

My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?

An Exegetical Study of Psalm 22:1-9

By David D. Reichel

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August Pieper informs us:

When Luther in February of 1521 undertook to interpret the 22nd Psalm, he took some bread and salt and locked himself in his room for three days, unavailable to all visitors. He did this not because of particular linguistic difficulties, of which the text has plenty but which don't really affect the psalm's theological content. What drove Luther into isolation was his holy awe as he stood in the presence of the great mystery of Christ's suffering which this psalm reveals.ⁱ

How, then, should I go about to do an exegesis of Psalm 22?! That has been the question that has been troubling me since I first began to really dig into the Hebrew text of this psalm a number of months ago. As Pieper states, it's not the Hebrew itself that is so difficult, but the whole subject matter of the psalm that holds one in such awe. This psalm is held up to the familiar and equally profound words of Isaiah 53 as being the most amazing portion of the Old Testament Scriptures in describing the sufferings of our Savior. Pieper explains:

In Psalm 22 we have the most magnificent piece of Old Testament revelation dealing with the suffering of Christ; only Isaiah 53 can be considered a worth counterpart. Isaiah 53 pictures the suffering Savior from the outside: in his lowliness and disgrace, in the punishment he suffered as our Substitute. Isaiah emphasizes the cause and the blessed fruit of Christ's suffering and mentions the inner grief of the Savior's soul only in passing. By contrast, the psalmist unveils the innermost heart of the Savior in that awful hour when the eternal judgment of an all-merciful and holy God was decreed upon him, the Mediator between God and a world under his curse.ⁱⁱ

Especially awe-inspiring are the many direct quotes from this particular psalm that Jesus Himself uses on the cross, during His actual suffering for mankind. Why did Christ on the cross go back to this particular psalm, this particular portion of Holy Scripture while hanging there for all sinners? Because He Himself was the one who revealed and spoke these words to and through the psalmist in the first place. Pieper details the many ancient and modern "theologians" who have tried to define Psalm 22 as a typical or typical-prophetic psalm.ⁱⁱⁱ He puts the argument to rest for all true biblical scholars who understand and hold to the inspiration of the Scriptures when he so assuredly concludes that this psalm is, in its entirety, a rectilinear messianic psalm by stating:

Three New Testament references effectively shut off all debate about the character of the psalm: Matthew 27:35; John 19:24; and Hebrews 2:11ff. In the first two references the dividing of the clothing of the Crucified and the casting of lots for his cloak are said to have occurred "that the Scripture might be fulfilled" (Matthew: "the word spoken by the prophet"). According to Hebrews 2:12, it was Christ who spoke in Psalm 22:23: "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."^{iv}

After granting the possibility that any portion of Old Testament Scripture may be both typical and

prophetic, Pieper states:

An interpreter has the right to assert this mixed form of messianicity for a psalm when the typical element contains features that apply only to the type, and do not at all fit the antitype. But that is not the case here. Every word of this psalm applies directly to Christ. We can find no situation in the life of David that corresponds to what this psalm describes.^v

Pieper adds:

In the face of such clear testimony from the New Testament, it is meaningless to insist that the Lord simply took these and other words of David from the 22nd Psalm and used them of himself. In conclusion, we want to hear the opinion of Luther and the old Lutheran interpreters. Bakius summarizes this for us: “We assert that this psalm, as a whole and in all its parts, is to be interpreted only of Christ, without allegory or figure of speech.”^{vi}

With the exception of the superscription, the entire psalm is spoken by the Messiah. With eyes opened by the Spirit of God, David is able to see what went on in the soul of the Messiah, who was about to die but who was confident of ultimate victory. The psalmist shares this with us in words taught him by the Spirit of God (2 Sam. 23:1ff).^{vii}

(An interesting sidelight: in my notes from the Seminary on the exegesis of Psalm 22, I found this note: “The Jews at Jesus’ time knew Psalm 22 referred to Jesus. See Hebrews 2:11-12!”)

Psalm 22 can be readily divided into two very distinct, but intimately connected parts. The first half of the psalm (vv. 1-22) can be summarized by the theme: “The Savior’s lament over his extraordinary suffering,” with two subdivisions: A. over being forsaken (vv. 2-12); and B. over the suffering caused by his enemies (vv. 13-22). The second half of the psalm (vv. 23-32) is “The Savior’s hymn of praise for his deliverance,” the subject of the paper that is to follow this one. We will be looking at the first half, which deals very specifically and most intimately with Christ’s sufferings as the Savior of mankind—an amazing, internal look at the Savior’s own heart and soul as he endures the punishment for our sins.

1 לְמַנְצֵחַ עַל־אֵילַת הַשָּׁחַר מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד:

NIV: “For the director of music. To [the tune of] ‘The Doe of the Morning.’ A psalm of David.”

Pieper: “For the director (of the temple music), a psalm of David, to ‘The Doe of the Morning.’”

Mine: “To the director (of music). To ‘The Doe of the Dawn.’ A psalm of David.”

לְמַנְצֵחַ -- Piel participle of נָצַח ”to supervise”; Piel verb form intensifies meaning of the verb; participle denotes continuing action of the verb

עַל־אֵילַת הַשָּׁחַר -- אֵילַת noun construct, “doe of a fallow deer”; הַשָּׁחַר noun with article, ה , “the dawn”

מִזְמוֹר לְדָוִד -- ”a psalm of David”

David begins the psalm in usual fashion by identifying how it is to be used, who is to use it, its subject,

and its author. לְמַנְצֵחַ is the Piel participle of נָצַח, meaning “to supervise,” used with activity connected with the temple. It is commonly found in the book of Psalms, in these “superscriptions,” and is most often simply translated as “to the director,” the director of music, presumably. The לְ prefix being the preposition “to” or “for.” The construct form אֵילָת with הַשְּׁחָר presents the unit concept “the doe of the dawn,” to which the pronoun עַל- is also tied by way of Maqqeph (־). The NIV treats this as a title of an unknown, lost song or folk tune, as does Pieper in his translation, to which this psalm is then presumably to be sung. However, in his explanation, Pieper takes exception to this interpretation by stating that this is more likely figurative language used by the psalmist to describe the contents of the psalm itself, rather than just a reference to the melody to be used! Covering 2-and-a-half pages of his exegesis, Pieper makes the point:

In Psalm 22 the “doe of the morning” is the troubled soul of someone who is suffering, who after the dark night of grief sees the dawn of deliverance, hope, and joy (as the second half of the psalm elaborates.). The superscription, therefore, points to the twofold message of the psalm: the anguish of the one suffering, as well as the joy that follows suffering.

We have here a psalm that pictures not only the anguished soul of someone suffering, but also his joy and finally his hymn of praise for his deliverance.^{viii}

Stripped of its figurative language (the theme) is: The Lord’s Agony in Death and Joy in Deliverance. If one understands it from the point of view...as the expression of His spiritual state in the hour before and after the favorable turn of His suffering, one will have to formulate it something like this: The Fervent Prayer of the Savior in the Hour When God Forsook Him and Then Again Embraced Him. Under this theme the two chief parts, vv. 2-22 and 23-32, naturally fall into place as: 1. His lament while forsaken; 2. His song of thanksgiving after His deliverance.^{ix}

If we were to take the עַל preposition as “regarding, concerning,” this would certainly be the thought, rather than simply “to,” understanding this in our American way of thinking, used as shorthand for “to be sung to the tune of,” followed by a song’s title. It would certainly seem to be a leap in translating technique, and a great deal of presumption on our part, to suppose that the Hebrew עַל is the same shorthand in hymnology as our “to”! Perhaps Pieper is correct, then, in understanding this phrase to be a figurative reference to the contents and message of the psalm. This is also how Luther took these words, although he adds a little more to the simple sense of the Hebrew with the translation “of the doe that was hunted early in the morning,” referring to the “suffering Savior who was condemned by the Sanhedrin in the early morning and delivered over to Pilate.”^x

Further identifying this psalm is the phrase מְזִמּוֹר לְדָוִד, “a psalm of David.” The לְ is possessive, referring to David as the author of the psalm. This is his signature to the work, placed at the beginning of the psalm.

2 אֵלֵי אֵלֵי לָמָּה עֲזַבְתָּנִי רְחוֹק מִשׁוֹעֲתֵי דַבְּרֵי שְׂאֲגֹתַי:

NIV: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so

far from the words of my groaning?

Pieper: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Far from helping me are the words of my groaning.

Mine: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me; ...far from my salvation; (from) the words of my groaning?

אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי -- "my God," repeated twice for greatest emphasis

לְמָה -- interrogative particle, "what, why"

עָזַבְתָּנִי -- Qal 2nd person singular perfect with 1st singular suffix of עָזַב meaning "to leave, abandon, forsake"

רְחוֹק -- adjective "distant, far"

מִשׁוּעָתִי -- noun with 1st singular suffix and preposition מִן prefix, meaning "help, salvation, prosperity," thus "my salvation"

דְּבָרֵי שִׁאָגוֹתַי -- plural construct of דְּבָר "word"; with noun construct with 1st person singular suffix of שִׁאָגָה from שָׁאָג ("to roar"): "roaring, bawling, groaning"

The אֱלֹהֵי, repeated twice for profound emphasis, the shortened form for אֱלֹהִים and the root אָוַל, meaning "to be powerful," is the name "God," the almighty, all-powerful, only true God of the universe, the only One who is able to help him. The noun is personalized with the suffix יָ, "my God." This is, recognizably, the same emotional, very profound cry from Jesus Himself on the cross after the three hours of darkness there. Here he recognizes himself as a creature of God as true man; thus, God is his God also. And to his God he appeals. The expression, אֱלֹהֵי is, perhaps, most profound because it is so simple, stark and bare, as the Hebrew language is known to be. The great emotion is felt by the reader because of this grand simplicity of the Hebrew language. The appeal of the Christ, who is speaking through the psalmist, is to the almighty God Himself—persistently, repetitively, and ever so personally. "You are my God," he insists, and to Him he emphatically and persistently calls. In this, he expresses and carries out his active obedience to God (First Commandment, especially). In perfect obedience, he has not forsaken God, even though God has turned His back on him.

עָזַבְתָּנִי is the Qal perfect of עָזַב, meaning "to abandon, forsake, desert." This word alone expresses a deep, terrible truth—the Father God has turned his back on His Son (Isa. 53:5; 1 Cor. 5:21). Christ here expresses that immense, inscrutable truth that he was made total sin for us. Here he expresses what the sufferings of hell are all about—being totally separated from God's presence, grace, and love. This is indeed a most awesome mystery, totally beyond our comprehension. This is not in any way grounds to claim a separation of the human and divine natures of Christ. This is Christ, the Person, the God-man, who is suffering in our place, so that we would not have to.

Luther comments: "With these words the psalmist brings the Savior at once to the very heart of the matter, *in medias res*, to the most intense degree of his suffering." With this statement the Lord summarizes all his suffering and pours out everything that lay on his heart."^{xi} As Pieper notes:

Everything that follows through verse 12 (actually through verse 22) merely elaborates, adds detail, gives the rationale for this immense thought, this unheard of lament. Luther correctly noted that nowhere else in Scripture are the words, *Eli, Eli* repeated. No one else has ever cried to God from such a full heart, so urgently, holding on to him so tightly—because no one else has ever suffered so intensely, yet trusted to firmly.^{xii}

לְמָה introduces the interrogative phrase with “*why*,” followed by the Qal perfect of עָזַב, with the 1st singular suffix, meaning “*to leave, abandon, forsake*.” It’s no wonder that the psalmist cries out with the double אֵלֵי! God has forsaken him, and he pleads for an explanation! He does not, cannot understand the reason(s) for God leaving him behind, turning His back on him, turning away from him. So he cries out, “*Why?*”!

Being forsaken by God—can any of us even begin to understand what that is? Thank God that we don’t have to—not only not have to understand it, but not have to endure it, because Christ did for us! As our Substitute, Christ bore the full load of our punishment for our sins—all of God’s anger, all of God’s curse, all the torments of hell, and death. As Pieper puts it:

What the suffering Savior laments here is bitter reality. At the time he uttered this complaint he was really and truly, in the fullest sense of the words, abandoned and accursed by God for a time; carrying the burden of God’s eternal wrath, the fury of his enemies, the terrors and torment of hell; given over defenseless to the powers of darkness. We cannot possibly comprehend suffering like that. God grant that none of us may ever have to experience it! This much we can comprehend, that Christ’s forsakenness brought God’s mercy to us, that God has adopted us as His children and will never forsake us.^{xiii}

רְחוֹק is the adjective “*distant, far*,” with מִן prefixed to יְשׁוּעָתִי, meaning “*help, prosperity, salvation*,” with the 1st person suffix יִ -- “*my salvation*” or “*helping me*.” Whether this is to be a parallel thought, set off by itself, or is a continuation or another aspect of the interrogative “*Why?*” -- either translation brings us to the same sense and conclusion: the fact that the Subject has been forsaken by God, the Mighty One who alone can save him, causes him to feel all the more acutely the fact that his rescue, his help is also now “*far off, distant*” from him. If that is how we are to take the phrase רְחוֹק מִיְשׁוּעָתִי, however, we are left with what to do with דְּבַרִי שְׁאֲגָתִי. Pieper, in his translation, makes it the apposition to מִיְשׁוּעָתִי, so that he translates “*Far from helping me are the words of my groaning*.” This seems to work fairly well, further explaining the subject’s feeling and state of being forsaken by God.

שְׁאֲגָתִי is translated “*groaning*,” referring to the roaring of lions, also used of thunder, of enemies in combat, and of the groaning of a mortally wounded warrior.^{xiv} Pieper explains:

The psalmist’s term encompasses all of the Sufferer’s sighs, groans, laments, and prayers from Gethsemane to his last outcry on Calvary. Despite all his appeals for help, however, the Savior lamented that help remained far from him. All his deep sighing, his anguished groaning, his bitter weeping, even his loud outcries, his “*roaring*” were in vain; the help he needed remained distant; his cries simply died away unanswered.^{xv}

We well wonder, Why does Jesus ask “*Why?*”! Pieper reminds us that it is not a question of despair, or

a reproach of God, or a complaint against God. It is also not a question of doubt, because the Sufferer has twice called upon God, “*my God*,” an expression of trust. Pieper states:

In his anguished cry there is not the slightest hint of a sinful thought. At the precise hour in which, for our sake, God was pouring out his furious judgment on His Son, that Son responded with the words, “My God, my God,” thereby offering God perfect obedience, turning eternal wrath for himself and us into eternal grace, securing our eternal rescue.^{xvi}

So why ask “why?” It is the fact that “Christ does not comprehend the terrifying fact of his being forsaken by God. He does not understand it, nor can he explain it. He does not see how it is possible for his God to abandon him, especially him, so completely.”^{xvii} In fact, it will not be until the second half of the psalm that the Sufferer finally hints at the reason for his being forsaken, which you and I know already—it was *for us!*

3 אֱלֹהֵי אֶקְרָא יוֹמָם וְלַיְלָה וְלֹא־דוֹמְיָה לִּי

NIV: O my God, I cry out by day, and you do not answer, by night and am not silent.

Pieper: O my God, I call to you by day, but you do not answer, and by night, and am not silent.

Mine: O my God, I cry (to you) daily but you do not answer; ...at night and am not silent (there is no silence for me).

אֱלֹהֵי -- “*my God*” from אֱלֹהִים with 1st person personal suffix

אֶקְרָא -- Qal imperfect 1st person singular of קָרָא “*to call, invoke*” denoting indefinite, ongoing action

יוֹמָם plural of יוֹם “*days*”

לֹא תַעֲנֶה -- Qal imperfect of עָנָה “*to answer*” with negative particle לֹא, denoting indefinite, ongoing action

לַיְלָה -- “*night*”

וְלֹא־דוֹמְיָה לִּי -- “*but there is no silence for me*” -- דוֹמְיָה noun “*silence, rest*”

אֱלֹהֵי repeats the cry of v. 2, although this is a lengthened form of אֱלִי, or simply אֱלֹהִים with the 1st person personal suffix again, יְיָ. It is the confident, trusting expression once again of the Sufferer, who turns yet again to his God for help, even though his God has forsaken him. Once again he affirms his perfect obedience to God in the First Commandment. It is the expression of total devotion to God, in spite of God’s abandonment, perfect obedience and trust, dedication and devotion to God, even though He has abandoned him.

The Qal imperfect, אֶקְרָא, from the root קָרָא, “*to call, invoke*,” denotes the ongoing calling of the Sufferer. His calling goes on for יוֹמָם, “*days*” at a time, or “*daily*.” Why so continuously? Because לֹא תַעֲנֶה “*you do not answer*,” another Qal imperfect, again denoting indefinite, ongoing action. The Sufferer continues to cry and cry, and call out to his God, because his God continues to ignore his pleas. Note the persistence of the Sufferer in his calling to God, the very essence of unwavering trust and devotion to God; and the continuing silence and lack of response on God’s part to the Sufferer! This is what it means to be “forsaken by God.”

Pieper observes:

...the words “Why have you forsaken me?” first of all assert Christ’s forsakenness abstractly as a fact; the(se)... words portray this forsakenness concretely and offer proof of it.^{xviii}

The Sufferer adds to this thought by telling us even further how persistent his cries to God have been:

וְלַיְלָה וְלֹא־דוֹמְיָהּ לִי -- “*at night, and am not silent.*” His cries go on into the night, a continuous pleading with God for His help and deliverance. These words “describe his anguish from a temporal aspect.”^{xix}

The pre-incarnate Christ is here revealing to us through the mouth of His inspired writer David the excruciating, very real, very intense physical, mental, and spiritual agony of being forsaken by God—all a part of his suffering for us and for our eternal salvation. Yet at the same time, he also shows his perfect obedience, trust, and devotion to his God, in spite of God’s abandonment. What a perfect and complete Savior we have! What a wonder that He endured so much for us, and that we should be given a glimpse into his very heart and soul here as he does so! What an awesome privilege to see into the very heart of the one who loved us and His God so much and so perfectly!

4 וְאַתָּה קְדוֹשׁ יוֹשֵׁב תְהִלּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל:

NIV: Yet, you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.

Pieper: Yet you are the Holy One, enthroned above Israel’s hymns of praise.

Mine: But you, you are enthroned as the Holy One; you are the praise of Israel.

וְ -- adversative: “*yet, but*”

אַתָּה -- 2nd singular personal pronoun” *you* “,for emphasis

קְדוֹשׁ -- adjective “*apart, sacred, holy*”; some understand this word to refer to “*separation from sin*”; others emphasize the “*transcendence*” of God. In Isa. 6:3 even the angels felt unworthy in God’s burning holy presence. Perhaps best is to keep both aspects of meaning in mind with this word.

יוֹשֵׁב -- Qal active participle of יָשַׁב “*to sit, sit down; be enthroned*”; participle emphasizing ongoing or continuous action of the verb

תְהִלּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל -- “*the praises of Israel*” -- תְהִלָּה plural construct form of תְהִלָּה “*praise, glory, honor*”

Two words are certainly in the emphatic position in verse 4: אַתָּה and קְדוֹשׁ. אַתָּה is the personal pronoun “*you,*” the subject of the sentence, used here for emphasis, referring to God. The Sufferer is directly addressing his God once again, speaking to him personally. He is also speaking to him confidently and with an unwavering faith and trust once again. יוֹשֵׁב is the Qal active participle, denoting ongoing action, with the meaning “*to sit, sit down,*” and thus, in reference to a king, “*to be enthroned.*” The Sufferer declares in a very reverent, sure and certain, praiseworthy manner that this God who has abandoned him, who refuses to answer his pleas, cannot in any way be guilty of any wrongdoing by abandoning him! Because God is the Holy One, the Sufferer says, “it is simply impossible for you, the holy One, the absolutely sinless One, to be guilty of sin,

of injustice, of lovelessness, of faithlessness, in your treatment of me.”^{xx} Even though God does not answer Christ, he recognizes that this is not an act of injustice on God’s part. He still is holy, and Christ confesses this. Brug says “The apparent failure of God to deliver his Son could not be due to injustice or weakness on God’s part.”^{xxi} What an amazing declaration of our Savior! What trust, confidence, and perfect devotion to his God! And to think that he does it all for us!

Pieper takes the next phrase, תְּהִלּוֹת יִשְׂרָאֵל, not in apposition to “*the Holy One*,” but as attendant circumstance to the verb “*enthroned*,” so that God, the Holy One of Israel, is pictured as the One who sits exalted in the heavens, the place to which Israel’s hymns and prayers of praise ascend in the clouds of incense smoke that was so much a part of their regular worship. If taken as a phrase in apposition to “*the Holy One*,” this would be stating that God is also the One who receives and rightly deserves Israel’s worship and praise as the one true God. God alone is to be praised and worshipped as God, the very action of praising and worshipping being the acknowledgement of His exclusive position and right to be called God. He is the one and only deserving Object of their praises. And even though the Sufferer has been forsaken by God and has received no answer to his calling, yet that does not mean that the Sufferer is to do the same, or that Israel should do the same—for God rightly remains the Holy One, and the object of Israel’s (and the Sufferer’s) constant, continuing praises! Again, another of the Sufferer’s expressions of trust, obedience, reverence, and unwavering loyalty to his God, in spite of being abandoned by Him!!

5 בָּךְ בָּטְחוּ אֲבֹתֵינוּ בָּטְחוּ וַתִּפְּלְטֵמוּ:
6 אֵלֶיךָ זָעָקוּ וַנִּמְלָטוּ בָּךְ בָּטְחוּ וְלֹא־בוֹשׁוּ

NIV: In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed.

Pieper: In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted, and you delivered them. They cried to you and were delivered; they trusted in you and were not put to shame.

Mine: In you our fathers trusted; they trusted and you brought them to safety. To you they called for help and were saved; in you they trusted and were not ashamed.

בָּטְחוּ -- Qal perfect 3rd plural of בָּטַח ”to trust”

אֲבֹתֵינוּ -- plural nou אָב ”father,” with 1st plural suffix, “our.” Christ identifies himself as being a Jew, a true physical descendent of Abraham and the patriarchs. Not just that he is truly a man, but a descendant of the patriarchs, a true member of the nation of Israel

וַתִּפְּלְטֵמוּ -- w-c imperfect Piel with 2nd singular suffix of פָּלַט ”to escape, bring to safety”; Piel verb form intensifies the meaning of the verb

זָעָקוּ -- Qal perfect of זָעַק ”to call for help”

וַנִּמְלָטוּ -- Niphal perfect 3rd person plural of מָלַט ”to get oneself to safety.” Passive verb form, “they were saved,” with God as agent.

וְלֹא־בוֹשׁוּ -- Qal perfect 3rd person plural of בּוֹשׂ ”to be ashamed of”

Here the Sufferer refers back to Israel’s well-known history, where it is clear for all to see that God, the

Holy One of Israel, was constantly the object of Israel's trust. Except, of course, for those times when *they* denied Him or forsook Him for the Baals, or for the gods of Egypt, etc., Israel had, throughout its history, turned to God for their salvation, and had placed their trust in Him. That is what the Sufferer's "*fathers*" were known for. In these two verses, he repeats that same theme three times—that the people of Israel had, as an established fact and definite action (the Qal perfect verb forms denoting this kind of action) put their trust in this very same God, the Holy One of Israel. And also, and just as importantly, when they put their trust in God, they were not disappointed, because He *always* delivered them. This is expressed by the waw-consecutive imperfect in verse 5, which translates as a perfect with "*and*," made even more emphatic by the Piel form of the verb פָּלַט ("to escape, bring to safety"). The Sufferer is emphatically stating that commonly-known and well-understood and well-documented truth that God's deliverance is a mainstay and an historical fact of Israel's existence for all to see. This becomes even more significant and important a fact when related to the next verses.

In verse 6, the Sufferer restates the same truth as in verse 5, for emphasis, and for further verification of this important fact. Here he states emphatically that whenever Israel, the Sufferer's ancestors, appealed to God for help, they *were* helped! That's the way it was! There can be no denying that fact! And it was אֱלֹהֶיךָ, "to You," the Holy One of Israel, that they turned, just as the Sufferer is now doing! The position of אֱלֹהֶיךָ is important in this verse also, as it too stresses and emphasizes the Subject—God, the Holy One of Israel! You, O God, did this in the past, as evidenced throughout Israel's history—that whenever they turned to you, you did indeed help them, and right quickly! And he adds to this a parallel thought: "*in you they trusted and were not put to shame*" (v. 6b). He reminds God that when they (his ancestors) put their trust in God, the Holy One of Israel, they were never ashamed or embarrassed later on because their trust had been misplaced. It was not misplaced! When they did put their trust in God, He saved them and did not leave them to shame or embarrassment by letting them down! That's the way it always has been!

This leads us into the next section, where the Sufferer makes a dramatic comparison.

7 וְאַנְכִי תוֹלַעַת וְלֹא-אִישׁ חֲרַפַּת אָדָם וּבְזוּי עָם:

NIV: But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.

Pieper: But I am a worm and not a man, scorned by men and despised by the people.

Mine: But I myself—a maggot, and not a man; a disgrace among mankind and contemptible to people.

וְ -- adversative, "*but*"—draws a contrast. God answered the patriarchs, as is clearly evident in history, but what about Christ?

תוֹלַעַת -- "*worm*"—lowly, insignificant, worthless; but also disgusting, repulsive. So too were men repulsed by Christ's appearance (Isa. 49:7; 50:6; 52:14; 53:2-3; Mat. 26:67; Joh. 1:11)

חֲרַפַּת -- noun construct of חָרַפָּה "*abuse, scorn, disgrace*"

בְּזוּי -- Qal passive participle construct of בָּזָה "*to despise, show contempt for*"; participle showing ongoing action of verb

Here, in direct and dire contrast to how God so clearly and consistently dealt with and treated his

ancestors, the Sufferer considers himself as not a man, equal to them, but as no more than the lowest, most despised and worthless creature there is—a worm, or a maggot. In apposition to this in the sentence is הַרְפָּת, for further emphasis and explanation of what he means by that expression: he feels that he is a “*disgrace among mankind and contemptible to the people.*” He views himself as being a disgrace among all people—he must be, if this is how God is treating him! All those before him who put their trust in God were heard and answered when they cried out to God. But God has not answered him; in spite of his continuous calling, there has been no response or answer from God to him. Therefore, he simply MUST be worth less than everyone else! In fact, he feels he is being treated by God as even less than a human being—as nothing more than a lowly worm or disgusting maggot, which is despised by all. And all this in direct and powerful contrast to how God has consistently treated all those referred to before!

Consistent with this also was the treatment and lack of reverence for Jesus and his message that came from many of the Jews. Jesus was not the earthly messiah the Jews were looking for. His message also was not attractive to many of them; it was, in fact, repulsive to many of them, and they showed their contempt for him. For example, at his trial, they spit in his face, one of the nastiest displays of contempt for another person. His enemies didn’t even treat him as another human being.

8 כָּל־רְאִי יִלְעָגוּ לִי יַפְטִירוּ בְּשִׁפָּה יִנְיְעוּ רֹאשׁ:

NIV: All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:

Pieper: All who see me mock me; they hurl insults and shake their heads.

Mine: All those who see me are ridiculing me; they separate the lip widely, they shake the head.

רְאִי -- Qal active participle with 1st singular suffix of רָאָה ”to see”; participle showing ongoing, continuous action of verb

יִלְעָגוּ -- Qal imperfect 3rd person plural of לָעַג meaning “to stammer, shudder; laugh, mock, ridicule”; imperfect verb form shows indefinite time of action

יַפְטִירוּ -- Hiphil imperfect 3rd person plural of פָּטַר meaning “to vanish, escape; to separate, to make a wry mouth” (open mouth wide) or “to stick out one’s tongue,” thus, “to insult”; Hiphil verb has causative force; imperfect form shows indefinite time of action of the verb

בְּשִׁפָּה -- noun שִׁפָּה ”lip”; with preposition בְּ -- ”they separate the lip”

יִנְיְעוּ רֹאשׁ -- Hiphil imperfect 3rd plural of נָוַע ”to shake, tremble, totter,” or “wag”; Hiphil verb has causative force; imperfect form shows indefinite time of action of the verb

Now, not only does it seem that God is ignoring him and mistreating him, but also those who see him show their contempt for him: they ridicule him, they open their mouths against him with insults, they shake their heads in disgust and rejection of him as well. Now the Sufferer observes that not only has God Himself been treating him like dirt, but others have picked up on that treatment as well, and he has become “the scorn and laughingstock of the whole world, as though you (God) take pleasure in my deepest disgrace.”^{xxii} As Pieper observes:

The Hebrew here is uncommonly meaningful. Translated literally, “...the object of man’s scorn and of nationwide contempt.” In other words, he suffered the ridicule not only of individuals, but of the nation in general. Concrete examples follow of the mockery he endured.^{xxiii}

Certainly the actions of the crowd at Jesus’ trial, the insults and mockery of the Sanhedrin and soldiers, the false witnesses, the crowd at the foot of the cross as well as the leaders of Jerusalem out there on Skull Hill--all combine in this vivid picture that the Sufferer describes for us, a millennium before it happened!

9 גַּל אֶל־יְהוָה יִפְלְטֵהוּ יִצְלֵהוּ כִּי חָפֵץ בּוֹ:

NIV: He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him.

Pieper: He called to the LORD; let the LORD help him out; Let him deliver him, if he delights in him.

Mine: Roll away to the LORD, He will rescue him; let Him snatch him away, if He delights in him.

גַּל -- from גָּלַל, either imperative or infinitive construct, meaning “*to roll on, roll away.*” “*To roll it on the Lord*” means that “*he trusted in the Lord.*” (see Psa. 37:5) This was his motto

אֶל־יְהוָה -- ”LORD”-- the Savior-God, the God of the covenant, Jehovah, the God of free and faithful grace

יִפְלְטֵהוּ -- Piel imperfect 3rd person singular with 3rd singular suffix of פָּלַט ”*to bring forth to safety*”; Piel verb intensifies verb action; imperfect denotes indefinite time

יִצְלֵהוּ -- Hiphil imperfect 3rd singular with 3rd singular suffix of נָצַל ”*to snatch away, pull out, rescue*”; Hiphil has causative force; imperfect denoted indefinite time

כִּי -- causal, “*since*” -- used here as sarcasm. They conveniently forgot Jesus’ baptism and transfiguration where God said publicly that He delighted in His Son!

חָפֵץ בּוֹ -- Qal perfect “*to want, desire; take pleasure in*”

These are now the taunts and insults of those who see the Sufferer and are ridiculing him. These are their very words, as recalled and quoted by the Sufferer, who hears them as they speak (See Matthew 27:39-44; Mark 15:29-32; Luke 23:35-43).

What is so powerful and especially hurtful to the Sufferer about their insults is *what* they use to insult him. They use the very trust and faith that the Sufferer had expressed earlier in his God as the core of their insults. Their insults go directly to the confident trust that he had claimed earlier for himself in his God. Now especially when he needs God’s deliverance, they taunt, now God doesn’t seem to even be interested, He doesn’t even appear to be willing to respond. “So,” they say, “go ahead and put your trust in this ‘LORD’ of yours! Go ahead, let Him show how much of a Savior-God He is; let Him demonstrate His powers to deliver, by delivering this one, the very one who so boldly was boasting about his God’s rescuing activity of old so shortly ago! Go ahead, let Him snatch this fellow out of his miserable state—that will give us evidence of

whether or not He TRULY is pleased with, him!” The people who are taunting the Sufferer see and use this as a perfect challenge or test of God’s favor on him and his trust in God -- does He really delight in him, or not?! Let’s see what happens!

Of course, this immediately calls to mind the words of the crowd and enemies of Jesus who insulted Him at the foot of the cross with these very words (Matthew 27)! As Pieper notes:

Christ’s enemies were not content to humiliate Him with coarse gestures; they had to satisfy their sick enjoyment of his suffering by venting their spite in biting and blasphemous sarcasm. He had claimed a special relationship with God. He had always appealed to his heavenly Father and trusted him. “All right, let’s put him to the test. Cry out to Jehovah, your God and ours; if he is pleased with you, if you are his special Son, let him acknowledge this by rescuing you” (cf. Mat. 27).^{xxiv}

The even more grinding point behind these insults was the fact that the Sufferer’s enemies did not at all believe that he had any special relationship with God; that his claims to trust in God were unfounded, misguided, and totally in vain. Their test, they felt, would certainly show him to be the biggest fool of all, because God would NOT deliver him, and he would continue to be forsaken and abandoned by God—unlike anyone else in all creation!

To this, Pieper adds this interesting insight:

What the suffering Savior could not comprehend was how the God who consistently responded to the fathers’ pleas for help could now turn his back on him completely and give him over to the vile mockery of his enemies.^{xxv}

Pieper’s comment takes us back to verses 2 and 3, where the Sufferer began his lament and appeal with the distressed question, “*Why?*” So, too, now, in light of this ongoing, shameful mockery of his unwavering trust in his God, why didn’t God deliver *him*, as all of Israel’s history had shown Him to have done for others, why didn’t God also do the same for *him*, especially now when all these witnesses of his (the Sufferer’s) plight were watching and waiting to see what would happen?! What a perfect time for God to give evidence of His saving power once again—especially to put to silence the arrogant, insulting mockery of his enemies! The Sufferer cannot understand *why* God isn’t taking the obvious advantage that this situation offers Him!

With the next verses, we are again brought to realize the amazing steadfastness and faithfulness of the Sufferer, who, in spite of the mockery, the unanswered questions he himself has, and the silence of his God, still clings unwaveringly in his trust in his God:

10 כִּי־אֵתָהּ נָחִי מִבֶּטֶן מִבְּטִיחִי עַל־שְׂדֵי אִמִּי:
11 עָלֶיךָ הִשְׁלַכְתִּי מִרְחֹם מִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי אֵלֶי אֵתָהּ:

NIV: Yet you brought me out of the womb; you made me trust in you even at my mother’s breast. From birth I was cast upon you; from my mother’s womb you have been my God.

Pieper: Yet it was you who brought me out of my mother’s womb; you taught me to trust you already at my mother’s breast. From the womb I was cast upon you; from the womb of my mother you have been my God.

Mine: Indeed You, you drew me out from the womb; you caused me to trust (in you) upon the breasts of my mother. Upon you I was thrown from the womb; from the womb of my

mother you have been (are) my God.

כִּי־אֵתָּה -- demonstrative particle כִּי “yes, indeed; for, because”; with 2nd singular pronoun “you,” for emphasis

נָחִי -- Qal perfect participle with 1st singular suffix from נָחַה meaning “to draw out.” Participle stresses the ongoing action of verb; could be “the Bringer-out”—even as an infant, he trusted in God, and God protected His Son (e.g. journey to Egypt, etc.)

מִבֶּטֶן -- noun בֶּטֶן “belly” or “womb”; with preposition מִן

מִבְּטִיחִי -- Hiphil participle with 1st singular suffix from בָּטַח ”to trust, direct trust”; verb form has causal sense to meaning, thus: “you caused me to trust”; Hiphil verb has causative force; participle form shows ongoing, continuing action

עַל־שְׁדֵי אִמִּי -- plural noun construct of שֶׁד ”breast”; אִמִּי noun אִם with 1st person singular suffix “my mother”

הִשְׁלַכְתִּי -- Hophal perfect, 1st person singular of שָׁלַךְ ”to be thrown”; Hophal verb shows causative action in passive voice

מִרְחֹם -- noun רָחֹם “womb,” with preposition מִן

מִבֶּטֶן אִמִּי -- noun בֶּטֶן “womb”; אִמִּי noun אִם with 1st person singular suffix “my mother”

אֵלֵי אֵתָּה -- same word אֵלֵי for “my God” as in verse 2; with predicate אֵתָּה as emphatic pronoun “you”

The Sufferer here calls to mind the very first instance of trust, which God Himself was responsible for initiating—at the birth process! He recalls the very earliest instance of his existence as the basis and reason for trusting in God, claiming that it was something that God Himself established in him at birth, at his mother’s breasts. He calls on God to see and remember that his current trust in God is not a foolish or unfounded, illogical thing for him; it is something which God Himself initiated in him from his birth! He reiterates that this point in time is a critical mark in his practice of trusting God-- from the time he came out of his mother’s womb, from birth already, he was “cast upon” God, that is, he was caused to trust in Him! And to make that even more impressive and have a greater impact, the Sufferer uses the very same name for God as he had in the beginning of this psalm when he asked the question, “Why?": אֵלֵי! With this term, he wishes to emphasize the fact that God has continued to be his own, his personal God; he has had and has maintained a personal relationship with his God from his birth! So the mockers know nothing at all when they insult and ridicule his trust in his God! This is no imaginary faith or unfounded trust-- no “atheist-turned-believer-when-he’s-in-the-foxhole” kind of claim on God, but a genuine, lifelong relationship! Pieper comments:

What the mockers scorned as pure imagination was reality and truth; this relation did in fact exist between God and him, beginning with the first moment of his life. What the Savior said to His Father was this: “...I do indeed stand in a very special relationship to you. You have treated me like a worm, but I know that in your eyes I am no worm. You deal with me as though I were less than human, but I know that in your eyes I count for more than an ordinary human. You

refuse me the help you formerly gave our fathers, but I mean more to you, I stand closer to you, than one of them did.”^{xxvi}

These verses set up for us yet another instance in the discourse of the Sufferer when he takes us back to the initial question he posed to God in the opening verses, “*Why?*” He simply cannot understand how it can be that his God would so reject and abandon him, now in light of his lifelong allegiance to his God! He struggles with this apparent contradiction in God’s treatment of him, does not comprehend why God would do this. But Pieper goes even deeper into this when he notes:

From all this our Lord’s intended meaning is clear: he does not understand why his God has abandoned him. That strikes us as being in conflict with his divine nature and his omniscience. Even as man Christ understood God’s entire plan for the sinner’s redemption. The psalmist’s presentation appears to deprive the Savior of understanding his imminent suffering that he so often shared with people. The fact remains, however, that dogmatic considerations dare never determine our exegesis or erase clear words of Scripture. Only a misuse of the analogy of faith can strike one word of the Bible in favor of another. Theology that is humble does not divide up but adds up all of the Bible’s various statements. Christ’s not knowing the answer to the “*Why?*” of his God-forsakenness is analogous to his not knowing the exact time of judgment day (Mk 13:32) and to his prayer in Gethsemane: “*Father, if it is possible...*” (Mt 26:39). When the Lord spoke these words, he was in the deepest depths of his humiliation. When God forsook his Son, he withdrew from him not only all strength and comfort, but his understanding as well. At that moment the answer to his question “*Why?*” was hidden from him; the question was unexplainable. So deep a humiliation of the majestic Son of Man is for us too an insoluble mystery, but it is a blessed mystery, worthy of our adoration.^{xxvii}

Thank you, August Pieper, for that reminder to remain humble and in reverent awe of our Lord’s extreme suffering. Not only are we to see through the eyes of faith that Jesus suffered excruciating physical pain on the cross, but now we are privileged to see also the agony of his heart and soul, which wrestled mightily with the total unreasonableness of God’s abandoning him, the unreasonableness of God’s silence toward him while he had to endure the insults of his enemies, the unreasonableness of God’s treatment of him now in his greatest hour of need in light of the lifetime of trust which the Sufferer has demonstrated in his God. Amazing grace!

12 אֶל־תִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי כִּי־צָרָה קְרוּבָה בֵּי־אֵין עֹזֶר:

NIV: Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help.

Pieper: Do not be far from me, for trouble is near; and there is no one to help.

Mine: Do not be far from me because distress is near; for no one is helping.

אֶל־תִּרְחַק -- negative particle אֶל with Qal imperfect 2nd singular of רָחַק ”to be far, distant; wander from”; imperfect verb shows indefinite time

כִּי -- causal, “for, since”

צָרָה -- noun, “distress,” in emphatic position

קרובה -- adjective קרוב "near, be near"

בִּי־אֵין -- noun construct of אֵין "no one, nothing"

עֹזֵר -- Qal active participle of עָזַר "to help, support"; participle denotes ongoing, continuous action of verb

Once again the Sufferer offers a prayer and a plea to his God: don't forsake or leave me, don't be far away from me now, especially now! This is a litotes, understood to mean, then, "be very near me!" This is also an understatement—he is being inundated with distress at this time, while on the cross, and is all by himself! He pleads for Someone to be with him. Why not distant now? "...because it is clear that great distress has come upon me. ...because it is also clear that there is no one else around to help me!" It is again noteworthy and astounding to see that after all the wrestling of the Sufferer with the question "Why?" in the previous verses, he still comes back to his God in total devotion, trust, and confidence, and appeals to Him for help. What faithfulness! What trust! What unwavering, unshakable confidence, in spite of the rejection and abandonment of God, the people, and even the insults and hideous treatment of the scoffers!

The Sufferer is not, however, only looking back in this verse at the trouble he has encountered as he prays for his God to be near. He is also looking forward, to the verses that follow, and calling for God's presence and help in what is to come. This verse serves as a connection, then, between the whole concept of abandonment by God that the Sufferer has come to realize and experience, and the very graphic description that will now follow of the anguish he feels at the hands of his enemies.

Brug summarizes:

Notice how this section alternates between troubled questions (vv. 1,2,6-8) and expressions of confidence which answer those questions (vv. 3-5,9-10). It concludes with a word of faith (v. 11) which calls for deliverance only God can give. Jesus stands alone, abandoned by his disciples. His enemies are powerful and vicious. Only God can deliver him now.^{xxviii}

13 סָבְבוּנִי פָּרִים רַבִּים אַבְּרִי בְּשֵׁן בְּתֵרוּנִי:

14 פָּצוּ עָלַי פִּיהֶם אַרְיֵה טֹרֵף וְשֹׂאֵג:

NIV: Many bulls surround me; strong bulls of Bashan encircle me. Roaring lions tearing their prey open their mouths wide against me.

Pieper: Many bulls have surrounded me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled me. They open their mouths wide against me, as a roaring, ravenous lion.

Mine: Many bulls have surrounded me, strong (bulls) of Bashan have surrounded me. They open their mouths against me, (like) a roaring, ravenous lion.

סָבְבוּנִי -- Qal Perfect 3rd person plural with 1st singular suffix of סָבַב "to turn, circle; go around"

פָּרִים רַבִּים -- plural noun form of פָּר "young bull"; with plural adjective רַב "many"

אַבְּרִי בְּשֵׁן -- plural adjective of אַבִּיר "strong, powerful"; with place name בְּשֵׁן "Bashan" (apparently had reputation of having strong, vigorous bulls)

כְּתָרוּנִי -- Piel perfect 3rd plural with 1st person singular suffix of כָּתַר "to surround"; Piel verb intensifies meaning of the verb

פָּצוּ פִּיהֶם -- Qal perfect 3rd person plural of פָּצָה "to open up"; with plural form of noun פֶּה "mouth"

אֲרִיָּה -- plural form of noun אֶרֶב "lion"

טָרַף וְשָׂאָג -- Qal perfect participles: טָרַף "to tear in pieces"; and שָׂאָג "to roar"; participles stressing ongoing action of verb

The Sufferer now describes the distress he encounters at the hands of his enemies. He calls attention to both the great number of them ("many"), and the strength with which they attack him ("strong"). He pictures them as "bulls," and describes them as "surrounding" him, completely encircling him, so that there is no chance for him to escape their insults and attacks. They are like a herd of young, powerful bulls, who are ready to charge him, as when two young males are sparing with one another for the right to a female. But this is no friendly jousting match! This is for real, and intense, and not just a few, but many! And they don't just stand there, in a great circle around him, with nothing to say or do! They use their numbers and strength to their considerable advantage, and the Sufferer's terrible disadvantage! He goes on to describe them as having their mouths forcibly opened wide against him, screaming at him at the top of their lungs, with no restraint, like a lion that has just killed its prey and is roaring in triumph and in warning against any who might try to take his prize from him. He is, of course, describing those who are ridiculing and insulting him (back in verse 8), whose mouths are wide open and loud with their verbal abuses against him. What a dramatic picture the Sufferer paints for us; how descriptive and impacting this is upon our view of his suffering! We are led to see not just a scattered, small group of people, leisurely milling around the Sufferer (more specifically, our Savior Jesus at the foot of his cross!). No, he enables us to see through his own eyes the considerable crowd of blood-thirsty, angry people, totally surrounding him, bombarding him from all sides with boisterous, hateful, biting derision and insult upon him, as he remains helpless and alone in the middle of all this. In what now follows, we are even allowed to see into the heart and mind of our Savior, to know even what is going on there.

15 כַּמִּים נִשְׁפָּכְתִּי וְהִתְפָּרְדּוּ כָּל־עֲצָמוֹתַי הִיא לִבִּי כְּדוֹנָג נֶמֶס בְּתוֹךְ מַעֵי:

16 יָבֵשׁ בְּחַרְשׁ כַּחֲי וְלִשׁוֹנִי מִדְּבַק מִלְּקוֹחֵי וְלַעֲפָר־מֹת תִּשְׁפָּתַנִּי:

NIV: I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.

Pieper: I am poured out like water; all my bones are out of joint; my heart has become like wax, it has melted away within me. My strength has dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death.

Mine: I am poured out like water; all my bones are out of joint. My heart has become like wax, it has melted in the midst of my bowels. My strength has dried up like a potsherd and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth. You lay me down in the dust of death.

כַּמִּים -- noun מַיִם "water," with preposition כְּ "like, as"

- נִשְׁפָּכְתִּי -- Niphal perfect 1st person singular of שָׁפַךְ "to pour, spill, shed"; verb form is passive:
"I am poured out"
- וְהִתְפָּרְדּוּ -- w-c Hithpael perfect of פָּרַד "to spread"; verb form is passive: "to be scattered,
separated from"; thus, "to be out of joint"; Hithpael verb adds reflexive or
reciprocal action to the meaning of the verb
- כָּל-עֲצָמוֹתַי -- plural noun with 1st singular suffix of עָצָם "bone"
- לִבִּי -- noun with 1st singular suffix of לֵב "heart"
- כְּדֹנֶגֶץ -- noun דֹּנֶגֶץ "wax"; with preposition כְּ "like, as"
- נִמָּס -- Niphal perfect participle of מָסַס "to dissolve, melt; lose courage"; Niphal verb is
passive; participle form denotes ongoing, continuous action of verb
- בְּתוֹךְ -- noun תוֹךְ "middle"; with preposition בְּ "in" -- "in the middle of"
- מֵעֵי -- noun construct with 1st person suffix of מֵעָה "bowels, intestines"
- יָבֵשׁ -- Qal perfect of יָבַשׁ "to dry up, wither"
- כְּחֵרֶשׁ -- noun חֵרֶשׁ "pottery, fired clay"; with preposition כְּ "like, as"
- כֹּחִי -- noun construct with 1st person singular suffix of כֹּחַ "strength"
- וּלְשׁוֹנִי -- noun construct with 1st person singular suffix of לָשׁוֹן "tongue"
- מִדְּבָק -- Hophal perfect participle of דָּבַק "to stick"; passive verb form "to be stuck"; Hophal
verb has causative force in the passive voice; participle form denotes ongoing,
continuing action of the verb (on the cross, Jesus fulfilled this reference prophecy
by asking for a drink)
- מִלְקוֹחַי -- plural noun with 1st person singular suffix of מִלְקוֹחַיִם "palate, roof of mouth"
- וְלֵעֶפְרָם-מָוֶת -- noun construct of עָפָר "dry dust"; with preposition לְ "to, for"; and noun מָוֶת
"death"
- תִּשְׁפָּתֵנִי -- Qal imperfect 2nd singular with 1st person singular suffix of שָׁפַת "to put on,
prepare"; imperfect tense denotes indefinite time with action of the verb

Here the Sufferer expresses in words his inner anguish due to the insults of his enemies. First, he is exhausted. Just as water that is poured out on burning hot sand and is sucked up immediately, disappearing without a trace and giving no appearance of having done any good whatsoever, so is his strength. The very life and energy that one would normally have has been completely drained from him. Secondly, he aches in all his body parts, like he is being pulled apart. The excruciating pain of dislocating a shoulder or knee permeates and penetrates every joint and bone of his body. And thirdly, he has lost all his drive, courage, determination, and self-confidence—it has just simply melted away, like a child's crayon in the hot sun or inside on the dashboard of an enclosed car. Pieper makes a few remarks:

Water can be contained only in a vessel; poured out, it drains away and evaporates. Similarly, the vital powers of the One nailed to the cross were drained away and exhausted when God gave

him over into the power of the enemy. ...under the steady torture of body and temptation of soul the Savior lost courage and composure and control.^{xxix}

He uses yet another picture to try to relate his suffering to us: he says that his strength is gone, like the moisture that is driven from a piece of clay pottery that has been fired in a hot furnace. And to further describe his agony, he refers to his dry mouth, with which he cannot even talk or swallow because his tongue is stuck to the roof of his mouth.

And then, almost as an afterthought, or perhaps as a last, gasping, whispered realization (revelation), the Sufferer tells us not only that he feels as though he is being prepared for death, but he even informs us as to the Perpetrator of his agony. He says, “*You*,” namely, the God in whom he has placed his trust, the God in whom he has trusted from the moment of his birth, “*You lay me in the dust of death!*” “It was God himself who brought this sentence of judgment on him and who brought about the end result: the Lord was laid in the dust of death, i.e., as inanimate dust he was laid in the dust of the grave.”^{xxx} How astonishing, how ghastly, how heart-wrenching a thought, perhaps the most severe aspect of what it means to be forsaken by God—but oh, how important for our eternal salvation!

17 כִּי סָבְבוּנִי כְּלָבִים עֵדַת מְרָעִים הַקִּיפוּנִי כְּאֲרִי יְדֵי וְרַגְלֵי:

NIV: Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet.

Pieper: Dogs have surrounded me, a mob of evil men has encircled me; they have pierced my hands and my feet.

Mine: For dogs have surrounded me, a band of evil men has encircled me. They have pierced my hands and my feet.

כִּי -- causal particle “*for, since*”

סָבְבוּנִי -- Qal perfect 3rd person plural with 1st person singular suffix of סָבַב “*to surround*”

כְּלָבִים -- plural noun of כָּלֵב “*dog*”

עֵדַת מְרָעִים -- noun construct of עֵדָה “*assembly, gathering, band*”; with plural adjective form of רָע “*evil, bad*”; here: “*a band of evil ones; evil men*”

עֵדַת -- Greek equivalent is *συναγωγὴ*! It was the visible church leaders who were doing this to Jesus, the Christ of God! Ironic!

כְּאֲרִי -- Qal perfect 3rd person plural of כָּרַה “*to dig, excavate, pierce; tie together*”; or אֲרִי “*lion*,” with preposition כִּי “*like, as*.” Older translations saw a verb here, not a noun. Luther states that the Masoretes have falsified the text. The Hebrew text without pointing would be: כְּאֲרִי -- Qal active participle, denoting ongoing, continuous action of the verb, or as a verbal: “*piercers of me*”

יְדֵי וְרַגְלֵי -- plural form of noun יָד “*hand*”; and plural form of noun רֶגֶל “*foot*”

The Sufferer points to yet another way in which his enemies insult and abuse him, with another graphic

picture of disgust: they have assembled and surrounded him like a pack of wild, rabid dogs, eager to bite and tear just for the sport of it. They are like a mob of evildoers who have gathered to do their evil deeds. And this band of evil men, like a pack of mad, raging dogs, pierce him through, hand and foot, so that there is no escaping them. Pieper states:

”Dogs” are a picture of what is common and base, of madness prone to biting. The expression characterizes the evil mob, the vulgar crowd without brain or heart. They showed no respect but had come only to tear a man apart, because that’s what they wanted. Like animals thirsty for blood, they pierced his hands and feet.^{xxx1}

What does that last point refer to except, very clearly, the crucifixion of our Lord! The amazing thing, though, is that none of the Gospels make any mention of this particular detail of the crucifixion; no reference to this fact by way of the familiar words, “this was so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled,” as is the case with so many of the other features of this very-obviously messianic psalm. Why is that feature ignored? Why ask why?!

Brug explains a bit more on the difficulties with this verse:

In its translation of v. 16, “they have pierced my hands and my feet,” the NIV is suggesting a correction of an apparent copying mistake in the standard Hebrew text, which reads, “like the lion my hands and my feet.” Although these translations are very different in English, the corresponding Hebrew words are very similar in appearance. A number of Greek and Hebrew manuscripts support the reading preferred by the NIV. This may be one of the comparatively rare cases in which other manuscripts preserve a better reading than the standard Hebrew text. If we accept the NIV translation, the verse is a very striking description of the process of crucifixion.^{xxxii}

אָסַפֵּר כָּל-עֲצָמוֹתַי הֵמָּה יְבִיטוּ יִרְאוּ בִי:

NIV: I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.

Pieper: I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.

Mine: I (can) count all my bones. They stare and gloat over me.

אָסַפֵּר -- Qal perfect 1st person singular of סָפַר ”to count, measure”

כָּל-עֲצָמוֹתַי -- plural form of noun עֶצֶם ”bone”; with adjective כָּל ”all, every”

הֵמָּה -- plural pronoun “they”; for emphasis

יְבִיטוּ -- Hiphil imperfect 3rd person plural of נָבַט ”to look at, gaze upon, stare”; verb form intensifies action of the verb; imperfect denotes indefinite time

יִרְאוּ -- Qal perfect 3rd plural of רָאָה ”to see, gloat over”

We are again privy to the inner thoughts and feelings of the Sufferer as he encounters and endures the insults and attacks of his enemies. His pain and suffering are so extreme, so extraordinary, that the evidence is outwardly obvious, even to the Sufferer himself! As he takes stock of his situation and lets his eyes fall on his

own frame, he even notices the disfigurement and shameful and embarrassing evidence of his suffering that his own body reveals. Thinking immediately of Christ on the cross, Pieper observes:

In the case of a person crucified that was the full and awful truth. In crucifixion every member of the body was racked with indescribable pain. This was even outwardly visible. After only a short time on the cross, limbs and muscles of the Crucified began to twitch and jerk convulsively, and the bloodthirsty mob of bystanders noticed it. But instead of turning their eyes away from such a heartbreaking sight, a sight so deserving of their sympathy, they stared at the quivering body of their Victim and actually feasted their eyes on his unspeakable agony.^{xxxiii}

One other point might also be made here. The fact that the Sufferer acknowledges and proclaims that he can count “all” his bones should remind us that all his bones really were there yet! All of them were still intact! This is also fulfilled in Christ as acknowledged in the gospel (John 19:36) that not one of his bones was broken. Also, by crucifixion, the rib cage is naturally distended, and would obviously display all the bones very vividly.

19 יְהִלְקוּ בְּגָדֵי לָהֶם וְעַל-לְבוּשֵׁי יַפִּילוּ גֹרְלִי:

NIV: They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

Pieper: They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing.

Mine: They divide my clothes among them and they cast lots for my garments.

יְהִלְקוּ -- Qal imperfect 3rd person plural of הִלָּק ”to divide, share, allot”; imperfect tense denotes indefinite time of the action of the verb

בְּגָדֵי -- plural noun with 1st singular suffix of בָּגָד ”clothes, garments”; referring to loose, outer garment, the toga of the Romans

לָהֶם -- plural pronoun “they”

וְעַל-לְבוּשֵׁי -- noun with 1st person suffix of לְבוּשׁ ”clothing”; referring to the close-fitting undergarment, the tunic

יַפִּילוּ -- Hiphil imperfect 3rd person plural of נָפַל ”to fall, throw down”; verb tense intensifies the action of the verb; imperfect form denotes indefinite time

גֹרְלִי -- noun meaning “lot”

Now in one final act of base ridicule, the Sufferer’s tormentors write him off by dividing his clothes. So far had they rejected him, after all their cruelty toward him, that they even divide up his clothes—in full view of him—as though he were already dead! One of the spoils of an execution were the clothes and other possessions of the dead. They would normally go to those who had put him to death. But that should normally come after the condemned is dead. Here, the Sufferer is made to view that last act of triumph, even before he is dead! So far had they rejected and turned away from him that they don’t even bother waiting for his demise. As far as they were concerned, he was already as good as dead, and so they divide up his clothes in victory.

Pieper marvels at the fact that this particular detail of our Lord’s crucifixion is included in this Old Testament prophecy, and that its fulfillment is so carefully recorded in the gospels. But Luther recognized the reason very well, as noted by Pieper:

“It was the opinion of the prophet/psalmist that Christ had been so completely given over into the hands of the godless and that his case looked so utterly hopeless, that in their overconfidence they even made a mockery of his clothing... I do not believe that the soldiers divided Christ’s garments in order to get something valuable. They were simply having fun in a matter that they considered a big joke, laughing and showing that they regarded him as a person totally destroyed, lost, undone.” ...The fact that the soldiers undertook to divide Christ’s garments before he even died shows how confident they were that he would die. The lament from the Savior’s lips calls attention to this fact: “They treat me as one already dead, as one who has surely been done away with, who no longer has a part in life. They are already celebrating their victory; I have come to my end.”^{xxxiv}

Brug simply notes about this verse: “The prophecy of the casting of lots for Jesus’ clothes is one of the most amazing Messianic prophecies. Its fulfillment is recorded in Matthew 27:35 and John 19:24.”^{xxxv}

In conclusion, Pieper writes:

This concludes the psalmist’s portrayal of Christ’s suffering. The enemies had done their utmost. They had heaped the vilest mockery on him. They had tormented and tortured him in whatever ways their evil minds could conceive. In their insatiable bloodthirst they had put him to death, and now they were celebrating their triumph.^{xxxvi}

What a stunning and sweeping panorama we have been privileged to view in these 18 verses of Psalm 22! We were confronted from the start with the innocent wondering of the Sufferer as to the reason for his treatment; made to view for ourselves the unreasonableness of his suffering, especially in light of all the evidence of his genuine trust in God and the reliability of his God; and even presented with the graphic nature of his torment at the hands of his enemies—with no relief from this onslaught except by way of his unwavering, constant, steady trust in his God.

How will this end? That’s the subject of the next paper, which will take up the second half of this great psalm. For now, marvel at the relative simplicity of the Hebrew of Psalm 22 -- it doesn’t present that many problems for translation, or difficult verb or word forms to wrestle with in order to find their meaning. The words of the original are fairly straightforward, uncomplicated, easily grasped and recognized. Even more, marvel at the detail, the insight, the very personal nature and quality of the Psalm, as though the author was himself actually going through and enduring every single last aspect of the sufferings, emotions, and pain described in the psalm -- because He was! Not David, the instrument that was used to record the words, but Christ, the Person, who Himself endured every single last aspect of those sufferings and emotions and pain described in this Psalm! And marvel as well, that Christ by inspiration of the Holy Spirit upon David, should give us a glimpse into that otherwise-hidden aspect of our Savior’s passion which took place during those terrifying hours of darkness while He hung upon the cross! For here in Psalm 22 we are enabled to do more than merely “imagine” what it must have been like; here Jesus himself, the pre-incarnate Christ, reveals to us, as far as human words can tell, what He endured on our behalf!

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Endnotes

- ⁱ Pieper, p. 287
- ⁱⁱ Pieper, p. 288
- ⁱⁱⁱ Pieper, p. 293
- ^{iv} Pieper, p. 294
- ^v Pieper, p. 293
- ^{vi} Pieper, p. 294
- ^{vii} Pieper, p. 294
- ^{viii} Pieper, p. 292
- ^{ix} Seminary Notes, p. 40
- ^x Pieper, p. 292
- ^{xi} Pieper, p. 295
- ^{xii} Pieper, p. 295
- ^{xiii} Pieper, p. 296
- ^{xiv} Pieper, p. 296
- ^{xv} Pieper, p. 297
- ^{xvi} Pieper, p. 297-298
- ^{xvii} Pieper, p. 298
- ^{xviii} Pieper, p. 297
- ^{xix} Pieper, p. 297
- ^{xx} Pieper, p. 298
- ^{xxi} Brug, p. 106
- ^{xxii} Pieper, p. 299
- ^{xxiii} Pieper, p. 299
- ^{xxiv} Pieper, p. 299-300
- ^{xxv} Pieper, p. 300
- ^{xxvi} Pieper, p. 300
- ^{xxvii} Pieper, p. 301
- ^{xxviii} Brug, p. 108
- ^{xxix} Pieper, p. 303
- ^{xxx} Pieper, p. 303
- ^{xxxi} Pieper, p. 303
- ^{xxxii} Brug, p. 109
- ^{xxxiii} Pieper, p. 304
- ^{xxxiv} Pieper, p. 304-305
- ^{xxxv} Brug, p. 109
- ^{xxxvi} Pieper, p. 305