

**Psalm 22:**  
**The Prayer of the Righteous Sufferer**

*Translation and Notes*

To the director. According to the doe of the dawn. A song of David.

<sup>1</sup>My God, my God, †why have you abandoned me? 4/4  
Far from my deliverance are the words of my groaning.

† LXX adds before this "Pay attention to me."

<sup>2</sup>My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer; 5/4  
And by night, but I have no rest.†

† LXX: "There is no folly to me."

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<sup>3</sup>But you are holy;† 2/3  
The one who sits enthroned (upon) the praises of Israel.

† LXX: But you in holy(ness?) dwell, the praise of Israel.

<sup>4</sup>In you our fathers trusted; 3/2  
They trusted and you delivered them.

<sup>5</sup>To you they cried out and they were delivered; 3/3  
In you they trusted and were not ashamed.

<sup>6</sup>But I am a worm, and not a man; 3/4  
A reproach of humans and despised of the people.

<sup>7</sup>All who see me mock me; 3/4  
They sneer, they shake (their head).

<sup>8</sup>“Roll† (your distress) to the LORD, let him deliver him; 3/4  
Let him rescue him, for he delights in him.”

† LXX: "He hoped upon the Lord."

<sup>9</sup>But you are the one who took me from the womb; 4/3  
Who made me trust upon my mother’s breasts.

<sup>10</sup>Upon you I was cast from the womb; 3/4  
From the belly of my mother you (have been) my God.

<sup>11</sup>Do not be far from me, 2/2/2  
For distress is near,  
For there is none to help.

<sup>12</sup>Many bulls have surrounded me; 3/3  
Mighty (bulls) of Bashan† have encircled me.

† LXX apparently reads **ןשד** (fat) instead of **ןשב**, Bashan.

<sup>13</sup>They have opened their mouth(s) over me; 3/3  
A lion, tearing and roaring.

<sup>14</sup>I am poured out like water; 2/3  
And all my bones have become separated;

My heart has become like the wax, 3/3  
It is melted within my belly.

<sup>15</sup>My strength is dried up like the potsherd, 3/3/3  
And my tongue cleaves† (to) my jaws,  
And you lay me in the dust of death.

† DSS: **שדבש** (from *davash*, honey, perhaps “to be sticky” (Aramaic verb), nstead of MT **שדבק** (“is stuck”).

<sup>16</sup>For dogs have surrounded me; 3/3/3  
A company of evildoers has encircled me,  
† They have bound my hands and feet.

† MT: “Like a lion my hands and Feet.” *DSS*: **כרו** instead of **כארי**. (DSS 4Q88); Also, 5/6Hev1b etc. has **כרו**, =**כרה** I, “dig out, hollow.” There is also a hypothetical **כרה** IV, “to wrap (with a turban),” with the meaning possibly of “to bind.” LXX understood it from **כרה** I, “to dig out,” hence “They have dug out my hands and feet,” meaning perhaps “pierced.” Roberts suggests “shriveled,” from Akkadian and Syriac cognates; Allen suggests “exhausted.”

<sup>17</sup>I can count all my bones; 2/3  
They behold, they look at me.

<sup>18</sup>They divide my garments for themselves; 3/3  
And over my clothing they cast lots.

<sup>19</sup>But you, O LORD, do not be far away; 3/3  
O my strength, hasten† to my aid.

† Apparently the LXX translator did not understand Hebrew **שחוש**, “hasten”; it has “be attentive to my help.”

<sup>20</sup>Deliver my life from the sword; 3/2  
My only soul† from the power of the dog;  
† MT and LXX both have "my only," or "unique" (יְחִיד, *yehîd*, "only (son)"; LXX μονογενῆ μου, "my unique," or "my only (begotten son),” compare with 1 John

<sup>21</sup>Save me from the mouth of the lion! 3

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Then from the horns of the wild ox† you answered me.§ 3  
† LXX has μονοκέρωσ, "unicorn."  
§ LXX understood the Hebrew to be from ענה II, "to humiliate," or more likely, a derivative ענוה, "humility," "my humble state," instead of ענה I, "to answer."

<sup>22</sup>I will tell your name to my brothers; 3/3  
In the midst of the congregation I will praise you.

<sup>23</sup>Praise him, those who fear the Lord; 3/3/4  
All of the seed of Jacob, give him glory;  
Fear him, all of the seed of Israel.

<sup>24</sup>For he has not despised 3/4  
Or detested the affliction of the afflicted,

And he did not hide his face from him, 3/3  
But he heard when he cried out to him.

<sup>25</sup>From you comes my praise in the great congregation; 4/4  
My vows I repay before those who fear him.

<sup>26</sup>The humble shall eat and be satisfied; 3/3/3  
Those who seek him will praise the Lord;  
May your hearts live forever.

<sup>27</sup>All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the LORD; 3/2

And all the families of the nations will bow down before you. 2/3

<sup>28</sup>For kingship belongs to the LORD; 3/2  
For he rules over the nations.

<sup>29</sup>All those who sleep† in the earth shall eat and worship; 4/4/3  
All those who go down to the dust shall bow down before him,  
The one whose soul he could not keep alive.§

† LXX says along with the Hebrew MT, “all the fat ones of the earth.”

§ Garbled in the LXX, and probably also the Hebrew. LXX: "And my soul, it lives."

<sup>30</sup>Offspring will serve him; 2/3  
They will be told of the Lord for generation(s).

<sup>31</sup>They will come and they will declare his righteousness; 3/4  
To a people (un)born that he has done (it).

### *Introduction*

There are several psalms which have "pride of place" in the Judeo-Christian appropriation of psalmody over the ages: Psalm 1, Psalm 23, Psalm 51, Psalm 100, Psalm 148, among others, come to mind. Psalm 22 has a special place in such a litany of psalms, as it serves as an interpretive and structuring guide to the passion narrative in Matthew and in Mark, and Jesus himself quotes Psalm 22:1 with reference to his own suffering and experience of the absence of God.

### *Some Textual Difficulties*

Any study of Psalm 22 must begin with a close look at the text. Even a quick glance at modern English translations will show that there are several places where the translations simply do not agree and where the attentive preacher or teacher must make decisions concerning the original text.

The first of these occurs immediately in v. 1. It may be that in antiquity, no less than in our day, the opening words were “off-putting.” We do not like to think about God abandoning us. The LXX includes a phrase not present in the Hebrew:

"O God, my God, pay attention to me!" It is possible that this phrase was either an ancient gloss, or else was included because the phrase "Let your ears be attentive" or "pay attention to my cry" is so common in the psalms and prophetic literature (see especially Ps 5:2, 10:17, 17:1, 55:2, 61:1, 66:19, 86:6, 130:2, and 142:6, and many times in the prophetic literature). Instead of an accusation, therefore ("Why have you abandoned me?"), the LXX of psalm 22 begins with a petition.

Perhaps the most well-known textual problem is in v. 16, where the Hebrew text has "like a lion my hands and feet." It is not immediately obvious what a lion has to do with the psalmist's hands and feet. This is made doubly difficult, because the LXX here has "They have dug out my hands and feet," quoted in Matthew with reference to Jesus' crucifixion, commonly translated in the English as "they have pierced my hands and feet" (see ESV, NIV, NASB; but compare with NRSV, which has "shriveled," following Roberts, instead of "pierced").

The Dead Sea Scrolls may come to our aid here. The Hebrew says *kā'ārî*, "like a lion," which is also reflected in one scroll from the DSS, but other scrolls have *kru* and *kry* (note that the DSS had no vowels). The problem 1) is the presence of the letter aleph (a ' above), and 2) the letter y at the end of the word when one expects a *w/u*. The w/y confusion is extremely common in every era of

the Hebrew language. The aleph, a silent letter, may have been included by accident, or is an “intrusive” aleph.<sup>1</sup> *krh/y* I means “to dig,” hollow out,” followed by the LXX. It is also unclear how one digs or hollows out hands and feet. Some have suggested a hypothetical verb *krh* IV, “to wrap,” as in the binding of hands and feet, which may make sense in this context. Roberts has suggested a *krh* V, “to be shrunken or shriveled,” while Allen suggests a *klh* III, “to be exhausted.” While the difficulties are almost insurmountable, hands and feet “bound” or “shriveled” seems to convey the best sense. This text is nowhere alluded to in Matthew 27, perhaps not surprising if the original did not mention “piercing hands and feet.”

A couple of other textual difficulties are worth mentioning. The first is in v. 20, where the LXX translates the Hebrew *yehîdatî* (“my only”) by μονογενῆ μου (*monogenā mou*), “my uniqueness, or “my only one.” This is unusual terminology in Hebrew, but does occur in Genesis 22:2, 12, and 16 with reference to Isaac being offered as the “only son” (*yehîd*) of Abraham. It is rare, occurring only 12 times in the Hebrew Bible. Given Matthew’s use of the psalm in the passion narrative, and the use in Genesis to depict Abraham’s sacrifice of his only son, the statement in 1

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<sup>1</sup> See Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms I (1-50)* (Anchor Bible, vol. 16; New York: Doubleday, 1965), 143. This is not at all impossible, as in this same text we have an example of “wild bulls,” *remîm*, which also occurs as *re’îmîm*.

John 4:9 has special meaning:

In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son ([μὸνογενή](#)) into the world, so that we might live through him.

V. 21b has long been a crux in the understanding of Psalm 22. A quick glance at the translations will underscore the problem:

NIV: Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;  
*save me* from the horns of the wild oxen.

RSV: Save me from the mouth of the lion,  
*my afflicted soul* from the horns of the wild oxen!

ESV: Save me from the mouth of the lion!  
*You have rescued me* from the horns of the wild oxen!

The issue here has to do with the structure of Psalm 22 and with our understanding of the theology of the lament psalms in general. In terms of structure, the question is where the “shift” from lament to praise occurs, as so often happens in the individual psalms of lament: at 21b, or v. 22? If v. 22, the shift is completely abrupt, but not unusual, as we see also in Psalm 6 (the radical shift between vv. 7 and 8). If in v. 21b, then the *parallelismus membrorum* is interrupted, because the A and B lines no longer exactly correspond. This is not really a problem, as also vv. 13, 14, 15, 16, and 17 do not exactly repeat the thought in synonymous parallelism either. If the “response” section of the individual lament indicates that God has *heard* the psalmist’s cry, and will at some point deliver the psalmist in the

undisclosed future (most verbs in the response sections are imperfects, indicating action which has not yet occurred!), then the fact that God has *answered* the psalmist from the horns of the wild ox is highly significant. The answer is that the God who was perceived as far off (vv. 11 and 19) is now close to the psalmist in his distress.

The last significant textual problem occurs in v. 29, “All the fat ones (*dishnêy*) of the earth,” followed by most English translations. The NRSV follows Dahood’s recommended reading, *di yishnêy*, “those who sleep in the earth,” parallel to “those who go down to the dust.” Read with Dahood, as it is unclear how “fat ones” = the living or the dead.<sup>2</sup>

### *The Structure of Psalm 22*

Something has been said about the structure of Psalm 22 above, in terms of the response section, characterized by a radical shift from lament to praise in many of the laments (except psalm 88, and possibly one or two others). While perceiving the structure of ancient poetry is difficult at best, and varies considerably from commentator to commentator,<sup>3</sup> there are patterns and commonalities which can be

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<sup>2</sup> Dahood, 143.

<sup>3</sup> For example, Allen suggests

shown within psalm 22 and between this and other lament psalms.<sup>4</sup> Individual laments have three sections. First, an *introduction*, in which the psalmist's problem is laid out in general terms and the theme of the psalm is expressed. This may be in the form of a petition, a complaint, or even a thanksgiving. Second is the *complaint* section, in which the psalmist articulates his problem to the Lord. The complaint section may be further subdivided into the complaint proper, the contrast motif, motivations for God to act, trust/wisdom statements, and petitions.<sup>5</sup> The third section is the *response* section, in which God is praised for having responded to/heard the psalmist, vows of worship/sacrifice are made, wisdom statements uttered, and calls to praise are issued. This is my suggestion for the structure of Psalm 22;

Vv. 1–2: *Introduction/Address to God*: This two verse introduction is also

<sup>4</sup> There are *many* attempts at structuring psalm 22. These are a few: 1) Gerald Wilson suggests the psalm is in four sections: v. 1, “thematic introduction”; vv. 2-11, “the silence and absence of God”; vv. 12-21, “vicious attacks by the enemies”; vv. 22-31, “promise to praise.” This structure appears to follow thematic concerns, rather than form-critical analysis. Mark Hamilton, “Psalm 22,” in *Timeless: Ancient Psalms for the Church Today*, R. Mark Shipp, ed. (Abilene: ACU Press, 2011), 163 suggests a different four part structure: Address (vv. 1-2), the psalmist's plight (vv. 3-18), call for help (vv. 19-21), and promise to praise (vv. 22-31). Robert Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 79-83, on the other hand, sees only two sections: vv. 1-21, the prayer; and 22-31, the praise. Leslie Allen, *Psalms 1-50* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word, 1983), 198, with many older commentators, suggests the following liturgical structure: lament (vv. 2-22b); response (v. 22c); thanksgiving by the lamenter (vv. 23-27); thanksgiving by the congregation (vv. 28-32). The presence of a radical shift to praise is indicative to Allen of the liturgical use of these laments. Regardless of the original setting of the pieces of these lament psalms, they have come to use all in one piece, lament to praise, and so must be taken as a unit.

<sup>5</sup> A lament must have at least a petition, and in the Psalter usually a complaint, or it is really not a lament.

the first complaint, in which the psalmist questions God's distance from the psalmist, failure to respond, and apparent disinterest in the psalmist's plight. The psalmist has internal and external issues, but his fundamental problem is with God.

Vv. 3–21a: *The Complaint Section*:<sup>6</sup> In this complaint, the psalmist essentially repeats most of its elements twice. First, the *contrast motif* (vv. 3–8), in which the psalmist contrasts the holiness of God and his trustworthiness to his people in the past (“to you our fathers cried and were not put to shame”), to the pitiful state of the psalmist in the present (“I am a worm, and not a man”) and the mockery of his enemies, who see that God is not responding (“Let him deliver him, since he delights in him”). Second, the *contrast motif* is repeated in vv. 9–10. In contrast to God's distance and silence in the present, since birth he had trusted in God; God is the one “made him trust.” This second contrast leads right into the first *petition* in v. 11, in which he articulates the basic problem: “Do not be far away, for trouble is near!” The *complaint* is also repeated twice. In vv. 12–13, the psalmist faces the external threat of enemies, who are likened to wild and ravenous animals. The psalmist also faces perhaps a physical crisis in vv. 14–15, but which involves his entire being (“I am poured out...,” “my bones...,” “my heart...,” “my

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<sup>6</sup> I follow, in broad outline, Allen's “liturgical model” (Allen, p. 198) and include in my “complaint section” the lament, the petitions, trust statements, and contrast motifs.

strength...”). The complaint is reiterated in vv. 16–18, with the enemies again as wild animals threatening him (v. 16), his personal, physical suffering (v. 17a, “I can count my bones”), and then a final statement about the ruthlessness of the enemies, gambling for his clothing (vv. 17b–18). The complaint section ends with a final *petition*, the second in a psalm so far characterized by repeating sections (vv. 19–21a).

*The Response Section:*<sup>7</sup> Psalm 22 has a rather lengthy response section. Something has already been said about the *response* proper in v. 21b (“then from the horns of the wild ox you answered me”), followed by an initial *vow to praise* and declare the Lord’s name to the community of faith (v. 22). This is followed by an initial *call to praise* (v. 23), followed by the reason for praise (v. 24: “he heard when he cried out to him”). *Vows to praise* and worship are repeated (v. 25), then *statements of trust* about God’s provision and care (v. 26; compare also with v. 24). The psalm ends with a cosmic *call to praise* (vv. 27–31), in which the ends of the earth (v. 27a), the families of the nations (vv. 27b–28), the living (v. 29a), the dead (v. 29b), and the unborn (vv. 30–31) are called upon to praise the Lord. In general, the motifs of the response section are also repeated, as in the complaint section.

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<sup>7</sup> Most commentators recognize the “hymnic” section in vv. 22–31 as a separate unit.

Tom Long suggests, in his book *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible*, that the text itself should suggest how we structure and preach our sermons.<sup>8</sup> Since individual laments are in three sections, the first one introduces the theme, and the last one ends with praise, we have a convenient three point sermon already organized for us.

### *The Theology of Psalm 22*

Psalm 22 is a typical individual lament, with general introduction, complaint/petition, and response/call to praise. It is atypical in its repetition of all of its sections.

*Vv. 1-2: The Introduction/Address:* It is also unusual in its “cry of dereliction,” “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” This terminology occurs only one other time in the Old Testament, in Lam 5:20, relative to the destruction of Jerusalem:

Why do you forget us forever, why do you forsake us for so many days?

The cry of dereliction is unsettling, as it suggests to the reader that it is possible for God to “turn his face” from us, to abandon us to our enemies (psalm 22), ailments

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<sup>8</sup> Thomas Long, *Preaching and the Literary Forms of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1989), 43–52. While Long uses the two part structure of Psalm one to illustrate his point, it is also applicable to the lament psalm.

(psalm 6), or sin (psalm 51). One might counter that the abandonment is perceived, but not real, and that it is hyperbolic, meaning that God shows up on the horns of the wild ox in any event, so proving that the cavalry always comes in the nick of time.

But what does the “nick of time” mean to the one who suffers? What did it mean to Job? Lament psalms are honest, faithful cries of the sufferer to God. What does it mean to say “God *feels* absent, but he really is present,” to the one who experiences God’s absence in pain, loss, death, or persecution? To the one who laments, such philosophizing is meaningless. So we are left with the honest and righteous cry of the laments—“Why are you so far away”?—regardless of whether the absence and silence of God are “real” or only perceived. The introduction brings us immediately to the problem of all faithful people who suffer: the problem of the enemy, who is not exactly identified for us (literal enemies? physical ailments? psychological distress?), and the very real absence and silence of God.

One thing to always keep in mind, as Mays reminds us, is that the cry and complaint to God is faithful complaint, because it is addressed from the beginning to “*my* God,” the claim and confession of relationship and paternity. It is not some estranged or distant deity who is invoked; it is the covenant God of Israel’s history

(vv. 3–5), whose covenant commitment is to hear all who cry out to him (Ex 2:23–25; Deut 26:7).

*Vv. 3-21a: The Complaint:* I recently had a discussion with someone at my church, who informed me that the lament psalms were composed by a “bunch of whiners.” We are also told from the time we are young not to complain. The perception many people seem to have about lament psalms is that they are inappropriate and faithless whinings, since we are the people who live AD, not BC, and should be characterized by praise. To say to someone “you should not lament” strikes me as strange as a father telling a young child who has been hurt, “Stop that crying! It’s not right!” It is not that Christians lament—everyone laments. It is that we voice our lament to the Lord. It is our faithful cry to our father, when all we have to offer is our lament. To fail to bring our laments to the Lord, on the other hand, is faithless.

The “contrast motifs” in vv. 3-8 demonstrate the contrast between a holy God, “enthroned on the praises of Israel” (the only occurrence of this phrase in the Bible), who answered the cries of Israelites in the past, and the sad, un-holy, state of the lamenter, who is mocked rather than “enthroned by praises.” The theological thrust of the passage is “you responded to those in the past who cried out, but now

I cry out and you are silent and far off.”

The first petition returns us to the introductory statement that God is distant and silent to the psalmist. The “Why are you far off?” of the introduction is seconded by the first petition, “Do not be far away.”

The complaint is repeated, as are the other movements of this psalm. The problem is two-fold: first is the problem of the enemies, who are depicted as savage beasts, circling and rending the psalmist. Equating enemies with wild beasts occurs occasionally in lament psalms, which equate the foes to ravenous lions (e.g., Pss. 7:2, 10:9, 17:12), and to dogs (59:6). It is tempting to think of the enemies as the same ones who mock his plight in vv. 7-8, and, if so, there may be a connection between the physical distress of the psalmist in vv. 14, 15, and 17, and the presence of the enemies. In the conventional wisdom of the ancients, suffering and sin were equated, and so the suffering of the psalmist was a sure sign of God’s rejection and punishment. On the other hand, the suffering of the psalmist could have been brought about *by* the mockery and enmity of the enemies. It does little good to speculate which distress came first, the physical or the social. To the psalmist, suffering is *holistic*, involving all parts of the human: physical, social, emotional, and spiritual: his *self* is poured out (“I am poured out...”), his *bones* are

separated (= his body in distress), his *heart* is melted (the seat of the will and deliberation), and his *strength* is dried up (his power of action). When the psalmist suffers, his entire being suffers. One thinks in this regard of Job and his three friends.

The second petition (vv. 19-21a) makes explicit the petition of the psalmist: he requires saving; whether the problem is social or physical is immaterial. As with the introduction and the first petition, part of the psalmist's problem is the absence and silence of God, so he first cries out for God to not be far off. Second, he cries out for the Lord to deliver and save him from his enemies. As is common in lament psalms, once a petition is made, once the cry to the Lord for help is uttered, the God who is "far off" becomes the God who is near. This may help explain the "abrupt shift" from lament to praise in many of the lament psalms. The God whose covenant commitment is to be near to all who cry out to him has been invited into the pit with the psalmist. The depths where God was *not* are now the depths where God *is*. This presence of God with the psalmist in the pit is what enables to psalmist to shift from lament to praise. Whether the physical ailment or affliction of the enemy has been removed is doubtful, but praise ushers forth from the psalmist, because the one who answers from the horns of the wild ox has come into

the pit with the psalmist.

The *response section* has all of its major movements repeated as well, as if to underscore the lament and the praise. It is important to remember that the verbs in the vows and the calls to praise are all in the Hebrew imperfect, our future tense. Deliverance has likely not yet happened, but is still to occur at some undisclosed time, in God's reckoning. Also, the movement in individual laments is from isolation to re-incorporation into the community of faith. When one laments, one laments alone, but there is no "individual hymn of praise." Restoration to community is in view in virtually all of the lament psalms.

Another feature to underscore is the cosmic nature of the final call to praise. The psalmist, and God, are not content to re-incorporate the psalmist into the community. The entire cosmos must join in the hymn of praise. First, the calls goes out to "those who seek the Lord," presumably Israel (v. 26). Then the ends of the earth—the "families of the nations," all the Gentiles, are called to worship (vv. 27-28), then the living (v. 29a), the dead, (29b), and finally the unborn (vv. 30-31) are all called upon to worship and praise the Lord. One is reminded here of Psalm 148, the Great Hallel, where the heavens, the earth, and the underworld are all called upon to praise.

*The Use of Psalm 22 in Matthew's Passion Narrative*

Gerald Wilson suggests in his commentary that psalm 22 in the passion narrative has such a gridlock on our psyches that it is difficult, if not impossible, to read the psalm on its own terms, for its own theology and message.<sup>9</sup> Mays adds a further caveat:

Because of the close connection of Psalm 22 with Jesus, it became the predominant custom in the early church to take the psalm as Jesus' words and relocate it completely in a Christological context. This results in understanding the psalm in terms of Jesus. But the canonical relation between passion narrative and psalm invites us also to undertake to understand Jesus in terms of the psalm, that is, to view him through the form and language of this prayer. That would be to follow the example of the apostles and evangelists by using the psalm as a hermeneutical context.<sup>10</sup>

Wilson furthers this idea by saying that it is only by reading the text in its own theological and cultural context that Matthew and Mark's use of it can become clear and meaningful. I agree completely with this assessment. It is possible, on the other hand, to so relegate psalm 22 to iron age irrelevance that it ceases to have meaning for other times and contexts.

Psalm 22 has three to five quotes or allusions in Matthew 27 (only three in

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<sup>9</sup> Wilson, 424.

<sup>10</sup> Mays, 323.

Mark 15).<sup>11</sup> These are, in order, v. 18 (dividing the clothing and casting lots for it, in Matt 27:35); v. 8 (“Commit your cause to the LORD; let him deliver—let him rescue the one in whom he delights,” in Matt 27:43); and v. 1 (the cry of dereliction, in Matt. 27:46). In addition, there may be other allusions, such as the crowd mocking him (v. 7, the enemies shaking their heads and mocking, compare with Matt 27:39), and Reumann includes “the one who cannot keep himself alive” (v. 29c, which he says has an allusion in Matt. 27:42).<sup>12</sup> Also, I pointed out earlier that other imagery or terminology used in the psalm make it uniquely qualified for appropriation as the messianic psalm *par excellence*. Psalm 22 was read as a psalm of David by the 1st century A.D., suggestive of Messianic application. The translation of *yehidatî* as μονογενῆ μου was suggestive both of Jesus as God’s “only begotten” and of the sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis 22. The psalmist being cast upon God from birth may have been suggestive also of Jesus’ special relationship with the father from birth. Along with the direct allusions or quotations, there could not be a better psalm with which to organize the passion narrative. The point is, the entire psalm, and not just a few select quotes, was utilized by Matthew in the constructing of the passion narrative, including the characterization of the suffering of the lamenter, his persecution, his cry, and finally his triumph and praise.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Psalm 69 also has one or two allusions, as does Isaiah 53.

<sup>12</sup> John Reumann, “Psalm 22 at the Cross: Lament and Thanksgiving for Jesus Christ,” *Interpretation* 28 (1974): 42.

<sup>13</sup> See Keith Campbell, “Matthew’s Hermeneutic of Psalm 22:1 and Jer. 31:15,” *Faith and Mission* 24 (2007): 46–58. Also, James L. Mays has an insightful article on the identity of the

Matthew is the Gospel writer *par excellence* of the Old Testament, particularly the Psalms and Isaiah, as prophetic of Jesus Christ. The Psalms, no less than the prophets, were understood to be “hymnic prophecy.” The laments of David and the Royal Psalms were fertile ground for application to the ministry and the death and resurrection of Christ.<sup>14</sup> New Testament passages which clearly make allusion to the prophetic function of Old Testament texts, in some sense prefiguring or pointing to the suffering and exaltation of Jesus, are 1 Peter 1:10–12 and 9:12:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied of the grace that was to be yours made careful search and inquiry, inquiring about the person or time that the Spirit of Christ within them indicated when it testified in advance to the sufferings destined for Christ and the subsequent glory. It was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but you, in regard to the things that have now been announced to you through those who brought you good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things into which angels long to look! (1 Peter 1:10-12)

He said to them, “Elijah is indeed coming first to restore all things. How then is it written about the Son of Man, that he is to go through many sufferings and be treated with contempt? (Mark 9:12)

The Old Testament prophetic texts, including select psalms (including 24 quotations or allusions to Psalm 22!), were understood to deal with the sufferings and glory of Jesus Christ.

Something further must be said about the cry of dereliction in Psalm 22:1 and Matt  

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lamer in psalm 22, and how the entirety of the psalm pictures a special sufferer only adequately captured in a royal messianic figure and ultimately in Jesus the Christ. See James L. Mays, “Prayer and Christology: Psalm 22 as Perspective on the Passion,” *Theology Today* 42 (1985): 329. Some aspects of the psalm which were apparently not picked up by the Gospel writers, but which subsequently were interpreted in light of Jesus include the piercing of the lamenter’s hands and feet in Psalm 22:16c, which seems an obvious application, unless the “piercing” word was in reality not present in the earliest texts.

<sup>14</sup> Campbell, 47–48.

27:46. Many have suggested that the quotation of Psalm 22:1 from the cross is a kind of “shorthand” for identifying an entire passage.<sup>15</sup> Thus, in the first century, everyone would know that quoting the first line of a work was a reference to the entire work, much like referring to “Onward Christian Soldiers,” the opening phrase of the classic hymn, is a way of referencing the whole. In this way, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” is a way of referencing the entire psalm, the final third of which is an exalted hymn of praise. In other words, the cry of dereliction from the cross means “suffering, and subsequent glory,” for the whole psalm is in view. It refers, then, to confidence and praise, not to lament at the apparent absence and silence of God. This interpretation can be open to charges that Jesus did not truly enter into the lament and did not truly suffer with us in all our afflictions.

On the other hand, others suggest that to so interpret Psalm 22:1, and its application in Matthew 27, is to damage the meaning of the lament, that God indeed had turned his back on the psalmist, and on Christ, and thus the cry of dereliction is real. Those who adopt this position may be open to the criticism that God does not abandon his only son, that it is impossible for the Godhead to be split in this fashion.

A third alternative is, I think, an attractive one. That it, that Jesus takes up the righteous cry of the sufferer, that he laments in every way as we do.<sup>16</sup> He enters into the pit of the lament, he suffers the same persecution from enemies, the same physical

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<sup>15</sup> Mays, 322.

<sup>16</sup> See in this regard Reumann, 43 and Mays, 325.

distress, the same apparent silence and absence of God, that afflicts the psalmist in Psalm 22. As I mentioned earlier, it does little good to speculate on whether God actually is silent and distant; what is the difference to the sufferer whether God *is* distant, or is merely perceived as such? We live on the ground, under the sun, and are often enough people of the lament. Jesus takes up the paradigmatic prayer of the righteous sufferer, like Job, who cries out to God in his anguish and loss and rails to him about his absence and silence. And notice that Job is never chided or condemned for his cries: God commends him, in fact, in the closing episode (Job 42:8), for speaking about him what was true! Jesus takes on the persona—in fact, becomes the persona—of the righteous sufferer, who cries out in his physical, social, and spiritual distress, and in so doing, calls God the Father into the lament and identifies with each and every one of us in our suffering. Psalm 22 is, then, the ultimate cry of the righteous sufferer, who makes his cry to the Lord, who is answered by God, and who turns to praise and calls the ends of the earth to trust and praise.