

Psalms 22-24, continued

Psalm 22 in light of the New Testament:

1. Read Mt 27:32-50, and Isa 53:3-12. Is there anything that tends to lead you to read Psalm 22 as a lament of David but Isaiah 53 as prophecy of Jesus?
2. God demonstrates his divinity when he says, “for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done” (Isa 46:9b-10a). The disciples understood Psalm 22 in this way: God had brought to pass that which had been prophesied through David. The early church used Psalm 22 and other passages to both understand God’s plan and argue that Jesus was indeed the promised Messiah. These passages were bedrock when they faced persecution and doubt.

Do you find prophecy such as this (a) sort of embarrassing in a Hal-Lindsey-late-great-planet-earth-70s way; (b) not terribly relevant to the life of the modern believer; (c) a source of strength and a sign of God’s miraculous hand in Scripture; (d) honestly not something you think about much; (e) other:

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3. Read Heb 2:10-12. Who is the “he” at the start of 12? What does he do? Since the author’s naming this as a messianic prophecy of the same caliber as the prophecy of Isaiah which he subsequently quotes, when and how is (was? will be?) this prophecy fulfilled?¹
4. Read Heb 2:13-15. When the “fear of death” (Heb 2:15) hangs over us, is it more helpful to read Ps 22:1-21a and know Jesus suffered too, or to read 21b-31 and hear Jesus telling us in awe and excitement (23) how God saved him out of death? Do you find it more comforting knowing that Jesus has also been through the darkest of times, or knowing that Jesus praises God alongside us for rescuing such frightened and pitiful creatures as we sometimes are?

Psalm 23

5. The much shorter Psalm 23 uses pastoral imagery for the first 4 verses, then switches to the imagery of a well-prepared meal. What is the focal point of this structure, the equivalent in Ps 23 of 22:21b?
6. Do you sense that the enemies of v. 5 are being held in check, have been overcome and are being held captive or are defeated rivals present as reluctant guests? (How safe is this meal?)
7. Three things are a comfort to the sheep in v. 4: the rod (for protection); the staff (which keeps the sheep where they should be); and the presence of the shepherd. Consider Paul, who walked through some very dark valleys. Paul received the comfort of God’s protection, as in the vision to him Corinth, where God told him, “Do not be afraid, but speak and do not be silent; for I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to harm you, for there are many in this city who are my people” (Acts 18:10). He

¹ **Bonus question:** How does the feast of Ps 22:26 relate to the Eucharist?

also received direction and discipline from God, on the Damascus road, through the thorn in the flesh, and in the vision prohibiting him from visiting Macedon, and likely many other times. In Paul's story we see rod, staff and presence.

What insights did you gain meditating on Psalm 23? When has God led you beside still waters, feasted with you in the presence of your enemies, or comforted you with his protection?

Psalm 24

8. What does this psalm describe? Based on its structure, how might it have been used?
9. Psalm 24 makes references to pagan gods, references we might miss. For instance, Yahweh founded the earth on the seas (v. 2), and "in the *Enuma Elish*, one of Marduk's names, Agilima, identifies him as the one who built the earth above the water and established the upper regions" (DOT:WL).² Later, in vv. 7 and 9, when Yahweh approaches, the gates lift up their heads (vv. 7, 9). Similarly, in the Babylonian hymn to their sun god Shamash the gateways and entrances rejoice.

Why does the psalmist make these allusions? If the original readers of this psalm had neighbors who worshipped the Babylonian gods, who or what do our neighbors worship? What claims do they make that truly belong to our God?

10. Many see this Psalm as referring to when David brought the ark to mount Zion (1 Ch 13:8). The language of this psalm is of God returning to Zion. In the new covenant, by contrast, God does not confine his presence to a temple or city, as Stephen made clear when explaining the Christian view of the Temple (Acts 7). How do we, as new covenant believers, read a psalm so immersed in the old-covenant world?



Fun fact: Psalm 24 says God founded the world on the "seas" and the "rivers", which scholars typically see as a reference to the Babylonian gods of the primordial waters, Tiamat and Apsu. In the Babylonian creation myth these give birth to the younger gods. However, the younger gods are more active and **disturb the sleep of their parents**. As a result, Apsu, over Tiamat's objections, decides to kill them. (*Dictionary of the OT: Wisdom Literature*)

Psalm 23, entirely addressed to the Lord:

Lord, you are my shepherd; I shall not want.

You make me lie down in green pastures; *you lead* me beside still waters; *you restore* my soul.

You lead me in right paths for your name's sake.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; **for** you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; *you anoint* my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,

and I shall dwell in your house my whole life long.

² The "waters" in the OT had a bad rap, "making the deep a reminder of formlessness (Gen 1:2), menace (Ps 46:5) and restlessness (Is 57:20).

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)

*The meal itself indicates a covenant bond, not a mere respite from danger. The “mercy” is “steadfast love”, and when the psalm says it follows you, it “does not mean... to bring up the rear but to pursue, as surely as His judgments **pursue** the wicked (83:15)” (IVP, 112, my emph.). Psalm 23 is an eloquent psalm of comfort. More than any other, this psalm was chosen as a favorite by members of the Huddle.*