

MOUNT SINAI MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

MONDAY EVENING BIBLE STUDY

Psalm 22

A Prophecy of the Cross

Quote

“The strongest objective argument for the validity of Scripture comes from fulfilled Bible prophecy.”

John MacArthur

I. Introduction

The Amazing Proof of Prophecy

The greatest proof that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant Word of God is fulfilled prophecy. Only God knows the future. This is because only God ordains the future and only he can bring it to pass. Students of Scripture understand that many events were recorded in Scripture hundreds of years before they came to pass, and each one fulfilled brings indisputable confirmation that the Scripture is what it claims to be—the inspired, infallible Word of God.

Nowhere is this validation of the Bible more true than those prophecies which were fulfilled at the first coming of Jesus Christ. Although recorded many centuries before his incarnation, more than one hundred Old Testament prophecies concerning the life and ministry of Christ were perfectly fulfilled in the New Testament. Each one documents the authenticity of Scripture.

This is what makes Psalm 22 so amazing. Written one thousand years before the first coming of Christ, this psalm reads as if it were actually recorded by a person standing at the foot of the **cross**. The very words spoken by Christ from the **cross**, as well as his thoughts and the injuries he suffered, are recorded here. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, set forth in this psalm a graphic portrayal of the **cross** hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented as a form of capital punishment. With the precision of an eyewitness observing the crucifixion of the

Lord Jesus Christ, David, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, wrote the most detailed description of the **cross** found anywhere in Scripture. Here is David's preview of the **cross**, a masterpiece that has been called "the fifth gospel," and "the gospel according to David."

It must be admitted that differing opinions exist about whether David wrote this psalm to describe a particular suffering that he himself experienced or as a prophetic psalm looking forward to the **Messiah**. Undoubtedly, this psalm was written primarily with a future event in mind, specifically the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This interpretation is supported by several facts.

First, there are no recorded events in the life of David that correspond to this event.

Second, the psalm has specific phrases that could only be used of someone undergoing crucifixion. Third, unlike other psalms, this psalm contains no mention of the psalmist's personal **sin**, **confession** of **sin**, or even regret for the pains that he was suffering. Fourth, there is no call to God for vindication of wrongs suffered. Surely if David were writing this psalm of himself, there would be some call for God's vengeance to fall on his enemies. But there is no cry for vindication on his behalf. Therefore, it is concluded that this psalm is a prophetic picture of the coming suffering Servant, the **Messiah**, who would suffer a grueling execution and would be forsaken of God so his people would know the Lord's **forgiveness**.

II. Commentary

MAIN IDEA

The Son of God will be forsaken by God, put to death by **evil** men, yet remain fully confident in the faithfulness of God to deliver him. This the Lord did so he would declare his victory.

A Prophecy of the Cross

A Christ's Separation From God (22:1–2)

SUPPORTING IDEA: God was distant from Jesus as he hung on the **cross** and did not answer his plea, yet he trusted God for his deliverance.

22:1. The psalm begins with a poignant rhetorical question that is meant to show the rejection and abandonment suffered by the Son: **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** This was the fourth saying of Jesus uttered on the **cross**. It was

the first statement spoken under the shroud of darkness. The intimate call by the Son was like the call of a lost child searching for the father whose face he longed to see again. Yet the absence of the words “my Father” and the use of the words “my God” in their stead indicate a breach in the relationship within the **Godhead**. This is followed by three statements in which the suffering one asks, Why have you forsaken me?

These were the exact words of Christ as quoted in the ninth hour of the day (3:00 p.m.) at the end of the three-hour period of darkness (cp. Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34).

This feeling of abandonment went further because the psalmist continued, **Why are you so far from saving me?** God purposely distanced himself from Jesus as he poured out his wrath on the **sin** bearer (Isa. 53:10) of his people. The Son cried out in desperation, “Why have you turned your back on me in the hour of my greatest need?” Yet the withdrawal was followed by God’s refusal to listen to the Son’s plea, Why are you **so far from the words of my groaning?**

No answer came because it was God himself who poured out his wrath on his suffering servant under the veil of darkness. The holiness of God forbade him from intervening in the death of Jesus Christ, since he became **sin** on behalf of his people (Isa. 53:4–6; 2 Cor. 5:21). This separation was the greatest **hell** known by Christ—to be utterly rejected by the Father with whom he enjoyed unhindered, intimate fellowship throughout all eternity. Furthermore, Jesus absorbed God’s wrath for the sins of many.

22:2. This rejection came from one who was not detached from God. This is evident in the words, **O my God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer.** The desired answer did not come by day. This is a reference to the first three hours of the crucifixion of Jesus. As Jesus hung on the **cross by night**, he was **not silent**, yet he still failed to receive a response. The silence of heaven was an experience that Jesus had never known (John 11:41–42). The final three hours of darkness that veiled the earth (noon to 3:00 p.m.) before the death of Jesus is surely the night to which the psalmist referred (cp. Matt. 27:45).

B Christ’s Strength From God (22:3–5)

SUPPORTING IDEA: Jesus affirms his trust in God to deliver him, knowing he will not be disappointed.

22:3a. These questions that seem to convey doubt and confusion are followed by a strong assertion of trust in God and his **sovereignty**. Christ thought to himself, **Yet you are enthroned**, as an affirmation of his understanding that the silence of God did not mean that God had abdicated his position as the sovereign ruler over the affairs of men. Also, this was the answer to Christ's own question "Why?" When Jesus became **sin** for the many, **the Holy One**, God, hid his face from his own beloved Son. He understood that a **holy** God would not have fellowship with one who was sinful and unclean.

22:3b–5. Furthermore, the psalmist knew that God was the praise of Israel, and this was exemplified by the fact that the **fathers put their trust** in God. The psalmist remembered the faithfulness of God from his past witness when dealing with Israel. Three times in verses 4–5 the verb for *trust* (Heb. *batah*) is used as a synonym for **faith** in God. Realizing the past faithfulness of God, the psalmist could confidently assert, **They trusted and you delivered them** (cp. Ps. 44:1). God has always been faithful to deliver his people who put their trust in him. "Will God not therefore also be faithful to deliver me?" pictures the psalmist in desperation.

Christ was encouraged to persevere upon the **cross**, as he meditated on the character of God and his faithfulness to deliver his own in his darkest hour. If the nation of Israel **cried to** the Lord and **were saved**, how much more the Son of God? From the beginning of the nation through the lineage of Abraham (cp. Gen. 15:6), the nation originated with men and women who **trusted and were not disappointed** in God (cp. Heb. 11). Indeed, the Son of God would not be disappointed because the same Father who hid his face from his Son would raise him from the grave in three days.

C Christ's Scorn From God (22:6–8)

SUPPORTING IDEA: The ridicule and derision hurled at Jesus Christ by **evil** men was countered by a trust in God that was active from the time he was in the womb of his mother.

22:6. The rejection of the Anointed One was not restricted to God alone. Man seized the opportunity but not because of an inherit holiness. Jesus lamented, **I am a worm**, which is an expression of reproach and is used of a maggot that is utterly

rejected. Moreover, he stated that he was **not a man**. The treatment that Jesus faced on the **cross** was inhumane. He was beaten so severely that a person who knew him probably could not recognize him (Isa. 52:14; 53:2–3). The scorn of man was shown in the ill treatment that Jesus suffered at the hands of satanic men who spit upon him (Matt. 26:67), struck him (Matt. 26:67–68), spoke blasphemous words against him (Luke 22:65), flogged him (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:16; John 19:1), and beat him with a staff (Matt. 27:30). The hatred and reproach shown by those who crucified Jesus were prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 53:3–4, 7–8).

22:7–8. The crowd’s reaction as they looked to the **cross** demonstrated the venom of hatred from those who crucified the Lord. Neither the crowds nor the religious leaders, having successfully pushed for the execution of Jesus, were satisfied in their thirst for blood. The phrase all who see me mock me indicates that the psalmist foresaw that as Jesus hung on the **cross**, many would **hurl** blasphemous **insults** while **shaking their heads**. This refers to a mocking gesture similar to jeering or sticking out the tongue. Beyond the outward actions of disgust were the insults that flowed from the mouths of his accusers (cp. Matt. 27:43; Mark 15:29–32; Luke 23:35–37).

D Christ’s Submission to God (22:9–10)

SUPPORTING IDEA: Jesus remembers God’s faithfulness to him at birth and throughout his life.

22:9–10. Contrary to the accusations of the mockers, Jesus knew that God **brought him out of the womb**—a reference to the virgin birth—and that God had made him trust as a child. Like Job, Jesus could say of God, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15 KJV). Furthermore, while in his mother’s womb, he declared, **you have been my God** (Jer. 1:5). Earlier, he meditated on God’s faithfulness to others, but presently there was a shift to God’s faithfulness to him. As Jesus suffered, he was sustained by meditating on how God had sustained him.

E Christ’s Suffering From God (22:11–18)

SUPPORTING IDEA: The anguish and misery placed on the Lord Jesus when he was on the **cross** attest to the depraved condition of the human heart and the attitudes of men toward God and his Christ.

22:11–15. The suffering Son asked God to bridge the distance between them: **Do not be far from me, for trouble is near.** Furthermore, Jesus pleaded, **There is no one to help** because his disciples and friends had deserted him. The trouble Jesus encountered on the **cross** is given in the imagery of being surrounded by a pack of wild, ravenous animals. The picture is one of base brutality. Note the metaphors used in comparing these people to beasts: **strong bulls** (v. 12), **roaring lions** (v. 13), dogs (vv. 16, 20), wild oxen (v. 21). When people reject God, they act like animals. The crowd was like a bloodthirsty pack of beasts.

The Lord's strength upon the **cross** was waning as his heart **turned to wax** and **melted away within him**. This failing strength, mingled with the blistering heat, produced an extreme thirst for water. This is indicated by the phrase **my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth**. The Lord Jesus Christ, the very one who created the rivers and lakes and who freely gives the water of life, thirsted on the **cross** (John 19:28). Even though **evil** men threatened, he realized that God is sovereign and the one who would lay him in the dust of death according to his eternal plan.

22:16–18. These **evil** men who crucified Christ were like **wild dogs who pierced his hands and his feet**. This is a prophetic reference to the wounds Jesus suffered in his crucifixion (cp. Isa. 53:5; Zech. 12:10). Although the original text is unclear, "like a lion, my hands my feet," this is a reference to the mauling he suffered or to the binding of his hands and feet. While on the **cross**, he thought, **I can count all my bones** because he could feel the pain of each one. He was aware that people stared and gloated over him. Here is the shame and indignity Christ felt because of his nakedness before the crowd, his mother, and the other women. The soldiers divided his garments and **cast lots** for his **clothing** (cp. Matt. 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24), a phrase that documents his nakedness.

F Christ's Supplication to God (22:19–21)

SUPPORTING IDEA: As Christ was crucified, he implored the Father to come to his aid and to save him from those who sought to destroy him.

22:19–20. This silent prayer offered by Christ as he hung on the **cross** begins with a plea to the Father to **be not far off**. For Jesus this dreadful distance from the Father, his **Strength**, was unbearable. So he cried, **come quickly to help me. Deliver my life from the sword, my precious life from the power of the dogs.**

22:21. Furthermore, Jesus pleaded, **Rescue me from the mouth of the lions; save me from the horns of the wild oxen.** Like the goring of the horns of a wild oxen, the nails pierced his hands and feet. Yet verse 21 ends on a note of triumph. The verb translated save me literally means, “you have heard me.” Therefore, this section ends on an optimistic note and begins an important turning point in the mood of the psalm. As Christ died on the **cross**, he anticipated the Father’s deliverance, believing his cry had been heard.

G Christ’s Salvation for God (22:22–31)

SUPPORTING IDEA: Having fulfilled his work of redemption, Jesus declares his victory at the **cross** to his disciples who will proclaim it to the nations.

22:22–24. There is a major shift at this point from a plea for deliverance to an affirmation of praise to God for his faithfulness. These verses imply a future resurrection of Christ in which he would announce his triumph over **sin** and death. From Hebrews 2:12, it is clear that Christ proclaimed, **I will declare your name to my brothers.** This verse is quoted in Hebrews 2:12 as referring to Christ. It tells us that Jesus is the speaker and will continue to be throughout the rest of this psalm. **In the congregation I will praise you** is a prophecy concerning Jesus’ appearance in the upper room to his disciples, later to five hundred at once, and ultimately to those in heaven (cp. 1 Cor. 15:5–7).

All you descendants of Jacob is a reference to Jewish converts after his resurrection, beginning with Pentecost. Certainly the gospel was proclaimed to the Jews first (cp. Rom. 1:16) as the first church was planted in **Jerusalem**, the **holy** city. Jesus understood this as he sent his disciples out to the “lost sheep of Israel” (cp. Matt. 10:5–6). Before any other nation, Israel was chosen by God to honor him. At this point Jesus pleaded for his people to **revere him, all you descendants of Israel!** Christ wanted the people to know that, although he was despised by them, God had not **despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one.** Nor had God **hidden his face from him.** God had approved of the **sacrifice** Jesus offered to the Father for the reconciliation of his people.

22:25–29. In view of God’s listening to his cry for help, the psalmist wrote, **From you comes the theme of my praise.** Not only was God the *object* of praise, but he was also the *source*. The vows were probably thank offerings vowed during his

trouble. In such cases the flesh of the **sacrifice** offered was to be eaten (Lev. 7:16). This explains the imagery of a banquet or feast at which **the poor** would **eat and be satisfied**. Because of the great **sacrifice** offered by Christ, people may enter into his presence so that **they who seek the Lord will praise him**. The **great assembly** refers to **all the ends of the earth** who **will remember and turn to the Lord**.

Included in the gracious redemptive plan of God that was revealed to Abraham was the extension of God's **grace** to bless people from all nations (cp. Gen. 12:3). For God deemed in eternity past that **families of the nations would bow down before him** (cp. Pss. 72:8–11; 96:10–13; Rev. 5:9). This submission resulted from the **dominion that belongs to the Lord as he rules over the nations**.

And just as **the poor** would **eat and be satisfied** at this banquet, so the **rich of the earth** would **feast and worship** because there will be a banquet in the kingdom of heaven for all the people of God (cp. Isa. 25:6). The phrase **all who go down to the dust will kneel before him** was perhaps the phrase the apostle Paul had in mind when he wrote Philippians 2:10 as he thought of the exaltation of Christ by God the Father.

22:30–31. The word **posterity** refers to **future generations** yet unborn who would serve God because of the remnant's faithfulness to tell them **about the Lord** and **proclaim his righteousness**. This proclamation of the gospel hinges on the **truth** that he has done it. This is another way of stating that Christ has finished it (cp. Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 19:30). It is finished! Because the righteous demands of God were fully met by the atoning work of Christ on behalf of all who believe on Jesus, the **righteousness** of God will be applied to their account.