

Christ In The Old Testament

Lesson 5

Psalm 22

Psalm 22 begins with the words, *“My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.”* The same phrase is spoken by our Lord Jesus while on the cross (**Matthew 27:46**), so this the first indication that the psalm must be a Messianic prophecy. It is the nature of this prophecy, however, that has confused many Christians, and led them to a misunderstanding of the point of the text. The very first lesson that must be considered is that not all of the psalm is necessarily Messianic prophecy. Some of the language of the piece is just not congruent with what we understand about Christ – His nature, His attitude, His actual being. The same would be true of many prophetic texts! While Christ is truly the underlying character throughout all the scriptures, not every prophecy has specific application to Him. For example, in **Psalm 22:2**, the writer says, *“O my God, I cry by day, but Thou dost not answer; and by night, but I have no rest.”* While this certainly may seem like it is true for us (for we do not have direct verbal communication from God to comfort us, and it sometimes *seems* like He is not listening), the scriptures clearly teach that Christ was, in fact, comforted and answered by the Lord when He prayed to Him in the garden in **Luke 22:43**. Also notice **22:19-21**, in which the speaker pleads with God to deliver him from death, and to save his *“only life.”* Does this sound like the prayer of Jesus, though? While Jesus asked God to *“let this cup pass,”* He did not continue to plead with Him when the decision was made. Not only that, from the very beginning of time, Jesus knew that He had to die on the cross in order for salvation to come to the world (**Luke 9:22**). *“...My only life from the power of the dog...”* Why would Christ be praying that His only life be saved, if He knew full well that He would be resurrected after His death? Truly, Jesus had no need for such a prayer. The point is that not all of **Psalm 22** applies to Jesus, so we must consider very closely the passages before us, and make application only when it is appropriate.

As for the Messianic prophecies within **Psalm 22**, we should carefully seek to understand what **22:1** means, as there are many who have misunderstood what

Jesus meant to say on the cross. Does Jesus mean that God actually has forsaken Him? Does He mean that God abandoned Him on the cross and somehow betrayed Him or tricked Him into dying in such a manner? First, Jesus knew He would die, and He was completely prepared for it beforehand (**Luke 9:22**). So to say that Christ felt tricked into the cross is incorrect. Second, Jesus never sinned in His entire life (**Hebrews 4:15**), so to say that He became angry with God on the cross is also an illogical statement. For a better explanation of **22:1**, consider this: Rather than saying this phrase for the purpose of blaming God, Christ may have said it to force the spectators around Him to think about the act they were doing. Perhaps Jesus says those words to refer everybody back to this psalm, to let the world know that He is the Messiah that the prophets wrote about hundreds of years earlier. By quoting those words, Christ is essentially saying, “Hey, do you remember **Psalm 22**? Well, go read it right now and you will see that the psalm is actually about Me. You have fulfilled every prophecy that was meant to happen.” Besides, we need to ask ourselves why He would be asking this question. Why *did* God forsake Him and let Him die on the cross? My God, my God, you forsook Christ so that I could be freed from the bondage of sin! My God, my God, Christ suffered all those terrible things for me, because I am a sinner! My God, my God, why did you forsake Christ? For me. Christ may have made that statement for the purpose of making all of us stop and think about His sacrifice.

Discussion Question: If it was so apparent, based on this psalm, that the chief priests, scribes, and Pharisees were fulfilling a prophecy, why did they not recognize it at the time? What factors could have contributed to their blind hatred of Jesus?

“But I am a worm, and not a man, a reproach of men, and despised by the people. All who see me sneer at me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit yourself to the Lord; let Him deliver him; let Him rescue him, because he delights in him’” (22:6-8). What makes this section of verses so very interesting is to see how accurately the prophesy came true. Take note of a few details in **Luke 23:32-39** and **Mark 15:27-32**. Just as it was predicted in **Psalm 22**, the people of Christ’s day mocked Him and hurled many insults at Him. From their perspective,

He was less than a man – considered a worm by the rulers of the Jews and the Roman heathens.

22:9-10 – As a side note, it might be helpful to note these two verses. One of the most prominent issues of our time is abortion, and many people do not have a good understanding of how God feels about the practice. Quite clearly, babies in the womb are loved by God and considered living souls because the verse states, *“Upon Thee I was cast from birth; Thou hast been my God from my mother’s womb.”* Even in his mother’s womb, the writer is saying that God loved him and cared for him. If even the Almighty considers unborn babies alive, then we should also.

22:11-18 – These verses make up the greatest portion of prophetic writing in the entire psalm, and noting the various fulfilled predictions will be very beneficial. We must all work hard at grasping the sacrifice of Jesus, and this text serves as a marvelous example of how He felt hanging on the cross! *“Be not far from me, for trouble is near; for there is one to help”* (**22:11**). In our Lord’s moment of need, who was there to support Him? Did not all of His disciples flee when He was arrested (**Matthew 26:56**)? When He needed His friends most of all, He found them sleeping in the Garden, unable to stay awake to pray with Jesus. Truly, our Lord had been abandoned by everybody but the Father. *“Many bulls have surrounded...”* The bull would have been considered an animal of power and uncontrollable ruthlessness – and image that seems to fit the madness surrounding Christ’s “trial” and His crucifixion. *“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within me”* (**22:14**). Again, take note of the fulfilled prophecies: it was water and blood that poured from His body while on the cross; it would have been conceivable for many of His bones to be out of joint, for crucifixion was an excruciatingly long way of dying (it was not uncommon for the wrists, elbows, and shoulders to be completely pulled out of their joints as a result of the crucifixion). *“My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws...”* (**22:15**). A potsherd is a piece of a broken clay pot, and would conjure up images of a complete lack of water. Also, the account of Christ’s experience on the cross indicates that He was quite thirsty during the process, which is not surprising since He would have conceivably gone many hours without any liquid. *“They pierced my hands and my feet”* (**22:16**). While it may have been common to tie criminals up to their crosses, for some reason it was decided to nail Jesus to His (although, it may have actually been both nails and rope). It is interesting that none of the Gospel accounts actually

record His hands and feet being nailed, but we can assume that such was the case because Thomas, in **John 20:25** asks to see the imprint of the nails in the hands of the resurrected Jesus. *“I can count all my bones...”* (**22:17**). This is a detail that could easily be passed over, so take special note of it. Along with other prophecies, this verse makes it clear that Jesus would be able to count all of his bones, i.e., none of His bones would be broken, and He would be able to count each and every one of them as intact. This prophecy is fulfilled in **John 19:32-36**, when one of the Roman soldiers decides not to break the legs of Jesus on the cross but pierces Him instead. *“They divide my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots”* (**22:18**). Be amazed at how specific these prophecies are, and how precisely they are accomplished in Jesus. In the Gospels we read that the Roman soldiers did indeed cast lots for the clothes of Jesus (**John 19:23-24**).

22:22 – *“I will tell of Thy name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise Thee.”* This is directly quoted in **Hebrews 2:12**, and is clearly fulfilled in Jesus. The Hebrew writer uses the verse as proof of Jesus’ close relationship to His followers. He considers us “brethren” and is not ashamed of having a relationship with us. To be sure, Jesus praised the name of God in the midst of great assemblies during His earthly ministry. He spoke in front of massive crowds, sometimes very receptive and sometimes not. During the last week, when Jerusalem’s population would have swelled to six figures or more because of the Passover celebration, it would not be unrealistic to imagine crowds in the thousands listening to Jesus speak. Consider **John 12:9-19** and **12:28-29**. There is, however, another way we can take the “assembly” reference. It could be that the assembly is made up of His believers in a spiritual sense, not just literal assemblies of people. He is, to this day, standing in the midst of His people praising the Father along with us (**Colossians 3:14-17**).

“From Thee comes my praise in the great assembly; I shall pay my vows before those who fear Him. The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the Lord. Let your heart live forever!” (**22:25-26**)

Discussion Question: Verse 30 mentions that *“it will be told of the Lord to the coming generation.”* What do you think this is referring to? What is the “coming generation”?