

Psalm 22

How to Approach God in Times of Unbearable Suffering: A Prophecy of Christ's Death and Resurrection, 22:1-31

(22:1-31) **Introduction:** alone, helpless, desperate... at times nearly all of us experience these strong feelings. In fact, life is filled with problems and setbacks. However, there are times when we face crises of such a serious nature that we question whether or not we can survive, times of...

- excruciating physical pain or handicap
- mental or emotional anguish from a tragic event in our lives
- overwhelming financial crisis
- betrayal by a loved one or a trusted friend
- loss of employment or the inability to find a good job
- death of a spouse, parent, or child
- life-threatening illness or injury of a loved one
- divorce or desertion by a spouse or guardian

These and many other devastating events—events that result in unbearable suffering of body or soul—can cause us to feel alone, helpless, and desperate.

In many of the psalms, we find the author crying out to God when facing a dangerous or distressing situation, and each time God answers and delivers him. This is exactly how David felt in Psalm 22. But this psalm is different: he cries and cries but no answer comes; nothing changes. He receives no comfort, no strength, no relief, no salvation. He cannot feel God's presence, nor can he do anything to change his dire circumstances. If God does not intervene, he is going to die.

The New Testament declares that David was a prophet as well as a poet (Ac. 2:29-30). During a time of intense suffering in David's life, the Holy Spirit spoke prophetically through him as he composed Psalm 22. Scripture provides no insight into the specific occasion that caused such anguish. The two darkest periods of David's life were when King Saul

pursued him and when his son Absalom rebelled against him. It is reasonable to conclude that an episode in one of those periods is the setting for this holy psalm.

In this hour of deep grief, when David felt totally abandoned by God, the Lord gave him an amazing gift, a holy privilege. The Holy Spirit lifted him up above his pain and revealed to him the suffering of one who would come approximately 1,000 years later. In striking, precise detail, David foretold the agony of the Messiah on the cross. He described the Roman method of crucifixion hundreds of years before it was known to the Jews. There was no deliverance from the cross; Jesus endured its punishment until the price for sin was fully paid and He yielded up His spirit to death.

Though David's pain was severe, neither he nor any other man endured the specific agonies described in this psalm (vv. 14-18). The sufferings in Psalm 22 are Christ's and Christ's alone. *Hebrews* clearly establishes that this is a Messianic psalm and that David was speaking of Christ (note the quotation of Ps. 22:22 in Heb. 2:12):

“For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee” (Heb. 2:10-12).

Jesus taught the disciples that He came to fulfill that which was written in the psalms (Lu. 24:44). Many scholars believe that Jesus actually quoted this psalm while on the cross. Because it mentions so many details that were fulfilled in the New Testament, some in the early church labeled Psalm 22 as “the fifth gospel.” (See Deeper Study #1, *A Chart on the Prophecies of Psalm 22 Fulfilled in Christ*).

The beginning of Psalm 22 includes a unique heading: To the chief Musician upon Ajeleth Shahar, a Psalm of David. *Ajeleth Shahar* means doe of the dawn or morning. This was likely an existing song, and David instructed the chief musician to sing Psalm 22 to its tune.

Psalm 22 does not end with suffering and death but with triumph and life. It testifies of “the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow” (1 Pe. 1:11). God would hear the cries of the *Afflicted One*, and He would greatly reward Him for paying the ultimate sacrifice of His life. David prophesied the preaching of the gospel to the ends of the earth and the recognition of Christ as Lord by all. “God brings life out of death; beyond Calvary is Easter. This is the ultimate meaning of Psalm 22.”

DEEPER STUDY #1

(22:1-31)

A Chart on the Prophecies of Psalm 22 Fulfilled in Christ

| <u>Psalm 22</u> verse | New Testament references |
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| My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? (<u>Ps. 22:1</u>). | “And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (<u>Mt. 27:46</u>). |
| “But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people” (<u>Ps. 22:6</u>). | “And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (<u>Mk. 15:34</u>). |
| | “And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the |

temple, and buildest it in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God. The thieves also, which were crucified with him, cast the same in his teeth” (Mt. 27:39-44).

And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews!...And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads (Mt. 27:29, 39).

“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,” (Ps. 22:7).

“And they that passed by railed on him, wagging their heads, and saying, Ah, thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest it in three days” (Mk. 15:29).

“And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he

“He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him” (Ps. 22:8).

“I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly” (Ps. 22:10).

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels” (Ps. 22:14).

“My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth

be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself. And a superscription also was written over him in letters of Greek, and Latin, and Hebrew, THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS. And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us” (Lu. 23:35-39).

“He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God” (Mt. 27:43).

“And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar” (Lu. 23:36).

“And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God” (Lu. 1:35).

“But one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water” (Jn. 19:34).

“After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that

to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death” (Ps. 22:15).

“For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet” (Ps. 22:16).

“I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me” (Ps. 22:17).

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the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst” (Jn. 19:28).

“And again another scripture saith, They shall look on him whom they pierced” (Jn. 19:37).

“The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the Lord. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe” (Jn. 20:25).

“And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him... And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God” (Lu. 23:27, 35).

“And there followed him a great company of people, and of women, which also bewailed and lamented him... And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God” (Lu. 23:27, 35).

“And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots” (Mt. 27:35).

“And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take” (Mk. 15:24).

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots” (Lu. 23:34).

“Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did” (Jn. 19:23-24).

“They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Ps. 22:18).

“I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the

“Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of

congregation will I praise thee” (Ps. 22:22).
the church will I sing praise unto thee” (Heb. 2:12).

“For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard” (Ps. 22:24).

“The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the LORD that seek him: your heart shall live for ever” (Ps. 22:26).

“For the kingdom is the LORD's: and he is the governor among the nations” (Ps. 22:28).

“All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul” (Ps. 22:29).

“They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that

“For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Ro. 8:29).

“Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared” (Heb. 5:7).

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world” (Jn. 6:51).

“And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen” (Mt. 6:13).

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth” (Phil. 2:10).

shall be born, that he hath done this” (Ps. 22:31).

“Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference” (Ro. 3:22).

This is, How to Approach God in Times of Unbearable Suffering: A Prophecy of Christ’s Death and Resurrection, 22:1-31.

1. Tell God that you feel abandoned or forsaken by Him: A prophecy of Christ’s suffering on the cross (vv. 1-8).
2. Confess your trust in the Lord (vv. 9-11).
3. Remember the incomparable sufferings of Christ (vv. 12-18).
4. Pray for God’s presence and help (vv. 19-21).
5. Bear strong witness for God: A prophecy of the Risen Christ witnessing for God, Heb. 2:12 (vv. 22-31).

1. (22:1-8) Tell God that you feel abandoned or forsaken by Him: A prophecy of Christ’s suffering on the cross.

David began this psalm with a desperate and passionate cry: he felt that God had utterly abandoned him (v. 1). David had known God’s presence throughout his life, but now he felt that God’s fellowship and protection were missing. He wailed out the question of “Why?” What was God’s purpose for...

- *forsaking* him—leaving him to bear his heavy burden alone?
- doing nothing to *help* him—nothing to save or deliver him from his agonizing situation?

- not responding at all to his painful groans for relief? *Roaring* or *groaning* expresses the depth of David’s suffering. It was so severe that it produced audible moans of anguish. Commentator Franz Delitzsch described this as “the loud cry extorted by the greatest agony.” The phrase, “words of my roaring and groaning” indicates that David had poured out his heart to the Lord, sharing the unbearable severity of his suffering.

Today, we know the answer to David’s question, an answer he likely did not realize. When we read these opening words, we are immediately thrust forward 1,000 years to Calvary, where Jesus Christ quoted them in his native Aramaic language (Mt. 27:46). Part of God’s purpose for seemingly deserting David in his great need was to point us to the somber truth that God would one day turn His back on His beloved Son when He bore our sin on the cross. Almost 1,000 years earlier, God had ordered Abraham to offer Isaac upon an altar as a sacrifice to Him. In so doing, Abraham had portrayed the *anguish of the Father* at Calvary. Here, in the present passage, David was given the incredible privilege of portraying *the anguish of the Son*.

a. Tell God you cry out day and night, but your prayers seem to go unanswered (v. 2).

David could not understand why God was silent, why He did not answer his prayers. His supplications were as persistent as his sufferings. All day long he cried out to God. Unable to drift into the silence of rest, he prayed throughout the night as well.

David’s unanswered prayers are a reminder of Christ’s experience at Gethsemane, just before He was captured, condemned, and crucified (Mt. 26:36-44; Mk. 14:32-41; Lu. 22:39-44). While others slept, Jesus cried out to God in deep distress. Scripture records three episodes of His passionate praying. Finally, His agony was so great that small blood vessels burst and blood seeped through His pores and fell to the ground. He begged God to remove the cup of His suffering, but His prayer, like David’s, went unanswered.

Notice that David continued to pray—as did Christ—even though no answer came. Legendary preacher Charles Spurgeon wrote that “in this he [Christ] set us an example of obedience to his own words, ‘men ought always to pray, and not to faint.’”

Some scholars also identify this verse as a prophecy of Christ’s cries from the cross. He was crucified during the day, but a supernatural *night season* occurred as darkness covered the earth for three hours (Lu. 23:44-45).

b. Acknowledge that God is holy and sovereign—worthy of praise and able to save (vv. 3-5).

Even though David was in terrible agony and God seemingly did nothing to help him, his faith did not fail. He declared that God was holy, on His sovereign throne, and worthy of Israel’s praise. Refusing to doubt the character of God, he dared not accuse him unjustly (Jb. 1:22; 2:10). As David spoke, he acknowledged God’s faithfulness to Israel throughout their generations. They had trusted in the Lord and called upon Him, and God had delivered them. Never had they been *confounded*—shamed or disappointed—by God.

“*Thou art holy*” is the answer to the prophetic “why” in David’s question (v. 1). Because of His holiness, the Father turned His back on Christ at Calvary. As the Lamb of God bore the sin of the human race, He paid the penalty for sin: complete separation from God. The awesome holiness of God could not look upon Christ as He became “sin for us” (2 Cor. 5:21). He was *cursed*—alienated from and abandoned by God—while He hung on the tree (Gal. 3:13). Grasp this sobering reality of the cross: Jesus faced it all alone. He endured it without the Father’s comfort, help, and strength.

c. Share the fact that you are persecuted by people (v. 6-8).

The mockery and contempt shown him by others multiplied David’s pain. His enemies thrived on his misery. People of his own country and

faith—fellow Jews—gloated over his affliction. Note their malicious responses:

- ⇒ They *reproached* or rebuked him (v. 6b).
- ⇒ They *despised* him (v. 6c).
- ⇒ They *laughed* at and *scorned* him (v. 7a).
- ⇒ They jeered him and flashed contemptuous gestures toward him, making childish faces (*shooting out the lip*) and wagging their heads (v. 7b).
- ⇒ They arrogantly mocked his faith in the Lord (v. 8a).
- ⇒ They called him a hypocrite because he had confessed that God *delighted* in him—that he was right with God (v. 8b). They made the faulty assumption that righteous people do not face extreme suffering, that anguish such as his was the result of God’s judgment (Jb. 4:7-9).

The open display of people’s hatred coupled with the severity of his pain made David feel like he was less than human: a *worm*, the lowest and most despised of creatures (v. 6a). Like a worm crawling in the dirt, he was being crushed under the feet of his cruel oppressors. He was defenseless and unable to escape their abuse.

At this point in the psalm David continued to speak of conditions he actually faced. He was partaking in the sufferings that the Messiah would endure throughout His trials and death. The Jewish leaders, supported by the shouts of the crowd, despised Jesus the way a worm is despised (Isa. 53:3; Mt. 27:39). Jesus would be beaten and mutilated to the point that He would not even appear to be human (Isa. 52:14). He would be mocked, insulted and reviled. The gospels clearly record that the people shook their heads scornfully at Jesus. (Mt. 27:39; Mk. 15:29; Lu. 23:36-39). Speaking almost word-for-word what David prophesied, the rulers of the Jews fulfilled verse 8 (Mt. 27:43; Lu. 23:36). Critics of the Scripture discount the fulfillment of Psalm 22 at Calvary by claiming that Jesus knew this psalm and intentionally quoted it in order to fulfill

it. Commentator John Phillips offers an important note addressing this point:

One of the most significant features of this prophecy lies in the fact that it foretold exactly what the Lord's enemies would say to Him. One can conceive an imposter play acting prophecies to make them seem to come true. But how could such a one make his enemies play act the fulfillment of prophecy too? The priests and [the] people assembled at Calvary knew Psalm 22 well enough. But they had no desire to prove the claims of Jesus to be Messiah to be true. On the contrary they did everything they could to disprove those claims. Yet, despite themselves, they used the very language of Psalm 22 when taunting Him, thus fulfilling prophecy. "He trusted on the Lord!" The prophetic words of the psalm fell from the lips of Christ's foes.

Thought 1. Sometimes, we face trials that are so severe, so excruciating, that we feel God has deserted us. As much as we pray, no answers come. It seems that our prayers never reach heaven, that God does not care, that He is ignoring us. Our circumstances do not change. No comfort or relief comes. The psalms teach us what to do during these times: pour out our hearts to God openly and completely. The psalms also offer models to follow in seeking the Lord and pleading for His help. Several lessons can be gleaned in this passage:

(1) Seek God's reason for your prolonged suffering. Ask Him why He is not responding and what He wants you to learn during this chapter of your life.

(2) Continue to pray and cry out to God. Do not give up on prayer when answers do not come immediately. Be assured that God hears your prayers. Remember that He does not always grant a "yes" answer. Sometimes, in His wisdom and love for us, He denies a request. He does not give us what we ask but what He knows is best for us. At other times, He does not grant our requests because He has a different purpose for us. Indeed, some answers to prayer are delayed because it is not yet the right time for God to grant what we request. Therefore, we should

seek to pray according to His will, and we should genuinely desire His will over ours. Prayers offered in agreement with God's will are guaranteed an answer (1 Jn. 5:14-15).

(3) Stay strong in your faith. Do not doubt God nor accuse Him unjustly.

(4) Acknowledge God's holiness and continue to praise Him.

(5) Remember that it is a privilege to suffer for being a Christian—to be persecuted for Him (1 Pe. 4:14-16).

(6) Rest in the promises of Christ: though it may seem God has abandoned you, He promises that He will never forsake you (Mt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

“Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen” (Mt. 28:20).

“*Let your conversation be* without covetousness; *and be* content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5).

“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed” (Ja. 1:5-6).

“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: And if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him” (1 Jn. 5:14-15).

“Why standest thou afar off, O Lord? *why* hidest thou *thyself* in times of trouble?” (Ps. 10:1).

“Also when I cry and shout, he shutteth out my prayer” (La. 3:8).

“O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! *even* cry out unto thee *of* violence, and thou wilt not save!” (Ha. 1:2).

2. (22:9-11) Confess your trust in the Lord.

David diverted his attention from his mockers and directed it to the Lord. All of his life—since his conception—God had faithfully protected and cared for him.

a. Confess that it was God who gave you life (out of the womb) (v. 9a).

The miracle of childbirth is certainly one of God’s most remarkable displays of His omnipotence. Every day hundreds of thousands of women endure considerable, and often prolonged, agony to bring their children into this world. They and their infants survive this strenuous process through the care of a powerful, loving God. David acknowledges God’s preservation of his own life from the very beginning. Just as God had been faithful to David’s ancestors, He had also faithfully cared for David.

b. Confess that you trust in Him—that your mother nurtured you and led you to believe: He is your God (v. 9b-10).

David could not remember a time when he did not know the Lord. He was afforded the tremendous privilege and advantage of being born to parents who knew and worshipped the Lord. When he was a very young child—still small enough to be nursing from his mother—he had been introduced to the Lord and taught to trust in Him (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). David recognized this as the gracious work of God.

David also acknowledged the remarkable fact that God’s work in his life predated his actual birth (v. 10^b). While David was yet in his *mother’s belly*, God was preserving and initiating His purpose for David’s life.

David understood that God carefully formed and shaped him in the womb, and that God had a marvelous plan for him before he ever breathed an independent breath (Ps. 139:13-16; Lu. 1:15).

David's personal testimony rings with prophetic overtones of the conception, birth, and early years of Jesus. Imagine the eternal Son of God—the Creator of heaven and earth—conceived in the womb of a young virgin through the seed of the Holy Spirit (Lu. 1:35)! God's powerful, protective hand was upon Him as He grew in Mary's womb. God's care overshadowed Him as she and Joseph traveled the rigorous road to Bethlehem, likely a week's journey (Lu. 2:4-5). God's power assured a safe delivery in primitive, unsanitary conditions (Lu. 2:7). God carefully selected parents who circumcised Him—the sign of the covenant—before presenting Him to the Lord (Lu. 2:21-24). God's providence preserved the holy toddler's life when Herod had decreed the slaughter of all children under the age of two (Mt. 2:13-16).

c. Confess that you need God: You are in trouble and no one else can help you (v. 11).

David could not understand why the Lord, who had so faithfully protected him from the beginning of his existence, would neglect to care for him now. Now, when in the most severe trouble of his life, he had no one else to help him. He pled with God to break His silence and to come to his aid.

It is important to remember God's special purpose for subjecting David to such an excruciating experience: through it, He would reveal the horrendous suffering that His Son would endure at Calvary. David's experience in this psalm is not one that every believer faces. Certainly, we face times of trouble, loneliness, and helplessness. But God has promised His presence and strength for every need. We cannot be deserted by God because we are indwelt by His Holy Spirit (Ro. 8:9).

Thought 1. In times of trouble and distress we must take our eyes off our situation and look to the Lord, remembering God's unwavering

faithfulness to us throughout our lives. His faithfulness in the past is a great encouragement for us in the present. He has a specific purpose and plan for our lives, a purpose that He initiated as He formed us in our mothers' wombs. He will complete that purpose (Phil. 1:6). God never promises to spare us from difficulties; in fact, He warns us that trials and persecution will be a part of our lives. But as with David, all of our trials contribute to His purpose. He uses them to accomplish His work *through* us and *in* us. He works all of our circumstances together for our good and for His ultimate purpose for us: that we be conformed to the image of His Dear Son (Ro. 8:28-29).

We need to trust the Lord in every trying situation. When we cannot understand why certain things are happening in our lives and why God does not intervene, we need to commit ourselves and the situation fully to Him. He has created us and preserved us for a purpose, and we can trust Him to keep what we have committed to Him until that purpose is fulfilled (1 Pe. 4:19; 2 Tim. 1:9-12).

“For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day” (2 Tim. 1:12).

“Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls *to him* in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator” (1 Pe. 4:19).

“Trust in the Lord, and do good; *so* shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed. Delight thyself also in the Lord; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring *it* to pass” (Ps. 37:3-5).

“By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: my praise *shall be* continually of thee” (Ps. 71:6).

“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths” (Pr. 3:5-6).

3. (22:12-18) Remember the incomparable sufferings of Christ.

As David described the fierceness of his enemies, his vision reached beyond his personal pain to a grueling experience that neither he nor any other man would ever know. In amazing detail, he foretold the crucifixion of Christ. Many good commentators believe he described his own suffering in metaphors (pictures or comparisons) that were inspired prophecies of Christ’s suffering. Others think he ceased speaking of his own anguish and spoke exclusively of Christ’s agony at Calvary. Respected commentator Arno C. Gaebelein states and explains this opinion:

The sufferings described in this Psalm could never be David’s. He did not pass through anything like the agony and the deep waters pictured here....The Holy Spirit came upon David and testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ. The New Testament applies this Psalm exclusively to the Lord Jesus Christ and His great atoning work on the cross. It seems to us that what He dictated into the pen of the fugitive king must have been of unspeakable comfort to him. He beheld the sufferings of One who trusted God, the Holy One of God. Before his vision there passed the agony of the cross and the glorious reward of the sinbearer.

In David’s darkest hour, God directed his attention to the experience of the promised Messiah, who would suffer far more cruelly than anything David was enduring. His record is not a view *of* the cross but our Savior’s view *from* the cross.

a. He was attacked, as if by ferocious beasts (vv. 12-13).

The enemies of Christ were so vicious that David compared them to hungry wild animals. First, they were like *bulls* gathering around an unfamiliar object in the field (v. 12). They slowly move in on it,

surround it, and taunt it with their horns, waiting for the right moment to charge and destroy it. *Bashan* was a very fertile area east of the Sea of Galilee where wheat and cattle were raised. Its cattle grazed in rich, green pastures and grew larger and stronger than other cattle of the region. The *bulls of Bashan* were a symbol of power and strength.

Second, Christ's enemies were like hungry *lions* devouring their prey (v. 13). They pounced upon Him with wide-opened mouths, *roaring* savagely as they mutilated and destroyed Him. Scripture describes them as *ravens* lions, meaning they literally wanted to tear Him to pieces (Ge. 37:33; Na. 2:12; Mic. 5:8).

Bible teacher J. Vernon McGee identified the bulls as the burly soldiers who seized Jesus, chastised Him, and carried out the orders of crucifixion. The lions represent Rome, the government that ordered His execution by the cruelest method. The lion was the symbol of Rome.

b. He endured an agonizing death (vv. 14-18).

“The victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths.” Only by divine revelation could David have described in such precise detail a method of execution unknown in his day. His description, however, is not just of crucifixion but of a specific crucifixion: the sacrifice of God's Son by death on a cross. The curtains of the future were parted and David witnessed from the Savior's perspective the darkest day in all of history—the death of the Messiah.

Jesus' life gradually slipped away from Him as He was crucified, like water being poured from a pitcher (v. 14a). This image additionally depicts His utter exhaustion on the cross: He was completely without strength, both physically and emotionally. The water speaks of the extreme perspiration caused by hanging in the mid-day sun as well as the water and blood mixture that gushed from the Savior's side when pierced by the soldier (Jn. 19:34).

Scripture states that all of Jesus' bones were forced out of their joints. The reality and the pain of such an occurrence is simply beyond human comprehension! What could have caused this to happen? Several possibilities exist. It might have been when the soldiers callously dropped the cross into the ground. Or, it might have been the distorted position of the body on the cross (14b). Dislocation might also have occurred as Jesus' body raised and dropped in His struggle to breathe, or, perhaps it was the result of blood loss or dehydration.

Medical doctors have determined that the blood and water that flowed from Jesus' side was caused by a ruptured heart. Some have declared this to be the physical cause of His death. David described this exactly: the heart of Jesus melted like wax and its fluids ran down into His abdomen (v. 14c).

The Savior's strength was utterly consumed as He hung on the cross, leaving Him fragile and brittle like a finished piece of pottery (v. 15). *Potsherd* (*cheres*) is used in the Old Testament both of earthen vessels and of fragments of those vessels. *Dried up* refers to the pot itself, which is dried and fired in a kiln and easily broken. This is a reference to severe dehydration, which would have painfully damaged Christ's vital organs. It also caused His tongue to cling to His mouth. John recorded that Jesus cried out from the cross suffering from unbearable thirst (Jn. 19:28). The loss of vital moisture initiated the process of the body's deterioration to the *dust* from which it was made and to which it eventually returns after *death* (Ge. 3:19; Ecc. 3:20).

David further described the company of people who contributed to Christ's death as *dogs* (v. 16a). Dogs in David's day were scavengers that prowled the streets in vicious packs. They fed on garbage, and even on human remains (1 Ki. 16:4). The *dogs* included the Jewish leaders who demanded Christ's death, the Roman officials who decreed it, and the soldiers who carried it out. In addition, *dogs* refers to the bloodthirsty crowd who cried, "Crucify Him" and cheered His execution with gloating and satisfaction.

Jesus was held to the cross not by cords but by spikes driven through His hands and feet (v. 16b). This especially cruel method was reserved for the most despised criminals. Usually, the more humane method of tying the condemned to the cross was used. The prophet Zechariah would also foretell this detail of Jesus' death (Zec. 12:10; 13:6).

Emaciated, dehydrated, and stretched out on the cross, Jesus' bones could be seen protruding through His skin (v. 17a). His grotesque body was a spectacle to all who watched that day. A handful of friends looked on in heartbroken horror while His enemies glared triumphantly at Him in morbid, unholy delight (v. 17b).

A remarkable prophecy concludes the account of Christ's suffering (v. 18). Its fulfillment is recorded by all four gospel authors (Mt. 27:35; Mk. 15:24; Lk. 23:34; Jn. 19:23-24). Jesus' clothing was stripped from Him to heighten His humiliation and disgrace. The soldiers divided his garments—items that could be sold for a significant price—among themselves. John specifies that they did not divide his coat, which they deemed to be especially valuable, but cast lots to determine who among them would receive it.

Thought 1. In the midst of David's intense agony, the Holy Spirit used his suffering to point to the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross. However, the Messiah would go through far more than David was presently enduring. But in his suffering, David was given the holy privilege of identifying with the sufferings of Christ. The Apostle Paul recognized the glory in this privilege, for he clearly desired to know the "fellowship of his [Christ's] sufferings" (Phil. 3:10). Peter, too, understood this. He instructs us to rejoice when we face severe trials because our affliction enables us to share in the sufferings of Christ on the cross. This is especially true when we are persecuted for our faith (1 Pe. 4:12-14).

Remembering Christ's agony in our time of affliction gives us a sense of what He went through for our sake, and it stirs us to seek His forgiveness and deliverance (Isa. 53:4-5). Christ's sufferings also

comfort us because they demonstrate God's extraordinary love for us (Ro. 5:8; 8:31-39; Heb. 2:9-18). Christ was temporarily abandoned by His Father so that we might know the never-failing presence of God in our lives. He was made weak so that we might be made strong through Him.

David was also granted a second remarkable honor: through his suffering, Christ was revealed. The Apostle Paul recognized this honor as both an opportunity and a responsibility. Paul viewed his trials as occasions for Jesus to be seen in him. As his body was broken, the light of the Lord Jesus Christ was able to shine through (2 Cor. 4:6-11). Suffering offers us an unparalleled opportunity to reveal the presence and power of Jesus Christ in our lives. We should be very careful in our painful experiences to always speak in faith, to demonstrate to others that God's grace and love are sufficient for life's darkest hours.

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to *give* the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us. *We are* troubled on every side, yet not distressed; *we are* perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh” (2 Cor. 4:6-11).

“I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

“That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death” (Phil. 3:10).

“Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:2-3).

“Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified” (1 Pe. 4:12-14).

4. (22:19-21) Pray for God’s presence and help.

A plea for deliverance rises from David’s lips, a clear picture of the Lord Jesus crying out for deliverance. For the third time, David seeks God’s intervention and help (vv. 1-2, 11). And when he offers this prayer, God is still far from him. This is the first time in this psalm that he addresses God as *Yahweh* or Jehovah (Lord)—God’s covenant name. Thus, David sought God’s help on the basis of their covenant relationship. Although it seemed that God had abandoned him, his faith in God’s character and Word was unwavering. “This faith, deeper than his pain, is his secret.”

a. Acknowledge that He is your strength (v. 19).

Even though David could not sense God’s presence, he leaned upon the Lord for strength. He continued to trust that, at some point, God would draw near him and provide all that he needed to endure his pain. The

word *strength* (*eyal*), as it is used only here and in Ps. 88:4, is unique. It refers to the strength of life, the courage to go on living rather than to die. David begged God to *haste* or hurry, to rush quickly to his side and not delay any longer. He was nearing death and knew he could not endure much longer without the Lord's supernatural strength. His only chance of surviving this horrific ordeal was for God to intervene.

b. Ask Him to save you from death (vv. 20-21).

Still foreshadowing and foretelling the crucifixion of Christ, David called upon the Lord to rescue him from imminent death. He begged God to “deliver [his] soul from the sword; [his] darling from the power of the dog” (v. 20). *Darling* (*yachid*) means his one and only life. This word has a theological connection to Christ. It refers to an only child and is used of Isaac in Genesis 22 when Abraham offered his only son as a sacrifice (Ge. 22:2, 12, 16). This sacred drama is a picture of Calvary, with Isaac portraying Christ (Ge. 22:14). The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) translates it here with *apagetos*, meaning beloved. This is the word the Father used of Jesus at His baptism and again at His transfiguration (Mt. 3:17; 17:5). In other places the Septuagint translates it with *monogenes*, which means only begotten (Jn. 1:14; 3:16). Its use here points prophetically to the fact that God offered His Beloved Son, His only Son, as the sacrifice for sin.

Bible teacher and commentator Warren Wiersbe notes a possible connection between *sword* (v. 20) and the Roman government that authorized Christ's death. The New Testament uses *sword* to refer to the authority of governmental officials (Ro. 13:4)

David called upon the Lord to spare him from being destroyed and devoured by his enemies (v. 20b-21). He applied the same images previously used to describe them, that of...

- the power of the *dogs* (v. 16, 20^b)
- the mouth of the *lions* (v. 13, 21^a)

- the horns of the *unicorns* or *bulls* (v. 12, 21^b)—*unicorns* are not the mythical one-horned creatures of legend. Modern translations better render this word *wild oxen*. It is also a synonym for wild bulls.

A seemingly subtle, yet drastic change suddenly occurs in David's (and Christ's) situation (v. 21). The verse begins with David's *praying* for deliverance and ends with David's *proclaiming* deliverance. Note the NKJV translation:

“Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me” (Ps. 22:21, NKJV).

Outstanding commentator Derek Kidner explains that this “sudden, dramatic change [is] kept back in the Hebrew to the last word...the Hebrew text has merely a verb in the perfect [or completed] tense...this single word is a cry that greets a last-minute deliverance. ‘...And from the horns of the wild oxen. *Thou-hast-answered-me!*’” Wiersbe notes, “This is the turning point of the psalm.”

This drastic transformation can point to only one event: the glorious resurrection of Jesus Christ. Between the beginning of verse 21 and the end, Christ has risen from the dead!

Thought 1. This passage teaches a significant truth: sometimes God allows us to suffer so He can give us an even greater victory in the end. Scripture promises that the sorrows of the present world cannot compare to the glories of the future (2 Cor. 4:17). Think about it: miraculous provision cannot occur where there is no dire need. Healing cannot occur without sickness. Death must precede resurrection. Jesus taught that the seed must die before it can burst forth with new life (Jn. 12:24). Paul recognized this fact: before he could experience the power of Christ's resurrection, he first had to learn to share in His sufferings and death (Phil. 3:10-11). We, too, must be cast into the fiery furnace before God can supernaturally deliver us from it (Da. 3:21-27).

Through it all, we have to continue to trust God when our circumstances do not change. We have to believe that because of our relationship with Him through His covenant the Lord will deliver us. Remember that God will not always deliver us, His followers, in this life, in this dimension of being. Sometimes He will deliver us by transporting us from this dimension directly into His glorious presence through the event of death. Faith transforms death from a *frightening* experience to a *freeing* experience. It is the ultimate deliverance, the only means of complete rescue from suffering. All who sleep in Jesus rest from their heavy labors, never to be weighed down or to hurt again (Re. 14:13; 21:4). And one day we will experience Christ's glorious miracle, a uniquely victorious event that first requires death: our bodies will be raised from the dead and we will live throughout eternity in glorified bodies like Christ's (1 Cor. 15:20-23; 1 Th. 4:16; Phil. 3:21)!

“Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and *that* all the Gentiles might hear: and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion” (2 Tim. 4:17).

“Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him: but I will maintain mine own ways before him” (Jb. 13:15).

“Then called I upon the name of the Lord; O Lord, I beseech thee, deliver my soul” (Ps. 116:4).

“I called upon the Lord in distress: the Lord answered me, *and set me* in a large place” (Ps. 118:5).

“Call unto me, and I will answer thee, and show thee great and mighty things, which thou knowest not” (Jer. 33:3).

5. (22:22-31) Bear strong witness for God: A prophecy of the risen Christ witnessing for God.

As David stood at death's door, his prayers were answered: the Lord delivered him from his enemies. The strong cries of Jesus Christ were

likewise heard and answered (Heb. 5:7). The Savior was not delivered from death by a miraculous rescue but by His own resurrection! Both lived to testify of God's faithfulness to them.

a. Praise God before believers (v. 22).

David vowed to declare the powerful name of *Jehovah* before others once again, when he was able to stand in the *midst of the congregation* of Israel. The Lord had kept His promise, and David promised to offer public witness of God's glorious deliverance.

David continued to speak prophetically of Jesus Christ. The New Testament applies this verse to the Lord's testimony before the very people for whom He suffered to save:

“For it became him, for whom *are* all things, and by whom *are* all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified *are* all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren, Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee” (Heb. 2:10-12).

Jesus celebrated with believers throughout the forty-day period between His resurrection and His ascension. The New Testament records Christ's multiple encounters with individuals and with groups of believers. One assembly consisted of over five hundred people (1 Cor. 15:5-7). Today, He continues to glorify the Father in “the heavenly Jerusalem...to the general assembly and church of the firstborn” (Heb. 12:22-24).

b. Call on all believers to praise God: Honor and revere Him (vv. 23-25a).

David called upon all who revered and worshipped the Lord to rejoice with him over God's great deliverance. He called upon all of God's

people to glorify Him and to stand in awe—holy fear—of Him (v. 23). The Lord had not ignored nor abandoned David. On the contrary, He had heard David's desperate pleas for help and responded by rescuing him (v. 24). Thus, all of David's praise was reserved for faithful *Jehovah* (v. 25).

This call to praise the God of the risen Christ extends to all who are recipients of His saving grace. Warren Wiersbe points out that this includes all the descendants of Jacob and Israel (v. 23)...

- the first Christians who were Jews and the first church that was located in Jerusalem
- the church that is made up of both Jews and Gentiles who form one body in Christ (Eph. 2:11-12:6)
- all believers, Jew and Gentile, who are by faith the spiritual descendants of Abraham (Ro. 4:16-25; Gal. 3:26-29)

c. Fulfill your vows before believers (v. 25^b).

When in distress, many people make vows to God that they never fulfill. But David did not make his vow while he was in anguish, pleading for God's help; rather, he made it *after* God delivered him (v. 22). And just as he had promised, David proclaimed the faithfulness of the Lord before the entire assembly of Israel. We should always bear in mind that failing to keep a vow made to the Lord has serious consequences (Ecc. 5:4-6).

“When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better *is it* that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it *was* an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?” (Ecc. 5:4-6).

d. Declare the glorious day coming—the day of Christ’s kingdom (vv. 26-31).

David looked forward to the fulfillment of God’s covenant promises for his kingdom. His descendant, the Messiah, would sit on his throne and reign eternally over a glorious worldwide empire. This is the great glory that would follow the indescribable sufferings of Jesus Christ (1 Pe. 1:11). It is “the joy that was set before Him” that caused Christ to endure the cross (Heb. 12:2).

David provides a joyous description of this radiant age. It will be a time of worldwide prosperity. There will be no famine, no hunger. The King will provide for every need. Those who have been poor and forced to exist on meager portions will eat to their satisfaction. This will result in unceasing praise to the Lord and rejoicing that will never end (v. 26).

The entire earth will acknowledge the Lord and turn to Him. Every tribe and every tongue will bow down in His presence and give Him the glory He is due (v. 27; Ps. 86:9). As Paul explained, this is Christ’s reward from the Father for becoming a man, humbling Himself, and suffering and dying on the cross (Phil. 2:9-11). The meek Lamb of God, slain at the hands of cruel men, will have power and authority over the entire universe. The one who was humiliated on the cross will rule over all the nations (v. 28; Ob. 21; Zec. 14:9).

The worldwide worship of Christ will include the prosperous as well as the poor (v. 29; Ps. 45:12). Every mortal will bow down to Jesus Christ and proclaim Him King of kings and Lord of lords. They will acknowledge Him as their source of life. All who were dead—physically and spiritually in trespasses and sins—and who accepted Him as Lord and Savior will live throughout eternity because of His death on Calvary’s cross.

The salvation provided by Christ will extend not only to every corner of the world, to rich and poor alike, but also to every generation (v. 30). Through prophetic eyes, David viewed

people of future generations hearing the glorious message of the gospel and many coming to faith in Jesus Christ. The righteousness that is through Christ will be proclaimed throughout eternity (Ro. 3:22; 5:17, 21; 2 Cor. 5:21; Phil. 3:9). People of all the ages will acknowledge that it is all possible because of Christ's work at Calvary—a work that concluded with His triumphant cry, “It is finished” (Jn. 19:30). Christ alone will receive the credit. He alone will receive the glory. He alone will be worshipped forevermore.

Thought 1. David bore strong witness to the glorious work of Christ as well as to the glorious work the Lord had performed in his own life. This passage sets an example for us to follow. First, we are commanded to proclaim the glories of the gospel: Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (1 Cor. 15:1-4). Our Savior has commissioned us—all true believers—to take the good news of salvation to the ends of the earth (Mt. 28:18-20; Mk. 16:15; Ac. 1:8).

Second, David testified to God's work in his own life. Among the family of God, our brothers and sisters in Christ, the assembly of the church, we should share how God has been faithful to us. We should praise Him before others for the wonderful works He performs in our lives. Our testimony regarding God's faithfulness glorifies Him and stirs others to rejoice in the Lord. And their praise encourages others who are walking through difficult trials in their own lives (2 Cor. 9:11-12; 2 Cor. 1:3-7).

“And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen” (Mt. 28:18-20).

“But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses

unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Ac. 1:8).

“But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (1 Pe. 3:15).

“I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation” (Ps. 40:10).