

# Psalm 22: They Pierced My Hands and Feet

Expository Lessons from the Psalms

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## I. Introduction to Psalm 22 (designated as Psalm 21 in the Septuagint)

### a. Importance of this psalm.

- i. This psalm contains very well-known prophecies about the crucifixion of Jesus.
- ii. In **1 Corinthians 15**, the apostle Paul reminded the Christians in Corinth of the foundation of their faith.
  1. “For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that *Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures*, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures....” (**1 Corinthians 15:3–4**, NKJV)
  2. When I ask Christians the question, “Where in the Old Testament Scriptures does it prophesy about the death of Christ?”, they typically mention **Isaiah 53** first. However, the second Scripture they mention is typically either **Psalm 22** or perhaps the story of the Passover Lamb from **Exodus 12**.
- iii. **Psalm 22** covers several aspects or details of the crucifixion of Jesus.
- iv. Also, it is quoted (and alluded to) in all four gospels. See:
  1. **Matthew 27:35**,
  2. **Mark 15:24**,
  3. **Luke 23:34**, and
  4. **John 19:24**.
- v. The early Christian writers referred to this psalm regularly, as evidence to support their claims that the manner in which Jesus died was in fulfillment of prophecy.
- vi. Jesus Himself spoke the opening line of this psalm when He was on the cross, right before He died (**Matthew 27:46**, **Mark 15:34**).

### b. Why we are exploring this today.

- i. With Easter (and Pascha/Passover) approaching, the thoughts of many turn especially to the events surrounding the death and

resurrection of Jesus. This provides a wonderful window into that and can help us prepare to reflect more deeply on this.

- ii. I believe understanding this psalm can fortify the faith of those who believe and open the door for unbelievers to pursue the faith further.
  - iii. It also gives us an insight into Jesus and what he went through, which also has profound implications for those of us who desire to follow Him.
- c. Understanding this psalm better will help us to appreciate many of the details presented in the four gospel accounts. This can deepen our understanding of the New Testament.
  - d. This psalm was written by David; therefore, it would have been written over 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem.
  - e. The Septuagint (LXX) is a Greek translation of the Old Testament that was made about 200 years before the birth of Jesus. When Jesus, the apostles and early Christian writers quote from the Old Testament, they generally follow the LXX (as opposed to most modern Bibles where the Old Testament translation is based on the Hebrew of the Masoretic Text).
    - i. We will be reading from the Orthodox Study Bible, a translation where the Old Testament is based on the LXX.
    - ii. While this psalm is designated **Psalm 22** in most modern Bibles, in the LXX, it is designated **Psalm 21**.
      - 1. For that reason, early Christian writers, who are reading from the LXX, generally refer to this as **Psalm 21**.

## II. From the Gospel Accounts of the Crucifixion

- a. Read **Matthew 27:11-14**.
- b. Read **Matthew 27:27-50**.
- c. Read **John 19:23-30**.
- d. **Challenge:** As we read through **Psalm 22** next, ask yourself, “How many *elements of the crucifixion of Jesus* were foretold in this psalm of David?”
  - i. Remember that **Psalm 22** was written over 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem!

#### III.IV. “My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?”

- a. Justin Martyr, in his Dialogue with Trypho, chapters 97-106, goes into great detail, explaining that the entire text of **Psalm 22** is about Jesus, especially including details of how He was crucified.
- b. Read **Psalm 22:1-6**.
- c. The first thing to notice is the opening line.
  - i. “My God, My God...why have you forsaken me?”
    1. Jesus is quoting from the opening line this psalm while He is on the cross, right before He dies.
    2. “Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?’ that is, ‘*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*’” (**Matthew 27:45-46**, NKJV)
  - ii. Recall that the psalms were sung; so everyone knew the words of the song that followed.
  - iii. Some have tried to make the case that, based on this statement, the Father forsook Jesus while He was on the cross (bearing the sins of everyone). Did God forsake Jesus at any point in time?
    1. Read **Psalm 22:25**.
    2. Here it says that when He cried out, *the Lord DID hear him!*
    3. Therefore, perhaps Jesus is just quoting the first line of this psalm, pointing those hearing to what followed in the psalm.
- d. Justin indicates that this “crying out by day and night” points to the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, when Jesus asked that the cup be taken away and prayed with drops of sweat like blood.

#### IV.V. Abandoned, Exposed, Surrounded and Pierced

- a. Read **Psalm 22:7-19**.
- b. The father of a friend of mine, who at the time was an agnostic, went to a lecture that changed the direction of his life. The lecturer opened with the challenge: “How many men from history do you know whose biography was written... over 1,000 years before he was born?”
  - i. The speaker, a Christian, then went on to go through **Psalm 22**, explaining how it all foretold the details of the life and death of Jesus.

- ii. Note that this psalm was written by David over 1,000 years before Jesus was born!
- c. The psalm includes the following statements:
  - i. “He” is despised and mocked by the people. (**Psalm 22:7**)
  - ii. The people taunt, “He hoped in the Lord, let Him rescue him....” (**Psalm 22:9**)
    - 1. “Likewise, the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, ‘He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is 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.”” (**Matthew 27:41–43**, NKJV)
  - iii. The Lord had protected Him from his mother’s womb. (**Psalm 22:10-11**)
    - 1. Recall how, even as an infant, the Lord protected him from Herod, who had tried to kill him.
  - iv. He is completely alone. There is no one to help him. (**Psalm 22:12**)
  - v. He is surrounded by strong enemies and evildoers, also described as “bulls” and “dogs”. (**Psalm 22:13**)
  - vi. His strength is gone. His entire body is in extreme physical distress. (**Psalm 22:16**)
  - vii. His tongue cleaves to his throat. (**Psalm 22:16**)
    - 1. He does not speak nor complain.
    - 2. He is parched, in need of something to drink.
- d. They pierce His hands and feet. (**Psalm 22:17**)
  - i. **Questions:**
    - 1. How many ways can you think of that people died in the Scriptures?
      - a. Beheaded, swords, arrows, illness, battle, poison, etc.
    - 2. What type of death would it have been to have one’s hands and feet pierced?

3. Did David (the author of this psalm) or any other Jewish king ever suffer a fate that matches this description?
  - a. From early Christian writer Tertullian, writing c. 207 AD:
    - i. “If you require still further prediction of the Lord’s cross, the **twenty-first Psalm** [based on LXX numbering; corresponds to **Psalm 22**] is sufficiently able to afford it to you, containing as it does the entire passion of Christ, who was even then prophetically declaring His glory. ‘They pierced,’ says He, ‘my hands and my feet,’ which is the special cruelty of the cross.
    - ii. “And again, when He implores His Father’s help, He says, ‘Save me from the lion’s mouth,’ that is, the jaws of death, ‘and my humiliation from the horns of the unicorns;’ in other words, from the extremities of the cross, as we have shown above. Now, David himself did not suffer this cross, nor did any other king of the Jews; so that you cannot suppose that this is the prophecy of any other’s passion than His who alone was so notably crucified by the nation.”
      1. (Source: Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 3, chapter 19; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 337).
    - iii. See also Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, chapter 10; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3. p. 166.
  - e. **Question:** How do we know that both his hands and feet were pierced with nails (as popularly depicted)?
    - i. Note that the four gospel accounts on the passion simply say that Jesus was crucified.
      1. **Question:** Could He have been fastened to the cross by some other means, such as being tied in place with ropes or cords?
    - ii. Consider the account of Jesus appearing to the apostle Thomas, after the resurrection, in the famous ‘doubting Thomas’ encounter.
      1. “Now Thomas, called the Twin, one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. The other disciples therefore said to

him, 'We have seen the Lord.' So he said to them, 'Unless I see *in His hands the print of the nails*, and put my finger *into the print of the nails*, and put my hand into His side, I will not believe.' And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, '*Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side. Do not be unbelieving, but believing.*'" (**John 20:24-27**, NKJV)

- a. Note that the Greek word used here that is generally translated "*print/mark/imprint*" (of the nails) is the same word (τύπος, *typos*) that is commonly rendered "type" or "pattern" elsewhere in the Scriptures. (See **Hebrews 8:5**, **Acts 7:44** and **Titus 2:7**.)
  - b. The concept here is that after the resurrection of Jesus, one could still see in His hands the pattern left by the nails from when He had been on the cross.
  - c. This confirmed both the identity of Jesus (it was the very same person who had been crucified on the cross) and the fact that He was bodily raised from the dead (not just His spirit).
- iii. Also, let us consider what Jesus said when He first appeared to the apostles after His resurrection:
1. "And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? *Behold My hands and My feet*, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.' When He had said this, *He showed them His hands and His feet.*" (**Luke 24:38-40**, NKJV)
    - a. This confirms that the signs of His crucifixion could be seen in His hands *as well as in His feet*.
- f. **Question:** Are there *any other prophecies* that might point to this unusual aspect of Jesus' death (that His hands and feet would be pierced)?
- i. Perhaps so. Both Tertullian and Hippolytus point to the blessing Jacob gave his sons shortly before his death. They both point specifically to the **Genesis 49:5-7** passage, which speaks of the cruelty of Simeon and Levi, who "killed a man and hamstringed an ox".
  - ii. Read **Genesis 49:5-7**.

1. This passage recalls the incident where these two brothers cruelly slaughtered the Shechemites, after their sister Dinah had been violated (**Genesis 34**).
  2. Note that the passage that follows, regarding Judah (**Genesis 49:8-12**), features the famous multi-faceted prophecy about Jesus that also identifies Him as “the lion of Judah” (**Genesis 49:9**; also in **Numbers 24:9** and **Revelation 5:5**).
  3. Recall that Simeon and Levi are the second and third oldest sons of Jacob, and that Levi is the forefather of all the priests and Levites.
- iii. From Tertullian, writing c. 197 AD:
1. “He, [*Christ*] again, will be the ‘bull’ elsewhere too in the same scripture. When Jacob pronounced a blessing on Simeon and Levi, he prophesies of the scribes and Pharisees; for from them is derived their origin. For (his blessing) interprets spiritually thus: ‘Simeon and Levi perfected iniquity out of their sect,’—whereby, to wit, they persecuted Christ: ‘into their counsel come not my soul! and upon their station rest not my heart! because in their indignation they slew men’—that is, prophets - ‘and in their concupiscence they hamstrung a bull!’ (**Genesis 49:5-7**) - that is, Christ, whom—after the slaughter of prophets—they slew, and exhausted their savagery by transfixing His sinews with nails. Else it is idle if, after the murder already committed by them, he upbraids others, and not them, with butchery.”
    - a. (Source: Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, chapter 10; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 165)
  2. They showed cruelty in killing a man unjustly and in torturing an ox (crippling its leg).
  3. See also: Hippolytus writing c. 205 AD in *Fragments from Commentaries*; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 164.
- g. They divided my garments and cast lots for my clothing.
- i. This is mentioned in all four gospels. More details are provided in **John 19:23-24**. There, it explains the reason why the soldiers cast lots for the tunic of Jesus rather than divide it among themselves (because it was woven seamless).
  - ii. His clothing was removed and given to others.

## V.VI. The Remainder of this Psalm: Deliverance

- a. Read **Psalm 22:20-32**.
- b. Save me from the lion's mouth.
  - i. Tertullian considered the "lion" here as referring to death, as noted above.
    1. (See Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 3, chapter 19; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 337)
    2. I also think of the story of Daniel in the lions' den, in **Daniel 6**.
  - ii. Justin believed the "lion" here could refer to Herod (lion = king) or to Satan.
    1. (See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapters 103-105; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 250-252)
    2. Peter also speaks of Satan as being like a *lion* (**1 Peter 5:8**).
- c. Save me from the horns of the unicorn.
  - i. While some think of a "unicorn" as a mythical creature, it is simply a one-horned animal (a rhinoceros being a real-life example).
  - ii. Tertullian explained this expression "horns of a unicorn" as referring to the extremities of the cross on which Jesus was crucified. There is a similar statement by Justin Martyr.
    1. (Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho, a Jew*, chapter 105; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 251-252)
    2. (Tertullian, *An Answer to the Jews*, chapter 10; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, p. 166)
    3. (Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 3, chapters 18-19; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, pp. 336-337)
- d. This speaks (in LXX) of "the church" (the same Greek word as "church" in the New Testament) and the kingdom of God.
- e. The door will be opened to all the Gentiles.
- f. All the ends of the world shall turn to the Lord.
  - i. This reminds me of what Jesus said in the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:18-20**) and in the parallel passage in **Mark 16** regarding the gospel going out to all people in all nations.



- g. The great message of salvation: to go to all nations and to future generations (those not yet born).

#### VI-VII. Implications for Us

- a. Such a detailed prophecy regarding Jesus Christ, written over 1,000 years before His birth in Bethlehem, should strengthen our faith and better equip us to persuade others who do not yet believe.
  - i. At its foundation, our faith has the evidence of many detailed prophecies that were fulfilled. Our faith in Jesus should not be based on fine-sounding, emotionally-based appeals.
  - ii. It is founded on the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, in fulfillment of the Scriptures.
- b. The ultimate challenge for Christians is to imitate Jesus Christ.
  - i. In the early 1400s (perhaps c. 1418 AD), *The Imitation of Christ* first appeared, a devotional classic attributed to Thomas à Kempis. Outside of the Bible, this is considered the most popular Christian devotional book of all time. From the opening words of chapter 1:
    1. “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness’ (**John 8:12**), saith the Lord. These are the words of Christ, by which we are admonished how we ought to imitate His life and manners, if we would be enlightened and delivered from all blindness of heart. Let therefore our chief endeavor be to meditate upon the life of Jesus Christ.
    2. “The doctrine [*teaching*] of Christ exceeds all the doctrine of holy men; and he who has the Spirit will find therein ‘the hidden manna’ (**Revelation 2:17**). But many who often hear the gospel of Christ have little desire for it, because they ‘have not the Spirit of Christ’ (**Romans 8:9**). But whoever will fully and with relish understand the words of Christ must endeavor to conform his life wholly to the life of Christ.
    3. “What does it avail to discourse profoundly of the Trinity if you are void of humility and are thereby displeasing to the Trinity? Surely profound words do not make a man holy and just; but a virtuous life makes him dear to God. I would rather feel contrition than know the definition thereof. If you knew the whole Bible by heart, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would it profit you without love (**1 Corinthians 13:2**)?”
    4. “‘Vanity of vanities...all is vanity’ (**Ecclesiastes 1:2**), except to love God and to serve Him only. This is the highest wisdom, by

the contempt of the world to press forward toward heavenly kingdoms.

5. “Therefore it is vanity to seek after perishing riches and to trust in them. Also it is vanity to hunt after honors and to climb to high degree. It is vanity to follow the desires of the flesh, and to long after that for which you must afterward suffer grievous punishment. It is vanity to wish to live long, and to be careless to live well. It is vanity to mind only the present life, and not to foresee those things which are to come. It is vanity to set your love on that which speedily passes away, and not to hasten to where everlasting joy abides.”
  - a. The goal of the Christian life is to meditate on the life of Christ and to imitate that.
- ii. The apostle Peter also calls us to imitate the example of Christ, specifically when He was on the cross.
  1. “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: ‘Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth’ (Isaiah 53:9, LXX); who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” (1 Peter 2:21–24, NKJV)
    - a. The gospel is NOT “Jesus suffered on the cross *so that we don’t have to suffer*”.
    - b. Rather, the call to the Christian way of life is that Jesus suffered and died for us; now, as His followers, *we are called to follow His example*.
    - c. He showed us the way; we must follow in His steps.
- iii. Read **Hebrews 12:1-6**.
- iv. Consider Jesus on the cross, as revealed in **Psalm 22** and throughout the Scriptures. Aspects of His example we are called to imitate include:
  1. He was rejected, considered less than human, treated like a worm.
  2. He did not retaliate.

3. He did not speak evil of others.
4. He was willing to suffer for righteousness' sake.
5. He was willing to persevere to the very end, striving against sin in anticipation of the glory that would follow.