

THE PSALM 22 PROPHECY

THE MESSIAH ON
THE CROSS



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Psalm Chapter 22 is one of the most extraordinary prophetic passages in all of Scripture. Written by David approximately one thousand years before the time of Christ, around 1000 BC,^{1 2} the Psalm describes a suffering individual in language that, as we will see throughout this study, corresponds in remarkable detail with the eventual suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

Before examining those details, however, it is important to understand how this prophecy works. Psalm 22 is written in the first person, with David speaking from the perspective of his own suffering and distress. Yet as the Psalm progresses, portions of the description begin to transcend anything we know David personally experienced. The language becomes increasingly specific, portraying circumstances that find their ultimate fulfillment centuries later in the suffering and death of the Messiah. In this sense, David's own experience forms the historical setting from which a greater prophetic picture emerges.

This kind of prophetic pattern is found elsewhere in Scripture. A person or event can have a real historical significance in its own time while also serving as a pattern that anticipates something greater in the future. David himself is especially important in this regard. As Israel's anointed king, his life repeatedly anticipates the greater Son of

David who would ultimately come as Israel's Messiah. In Psalm 22, David's suffering becomes the framework through which the Holy Spirit prophetically portrays the suffering of that greater King.

The purpose of this study is to examine Psalm 22 itself and compare its specific details with the later New Testament record. As we proceed, we will see that the cumulative correspondence becomes increasingly difficult to explain as coincidence. Some portions are so vivid that they read almost as though the suffering Messiah Himself were describing the scene from the cross centuries beforehand.

Since this study will compare the details of Psalm 22 with events that occurred centuries later in the life and death of Jesus, it is important to establish that the Psalm unquestionably existed long before those events took place. As mentioned earlier, because Psalm 22 is attributed to David, it is conventionally dated to around 1000 BC, placing its composition roughly a thousand years before Jesus.

Beyond this traditional dating, we also have clear historical evidence that Psalm 22 was already in existence centuries before the time of Christ. Psalm 22 was already included in the Greek Septuagint, the ancient translation of the Hebrew Scriptures produced several centuries before Christ.³ Additionally, fragments of Psalm 22 have been discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls. One manuscript from Qumran Cave 4, known as 4Q88, preserves portions of Psalm 22:14-17 and dates to the pre-Christian Hasmonean period.⁴ These independent witnesses establish beyond reasonable dispute that the text of Psalm 22 existed centuries before the events we are about to compare it with.

This is what makes biblical prophecy so compelling. When Scripture describes specific events centuries before they occur, and those details later converge upon actual events in history, we are confronted with evidence that reveals the true Author as possessing knowledge far beyond anything available to the human writer. Psalm 22 gives us an opportunity to examine one particularly remarkable example of this phenomenon in detail.

Before examining the individual prophetic passages and their New Testament fulfillments, let's first read through Psalm 22 in its entirety:

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¹ My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

² O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

³ But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

⁴ Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them.

⁵ They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.

⁶ But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

⁷ All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,

⁸ He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

⁹ But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts.

¹⁰ I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother's belly.

¹¹ Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.

¹² Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.

¹³ They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

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

¹⁵ My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

¹⁶ For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.

¹⁸ They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

¹⁹ But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me.

²⁰ Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog.

²¹ Save me from the lion's mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.

²² I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.

²³ Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel.

²⁴ 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.

²⁵ My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

²⁶ The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever.

²⁷ All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.

²⁸ For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations.

²⁹ 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.

³⁰ A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation.

³¹ They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

-Psalm 22

In the next chapter, we will examine ten specific prophecies from segments of Psalm 22 and their later fulfillments as recorded in the New Testament.

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CHAPTER 2

TEN PROPHECIES FROM CHAPTER 22

Let's now begin our investigation of ten specific prophetic passages found within Psalm 22.

#1 – Psalm 22:1

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

-Psalm 22:1

These are the identical words that Jesus said while on the cross approximately one thousand years later, recorded in Matthew 27:46.

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?

-Matthew 27:46

Jesus Christ, verbalizing the anguish of His human experience, felt forsaken of the Father as He hung on the cross – suffering the wrath of

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God against sin, and dying as the sinners' substitute. The Bible says in Galatians 3:13 (as the apostle Paul quotes the Old Testament Law in Deuteronomy 21:22-23) that Jesus actually became a curse, and suffered under the curse of the Father while bearing our sin, so that we might be freed from the curse and given the blessing of eternal life through the Holy Spirit.

Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree:

-Galatians 3:13

In context, the word “tree” here refers to a wooden cross for crucifixion (as we see it used similarly in other passages like Acts 5:30; 10:39; 13:29). The concept of cursing and blessing in association with a tree is a consistent theological pattern throughout the larger narrative of Scripture, showing the prophetic integration of the Bible. For example, in Genesis 3, Eve and then Adam eat fruit from a tree in the Garden of Eden, which they were forbidden to eat. And in Revelation 22, people are eating from the Tree of Life in the Eternal State. It yields fruit every month, and its leaves are for the healing of the nations, emphasizing the restoration and wholeness in the new heavens and new earth. So, we see that:

- a tree was involved in the entry of sin into humanity (through the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in the Garden).
- a tree was involved in the answer to sin for humanity (redemption through Christ's death on the cross).
- a tree is involved to emphasize the ultimate removal of sin and state of restoration in the Eternal State (through the Tree of Life).

So, we can clearly see not only the prophetic nature of this passage,

as David directly records the future words of the Savior dying on the cross, but also the remarkable unity of Scripture. This is evident both in those prophetic words and in the carefully developed motif of the tree, which God uses throughout the biblical story of redemption, from its beginning, through its central accomplishment at the cross, and finally to its ultimate completion.

#2 – Psalm 22:6

But I am a **worm**, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

-Psalm 22:6

This verse is an amazing prophecy in and of itself, but to capture the fullness of it, we have to look at the Hebrew text behind it. The Hebrew word translated as “worm” in our Bible finds its origin in the name of a very specific worm native to Israel. This word in Hebrew is *tola* (Strong’s #8438), also meaning scarlet or crimson.¹

Let’s discuss some of the main points regarding this “worm” and how it prophetically relates to the precise imagery of Christ’s work on the cross.

- Scarlet or crimson dye was made from a particular worm, the *Kermes vermilio* (the origin of the word “vermilion”) also known as the *Coccus ilicis*.
- The shells of this worm were used to make a red dye to color cloth.
- The *Kermes vermilio* would **pierce** the thin bark of twigs to suck the sap, from which it prepared a waxy scale to protect its soft body. The red dye is in this scale.

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- When reproducing, the female climbs a **tree** where it bears the eggs; the larvae then hatch and feed on the body of the worm. It gives its life so others can live. It is of no use to humans unless it dies.
- A **crimson** spot is left on the branch of the **tree**; when the spot dries out in about **three days**, it changes to **white** as it flakes off.²

So, we have some key words we need to keep in mind as we continue – “pierce,” “tree,” “crimson,” “three days,” “white,” and the idea of one giving its life that others might live. This imagery is precisely representative of what Jesus Christ did on the cross. The parallels are overwhelming.

- Jesus Christ was **pierced** on a **tree** (the cross).
- Through the crucifixion, He was crushed like a worm under the wrath of God for our sins in order to extract a precious **crimson** substance, which was His sinless blood.
- This blood would then be symbolically applied to mankind as a precious dye to cover their sins. In other words, He died so that we might live.
- He then was in the grave for **three days** before resurrecting to make this redemption plan complete. Through His blood, He would wash us, covering our sins, and making us “**white** as snow.”

This entire concept is dramatically brought together for us in Isaiah 1:18, another well-known prophetic Scripture containing Messianic references.

Come now, let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as **scarlet**, they shall be **white as snow**; though they be **red like crimson**, they shall be as **wool**.

-Isaiah 1:18

If it wasn't a great enough condescension for God to become a man, He then became likened unto a worm – and no man – in order to take upon Himself the sins of the world in order that we might be made free.

#3 – Psalm 22:7-8

All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,

He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

-Psalm 22:7-8

This passage prophetically describes the intense ridicule the suffering Messiah would endure. But the correspondence with Jesus' crucifixion goes far beyond the general fact that He was mocked. Psalm 22 specifically describes His enemies shaking their heads at Him and then challenging God to deliver Him because He trusted in the Lord. Matthew records these same actions and even essentially the same words being directed at Jesus while He hung on the cross.

³⁹ And those who passed by derided him, wagging their heads ⁴⁰ and saying, "You who would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save yourself! If you are the Son of God, come down from the cross." ⁴¹ So also the chief priests, with the scribes and elders, mocked him, saying, ⁴² "He saved others; he cannot save himself. He is the King of Israel; let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. ⁴³ He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he

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desires him. For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’” ⁴⁴ the robbers who were crucified with him also reviled him in the same way.

-Matthew 27:39-44 (ESV)

The parallel is astonishingly precise. Psalm 22 says, “they shake the head,” while Matthew records those passing by Jesus “wagging their heads.” The Psalm then says, “He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him,” while Jesus’ enemies mockingly declared, “He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him.” The correspondence therefore extends beyond the general fact that Jesus was ridiculed – both the physical gesture and the substance of the taunt closely match what David had written centuries beforehand. Jesus willingly endured this humiliation at the hands of His own creation without coming down from the cross or retaliating against those who mocked Him.

#4 – Psalm 22:9-10

⁹ But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. ¹⁰ I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly.

-Psalm 22:9-10

This passage describes a relationship with God that extends all the way back to the sufferer’s entrance into the world. He had been under God’s care from the womb and had trusted in Him from the very beginning of life. In the fullest sense, this language finds its fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The New Testament records that Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of Mary (Luke 1:35). From the moment of His conception, His life was uniquely set apart to God.

Unlike every other human being, Jesus did not begin life under the corruption of sin and later turn to God. He was born holy and remained perfectly righteous throughout His life. Even as a child, He demonstrated

an awareness of His unique relationship with the Father, saying at twelve years old, “wist ye not that I must be about my Father’s business?” (Luke 2:49). Psalm 22:9-10 therefore fits naturally within the larger portrait of the Messiah presented in the Psalm – one whose relationship with God extended from the womb through a life of perfect trust and obedience, even to the suffering and death described in the verses that follow.

#5 – Psalm 22:11-13

¹¹ Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help. ¹² Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round. ¹³ They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.

-Psalm 22:11-13

The strong bulls of Bashan are spoken of because of their reputation in the Psalmist’s day as being the strongest and fiercest among bulls.³ This on the surface may be very appropriate imagery depicting the Roman soldiers who crucified Him, showing no mercy to their victims, but gouging them as a bull would. In other words, on its most superficial prophetic level, this would seem to anticipate the piercing of Jesus’ hands, feet, and side with the Roman nails and spear.

A deeper potential understanding is that Bashan (the modern-day Golan Heights) was not only the home of these bulls, but more importantly, it was the notorious home of the Rephaim. In the Bible, the Hebrew word Rephaim is not only used to designate the specific tribe of giant descendants of the Nephilim (the product of fallen angels comingling with human women) who lived in Bashan (Genesis 6:4; Numbers 13:33; Joshua 13:12), but was also later used to poetically refer to the “undead” disembodied spirits of the Nephilim (Isaiah 26:14), who became evil, unclean spirits upon the earth.

It’s possible, then, that the Spirit, in inspiring David, drew upon this imagery associated with Bashan to portray the evil demonic spirits that may have been harassing Jesus as He suffered on the cross

for our sins. You can imagine that they would have viewed His death as a tremendous victory, never realizing that three days later He would rise from the dead and triumph over the grave.

#6 – Psalm 22:14

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.

-Psalm 22:14

This verse was vividly fulfilled in the physical experience of the crucifixion. The first part, describing being “poured out like water” would seem to describe a state of total physical exhaustion, and could include the loss of fluid volume in the body due to excessive sweating, trauma, and blood loss.

His initial flogging alone could have been enough to induce the onset of hypovolemic shock. This occurs when a person loses twenty percent or more of the body’s blood supply. The symptoms of hypovolemic shock include nausea, profuse sweating, dizziness, confusion, and loss of consciousness.^{4 5 6} You can imagine how these symptoms could give the feeling of “being poured out.”

The next three phrases also clearly portray the bodily experience of crucifixion. “All my bones are out of joint” illustrates the torturous feeling of being stretched out on a rack. During crucifixion, it was common for the shoulders to be ripped out of joint due to the weight of the hanging body. The body would then sink lower, dislocating the wrists.⁷ The result is that the arms are extended at least fifteen centimeters (six inches) beyond their normal span of reach. This causes the body to hang in an extended, slumped position, which forces the chest cavity to protrude outward. The extended chest cavity allows for inhalation but makes exhaling nearly impossible.⁸

The next two phrases vividly portray the bodily experience of crucifixion as well – “my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.” The difficulty surrounding exhalation leads to a slow form of

suffocation. The decreased oxygen causes damage to the tissues, and the capillaries begin leaking watery fluid from the blood into the surrounding tissues. This results in a build-up of fluid around the heart (pericardial effusion) and lungs (pleural effusion). The collapsing lungs, failing heart, dehydration, and inability to get sufficient oxygen to the tissues essentially suffocate the victim. The decreased oxygen also damages the heart itself (myocardial infarction) which leads to cardiac arrest. In severe cases of cardiac stress – such as crucifixion – the heart can even burst, a process known as cardiac rupture. This seems to be what “my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels” could be referring to.^{9 10}

#7 – Psalm 22:15

My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.

-Psalm 22:15

As we just discussed, Jesus’ physical condition on the cross would have involved extreme weakness, blood loss, dehydration, and intense thirst. A “potsherd” is a broken piece of pottery, dry, hard, and devoid of moisture. The picture of strength being “dried up like a potsherd” therefore vividly describes a body whose strength and moisture have been completely drained away. The next phrase, “my tongue cleaveth to my jaws,” continues the same imagery, portraying the severe dryness of the mouth that would accompany such suffering.

Near the end of the crucifixion, John records Jesus saying, “I thirst” (John 19:28), directly corresponding with this description. The final words of the verse, “thou hast brought me into the dust of death,” then bring the suffering figure to the point of death itself. Shortly afterward, Jesus declared, “It is finished,” and died (John 19:30). Psalm 22:15 therefore presents a vivid progression of physical exhaustion, extreme thirst, and approaching death that corresponds remarkably with Jesus’ final moments on the cross.

#8 – Psalm 22:16

For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet.

-Psalm 22:16

“Dogs” was a common Jewish term of insult when talking about Gentiles (Matthew 15:26). This passage anticipated the heathen Gentiles who would be surrounding the Messiah during His sufferings, which was fulfilled at the cross as the Roman soldiers crucified Jesus.

The second part of the verse – concerning the piercing of hands and feet – was precisely fulfilled in the crucifixion. Astonishingly, the practice of crucifixion was not even yet invented at the time of the writing of this prophecy, and would not become common in Israel until the Roman era.¹¹ Jesus’ hands and His feet were pierced through to the cross as the wicked gathered around Him in ridicule (John 20:25; Acts 2:23).

Critics often try to cast doubt on the Hebrew behind the words translated “they pierced my hands and feet,” claiming instead that it means “like a lion, they are at my hands and feet.” The Hebrew words for “lion” and “pierced” are almost identical, and differ so slightly that they could easily be confused. Old Testament scholars do concede that most of the Hebrew texts available today read “lion,” rather than “pierced.” In some of these manuscripts “pierced” is a marginal note. That being said, there are several reasons to believe that “pierced” is the correct rendering. Because this is such an important subject, we will briefly list several.

First, in the Dead Sea Scrolls – which pre-date the common Hebrew texts by a thousand years – the term used is clearly “pierced,” not “lion.”¹²

Second, the ancient versions (translations of the Hebrew text into various languages) overwhelmingly support the reading “pierced.” This is the case in the Septuagint (Greek version), the Syriac, Vulgate,

Arabic, and the Ethiopic. One must remember that the Masoretic Hebrew text from which the “lion” reading derives, originated *after* the crucifixion, while the Septuagint dates from the third century BC – in other words, long *before* the crucifixion. The obviously biased Jews would have every reason to obfuscate the true meaning of this prophecy after the crucifixion, providing us the probable explanation of why it now reads “lion” in the Hebrew texts of today. Consider the following quote from Derek Kidner.

A strong argument in its (the “pierced” rendering) favor is that the LXX (the Septuagint), compiled two centuries before the crucifixion, and therefore an unbiased witness, understood it so.¹³

So, then it seems clear that the evidence lies with our common English versions that use the term “pierced.” Psalm 22:16 is an explicit prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, accurately detailing the piercing of His hands and feet hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented.

#9 – Psalm 22:17

I may tell [count] all my bones: they look and stare upon me.
-Psalm 22:17

The *New International Version* phrases it:

All my bones are on display; people stare and gloat over me.
-Psalm 22:17 (NIV)

And the *English Standard Version* says:

I can count all my bones – they stare and gloat over me;
-Psalm 22:17 (ESV)

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The experience of suffering the whipping Jesus endured would have filleted open His skin, exposing His bones so that both He and those nearby could see and count them. The Roman whips had shards of sharp metal and hooks that would embed into the victim's skin and rip the skin apart as the whip was retracted. A *Wikipedia* article on flagellation (whipping) in antiquity says the following:

In the Roman Empire, flagellation was often used as a prelude to crucifixion, and in this context is sometimes referred to as scourging. Whips with small pieces of metal or bone at the tips were commonly used. Such a device could easily cause disfigurement and serious trauma, such as ripping pieces of flesh from the body or loss of an eye. In addition to causing severe pain, the victim would approach a state of hypovolemic shock due to loss of blood.¹⁴

This passage also appears to anticipate the fact that during His crucifixion, none of Jesus' bones were broken. Although it was commonplace to break the legs of crucifixion victims, it was recorded that not a bone of His was broken (John 19:36) – this being in compliance with the Levitical requirements for the Passover sacrificial lamb (Exodus 12:46).

#10 – Psalm 22:18

They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.

-Psalm 22:18

This was precisely fulfilled in John 19:23-24 as the Roman soldiers divided Jesus' garments among themselves and then cast lots for His coat. What makes the correspondence especially significant is that Psalm 22 describes two distinct actions: the garments would be divided, while a particular garment would be decided by the casting of lots. John records both details occurring at the crucifixion.

²³ 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. ²⁴ They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be.

-John 19:23-24a

The soldiers themselves had no reason to act with Psalm 22 in mind. They were simply deciding what to do with Jesus' clothing, and the seamless coat led them to cast lots rather than tear it apart. Jesus had no control over what the Roman soldiers would do with His garments after He had been crucified, yet their actions reproduced the two-part pattern Psalm 22 had described centuries beforehand.

Conclusion

As we conclude this chapter, these ten passages reveal a remarkable concentration of details in Psalm 22 that correspond with the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Taken together, they present a prophetic picture far more specific than any single similarity considered in isolation. In the next chapter, we will examine the principal attempts to explain these correspondences apart from genuine prophecy and consider whether those explanations can reasonably account for the evidence.

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CHAPTER 3

EXAMINING THE ARGUMENTS OF THE CRITICS

After examining these ten prophetic segments of Scripture, the obvious question becomes: how should we explain the remarkable correspondence between Psalm 22 and the crucifixion of Jesus? The parallels are not limited to one vague statement or general similarity. As we have seen, numerous specific details converge upon the same event.

There are really three basic possibilities:

1. It is coincidence. The details simply happen to line up as they do.
2. It is an early Christian fabrication. The New Testament writers deliberately shaped the account of Jesus' death to make it correspond with Psalm 22.
3. Psalm 22 is genuinely prophetic and was ultimately fulfilled in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

Let's examine the first two alternatives and determine whether either provides a reasonable explanation of the evidence.

#1 – “Mere Coincidence”

It seems highly improbable that the Psalmist would describe so many specific details – the piercing of hands and feet, intense physical suffering and thirst, public ridicule, bodily exposure, and the dividing of clothing by casting lots – only for all of them to later appear in the crucifixion of Jesus. Any one of these similarities, taken by itself, might be dismissed as coincidence. But explaining so many specific details appearing together within the same passage as mere coincidence becomes increasingly difficult.

The historical setting makes this even more remarkable. As we know, Psalm 22 is conventionally dated to the time of David, around 1000 BC. This is significant because Roman-style crucifixion did not exist in David’s world and would not be developed and widely practiced until centuries later.¹ Yet Psalm 22 describes bodily suffering that corresponds precisely with the experience produced by that later method of execution.

This point is especially important. David could not have been observing a crucifixion and poetically describing what he saw, because the form of execution described by these details belonged to a later historical world. Even apart from the New Testament identification of Jesus with the Psalm, we are still left with the extraordinary fact that an ancient writer described suffering that would eventually characterize a method of execution developed centuries afterward.

Thus, to attribute the similarities of Psalm 22 and the crucifixion of Jesus to coincidence seems more than a bit of a stretch. This does not seem plausible.

#2 – “A Christian Plot”

A more serious objection is that the New Testament writers deliberately shaped the story of Jesus’ death around Psalm 22. According to this explanation, the Psalm was not actually predicting the crucifixion. Instead, later Christian writers knew the Psalm and constructed

details in their accounts of Jesus' death to make it appear that He had fulfilled it.

But before examining that theory, we should ask why Psalm 22 would have been selected as the model for Jesus' execution in the first place. The proposed fabrication only makes sense if the Psalm was already understood as having prophetic significance connected with the Messiah. Otherwise, there would have been no apparent reason to construct the crucifixion narrative around it. In that sense, the theory itself assumes that Psalm 22 was already regarded as relevant to the Messiah's suffering – the very prophetic connection it is attempting to explain away.

Beyond that initial problem, the fabrication theory faces several additional difficulties when we look at the historical evidence.

First, the crucifixion of Jesus was not an invention of the Gospel writers. It was already a central part of the earliest Christian testimony and is affirmed throughout the New Testament, including the books that predate the Gospels. In other words, belief in Jesus' crucifixion was already firmly established within the Christian movement before the Gospel accounts were written.

This creates a serious problem for the fabrication theory. The Gospel writers could not simply invent a manner of death that fit Psalm 22, because Jesus' crucifixion was already an established part of the Christian testimony before the Gospel accounts were written.

Secondly, we are not dealing with the testimony of only one New Testament writer. Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all record the crucifixion of Jesus. Many scholars believe that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, commonly called the Synoptic Gospels, made some use of shared sources or relied upon one another in some way. Even allowing for this, however, the fabrication theory would still require an extraordinarily widespread, coordinated, and detailed deception involving multiple writers, all working to take the same supposedly unrelated Psalm and reshape the story of Jesus' death around it. That already stretches the fabrication theory well beyond what reasonably explains the evidence.

John also gives us a separate account of the crucifixion, so the case

does not rest entirely on the Synoptic Gospels. And the connection to Psalm 22 does not stop with the four Gospel writers. The author of Hebrews also applies language from Psalm 22 directly to Jesus. So the fabrication theory would require this same supposed invention to spread beyond one Gospel tradition and become established across multiple New Testament writings very early in the Christian movement. The more widely this connection appears across these different writers and sources, the more difficult it becomes to explain it as the result of a coordinated Christian fabrication.

Thirdly, most of the parallels between Psalm 22 and the crucifixion accounts appear naturally within the narratives. The Gospel writers do not repeatedly stop to say, “as it was written,” or “this happened to fulfill the Scripture,” as they often do when deliberately drawing attention to fulfilled prophecy. In fact, Mark and Luke do not directly cite Psalm 22 in their crucifixion accounts at all, while Matthew and John draw minimal attention to the connection.

This is extremely significant. If these writers were deliberately inventing the details of Jesus’ execution in order to convince readers that He had fulfilled Psalm 22, we would expect them to continually point out the very correspondences they had supposedly manufactured. Instead, many of those correspondences simply emerge naturally from the events they describe. The Gospel writers record what happened, and the reader discovers the remarkable relationship to Psalm 22 by comparing the accounts with the earlier prophecy. That is not what we would expect from writers deliberately constructing a false fulfillment.

Fourthly, many of the details described in the Gospels involve actual methods of humiliation, torture, and execution belonging to the Roman world of Jesus’ time. The Gospel writers could not simply invent unrealistic Roman practices in order to force the crucifixion narrative to resemble Psalm 22. Their original readers lived within that same historical world and knew what Roman punishment and execution looked like. Fabricated practices and unrealistic descriptions would have been immediately recognizable.

This is especially significant because Psalm 22 described these real-

ities centuries before crucifixion had developed, while the Gospel writers recorded Jesus' death within a world where those practices already existed. David could not have known what crucifixion would eventually look like, and the Gospel writers could not control what Roman crucifixion actually involved. Neither side of that correspondence could have engineered the other.

Fifthly, we must consider what the earliest Christian witnesses were willing to endure for their testimony about Jesus. They faced rejection, persecution, imprisonment, physical suffering, and, in many cases, death, while gaining little of obvious worldly value. Meanwhile, they had tremendous reason to abandon their testimony if they knew it was deliberately concocted.

While their willingness to suffer does not, by itself, prove that their testimony was true, it does make the idea of deliberate fabrication much more difficult to sustain. People can sincerely suffer and even die for beliefs that are false, but usually because they genuinely believe something they have received from others. The earliest Christian witnesses, by contrast, claimed to be testifying about events they had personally seen and experienced.

That distinction is important. If the events surrounding Jesus did not happen as these witnesses claimed, then they were not simply mistaken about something they had been taught. They would have been knowingly promoting a story they themselves had invented. Continuing to defend that story despite persecution, suffering, and even death would therefore be very different from dying for a false belief sincerely received from someone else. Their willingness to endure those consequences strongly supports the conclusion that they genuinely believed the events they described had actually occurred.

When considered together, these points make the fabrication theory extremely difficult to sustain. It requires us to believe that multiple early Christian writers conspired to take the same ancient Psalm and deliberately reshape the story of Jesus' death around it, incorporate historically accurate details belonging to a Roman method of execution that did not even exist when the Psalm was written, frequently fail to draw attention to the very correspondences they

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supposedly manufactured, spread the same fabricated connection throughout the early Christian record despite the presence of numerous eyewitnesses who could have challenged their claims, and then continue defending their testimony despite severe personal consequences.

At some point, the proposed explanation becomes far more complicated and improbable than the conclusion it was designed to avoid. The far simpler and more reasonable explanation is that Psalm 22 was genuinely prophetic and that the New Testament writers faithfully recorded the remarkable manner in which its details were fulfilled in the suffering and death of Jesus Christ.

There is also one final piece of evidence within the Psalm itself. Psalm 22 does not end with the suffering figure in defeat. Instead, after describing his suffering and deliverance, the Psalm looks forward to the remarkable result that would follow:

All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and
all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.

-Psalm 22:27

David's own suffering did not cause people from nations throughout the world to turn to the Lord and worship Him. Neither did the suffering of any other ordinary king, prophet, or patriarch. But through the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, people from nations throughout the world have turned to the Lord, and this prophecy will reach its ultimate fulfillment when the Messiah reigns over the nations in His coming Millennial Kingdom.

So it is not only the details of the suffering that correspond with Jesus. The result that follows that suffering does as well. The Psalm does not simply portray how the Messiah would suffer – it also anticipates the great redemptive result that would follow, as people from nations throughout the world turn to the Lord, worship Him, and receive the life that comes through Him.

Taken as a whole, Psalm 22 reaches far beyond anything recorded in the life of David. Its suffering, its specific details, and the worldwide

result that follows all converge with remarkable precision upon Jesus Christ. The most reasonable conclusion is that Psalm 22 is genuinely Messianic and prophetic, and that its ultimate fulfillment is found in Him.

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1. Kiehl, pp. 123-124.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In Psalm 22, we find a remarkable collection of prophetic details that converge upon the suffering and crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The piercing of the hands and feet, the intense physical suffering and thirst, the public ridicule, the exposure of the body, the dividing of the garments, and the casting of lots all find striking correspondence in the events surrounding Jesus' death. As we have also seen, the attempts to explain these details as coincidence or later Christian fabrication face serious difficulties when all of the evidence is considered together. Even the worldwide redemptive result anticipated at the end of the Psalm corresponds with what followed the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 22 ultimately gives us far more than an impressive collection of predictions. It provides compelling evidence of the supernatural origin of Scripture by displaying a characteristic that belongs uniquely to its true Author: the ability to declare the future before it happens. No human writer could describe events centuries in advance with this kind of precision. The knowledge revealed in Psalm 22 therefore points beyond David himself to the divine Author who knew exactly what would occur long before the events ever took place.

But Psalm 22 reveals more than God's foreknowledge. It also

reveals His extraordinary love toward us. God knew beforehand exactly what the Messiah would suffer, yet He still entered into human history and provided the sacrifice necessary for our redemption. Long before the cross ever stood outside Jerusalem, God gave mankind a prophetic picture of the suffering He would one day endure on our behalf. Psalm 22 therefore stands not only as powerful evidence of the supernatural origin of Scripture – it is also a prophetic testimony to the extraordinary love of the God who authored it.

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