

PSALM 22: FROM TRIAL TO TRIUMPH

RICHARD D. PATTERSON*

I. INTRODUCTION

It has long been this writer's contention that the application of the Scriptures should be based upon careful exegetical procedures, which wherever possible consist in properly balanced grammatical, historical/cultural, literary, and theological data. Elsewhere I have termed this fourfold approach "the chair of (biblical) hermeneutics."¹ Admittedly, not every biblical passage yields equal or sufficient information in all four categories. Thus prose texts most readily lend themselves to such a full-orbed approach, while the inherent qualities of poetry pose more of a challenge.² Moreover, each literary genre exercises its own constraints.

Psalm 22 has received the attention of able Jewish and Christian expositors through the centuries.³ Yet few have considered the third "leg" of the

* Richard Patterson is distinguished professor emeritus at Liberty University, 1971 University Blvd., Lynchburg, VA 24502.

¹ R. D. Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* (Chicago: Moody, 1991) xvi; see also D. Brent Sandy and R. Giese, *Cracking Old Testament Codes* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995) 4.

² Narratives that contain inset poetry (e.g. Exod 13:20–15:22; Judg 4:1–5:31) provide particularly rich sources for applying the hermeneutical principles relevant to both prose and poetry. See the two-part study by R. D. Patterson and Michael Grisanti, "Victory at Sea: Moses the Historian as Narrator and Poet," in *Bibliotheca Sacra* (forthcoming).

³ In addition to many of the Church fathers, the list of those who have studied and commented on this psalm includes such noteworthy scholars as Rashi, Kimchi, Calvin, DeWette, Ewald, Luther, and Olshausen. For details and a consideration of other noted scholars who have wrestled with Psalm 22, see G. Dahan, "Le moyen âge et le Psaume 22," and B. Roussel, F. Laplanche, and M. Berder, "La Réforme lit le Psaume 22," in *Mon Dieu, Pourquoi m'as-tu abandonné? Psaume 22 (Cahiers Évangile, Supplement 121, 2002) 71–88; 89–98*. The psalm continues to be the object of careful scrutiny among scholars of all theological persuasions. Standard older OT commentaries in which Psalm 22 receives extended attention include: J. A. Alexander, *Commentary on Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, reprint ed., 1991); C. A. Briggs and E. G. Briggs, *The Book of Psalms (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1907)*; M. Bittenwieser, *The Psalms* (New York: KTAV, 1969); A. Cohen, *The Psalms* (13th ed.; New York: Soncino, 1985); Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms* (3 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint ed. 1955) 1.301–28; A. R. Fausset, *Job-Isaiah in A Commentary Critical, Experimental and Practical on the Old and New Testaments (JFB; 6 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint ed., 1948) 3.148–52*; C. B. Moll, *The Psalms in Lange's Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, reprint ed., 1971) 5.165–80; and J. J. S. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, reprint ed., 1976). More recent commentaries include: A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms (NCBC; 2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981)*; P. C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50 (WBC; Waco: Word, 1983)*; M. Dahood, *Psalms I: 1–50 (AB; Garden City: Doubleday, 1965)*; D. Kidner, *Psalms 1–72 (TOTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1973)*; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, reprint ed., 1969);

“chair of hermeneutics.” Nevertheless, the literary approach is an indispensable tool for exegesis. As Michael Travers points out, “Indeed, exegesis is incomplete without proper attention being paid to the literary features of the Biblical passage in question. . . . before a reader can judge a Biblical text authoritatively, he must pay adequate attention to matters of genre and form as well as matters of theology and history.”⁴

Mindful of the above-mentioned difficulties, the following study shall undertake an examination of Psalm 22 in an effort to gather and use the available data for all four “legs” of the “hermeneutical chair” in order to gain the psalm’s full impact. In so doing it is hoped that the result will prove to be a contribution to the ongoing study of this crucial psalm.

1. *Historical context.* The attempt to locate Psalm 22 in its historical context is difficult at best. Delitzsch suggests a possible but not exhaustive background in Saul’s persecution of David in the Desert of Maon (1 Sam 23: 25–26).⁵ One might just as plausibly suggest the earlier days when David was alone and suffering incessantly at the hands of Saul (e.g. 1 Sam 20; 21:1–15) or the time of his flight from Absalom (2 Sam 15–17) or his observations in later years born of disillusion.⁶ One must acknowledge, however, that Cohen is probably correct in stating, “The language is not always agreeable to the hypothesis that David voices his personal distress under Saul’s persecution.”⁷

The difficulty of locating a precise occasion in David’s life has led many scholars to postulate an entirely different *Sitz im Leben* for the psalm.⁸

K. Schaefer, *Psalms (Berit Olam; Colleagueville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2001)*; W. VanGemeren, *Psalms (EBC; 12 vols.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991)* 5.198–214. Numerous special studies have appeared, many of which will be cited in the following pages. A partial list includes: P. Auffret, “Tu ma’as répondu. Étude structurelle du Psaume 22,” *SJOT* 12 (1998) 102–29; S. B. Frost, “Psalm 22: An Exposition,” *CJT* 8 (1961) 102–15; H. Gese, “Psalm 22 and the New Testament,” *TD* 18 (1970) 237–43; M. H. Heinemann, “An Exposition of Psalm 22,” *BSac* 147 (1990) 286–308; W. L. Holladay, “Background of Jeremiah’s Self-understanding: Moses, Samuel, and Psalm 22,” *JBL* 83 (1964) 153–64; H. D. Lange, “The Relationship Between Psalm 22 and the Passion Narrative,” *CTM* 43 (1972) 610–21; J. L. Mays, “Prayer and Christology: Psalm 22 As Perspective on the Passion,” *TToday* 42 (1985) 322–31; V. S. Poythress, “Divine Meaning of Scripture,” *WTJ* 48 (1986) 241–79; J. H. Reumann, “Psalm 22 at the Cross,” *Int* 28 (1974) 29–58; H. H. Schmid, “Mein Gott, mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen? Ps 22 als Beispiel alttestamentlicher Rede von Krankheit und Tod,” *WD NF* 11 (1971) 119–40; S. Tostengard, “Psalm 22,” *Int* 46 (1992) 167–70.

⁴ R. D. Patterson and M. Travers, “Nahum: Poet Laureate of the Minor Prophets,” *JETS* 33 (1990) 438. L. Ryken (*Words of Delight: A Literary Introduction to the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981] 20) rightly observes, “Literary analysis is a necessary precondition to a sounder textual scholarship.”

⁵ Delitzsch, *Psalms* 1.305.

⁶ See Moll, *Psalms* 138, 168.

⁷ Cohen, *Psalms* 61.

⁸ A great many expositors place no confidence in the attribution of the psalm to David in the psalm’s title. Although one need not hold the titles of the psalms to be inspired, they do represent very ancient opinion, being attested even in the LXX. For a consideration of the place and value of psalm titles, see T. Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1988) 38–42; D. W. Music, “The Superscriptions of the Psalms,” *Biblical Illustrator* 15 (1989) 49–53.

Thus many propose that the writer is an ideal person suffering at the hands of others whose identity is unknown.⁹ Others suggest that the unknown person is someone who is suffering a grave illness. "If we are allowed a guess, the original cause of the distress may have been illness aggravated by the attitude of the Psalmist's fellow men, as well as by his own doubts and the spiritual dilemma."¹⁰ Because he accepted the psalm's title as a reference to Esther on the basis of the Talmud, the Hebrew scholar Kimchi "referred the Psalm to the period of Haman's plot of annihilation."¹¹ Hitzig and Holladay compared the similarity of sentiment with the soliloquies of Jeremiah: "Hitzig persists in his view, that Jeremiah composed the first portion when cast into prison as an apostate, and the second portion in the court of the prison, when placed under milder restraint."¹² Craigie views the setting of the psalm in connection with Israel's liturgy. "It is probable that a liturgy such as this was used for any person who was sick and threatened with death."¹³ Many are convinced that the psalm has its setting in the exilic or post-exilic periods, perhaps even as late as the Maccabean Era.¹⁴

Yet even setting aside the ascription of the psalm to David in the psalm's title, its internal features bear the marks of Davidic authority. Not only in its general reflection of David's stormy career but in the details of the psalm one can see a close resemblance to 2 Samuel 22 (cf. 2 Sam 22:4–7, 17–20, 49–50), whose narrative introduction clearly attests Davidic authorship. As well, the psalm's use by Jesus, the Messiah and Davidic heir *par excellence*, argues for the traditional view that the psalm was written by David. Although we cannot know the precise occasion of its writing, unless there is compelling evidence to the contrary, one can do little better than accept the traditional view that the psalm is David's.

2. *Literary context.* Our examination of the psalm's literary features will proceed in three areas: (1) its unity; (2) its structure and genre; and (3) its imagery.¹⁵

a. *The unity of the psalm.* Although some have viewed Psalm 22 as originating from two different poetic pieces, the vast majority of exegetes treat the psalm as a unified product of a single author (or editor).¹⁶ Our study will endorse the majority opinion.

⁹ See e.g. Alexander, *Psalms* 106; Dahood, *Psalms* 1.138.

¹⁰ Anderson, *Psalms* 1.185; see also Tostengard, "Psalm 22" 167; Frost ("Psalm 22" 102) adds: "The psalm that is numbered twenty-two in the English Bible is the psalm of a man who has been very ill, who has looked upon the face of death, and has recovered."

¹¹ Cohen, *Psalms* 61.

¹² Delitzsch, *Psalms* 1.304; see also Holladay, "Background" 153–64.

¹³ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* 198.

¹⁴ See Buttenwieser, *Psalms* 588–606; C. Stuhlmüller, "Psalm 22: The Deaf and Silent God of Mysticism and Liturgy," *BTB* 12 (1982) 86–90; Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* 236 cites Olshausen as endorsing a Maccabean date.

¹⁵ Grammatical and theological insights will be covered in the comments that follow. Unless otherwise noted, all scriptural quotes will be taken from the NIV.

¹⁶ Cheyne, Duhm, and Hitzig are often cited as holding to the psalm's composite authorship. VanGemeren (*Psalms* 198) also notes the work of P. Weimar, "Psalm 22, Beobachtungen zur

b. *The structure and genre of the psalm.* Although many approaches to the psalm's structure and genre have been made, the psalm is most commonly treated in one of two ways. Scholars such as Anderson, Auffret, Kidner, Leupold, Perowne, Tostengard, and Westermann argue for a two-part structure of the psalm. This characteristically takes the form of lament or appeal for help (vv. 1–21) and thanksgiving/praise (vv. 22–31). Thus J. L. Mays observes, "The whole is composed of a full-scale prayer for help (verses 1–21) and a full-scale psalm of praise for help (verses 22–31)."¹⁷ Others such as Alexander, Cohen, Heinemann, and Schaefer prefer three equal parts (vv. 1–10, 11–21, 22–31). Heinemann's presentation is typical. Noting characteristic literary devices, he suggests the following arrangement: introductory address (vv. 1–10), petition (vv. 11–21), and praise (vv. 22–31).

Our study will proceed in accordance with the former position, arguing for a first section focusing on lament/cry for help (vv. 1–21) and a second, containing the delivered psalmist's thanksgiving and praise (vv. 22–31). Although genre classifications should not be rigidly applied, the first section does contain features typical of other lament psalms: invocation (vv. 1–2), crisis/complaint (vv. 6–8, 13–17), petition (vv. 12, 19–21), confidence (vv. 9–10), and praise (vv. 3–5).¹⁸

The second section breathes the air of a delivered man's thanksgiving and praise to God. Typical of this sub-type of praise psalms, psalms of thanksgiving feature a tone in which the petitioner/speaker subordinates himself and elevates God as the One who alone is ultimately worthy. Characteristic features of this type of psalm appear here: an opening call to praise God (vv. 22–23), a catalogue of reasons to praise/thank the Lord (vv. 24, 26), the psalmist's resolve to praise God (v. 25), and a concluding invitation (here in the form of a prophetic declaration) for all to join the psalmist in the worship of God (vv. 27–31).¹⁹

The psalm's structural clues tend to support the two-part hypothesis. Thus poetic bracketing (or bookending) is evident for the first section in the poet's appeal for being saved from his distress (vv. 1, 21). Likewise, the second section is bracketed by the theme of declaring/proclaiming God's name

Komposition und Entstehungsgeschichte," *Freude an der Weisung des Herrn. Beiträge zur Theologie der Psalmen. Festgabe zum 70. Geburtstag von Heinrich Gross* (ed. Ernst Haag and Frank Luther Hossfeld; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1986) 471–94.

¹⁷ Mays, "Prayer and Christology" 324; S. Guillet ("Louer Dieu dans la détresse: Analyse rhétorique et interprétation du Psaume 22," *Hokhma* 57 [1994] 1–16), however, argues for a two-part structure consisting of verses 1–26 and verses 27–31, the second division being more universal in its outlook.

¹⁸ See L. Ryken, *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987) 239–45. Some (e.g. Frost) have cogently argued that the whole psalm can be classified as a lament. Thus Westermann (*Living Psalms* 82) calls it a "lament that is turned round." Admittedly such lament psalms features as confidence and praise figure prominently in verses 22–31 but, as we shall argue, the clear break in structure between verses 21 and 22 strongly suggests that the lament/petition has been answered and the psalmist now turns to praising the Lord in thanksgiving and worship.

¹⁹ See further Ryken, *Words* 245–50; S. F. Gillingham, *The Poems and Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (Oxford: University Press, 1994) 222–24.

and righteousness (vv. 22, 31). Moreover, “help” (vv. 11, 19, 24) and “praise” (vv. 3, 22, 23, 25, 26) serve as stitching devices between the two major sections.²⁰ Further linkage between the two major sections is accomplished by (1) the contrast between the psalmist’s being despised by the people (v. 6) and God who has not despised his suffering (v. 24); (2) “all” of the psalmist’s mockers (v. 7) and “all” who will one day join in the adoration of Yahweh (vv. 27–29); and (3) the clear distinction between the psalmist’s feeling of being forsaken by God (v. 1) and the evident sense that the Lord has not done so (v. 24).

Having established the two major sections of the psalm, one may proceed to note further their sub-units. The first major section (vv. 1–21) is made up of two stanzas, which display a close relation between the suppliant’s cry/lament (vv. 1–10) and call/petition for help (vv. 11–21).²¹ The two stanzas are also stitched together by the use of the words “far” (vv. 1, 11, 19) and “roaring” (vv. 1, 13). Each stanza is characterized by doubling: alternating negative and positive themes in verses 1–10 and the twice-occurring phrase “be not far off” in verses 11, 19.

In turn, each stanza is composed of two strophes (vv. 1–5, 6–10; 11–18, 19–21).²² To be noted also are the stitching devices between the various strophes. Thus within the first stanza the ideas of trusting (vv. 3–5, 8–9) and saving (vv. 3, 8) provide stitching between the two strophes (vv. 1–5, 6–10). In the second stanza stitching is accomplished between the two strophes (vv. 11–18, 19–21) by both (1) the need for God to be close by (vv. 11, 19) because the weakened psalmist is dependent upon the strength that God alone can provide (vv. 15, 19) and (2) the characterization of the psalmist’s enemies as animals (vv. 12–13, 16; 20–21).

Turning to the second major section (vv. 22–31), stitching between its two stanzas (vv. 22–26, 27–31) is accomplished by a double contrast of themes. All Israel is called on to worship the Lord in the first stanza (v. 23), while in the second all the families of earth will participate in the worship of Yahweh (vv. 27–31). The word “praise” occurs four times in the first strophe (vv. 22, 23, 25, 26) while trusting and service are featured in the second.

Granted the mixed genres of the psalm as lament/cry for help and praise/thanksgiving, can it also be assigned a further classification? Indeed, some have proposed that the psalm is a royal psalm. “More recently some exegetes . . . have argued that this poem is a Royal Psalm . . . which accompanied the

²⁰ For bracketing and stitching as attested Hebrew compositional principles, see R. D. Patterson, “Of Bookends, Hinges, and Hooks,” *WTJ* 51 (1989) 116–24; H. Van Dyke Parunak, “Transitional Techniques in the Bible,” *JBL* 102 (1983) 540–41.

²¹ Whether verse 11 should be understood as concluding the first stanza (vv. 1–11) or as forming a heading to the second (i.e. vv. 11–21) rests upon a decision as to whether one views the phrase “be not far off” as a refrain in both stanzas (i.e. vv. 11, 19–21). Those who hold to the second alternative include Alexander, Frost, Gese, Mays, and Schaefer.

²² For the distinctions inherent in stanza, strophe, and strophic patterns, see W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry (JSOTSup 26)*; Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 1984) 160–200. For our study “section” designates the two major division of the psalm, while “stanza” and “strophe” indicate respective further sub-units.

symbolic humiliation of the King and his restoration. This tentative suggestion, in its more moderate form, is a reasonable possibility."²³ Most evangelicals hold that it is certainly a messianic psalm. Thus Heinemann asserts, "In the course of studying the psalm the messianic aspect must be kept in mind."²⁴ But does the psalm refer exclusively to the Messiah (= Christ)? Such a view has both ancient Jewish and Christian support. "The merely prophetic or direct Messianic interpretation of the ancient synagogue . . . as the name of the Shekinah and as a symbol of the approaching redemption, so likewise the orthodoxy of the ancient church . . . referred each and all literally and properly to Christ alone, excluding David."²⁵ Among the sub-apostolic Fathers one may note the words of the so-called 1 Clement:

And again he [Jesus] himself says: "But I am a worm and not a man, a reproach among men and an object of contempt to the people. All those who saw me mocked me; they 'spoke with their lips,' they shook their heads saying, 'He hoped in the Lord, let him deliver him; let him save him, because he takes pleasure in him.'"²⁶

To the same effect are the words of the Epistle of Barnabas:

Therefore the Son of God came in the flesh for this reason, that he might complete the full measure of the sins of those who persecuted his prophets to death, . . . for the one who prophesies says concerning him: "Spare my soul from the sword, and pierce my flesh with nails, for bands of evil men have risen up against me."²⁷

A. R. Fausset may be noted as one of the more modern expositors who endorses the full-fledged messianic interpretation.²⁸ Leupold also comes very close to sanctioning such a view declaring, "The predictive approach regards the entire psalm as pure prophecy concerning the Christ Himself and assumes that the author was conscious of the fact that he was prophesying. We believe that this last type of interpretation deserves the preference but . . . some of the experiences related here are duplicated in the life of David."²⁹ Still others hold the psalm's messianic character to be typically prophetic. Thus Delitzsch remarks, "Since David has been anointed with the oil or royal consecration, and at same time with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the kingship of promise, he regards himself also as the messiah of God, towards whom the promises point . . . He does not distinguish himself from the Future One, but in himself he sees the Future One, whose image does not free himself from him till afterwards, and whose history will coincide with all that is excessive in his own utterances."³⁰ Heinemann adds,

²³ Anderson, *Psalms* 1.184.

²⁴ Heinemann, "Exposition of Psalm 22" 286.

²⁵ Moll, *Psalms* 168.

²⁶ *The Apostolic Fathers* (2d ed.; trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer; ed. and rev. M. W. Holmes; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989) 37.

²⁷ *Ibid.* 168.

²⁸ Fausset, *Book of Psalms* 149–52.

²⁹ Leupold, *Psalms* 195.

³⁰ Delitzsch, *Psalms* 1.307.

If David was aware that God had spoken about his descendants in the distant future (2 Sam 7:19; Ps 89:29, 36) and if on at least two other occasions he had knowingly looked into the future of his greatest descendant, the Messiah, then it seems likely that he wrote with awareness in Psalm 22. As David wrote about and beyond himself he also wrote about “the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow,” and his seeming hyperbole prefigured Jesus’ future reality. Though David did prophesy in a sense he did not *directly predict* the sufferings of Christ, but rather *indirectly prefigured* them as a *type*.³¹

Although final decision as to the messianic nature of the psalm must await the comments that follow, one must provisionally acknowledge the conclusion of J. L. Mays,

In the Old Testament, God deals with the nations through the corporate entity of God’s people. The only individual through *whose person* God deals with the nation is the Davidic king, the messiah, the Son of God, and one must add the unidentified servant of the “songs” in Isa. 42:1–4; 49:1–6; and 52:13–53:12. Psalm 22 cannot be the prayer and praise of just any afflicted Israelite . . . in its preset form the figure in the psalm shares in the corporate vocation of Israel and the messianic role of David.³²

c. The imagery of the psalm. Before turning to a discussion of the psalm itself, we wish to add a word concerning the psalm’s imagery. Among the psalm’s images and figures one may note the following: apostrophe (v. 26), hyperbole (vv. 9–10, 14), merism (v. 2), and especially the poet’s rich use of metaphors and similes. David calls himself a worm (v. 6) and describes his enemies as “strong bulls,” “roaring lions tearing their prey,” “dogs,” and “wild oxen” (vv. 12–13, 16, 19–20). The psalmist describes his suffering as being “poured out like water,” his heart as “turned to wax,” his strength “dried up like a potsherd,” and his near-fatal condition as being lodged in the “dust of death” (vv. 14–15).

II. COMMENTS

Our comments will proceed in accordance with the following outline.

- I. Lament: The psalmist’s trial (vv. 1–21)
 - A. The psalmist’s torment: his seeming rejection (vv. 1–10)
 - B. The psalmist’s turmoil: his suffering rehearsed (vv. 11–21)
- II. Thanksgiving: The psalmist’s triumph (vv. 22–31)
 - A. The psalmist’s praise (vv. 22–26)
 - B. The psalmist’s prophecy (vv. 27–31)

1. *Lament: The psalmist’s trial (vv. 1–21).*

a. The psalmist’s torment (vv. 1–10). The psalm opens with David’s plaintive cry. Rather than responding to the psalmist’s desperate situation, God

³¹ Heinemann, “Exposition of Psalm 22” 302.

³² Mays, “Prayer and Christology” 329.

has seemingly rejected him (v. 1). Rather than being a present help (Ps 46:1), he remains at a distance, far away from delivering him from his troubles.³³ God apparently does not even hear the loud groaning of the psalmist's words. The imagery here reflects a pained and anguished cry that resembles the roar of a lion. Indeed, the Hebrew word (אָג, ša'ag) and its root basically connote the idea of a roar that is characteristic of a lion (Judg 14:3; Amos 3:4; Zech 11:3). Yet it is also employed to describe the pained cry of the sufferer (Job 3:24; Ps 32:3).³⁴

The psalmist moves on to complain that God does not answer his continual cry to him.³⁵ In so doing he utilizes the well-known call/answer motif expressive of communion. Thus, the believer may call upon God for refuge and as a protector in the face of the enemy who would ill-treat him (Ps 17:6–12). God longs to relieve the burden of the saint and to rescue him in time of trouble (Ps 81:6–7). Accordingly, the troubled believer may with confidence (Ps 138:3) call out to God in his distress (Ps 102:1–2) and expect his deliverance (Ps 20:6–9). God's availability to the believer is not just for seasons of difficulty, however. The great Creator and Controller of this world invites the believer to receive instruction and guidance from him for their daily lives (Jer 33:2–3).

But the call/answer motif also has a negative side. Where there is godless living (Isa 56:11–12), lack of concern for others in their need (Isa 58:6–9), and carelessness with regard to the clear instruction of the Word of God (Jer 35:17), God cannot honor the one who prays. Rather, such a one stands in danger of divine judgment (Zech 7:8–14). Perhaps David sensed that fellowship with God was broken. In the light of the use of the motif one wonders whether he was merely complaining to God out of anguished frustration or whether there was an underlying fear that he had done something to cut off that intimacy of communion that he once enjoyed.³⁶

But David's depression now experiences an upward movement. He reminds himself (and God) of God's holy nature and past goodness to the forefathers (vv. 3–5). Because God is the Holy One, he justly was the object of Israel's praise. Like Habakkuk, who likewise wished for God's answer to his repeated cries (Hab 1:2–4), David reminds himself that God is altogether holy (v. 3; cf. Hab 1:12). "Because holiness is represented in the Scriptures as being the quintessential attribute of God (Ex. 15:11; Ps. 99:9; Isa. 6:3), and hence is the dynamic of the believer's ethic (Ex. 19:6; Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 1 Pet. 1:16), God is often called 'the Holy One' (e.g., Job 6:10; cf. Isa. 57:15) and especially 'the Holy One of Israel' (Pss. 71:22; 89:18[HB 89:19])."³⁷ Although God

³³ As noted previously, "far" prepares the reader for the second movement of the psalm.

³⁴ The verb is also used for God's coming in mighty judgment (Joel 3[4]:16; Amos 1:2). David will employ it again in verse 13 in describing his enemies.

³⁵ "Day and night" comprise a merism indicating continual or continuous action. David complains that God simply fails to answer his repeated cries.

³⁶ By taking the initial "m" in the Hebrew מְשַׁלְּחִי as an enclitic particle that belongs with the previous הוֹדִי, Dahood (*Psalms* 1.136, 138) translates "Dismissing my plea." Although such an understanding would underscore David's doubts and frustration, it takes unnecessary liberties with the text.

³⁷ Patterson, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah* 156.

seemingly does not now listen to David's cries so as to deliver him (vv. 1–2), David knows that Yahweh is one who is holy and has answered the cries of his covenant people in the past. Perhaps David needed the reminder that the Lord could safely be trusted.³⁸

Unfortunately, assurance is often followed by doubt. So it is with David. As the second strophe begins, he regards himself as “less than human.”³⁹ He calls himself a mere worm, “a metaphor of lowliness and humiliation.”⁴⁰ For the very trust concerning which he has just reminded himself is cast in his teeth by his mocking enemies (vv. 6–8). Did David expect God's deliverance? They sarcastically taunt him (v. 8) with insults accompanied by gestures of derision and contempt: “They make mouths at me, they shake their heads” (v. 7, NRSV). The Hebrew verbal form (לָלַךְ, gal) could be understood as a perfect, “he trusts/trusted,” paralleling the previous perfect, “he delights,” rather than the imperative of the MT. The basic meaning of the root is “be round, roll.” Used figuratively the verb takes on special spiritual significance. The Psalmist advises the believer “to roll himself upon the Lord in total commitment to God” (Ps 37:5). Indeed, the faithful believer is to commit his whole life situation to God who alone can grant him good success (Prov 16:3; Ps 119:22).⁴¹

Once again ascending feelings replace those that brought him down to despair. In a bit of hyperbole he reminds himself that God has been with him all along—ever since his birth (vv. 9–10). Indeed, he learned trust (cf. vv. 4–5, 8) even as a nursing infant. “The idea that this relationship was of the longest possible standing is strongly emphasized by the fourfold repetition of birth images (“out of the womb,” “upon my mother's breasts,” “from birth,” and “from my mother's womb”).⁴² Yes, the forefathers' God was also David's (v. 10).

b. The psalmist's turmoil. The second stanza (vv. 11–21) of the poem focuses on the psalmist's plea for God's presence in the midst of his agonizing trials. Like the first stanza, this portion also contains two strophes, both of which are introduced by the plaintive cry, “be not far from me,” and a plea for help (vv. 11, 19). The first strophe centers on David's great sense of

³⁸ The idea of “trust” links the first negative/positive movement (vv. 1–5) to the second (vv. 6–10). Similar sentiment may already be noted in such early fathers as Justin Martyr and Tertullian. See Anne-Catherine Avril, “Lectures juives du Psaume 22,” *Cahiers Évangile*, Supplement 121 (2002) 25–27.

³⁹ VanGemeren, *Psalms* 202.

⁴⁰ Anderson, *Psalms* 1.187. Interestingly enough, undeserving Israel, which is promised a future redemption by the “Holy One of Israel” is also called “worm Jacob” (Isa 41:14). Perowne (*Book of Psalms* 240) observes, “Every word of this verse finds its echo in Isaiah.”

⁴¹ In a crucial moment of Israel's redemptive experience Joshua pronounced God's declaration, “This day have I rolled away (*gālal*) the reproach of Egypt from off you” (Josh 5:9). Accordingly, that place was named Gilgal. Interestingly, the root was also used to form the word for skull—*gulgoleth*. The Aramaic form of the word was to be forever remembered in the Greek NT as the place of our Savior's crucifixion—Golgotha.

⁴² Heinemann, “Exposition of Psalm 22” 292; Buttonwieser (*Psalms* 591) appears to be on the wrong track in affirming that these lines “are understood as the author meant them to be—as figures referring to the infancy of the nation; taken literally, they would be an insipid exaggeration.”

loneliness and helplessness: "There is no one to help" (v. 11),⁴³ the second on God as his sole hope and source of strength. In both strophes David depicts his enemies with vivid metaphors: powerful bulls/wild oxen (vv. 12, 21), roaring and ravenous lions (vv. 16, 21), and snarling dogs all around him.⁴⁴ Each metaphor adds to the picture of David's helpless state, and the vicious nature and relentless persecution of his enemies. "These animal metaphors symbolize vicious threats to life. The conventional pair of lion and bull represents the epitome of power. . . . Hounds evoke the sense of helpless prey, which is how the psalmist feels."⁴⁵

Turning to the first strophe, we note the first of these beasts, the "strong bulls of Bashan" (v. 12). Since Bashan was famous for its rich pastures suitable for growing wheat and raising cattle, such bulls would be well nourished and especially hearty. Denis Baly remarks, "Here the primary crop is wheat, and the life is an endless cycle of plowing and sowing, threshing, winnowing, and gathering into barns. . . . 'Strong bulls of Bashan' (Ps. 22:12) were needed to till the heavy volcanic soil, and with their help the level fields brought forth harvests which were the envy of the neighboring peoples."⁴⁶ To add to his troubles, his enemies treat him like vicious raging lions roaring at the sight of their prey (Amos 3:4) with mouths wide open to consume him (v. 14). The terror produced at the clutches of such animals is legendary. "Mortal lions were frightful enough. . . . The mention of their teeth, paw or mouth summoned all the fears they provoked (Joel 1:6; 1 Sam 17:37; Ps 58:6). The mouth of the lion is a predicament from which escape seems hopeless (Dan 6:22; 2 Tim 4:17; cf. Ps 22:21; Heb 11:33)."⁴⁷

Further distress came from enemies surrounding him like a pack of predatory dogs (v. 16). As many a climber of Mount Everest has learned, such animals can scarcely resemble our western pets. Even though some dogs were domesticated in the ancient Near East, often "the dogs, which are half wild, and usually rove about in troops, are especially wicked and dangerous."⁴⁸ Moreover, the psalmist is emotionally and physically drained. "The images of poured-out water and dislocated bones seem to describe his loss of physical strength, while the melted heart of wax seems to describe his loss of emotional strength. . . . The concept of physical dryness is conveyed by the figure of David's description of his tongue sticking to the inside of his mouth. All his vital fluids were draining away and with them, his strength."⁴⁹

⁴³ The second occurrence of the particle *ki* here is doubtless emphatic: "Surely there is no one to help." For emphatic *ki*, see R. Gordis, "The Asservative Kaph in Ugaritic and Hebrew," *JAOS* 63 (1943) 176-78; M. Dahood, *Psalms 101-150 (AB)*; Garden City: Doubleday, 1970) 402-6; B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 204.

⁴⁴ Watson (*Classical Hebrew Poetry* 318-21) classifies such cases as extended hyperboles.

⁴⁵ Schaefer, *Psalms* 54. For background details of the animal metaphors employed here see J. H. Walton, V. H. Matthews and M. W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2000) 523-24.

⁴⁶ D. Baly, *The Geography of the Bible* (new and rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1974) 216.

⁴⁷ L. Ryken, J. C. Wilhoit, T. Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1998) 514.

⁴⁸ Moll, *Psalms* 172.

⁴⁹ Heinemann, "Exposition of Psalm 22" 294, 295.

So desperate is his situation that he feels that death is inevitably near. In the striking, if not hyperbolic, figures he uses to describe his weakened condition, “the sufferer feels as if ‘poured out like water’ . . . and as if all his bones were disjointed—he was merely a bag of useless bones! Though not yet dead, he felt already that he had been deposited in *death’s dust*.”⁵⁰ It is small wonder, then, that his enemies “stare and gloat” over him (v. 17). As if that were not enough, David “pictures his enemies watching for his death, that they can strip his body and share his garments among them.”⁵¹

Within this first strophe a notable crux occurs: “They have pierced my hands and feet” (v. 16). The traditional reading of this line (HB, v. 17) has occasioned a great deal of discussion. The Hebrew renders the line, “Like a lion, my hands and feet.” The common rendering in the English versions follows the major ancient versions (LXX, ὀρυζαν; Peshitta, *bēzʿ(û)*; Vg *foderunt*), all of which can be understood as “dug/bore [through]” or “pierce.”⁵² Final determination as to the precise reading of the original text eludes us at present. Therefore, “the text remains an exegetical problem.”⁵³ For our purposes, we shall content ourselves with the decision of the ancient versions, a decision that is fortified by noting that the Psalms Scroll discovered at Nahal Hever reads: “They have pierced my hands and feet.”⁵⁴

The second strophe opens with a renewed petition to God. Once again he cries, “Be not far off.” Because of David’s feelings of total helplessness, he turns to God as his only sure strength (vv. 19–21). In so doing he reiterates the catalogue of his adversaries, listing them in inverse order to his previous description. Whereas he had mentioned bulls, lions, dogs, and evil men piercing his hands and feet (vv. 12–13, 16), he now speaks of the sword, dogs, lions,⁵⁵ and wild oxen.⁵⁶

Two problems arise in verse 20. (1) The reading of the KJV, “darling,” is more appropriately read in the NIV as “precious life.” The Hebrew term (יְהִיד, *yāhîd*, “only one”) implies singularity. By placing it in parallel with “soul” (NIV, “life”), the psalmist refers to himself in his distinct uniqueness (cf. *Die Heilige Schrift*, “*meine einsame*”). Leupold appropriately observes that this

⁵⁰ Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* 200.

⁵¹ Cohen, *Psalms* 64.

⁵² Some ancient Hebrew manuscripts also read “dug.” Among the many ingenious proposals that have been made for the Hebrew consonants כָּאֵר, two have received particular attention: (1) a root כָּרַר (participle, כָּאֵר), “dance/go around, encircle” and (2) a root כָּרַה, “bind.” For full discussions of this complex problem, see Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* 196; Perowne, *Book of Psalms* 246–48.

⁵³ VanGemeren, *Psalms* 207.

⁵⁴ See M. Abegg, Jr., P. Flint, and E. Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (San Francisco: Harper, 1999) 519.

⁵⁵ The image of the lion is also attributed to Yahweh in his judicial power (Hos 13:7–8) and to Israel, which God brought out of Egypt (Num 23:24; 24:9). See further Ryken, Wilhoit, Longman, *Biblical Imagery* 514–15.

⁵⁶ The rendering of the KJV, “unicorns,” here is scarcely satisfactory. The ox mentioned here is the wild ox (*rēʿem*), which was well known in the ancient Near East. The name was often applied to strong rulers. Thus Hammurapi refers to himself as a “wild ox that gores the foe” (*rimum kadrum munākkip zāʿiri*). See E. Bergman, *Codex Hammurabi: Textus Primigenius* (Roma: Pontificium Institutum Biblicum, 1953) 2 (column 3, lines 7–9). Similar descriptions are given of the Ugaritic gods Baal and Mot. In the OT Yahweh is depicted as the god who brought up his people out of Egypt and made them as strong as a wild ox (Num 23:22; 24:8).

is “an obvious reference to the soul or life. For man has but one, and it is, in the last analysis his chief treasure.”⁵⁷ (2) Some have found the phrase “from the power of the dogs” to form a strange conclusion to the verse. Thus the *Revised English Bible* translates the line, “My precious life from the axe.” A similar rendering was given previously by Dahood (*AB*) who translates, “My face from the blade of the ax.” Although there may be lexical justification for such renderings, they are perhaps needlessly strained and destroy the poetic design that reverses the listing of the animals from those in verses 12–13, 16.⁵⁸ The effect of the reversal is to call attention to the psalmist’s mortal danger amid evil enemies who even seek to take his life. Thus the second stanza ends with the psalmist’s casting himself totally on the Lord and his sufficiency.

2. *Thanksgiving: The psalmist’s triumph (vv. 22–31)*. A notable change of tone occurs with the onset of the second major section. Rather than lament and pleas for help, the psalmist sounds a note of victory. He has been delivered from his great ordeal. God has answered his cries. Therefore, he now turns to give thanks and praise to the Lord, and invites others to join in with him in assembled devotion. Like the first section (vv. 1–21), the second comprises two stanzas, the first of which celebrates his personal thanksgiving and praise in the midst of his fellow worshipers (vv. 22–26), and the second his firm conviction that one day the covenant people and all nations will proclaim God’s essential righteousness.

a. *The psalmist’s praise (vv. 22–26)*. David now vows to declare God’s name in the assembly out of thankful praise to the Lord for his deliverance (vv. 24–25). “It is clear in v 25 that the worshiper has experienced a total reversal of his predicament as expressed in vv 2–3. He began feeling forsaken (v 2), but now knows that God did not in fact despise his affliction.⁵⁹ He began by crying out for help, with no apparent answer (v 3), but now perceives that God had in fact heard him and that an answer was coming.”⁶⁰ Declaring God’s name was a significant act in the OT. “Names were extremely important, being used not only to identify persons but, at times, to be descriptive of one’s nature or character.”⁶¹ Theologically, the term “name” des-

⁵⁷ Leupold, *Psalms* 202.

⁵⁸ Dahood (*Psalms* 141) bases his translation on the well-known Semitic interchange in the consonants “b” and “p.” Thus the Hebrew “*klb* [‘dog’] is a by-form of *kēlappōt*, ‘ax’ which occurs in Ps lxxiv 6.” Having pointed out other examples of the Hebrew consonants in question as indicating a meaning “ax” in both late Hebrew and Aramaic, Dahood is then free to understand Hebrew ךַׁ (*yad*), “hand,” “side,” “the blade of the ax. It should be pointed out that a similar “b/p” interchange takes place in Akkadian in the word for ax: *kalappu/kalabbu* (CAD 8:66).

⁵⁹ Instead of the reading of the NIV, “save me,” the Hebrew text reads: ׀ַנִּיָּנִי (*‘ānitānī*) “you answered me” (cf. LXX, “my humility/lowliness”).

⁶⁰ Craigie, *Psalms* 1–50 201. To the same effect, M. Berder (“Le Psaume 22 dans les deux Testaments,” *Cahiers Évangile*, Supplement 121 [2002] 11–12) observes that if one accepts the reading of the HB, then “il est clair que cet énoncé se situe à l’articulation entre la plainte et la louange: un élément nouveau est survenu, qui s’oppose explicitement à ce qui était rapporté en termes négatifs au v. 3: tu ne réponds pas.”

⁶¹ R. D. Patterson, “A Multiplex Approach to Psalm 45,” *GTJ* 6 (1985) 37.

ignates the revealed character and reputation of God.⁶² David's praise of God's name thus involves all that he knows God to be and to have done for him. That David's praise was sincere and personally meaningful is emphasized by the fact that the word "praise" occurs four times in verses 22–26.

Not only will he praise God (vv. 22, 25) but he invites all those in the covenant community who also fear the Lord to join him in genuine worship (vv. 23, 26). It is generally conceded that David speaks here of a formal service featuring a sacrifice in fulfillment of his vow. "The language is borrowed from a typical OT mode of expressing thanksgiving to the Lord, the peace offering (Lev. 3), in connection with which a feast was prepared (Lev. 7:15f.) to which a man would invite poor friends of his that they might share in his joy and deliverance."⁶³ In a dramatic apostrophe, David imagines himself before the assembled congregation and exclaims, "May your hearts live forever!" (v. 26).

b. The psalmist's prophecy (vv. 27–31). With the second stanza David's vision moves to ever-widening circles. The praise and worship of the Lord will not only be on his lips and those of the assembled congregation but come from all families and nations to the "ends of the earth" (v. 27). Indeed, "The cosmic kingship of Yahweh must eventually lead to a universal worship of him."⁶⁴ This is rightly so, for Yahweh is the sovereign creator, controller, and consummator of earth's history—"Dominion belongs to the Lord" (v. 28).

A notable crux occurs at verse 29. A more literal translation of the first phrase would read: "All the fat of the earth."⁶⁵ Because "the fat was regarded as particularly nourishing food, *dšn* is connected with the idea of satisfaction, of being pleased, of abundance."⁶⁶ Most modern translations adopt a reading like that of the NIV, "All the rich." Thus "among the worshiping community the psalmist sees 'the rich,' i.e., the prosperous, people and nations and all the dying."⁶⁷

The parallel line also presents the exegete with difficulties. Calling upon Northwest Semitic parallels Dahood translates, "Before him shall bend the knee, all who have gone down to the mud."⁶⁸ Although the result makes for tolerable sense, as VanGemerén points out, there is no strong evidence "to question the reading of the MT."⁶⁹ Granted the authenticity of the existing text, we do better to follow VanGemerén here: "The participial phrase 'all who go down' denotes those who are faint-hearted, sickly, dying, and filled

⁶² The term "name" became used as a substitute for God (Dan 9:18–19) and was later applied to Christ in the NT (Acts 4:12; 5:41; 3 John 7). See further G. H. Hall, "שם (*šēm*)," *NIDOTT* 4.147–51.

⁶³ Leupold, *Psalms* 205; see also Cohen, *Psalms* 65; Frost, "Psalm 22: An Exposition" 106; Gese, "Psalm 22 and the New Testament" 240–41; Heinemann, "Exposition of Psalm 22" 305–6; Moll, *Psalms* 175.

⁶⁴ Anderson, *Psalms* 1.193.

⁶⁵ See the KJV, ASV.

⁶⁶ K. Seybold, "דָּשָׁן (*dāšhan*)," *TDOT* 3.311.

⁶⁷ VanGemerén, *Psalms* 211. VanGemerén, however, prefers a division of the word אֶכְלוּ "they will eat" into two particles: לוֹ אֶכְלוּ "indeed to him." Thus he translates, "Indeed him [emphatic] all the rich of the earth will worship." See also Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* 195; Dahood, *Psalms* 138.

⁶⁸ Dahood, *Psalms* 138, 143–44.

⁶⁹ VanGemerén, *Psalms* 211.

with anguish, even as the psalmist once lay 'in the dust of death' (v. 15; cf. 30:3). Both well-fed and poor people will join in the worship of God."⁷⁰

The psalm ends in a glorious crescendo. The last two verses round out the picture that tells that the effects of this great deliverance shall be universal. For they state that "also the generations yet to come are to hear of and rejoice in that which happened."⁷¹ The closing sentiment is reminiscent of many OT passages that speak of earth's final blessings. Thus Isaiah prophesies,

In that day you will say:
Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name;
make known among the nations what he has done,
and proclaim that his name is exalted.
Sing to the LORD, for he has done glorious things;
let this be known to all the world. (Isa 12:4–5)⁷²

Verses 30–31 speak of a "seed" (NIV, "posterity") that will learn of God's saving righteousness and carry that message to future generations. The term "seed" partakes of God's promised spiritual remnant that extends from the Abrahamic Covenant to its culmination in the enactment of the New Covenant in David's heir (cf. Ezek 37:18–21).⁷³ Throughout the ages the proclamation of God's demonstrated righteousness will be broadcast to the world. In that glorious future the Lord's words through Isaiah will be fully realized: "My salvation will last forever, my righteousness will never fail. . . . My righteousness will last forever, my salvation through all generations" (Isa 51:6, 8).

The final words of the psalm resound to this completed salvation and righteousness: "For he has done it." The line could also be rendered "He has surely done it!"⁷⁴ Trial has been swallowed up in triumph.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Ibid. 211.

⁷¹ Leupold, *Psalms* 206. Anderson (*Psalms* 1.194–95) appropriately adds, "Although no man lives forever, the story of God's saving works knows no end."

⁷² Zechariah also predicts that, "Then the survivors from all the nations that have attacked Jerusalem will go up year after year to worship the King, the LORD Almighty, and to celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zech 14:16).

⁷³ See also Acts 3:25–26; Gal 3:29. W. C. Kaiser, Jr. (*Toward an Old Testament Theology* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978]) observes, "When Yahweh appeared to Abraham after the patriarch had arrived at Shechem, that ancient word about a 'seed' was again revived and now directed to Abraham (Gen. 12:7). From there on the importance of this gift of a child who would inherit the promises and blessings becomes one of the dominant themes in the patriarchal narrative. . . . 'Seed' was always a collective singular noun; never did it appear as a plural noun. . . . Thereby the 'seed' was marked as a unit yet with a flexibility of reference: now to the one person, now to the many descendants of the family."

⁷⁴ With no loss of the consonantal text, one might also argue for emphatic ׀ followed by a *qal* passive verb ׀שׂ, "It is surely done." For the persistence of the *qal* passive theme in biblical Hebrew, see R. J. Williams, "The Passive *Qal* Theme in Biblical Hebrew," *Essays on the Ancient Semitic World* (ed. J. M. Weavers and D. B. Redford; Toronto: University of Toronto, 1972) 43–50; B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990) 373–76. For emphatic *ki*, see R. Gordis, "The Asseverative *Kaph* in Ugaritic and Biblical Hebrew," *JAOS* 63 (1943) 176–78; Waltke and O'Connor, *Hebrew Syntax* 204. It is interesting to note that in the NT citation of Ps 22:31 in John 19:30, although the Vg translates τετέλεστοι by an adjectival phrase (*consummatum est*), Franz Delitzsch renders his Hebrew NT translation

v. 1 with Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34; v. 5 with Rom 3:5; v. 7 with Matt 27:39; Mark 15:29; v. 8 with Matt 27:43; Luke 23:35; v. 18 with Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24; v. 22 with Heb 2:12; v. 23 with Rev 19:5; v. 31 with John 19:30). In addition, J. H. Reumann suggests that allusions to the whole psalm are reflected in the NT (e.g. Mark 9:12; 14:21; Luke 24:27; Acts 13:29; 1 Pet 1:11), as well as several of the psalms individual verses (cf. v. 13 with 1 Pet 5:8; v. 15 with John 19:28; v. 21 with 2 Tim 4:17; v. 24 with Heb 5:7; v. 28 with Rev 11:15; 19:16; v. 29 with Matt 27:42; Mark 15:31).⁸³

Our concern is with Christ's appropriation of the psalm at Calvary. To be sure, the setting was *apropos*. For Christ hung in the presence of mockers (Ps 22:7; Matt 27:39) who taunted him with the unlikelihood that God would deliver him (Ps 22:8; Matt 27:43; Luke 23:35) and others who cast lots for his garments (Ps 22:18), a fact noted by all of the Gospel writers. Moreover, the Savior was aware that this was the moment for which he had come. For he warned his disciples, "We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled" (Luke 18:31; cf. John 12:27). During his last recorded prayer meeting with his Father he prayed, "Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you" (John 17:1). Obviously, Jesus was well aware that this was the crowning moment for which he had come to earth, and by it he would provide the means for all people to experience his saving grace (John 12:30–33; 17:25–26).⁸⁴

It was altogether fitting, then, that Jesus would seize upon Psalm 22 as an expression of what he was experiencing on the cross and why he was there. Perhaps it was also intended to be a means of instructing any spiritually sensitive and mature among the people who witnessed the event.

As the moment of propitiation arrived, he began his rehearsal of the psalm with the so-called fourth word from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"⁸⁵ Certainly similarities and dissimilarities exist between David's experience and Christ's. Like David, and even more than David, Jesus understood what to be eternally forsaken of God meant. As the holy, sinless, divine Son he must have felt that in an infinitely deeper way than sinful man can know. Thus Edersheim remarks, "And we conceive that the purer the being the greater the violence of the tearing asunder of the bond with which God Almighty originally bound together body and soul. In the Perfect Man this must have reached the highest degree."⁸⁶

Yet like David he knew that while others may forsake him absolutely, because he and the Father were one (John 10:30; 17:11; cf. John 10:38; 14:11),

⁸³ Reumann, "Psalm 22 at the Cross" 41–42. Reumann also feels that the description of the psalmist's enemies as dogs (vv. 16, 20) was influential in Paul's warning for the Philippian believer's to "watch out for those dogs" (Phil 3:2).

⁸⁴ See also John 17:21–23. Jesus was certainly aware of his place in redemptive history as recorded in the two other great messianic psalms (e.g. cf. Ps 2:7 with Matt 17:5; Heb 1:5; cf. Ps 110:1 with Matt 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42–43) as well as other texts dealing with his messianic mission (e.g. cf. Isa 53:12 with Luke 22:7; Isa 61:1–2 with Luke 4:18–19).

⁸⁵ Text-critical variations of the saying in Matthew and Mark are not at issue here.

⁸⁶ A. Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953) 2.206.

God would never literally, ultimately forsake him.⁸⁷ Thus Jesus had informed his disciples, “A time is coming, and has come, when you will be scattered, each to his own home. You will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me” (John 16:32). Nevertheless, the full understanding of all that Jesus the Christ experienced at that time remains a mysterious truth. It is sufficient to know that this was the very moment when the sacrificial system reached its culmination (cf. Heb 9:24–28).

As was demanded of all the sacrificial animals (Lev 11:1–30), Jesus was the pure, spotless Lamb of God who was paying the price for the sins of all mankind (John 1:29).⁸⁸ Accordingly, 2 Cor 5:21 must be understood as indicating, not that Christ was sinful or a sinner, but that God was treating him as both the object of his judicial wrath for sinful mankind and also was receiving him as the acceptable propitiatory sacrifice that was demanded by the offended holiness of God.⁸⁹ Thus Philip Hughes observes:

It is important to notice that he does not say that God made Him a sinner; for to conceive of Christ as sinful, or made a sinner, would be to overthrow the very foundation of redemption, which demands the death of an altogether Sinless One in the place of sinful mankind. But God made Him *sin*: that is to say that God the Father made His innocent incarnate Son the object of His wrath and judgment, for our sakes, with the result that in Christ on the cross the sin of the world is judged and taken away.⁹⁰

By citing the opening verse of Psalm 22, Jesus was inviting all to understand his divine mission and his intense struggle as the God-man. The fourth word, then, envisions not only the whole psalm generally but in particular the first stanza (vv. 1–10).

As our Lord’s agony continued, not just physically but in the fullest, deepest spiritual sense, he uttered the fifth word, “I thirst” (John 19:28). I would suggest that by this word Jesus invites us to consider the second stanza of Psalm 22: the presence of hostile forces, human and spiritual, his personal suffering, and the realization that only God can deliver the innocent sufferer (vv. 11–21).

Then came that triumph cry, τετέλεσται! (“It is/stands finished!”; John 19:30).⁹¹ With that grand utterance can be heard an echo of the closing phrase of Psalm 22, הַצְּרִיף, hence the message of the last section of Psalm 22

⁸⁷ Of course, on a deeper level the inviolability of the eternally existing Trinity made any ultimate ontological schism an impossibility. To the contrary, see D. A. Carson, *Matthew* (EBC; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984) 8.579.

⁸⁸ In his commentary on Psalm 22, St. Augustine (*Expositions on the Book of Psalms* [NPNF, First Series; 14 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, reprint ed., 1989] 8.58) understands the words of the psalm to be those of Jesus as he bears the penalty of our sins, “[W]hilst hanging on the Cross, sustaining also the person of the old man, whose mortality He bare. For our old man was nailed together with Him to the Cross . . . For these are not the words of righteousness, but of my sins.”

⁸⁹ The deep mystery inherent in the divine suffering makes the common remark that “on the cross God the Father turned his back on the Son because he could not look at sin” to appear scarcely appropriate.

⁹⁰ P. E. Hughes, *Paul’s Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977) 213.

⁹¹ My dear mentor, Marchant King, used to affirm, “Christ was never more king than when he hung on the cross.”

(vv. 22–31). To be sure, the ancient versions (Vg, LXX, Peshitta) all reflect the meaning of the MT of Ps 22:32 (English versions, 22:31), “He has done it.” Yet although the LXX customarily renders the Hebrew $\pi\psi\psi$ by a Greek word with the same meaning (ποιέω), the meaning “complete/finish” was often felt so that at times the editors of the LXX used verbs such as τελειόω , τελέω , and συντελέω to translate this Hebrew verb. Thus Nehemiah (6:16) reports that his enemies “lost their self-confidence because they realized that this work had been done [HB, $\pi\psi\psi$]/LXX, τελειωθῆναι] by the help of our God.” The Lord declared through Isaiah (55:11) that his spoken word would “accomplish [HB, $\pi\psi\psi$]/LXX, τελέσθῃ] what I desire, and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” Thus Jesus did not do violence to the range of meanings inherent in the Hebrew verbal root. With Christ’s accomplished redemption and the completion of the canon, Psalm 22 must be read in the light of the whole Bible.⁹²

Yes, τετέλεσται ! For God has not been insensitive to or inattentive to the petition of the Divine Offerer but has accepted his propitiatory sacrifice. The redemption price for sinful mankind has been paid. Indeed, “There is no other way of salvation but by grace, and specifically, the death of Christ. It has an infinite value and thus covers the sins of all mankind for all time.”⁹³ The good news of God’s saving grace could henceforth be broadcast to all nations and families of the earth (Matt 28:18–20). What a helpless humanity could not do, God himself did through the blood of the divine Son of God (John 3:16; Rom 3:23–26; 5:6–9). The promised new covenant in David’s heir now stood ratified (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 37:24–28; Matt 26:27–29; Heb 8:1–13). Therefore with the consummation of the sacrificial act Jesus could give the seventh and final word from the cross, “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” (Luke 23:46).

It remained only for the capstone of the sacrificial act to be accomplished in Christ’s resurrection on the prophesied third day (cf. Matt 16:21; Luke 18:31–33; 1 Cor 15:4). Long before, God had appeared to Israel on Mount Sinai on the third day (Exod 19:10–16) and subsequently gave his people the old, Sinaitic (Mosaic) Covenant. The special significance of the “third day” made it the ideal occasion for Christ to rise from the dead and initiate mankind’s new relation to God—a new, everlasting, living relationship with God through the auspices of the new covenant.⁹⁴ With the death and resurrection of Christ, Jesus’ prayer (John 17:20–23) concerning the believer’s union in Christ has been answered.⁹⁵ “In Him, God has gathered up all

⁹² In his edition of the LXX, however, A. Rahlfs, ed. (*Septuaginta* [2 vols.; Stuttgart: Privilegierte Württembergische Bibelanstalt, n.d.] 2.21) reads συντελέσθῃ . For the comparison of Ps 22:31 and John 19:30, see also footnote 74.

⁹³ M. J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 822.

⁹⁴ The motif of the third day is an important one in the Scriptures. Crucial decisions were postponed until the third day (1 Kgs 12:12). It was the day for healing and sacrifice (Lev 7:17–18; 2 Kgs 20:8). Spiritually sensitive people under the old covenant should have been prepared for something of the significance of the third day. Yet although Jesus predicted his resurrection on the third day, his own disciples seemed to have missed the point (Luke 24:18–21).

⁹⁵ As God designed the original pair and their respective descendants to be one (Gen 2:24), so Christ and his church are to be one, even as he and the Father are one (John 17:22; Eph 5:29–32).

things in heaven and earth into one, one body, one family, on whom is all their dependence, in whom they all now consist. (see I Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22, 23) This glory was reserved for Him; none other could be meet for it or worthy of it. (See Col. 1:17–19).⁹⁶

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Properly applied, a fourfold approach to a biblical text provides a fuller understanding and appreciation of the author's (or narrator's) point of view. To be sure, the first "leg of the chair" provides the bases for the translation and clarification of the text. Such matters as lexicography, syntax, and context are the *sine qua non* with which exegesis must proceed. Though not always apparent in the final presentation, they nonetheless provide the essential parameters for the discussion and conclusions.⁹⁷

The second "leg of the chair of hermeneutics" is less promising for our psalm but is not without its benefits. Even though we cannot relate this psalm to a specific event in David's life, what we do know of his arduous spiritual odyssey argues for its Davidic authorship. Knowing that David was spiritually gifted with the ability to prophesy (Acts 2:28–31), it seems reasonable that Jesus, David's heir, would appropriate Psalm 22 for the most significant event in redemptive history. Its use by our Lord makes it certain that we cannot read the psalm without thinking of Calvary. Although the psalm has a primary, historical meaning in connection with David, its canonical message encourages us to read it again in the light of the completed Scriptures. As Vern Poythress appropriately observes, "Scholars are correct in taking care to distinguish what comes from the psalm itself and what comes from the psalm seen in the light of the whole Bible. But God also intends that we should read Psalm 22 in the light of the rest of what he says. Scholars are correct in going on to a second stage in which they relate the psalm to the whole Bible."⁹⁸

When applied to Psalm 22, the third "leg" is richly rewarding. Indeed, our study has enabled us to see David's turmoil of heart and yet his trust in God's ultimate deliverance. The figures and imagery he employs reveal his soul's travail and deep sorrow as he pours out his lament before God. His use of the call-answer motif tends to indicate his fear that perhaps he has been cut off from fellowship with the God of Israel (v. 2). On the one hand, some figures, particularly his metaphors and similes, portray his sense of hopelessness and desperation; perhaps death itself lay near (vv. 6–8, 12–17, 20–21). On the other hand, his remembrance of God's care for his own and for David himself remind him of the need to trust the Lord through it all (vv. 3–5, 9–11, 19).

The present reality of that union anticipates the future coming of the Heavenly Bridegroom for his bride (Rev 19:6–9; cf. Rev 21:1–4).

⁹⁶ J. Owen, *The Glory of Christ* (Chicago: Moody, 1957) 161.

⁹⁷ Several of the more significant points have been noted in the comments on Psalm 22 (e.g. vv. 1, 7, 8, 11, 16, 20, 21, 29, 30).

⁹⁸ V. S. Poythress, "Divine Meaning of Scripture" 275.

The resounding dramatic reversal of tone in the latter half of the Psalm tells of the reward of David's trust. God has not been unmindful of his servant but has answered his cries (v. 24). Therefore, he can and will praise the Lord. His deliverance convinces David that as did he, all peoples of earth will one day experience the mighty goodness and righteousness of Israel's God (vv. 27–31).

Psalm 22 also has theological importance (the fourth "leg") as well as practical application. They remind believers of the tremendous price that was paid for their salvation and the great anguish that our Lord must have experienced as he hung on the cross. He, the sinless One, the Holy One, was undergoing the penalty for a sinful humanity. Although he knew that this was the moment for which he had come and that victory lay ahead, the experience must have been indescribably horrendous. Such great devotion and love (Rom 5:6–8) should stimulate believers to likewise live sacrificial lives and love others as God loved them so as to bring others to know the Savior (Gal 2:20; 2 Cor 5:14–21; 1 John 4:10–12). As Frost rightly observes, "Our psalm is among those writings that beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, point to Jesus as the Christ whom it behooved to suffer. But it also shows more than that. In the Anticipatory Thanksgiving the psalm went on to prophesy a vindication and a restoration. It looked for world-wide praise of God for salvation achieved."⁹⁹ Thus the appropriation of Psalm 22 by our Lord gives all readers of Holy Scripture a source of assurance of a completed redemption in Christ's sacrificial death and resurrection and confidence in the full realization of David's prophetic conclusion in the psalm (vv. 27–31).¹⁰⁰

The psalm should thus serve as a missionary imperative to "proclaim his righteousness" (v. 31) and salvation in Christ to a needy mankind (Rom 10:9–15; 2 Cor 5:20–21), which will one day acknowledge him as sovereign (Phil 2:9–11). Likewise, Jesus' suffering serves as an example for believers to finish their God-given course whatever the obstacles. As did Christ, believers must stand courageously for the truth and be faithful to the end of their God-appointed course (Acts 20:24).¹⁰¹

Our study has also emphasized the importance of the chain of covenants (Abrahamic, Davidic) culminating in the new covenant with all its potential for living under its provisions. Gese rightly declares, "We understand the account of Jesus' death, which originally was wholly patterned after Ps 22, and the Lord's Supper as a confession, which thankfully proclaims this event, establishing a new existence in which the Risen One is present."¹⁰² It is

⁹⁹ Frost, "Psalm 22" 114.

¹⁰⁰ M. Travers (*Encountering God in the Psalms* [Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2003] 192) remarks, "God is faithful to his promises. . . . Psalm 22 reminds us of the Davidic covenant in which God promised David a kingdom forever and ruler on his throne forever (2 Samuel 7). . . . God has fulfilled his promise of a Davidic king in Jesus Christ ruling over all who believe in him."

¹⁰¹ I. H. Marshall (*The Work of Christ* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970] 40) observes, "The courage of Jesus shows how passionately He believed in the truth of His message. His moral integrity forbade Him to yield to the opposition. He trusted in God to vindicate His cause and to deliver Him (Mt. 27:43)." Believers do well in following the example of the Lord.

¹⁰² Gese, "Psalm 22" 243.

hoped that this study of Psalm 22 and its appropriation by our Lord may remind us again of a completed redemption and the power available to those whom Jesus has taken into union with himself.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ For a helpful study of the believer's union with Christ, see A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson Press, 1934) 795–808; Erickson, *Christian Theology* 948–54.