 16).

"They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing [?]" (v. 18).

"But You, O LORD, be not far off ... come quickly to help me" (v. 19).

"Deliver my life . . . my only life" (v. 20).

"Rescue me . . . You have heard me" (v. 21).

In the listing above, only verses 16 and 18 remain to be dealt with as containing phrases that still sound suspiciously beyond David's actual historical experience. In this view one would say that the piercing of David's hands and feet (v. 16) is a figure or that the Masoretic Text rendering "like a lion" (a simile) is correct. The casting of lots for David's clothing (v. 18) would also be seen as figurative, perhaps indicating how completely his enemies had succeeded in defeating him.

This may be how the pre-Christian era hearers and readers took David's words. He probably wrote this poetry to describe some terrible suffering that he was experiencing, and the contemporary listeners and readers probably attributed the discrepancy between his descriptions and his experience to the use of figurative language.

But a third position could be taken, namely, that David's descriptions do go beyond his own experience, even taking into account figurative language. Taken figuratively, verse 16 is strange and obscure. But taken from the New Testament perspective as prefigurative language, the sentence is striking and enlightening. The same is true of the reference to casting lots for clothing in verse 18. Furthermore David clearly transcended his own experience in the last section of the psalm (vv. 22-31) when he implied in verses 27-31 that all the earth will praise God for what He has done for him. Therefore the possibility cannot be ruled out that David went beyond himself in the earlier verses.

A second question presents itself. Was David aware that he was in some way prefiguring future events?

It may be that David was unaware (until v. 27, at least, where he directly prophesied) of any prophetic aspect of his writing in

Psalm 22. However, that seems highly unlikely, especially if one holds to the view that his descriptions go beyond his own experience. As noted above, I Peter 1:10-12 seems to indicate that prophets who predicted the sufferings of Christ were aware that they were doing so. And Peter, in Acts 2:30-31, indicated that David was aware that he was prophesying in another psalm, Psalm 16, when he predicted the resurrection of Christ. Psalm 110:1, quoted in Acts 2:34-35 by Peter and by Jesus in the Gospels (Matt. 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42-43), is another clear example in which David knowingly prophesied. If David was aware that God had spoken about his descendants in the distant future (2 Sam. 7:19; Ps. 89:29, 36), and if on at least two other occasions he had knowingly looked into the future of his greatest descendant, the Messiah, then it seems likely that he wrote with awareness in Psalm 22. As David wrote about, and beyond himself, he also wrote about "the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow," and his seeming hyperbole prefigured Jesus' future reality.

Though David did prophesy in a sense, he did not *directly predict* the sufferings of Christ, but rather indirectly prefigured them as a *type*. Typology, a subcategory of prophecy,⁴³ is traditionally defined as "the preordained representative relation which certain persons, events, and institutions of the Old Testament bear to corresponding persons, events, and institutions in the New."⁴⁴ Because David went beyond his own experience in Psalm 22, the typology there can be seen as blending into direct prophecy. The existence of this "hybrid" sort of typology caused Delitzsch to create a special class of psalms he called typico-prophetically Messianic, "in which David, describing his outward and inward experiences--experiences even in themselves typical--is carried beyond the limits of his individuality and present condition, and utters concerning himself that which, transcending human experience, is intended to become historically true only in Christ."⁴⁵ Though Delitzsch does not list examples of this class of psalms, Psalm 22 may have been one he had in mind.

To sum up this section, David's descriptions of his own suffering in this psalm closely correspond to what Jesus must have experienced

⁴³ S. Lewis Johnson writes that predictiveness is a principal feature of typology (*The Old Testament in the New* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1980], p. 56; and J. Dwight Pentecost writes, "By its very nature a type is essentially prophetic in character" (*Things to Come* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958], p. 52).

⁴⁴ Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 3d rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 19; 0), pp. 227-28. Ramm quotes Milton S. Terry, who in turn quoted Muenscher.

⁴⁵ F. Delitzsch, *The Psalms* (1871; reprint, Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), p. 69.

during His scourging and execution. What David wrote fits well with the exhaustion, stretching, suffocation, and circulatory stoppage that occur during crucifixion.⁴⁶

It seems likely that David was conscious of speaking of the future. And though it cannot be proven that his descriptions go beyond his own experience, they are clearly hyperbolic in nature. Regardless of what position one holds on these matters, it is difficult to deny that Psalm 22 contains one of the most striking and unique examples of typology in the Bible. The magnificent sovereignty of God in ordering history and inspiring David to mirror the future in so much detail, the trustworthiness of the Bible, and a strong witness to the validity of Jesus' claims to be the Messiah are clearly displayed.

This typological aspect, of course, adds another dimension to the meaning of the psalm. Jesus, as David's antitype, became the ultimate example of trusting God in the face of trials. But in Jesus' case, instead of being rescued, He was resurrected. Instead of sparing Jesus' single life, God provided through Jesus' death a glorious resurrection to new life for Him and for all who trust in Him. Also the event of the crucifixion became the antitypical event in which the seemingly exaggerated aspects of David's descriptions of his typical suffering found their literal fulfillment. Likewise David's enemies are types of the enemies of Christ. Those who mocked David prefigured the mockers at Christ's crucifixion. The bulls, lions, and dogs also prefigured Jesus' enemies--the Jewish leaders who accused Him, the Roman leaders who condemned Him, and the rabble who screamed, "Crucify him!"

Praise (vv. 22-31)

In this third major section David stated that having once again experienced God's care in the midst of trials, he publicly praised Him.

22 I will declare Your name to my brothers; 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 revere Him, all you descendants of Israel!

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

25 From You comes my praise in the great assembly; I will fulfill my

⁴⁶ See Bo Reicke, *The New Testament Era*, trans. David E. Green (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), pp. 186-87; *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. G. W. Bromiley, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979), s.v. "Cross," by D. G. Burke, 1:829-30; Josh McDowell, *Evidence That Demands a Verdict* (San Bernardino, CA: Campus Crusade for Christ, 1972), pp. 172-73, 204-7.

vows before those who fear Him.

26 The afflicted will eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the LORD. May 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 bow down before Him.

28 For the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations.

29 All the prosperous ones of the earth will eat and bow down; all who go down to the dust will kneel before Him--those who cannot keep themselves alive.

30 A seed shall serve Him; future generations will be told about the Lord.

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

DAVID PRAISED GOD AND EXHORTED THE GOD-FEARERS IN ISRAEL TO DO THE SAME (vv. 22-26)

David now added his praise (הלל appears four times in vv. 22-26) to the "praises of Israel" (v. 3), because God, unlike the people of verse 6, had not despised him, but instead had heard his cry.⁴⁷

David told God that he would publicly praise Him (v. 22). As previously mentioned, the writer to the Hebrews quoted verse 22 in Hebrews 2:12 as the words of the Messiah, establishing that his a view of the psalm was also messianic. He further explained in Hebrews 2:10-11 that the "brethren" of Psalm 22:22 are those who have received salvation. It is fellow-believers David now addressed as my brothers, "you who fear the Lord, those who fear Him, and "those who seek Him." Whereas he was surrounded before by a band of evildoers, now he was surrounded by an assembly of those who fear God. Just as the total absence of sympathizers in the first part of the psalm emphasized David's wretched aloneness, now the absence of the evildoers and the oft-mentioned presence of his brethren emphasizes the blessed fellowship he now experienced as part of the assembly of the God-fearers.

David exhorted his fellow God-fearers to praise God because He had heard David's cry for help (vv. 23-24).⁴⁸ Verse 23 makes it clear that it is specifically believing Israelites to whom David was

⁴⁷ Ridderbos points out that the carry-over of themes through the repetition of vocabulary establishes a close connection between verses 22-31 and the first two-thirds of the psalm (Die Psalmen, p. 190). He mentions these instances: הלל ("praise," vv. 22-26) from תהל ות "the praises of," v. 3); לא בזהב ("not despised," v. 24) from בזוי עם ("despised of the people," v. 6); plus homonymic repetition of שוע in verse 1 (מישועתי) "from saving me") and verse 24 (ובשוע) "he cried") and polysemantic repetition of אספר [ה] in verse 17 ("I can count") and verse 22 ("I will declare").

⁴⁸ Up to this point David addressed only God. He addressed God again in verse 25, but in the bulk of the rest of the psalm he addressed the assembly, with possible liturgical participation by them (see esp. v. 24, where both God and the psalmist are referred to in the third person).

declaring God's name and whom he now exhorted to praise (as opposed to the Gentiles of whom he would speak in verses 27-31).⁴⁹ Anderson writes, "Yahweh's saving work, even if it concerns primarily the individual, is not a private matter; it is relevant not only to the person concerned, but also to the whole congregation."⁵⁰ The three-fold parallel structure of this verse (praise Him/glorify Him/revere Him) shows the depth of feeling behind this call to praise.

David now praised God, because the Lord had heard his cry. For him, the recognition of an answer and the opportunity to praise came while he was still living on earth. But this psalm teaches that sometimes, as with David's antitype, Jesus Christ, God's timing and procedure will mean that man's opportunity to praise will occur only in the life to come. Believers are sometimes called on to trust that God has heard them even though it seems as if He is silent. Their solace is that He is not limited to earthly time and solutions.

The causal ׀ plus the double length (six words) of the opening line of verse 24 coupled with the threefold structure of the three synthetically parallel lines serves to emphasize this verse, which, as previously mentioned, summarizes the message of the psalm: God hears the cry of the afflicted. It is important to point out that the "afflicted" here refers to David, who used the same term in verse 26 to refer (implied through the synthetic parallelism of that verse) to those who "seek Him." Therefore the assembly of the believers could also be called the assembly of the afflicted ones (cf. Pss. 10; 14:6; 102). This fits perfectly with the concept that believers share in the sufferings of Christ at the hands of the unbelieving world (e.g., "the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings," Phil. 3:10, and "you participate in the sufferings of Christ," 1 Pet. 4:13).

David told God that He was David's source of praise and he promised to fulfill his vows publicly (v. 25). David turned back again to God and declared that as the Giver of deliverance He was both source and object of David's praise.⁵¹ The vows referred to in this verse probably relate to the thank-offering mentioned in Leviticus 7:11-13. Kidner writes, "The law encouraged those who vowed some service to God, should their prayer be granted, to fulfil the vow with a sacrifice, followed by a feast (26) which might last as long as two days (Lev. 7:16)."⁵²

⁴⁹ The word translated "descendants" is literally "seed" (זרע) which is repeated in verse 30, producing distant parallelism that helps bind verses 22-31 together structurally. See note 2.

⁵⁰ Anderson, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 192.

⁵¹ Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 244.

⁵² Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, p. 108.

David encouraged his fellow God-fearers by predicting that they too would be blessed (v. 26). Here it seems as if David once again addressed the assembly, since "the Lord" is in the third person. He continued the thanksgiving meal image, picturing his fellow-believers ("those who fear Him," v. 25, and "the afflicted," v. 26) as his guests. They will eat, be satisfied, and praise God, said David. "May your heart live forever!" is taken as the psalmist's blessing on his guests.⁵³ A similar expression is found in Psalm 69:32, "The poor will see and be glad--you who seek God, may your hearts live!" There the meaning is something like, "May you be inwardly revived!" It is notable that in Psalm 22:26 the word "forever" is added, giving a permanent or eternal dimension to the blessing. From the New Testament perspective, the antitype, Jesus Christ, invites believers to His banquet table and gives them an eternal blessing.⁵⁴ The ultimate meaning of the idea that God hears the cry of the afflicted (v. 24) is that He has provided Jesus to be their source of eternal salvation. Hebrews 5:7-9 says: "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became a source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

DAVID PREDICTED THAT ALL NATIONS IN THE FUTURE WILL PRAISE GOD
(vv. 27-31)

David predicted that all nations will someday turn to God and worship Him (vv. 27-29). Kidner writes, "Now David's language overflows all its natural banks."⁵⁵ David was truly a great king, and his impact on history is great, but the rescue of an earthly king would not result in the dominion of God over the whole earth and the enlistment of posterity for the purpose of proclaiming His righteousness to future generations. The last five verses make sense only in the light of the consequences proceeding from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

"All" is repeated four times in these verses. All nations (now the Gentiles come into the picture) in the whole earth will turn to the Lord and worship Him. This refers to that future time of which Isaiah wrote, "For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the

⁵³ Delitzsch, *The Psalms*, p. 324.

⁵⁴ The figure of the banquet is elsewhere used to picture the joy of participation in the blessings of God and especially those of the messianic kingdom (cf. Ps. 23:5; Isa. 25:6; Matt. 8:11; Rev. 3:20).

⁵⁵ Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, p. 109.

Lord as the waters cover the sea. In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him" (Isa. 11:9-10).⁵⁶ Having just sung of the joys of the salvation Christ has won for all believers, David now spoke of the glories of His future dominion over all the earth. The idea of all the nations of the world worshipping the Lord is stated twice in verse 27, and the idea of God's dominion over them is stated twice in verse 28. This hits both sides of the relationship twice and thus emphasizes God's complete dominion in the strongest possible way.

In keeping with this idea that all people will worship God, verse 29 returns to the figure of the banquet of verse 26. David wrote that all the "prosperous ones" (lit., "fat ones") of the earth will eat and worship, and all the perishing ("all who go down to the dust . . . those who cannot keep themselves alive") will kneel before the Lord.⁵⁷ Of whom did David write here?

Most commentators hold that the contrast here is between the prosperous and the poor.⁵⁸ It is probable that David was utilizing the poetic technique of merism. That is, the extremes of prosperity and poverty are meant to communicate the idea that everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, will someday bow before God.⁵⁹

David predicted that future generations will proclaim to succeeding generations what God has done (vv. 30-31). Finally David saw "a seed" (posterity) serving God, whose task is to proclaim the righteousness of the Lord to future generations, who in turn will tell

⁵⁶ Exactly when and where in the future any given interpreter believes this will happen depends on his eschatology. This writer takes the premillennial position that these passages refer to the time of the millennium, the 1,000-year earthly reign of Christ referred to in Revelation 20:1-6.

⁵⁷ Some commentators, feeling that the meaning of the last phrase of verse 29 is obscure, join it to the first line of verse 30, with the result: "As for him that could not keep his soul alive, [his] seed shall serve Him" (Cohen, *The Psalms*, p. 66). However, this change seems to create a new problem, since it is not clear how proclaiming the Lord's righteousness to future generations is a form of service to those that have passed on; such activity is clearly, however, a service to the Lord.

⁵⁸ E.g., Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, p. 244. Anderson (*The Book of Psalms*, p. 194) and Craigie (*Psalms 1-50*, p. 197) feel the verse is obscure and emend the text to read "those who sleep" (יָנִי) instead of "fat ones" (יָדֵי) to provide a parallel to "those who go down" in the following clause, but this has no manuscript support. Dahood comes up with a similar emendation (*Psalms I, 1-50*, p. 143).

⁵⁹ This commends itself as the simplest solution. A second possible interpretation is that the idea of "the quick and the dead" is meant to be communicated. Kirkpatrick likes this option of the physically living versus the dead but considers the idea (the quick and the dead bowing in homage before the universal sovereign) "foreign to the O.T." (*The Book of Psalms*, p. 123). In answer to this objection, however, it should be remembered that David was speaking here about the future, and so the context is one in which the presentation of new concepts could be expected. This idea is not foreign to the New Testament picture of the future.

generations beyond them. This is reminiscent of what Isaiah wrote in Isaiah 12:4-5: "In that day you will say: 'Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done, and proclaim that his name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things; let this be known to all the world.'" The two-word colon at the end of Psalm 22:31 ("that He has done it") makes a dramatic conclusion reminiscent of Jesus' words on the cross: "It is finished" (John 19:30). What has Jesus done? At the cross He accomplished the greatest victory in the history of the world. Having defeated sin, death, and Satan, He offers mankind the gift of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Despite his feelings of being forsaken by God and man, David *drew encouragement from God's past record of faithfulness*. And despite his terrible sufferings at the hands of his enemies, he *kept praying*, and he ultimately found that God had heard his cries for help. As David's antitype, Jesus is the prime example of this kind of persevering faith. The lesson comes through clearly that *God hears the prayers of the faithful and answers according to His own perfect plan*. In Jesus' case, God's answer took a totally unexpected form; instead of being *rescued*, He was *resurrected*. Instead of sparing Jesus' single life, God purchased through Jesus' death a glorious resurrection to new life for all who trust in Him. Likewise God's answers to believer's prayers may not be perceived by them till they enter the life to come. But then all their sorrows will be swallowed up in the joy of His presence and the recognition of His dealing with them in His perfect wisdom.

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