

Psalms 22, part 1

First, we consider Psalm 22 without reference to the New Testament:

1. Last week we discussed another lament, Psalm 35. How is the response of the Psalmist different in 22?
2. The first portion of the psalm (1-21a) is a dire cry for help. In this portion, the psalmist alternates between “I” sections describing David’s plight and “thou” sections addressed to God (3-5; 9-11; 19-21a). How does the tone change from in the successive “thou” sections?
3. What sort of parallelism is used? Which lines or verses break the parallel structure—that is, which lines are orphaned, and are not tied to adjacent lines by meaning or language? What role do they play?
4. Based solely on the text, does the first part of this lament sound to you like a description of (a) a soldier in battle; (b) a terrible illness coupled with betrayal; (c) a gangland execution; (d) other: _____.
5. The first part of the psalm (1-21a) is characterized by doubt and abandonment, pleading and terror.
 - a. Does the psalmist ever emerge to a place of peace and trust prior to rescue in 21b?
 - b. In those dark times of your life when you have felt tormented and afraid, have you ever felt abandoned by God? If so, did you find your way back to faith and hope prior to resolution or rescue?
6. The word for “the afflicted” in 24 is the same as that for “the poor” in 26 and means “poor, wretched, in a needy condition”. What does the parallel structure of v. 26 say about the identity of the “poor”? Are they the same as “the poor in spirit” in the beatitudes of Mt 5:3 or “the poor” in Lk 6:20?
7. “The law [Lev 7:16] encouraged those who vowed some service to God, should their prayer be granted, to fulfill the vow with a sacrifice, followed by a feast which might last as long as two days” (Derek Kidner, IVP). This is the context in which the psalmist recounts his gratitude and God’s saving work.
 - a. In what ways does 21b-31 go beyond this local, communal celebration of gratitude?
 - b. The Huddle rightly begins prayer time with thanksgiving. If we had the occasional celebration of gratitude hosted by a family in our group, for a particular blessing or rescue from a tight spot, would it be (a) weird; (b) totally appropriate; (c) embarrassing; (d) expensive; (e) a dubious use of the OT sacrificial system for a New Covenant community; or (f) other: _____?

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Fun fact: The KJV translates 22:21b, “You have rescued me from the horns of the wild oxen!” as “Save me from the lion’s mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.”

Bonus fun fact: The earliest reference to Psalm 22 appears to be the allusion in the Testament of Solomon (6:8) in which Satan says, “If anyone adjures me with the oath (called) ‘the Elo-i’, a great name for [God’s] power, I disappear.” (Carson & Beale, Commentary on NT use of the OT, p. 99)

Psalm 22, English Standard Version (ESV)

[Read Psalm 22 antiphonally using three groups of readers (A, B, C), as follows: A: 1-2; B: 3-5; A: 6-8; B: 9-11; A: 12-18; B: 19-21a; C: 21b-26; A+B+C: 27-31.]

A

22:1 My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?

2 O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer,
and by night, but I find no rest.

B

3 Yet you are holy,
enthroned on the praises[a] of Israel.

4 In you our fathers trusted;
they trusted, and you delivered them.

5 To you they cried and were rescued;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

A

6 But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by mankind and despised by the people.

7 All who see me mock me;
they make mouths at me; they wag their heads;

8 “He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;
let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”

B

9 Yet you are he who took me from the womb;
you made me trust you at my mother's breasts.

10 On you was I cast from my birth,
and from my mother's womb you have been my God.

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

A

12 Many bulls encompass me;
strong bulls of Bashan surround me;

13 they open wide their mouths at me,
like a ravening and 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 within my breast;
15 my strength is dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue sticks to my jaws;
you lay me in the dust of death.

16 For dogs encompass me;
a company of evildoers encircles me;
they have pierced¹ my hands and feet—

17 I can count all my bones—

¹ LXX is responsible for the phrase “are pierced”, whereas the MT has “like a lion”, a word in the Hebrew which is quite close to that for “pierced.” Though Jerome and the early church seem to have had “pierced” (despite the lack of any reference in this NT to this verse), the MT is generally preferred to the LXX. In this case, though, the LXX agrees with a scroll discovered near the DSS which has recently come to light, and may lead the preferred translation back to “pierced.” See Conrad R. Gren, *JETS* 48/2 (June 2005) 283-99.

they stare and gloat over me;

18 they divide my garments among them,
and for my clothing they cast lots.

B

19 But you, O Lord, do not be far off!
O you my help, come quickly to my aid!

20 Deliver my soul from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dog!

21 Save me from the mouth of the lion!

C

From the horns of the wild oxen *you have rescued me!*²

22 I will tell of your name to my brothers;
in the midst of the congregation I will praise you:

23 You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you offspring of Jacob, glorify him,
and stand in awe of him, all you offspring of Israel!

24 For he has not despised or abhorred
the affliction of the afflicted,
and he has not hidden his face from him,
but has heard, when he cried to him.

25 From you comes my praise in the great congregation;
my vows I will perform before those who fear him.

26 The afflicted[d] shall eat and be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord!
May your hearts live forever!

A, B, C

² The word order has been changed here to reflect the Hebrew.

27 All the ends of the earth shall remember
and turn to the Lord,
and all the families of the nations
shall worship before you.

28 For kingship belongs to the Lord,
and he rules over the nations.

29 All the prosperous of the earth eat and worship;
before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
even the one who could not keep himself alive.

30 Posterity shall serve him;
it shall be told of the Lord to the coming generation;

31 they shall come and proclaim his righteousness to a
people yet unborn,
that **he has done it.**

Leader's Notes:

Regarding inductive study of Psalm 22:

As you can see from the handout following the questions, the Psalm is in two parts: before rescue and after.

Part one has an ABABAB structure; A's are the psalmist lamenting to himself, B's are his increasingly frantic cries to God.

The Psalm also uses parallel couplets. The places where the psalmist departs from these, the "orphaned lines", then stand out and command greater attention. While the orphans aren't trivial to identify, they seem to include 3, 15b, 26b, 29b. These are each worth careful consideration.

Similar to the orphans is 21b which is the climax of the psalm and is a pivot verse: it belongs both with the lines before and after it. It is the crescendo to which the agony and terror build.

The psalmist is very explicit about his torments, but in a phrase God rescues him, and we are not told how. A number of participants in the discussion saw the rescue not as removing the psalmist from the dire situation but as providing him with the perspective needed to go pas through his trial. The traditional reading holds that the psalmist really is rescued, as 21b suggests.

The psalm turns to waves of gratitude in 21b-31. These start out with a statement that the psalmist will both tell of God's saving work among and will do so in the context of a feast in which the community shares the meat of a thank offering--and this offering of course goes not just to feed the psalmist's friends, but the whole community, which includes the poor of v. 26.

In 27-31 the scope of the psalm broadens, breaking and defying a simple historical understanding. Now the good news of God's work is spread to the gentile nations, who all turn to God. Finally, there are hints in 26b and 29 of resurrection (though it's not obvious whether the psalmist intended them or not), and the psalm ends with words which call to mind Jesus' final "it is finished".

Important note: Many new translations use phrases like "like a lion" instead of "pierced" in v. 16. Use of new ancient documents may well be swinging academic opinion back in favor of "pierced"--see the footnote on p. 2 and the article referenced.

Regarding Psalm 22 and the NT: The Psalms are quoted more than any OT book by the NT authors, and no Psalm is quoted more than this one, which is alluded to seven times (though only once is it explicitly named). All but one of these is in the context of crucifixion. This Psalm was important to the early church for understanding why the Messiah would be crucified, functioning very much like Isaiah 53. We tend not to think of David as a prophet in the same way that we do Isaiah. Yet Peter in Acts 2:30-31 speaks of David as prophesying of the Messiah, and we have Jewish writing prior to the time of Jesus also viewing David as a prophet. The view of this Psalm as prophecy is strengthened by our having no record of any event in David's

life that come remotely close to fitting this description. Some have also seen this Psalm as a description of crucifixion, a form of execution not practiced by the Jews and probably not witnessed by David.

To appreciate how Ps 22 was read by the early church, we will read Isa 53:3-12. We also bear in mind the verses which make use of Ps 22, and those which either allude to it or are descriptively parallel to it:

- The first of this Psalm is Jesus' use of the first verse when he is on the cross (Mt 27:45-46; Mk 15:34)
- "they divide my clothes among themselves, and for my clothing they cast lots" (Ps 22:18); "And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take" (Mk 15:24; Jn 19:24)
- "All who see me mock at me; they make mouths at me, they shake their heads; 'Commit your cause to the Lord; let him deliver—let him rescue the one in whom he delights!'" (22:7-8); "Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes, were also mocking him among themselves and saying, "He saved others; he cannot save himself" (Mk 15:29-31); "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he wants to" (Mt 27:43; Lk 23:35)
- Though the NT authors didn't do so, one could add to this the reference to hands and feet being pierced in 17b.

Regarding Psalm 23: "He restores my soul" "may picture straying sheep being brought back as in Is 49:5 or Ps 60:1 (Heb 3), which use the same verb, whose intransitive sense is often 'repent' or 'be converted' (e.g. Hos 14:1+, Joel 2:12). Psalm 19:7, by its subject (the law) and by the parallel verb ("making wise"), points to a spiritual renewal of this kind, rather than mere refreshment. On the other hand, my soul usually means 'my life' or 'myself'; and 'restore' often has a physical or psychological sense, as in Isa 58:12, or using another part of the verb, Prov 25:13, Lam 1:11, 16, 19. In our context the two senses evidently interact, so that the retrieving or reviving of the sheep pictures the deeper renewal of the man of God, spiritually perverse or ailing as he may be." (IVP, 110)

For fun:

“The Lord” in Psalm 23 is Yahweh. The compound names of Yahweh in the OT reflect the contents in this psalm:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I shall not want”—Jehovah-jireh, “the Lord will provide” (Gen 6:24)• “still waters”—Jehovah-shalom, “the Lord our peace” (Judg 6:24)• “restores my soul”—Jehovah-Rophe, “the Lord who heals” (Ex 15:26)• “paths of righteousness”—Jehovah-Tsidkenu, “the Lord our righteousness” (Jer 33:16) | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• “you are with me”—Jehovah-shammah, “the Lord is there” (Ezek 48:35)• “presence of my enemies”—Jehovah-nissi, “the Lord our banner” (Ex 17:15)• “anoint my head”—Jehovah-M’Kaddesh, “the Lord who sanctifies” (Lev 20:8) |
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