

# Grief That Goes Somewhere

## New Testament Lament: Jesus, Psalm 22, and the Crucifixion



Artist concept sketch for the weeping Lion of Lucerne



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### I. Introduction: A Father's Fear

### II. Background - Lament in the New Testament: Does it exist?

#### a. The Gospels- Corporate Lament (cf., Psalm 79)

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! Look, your house is left to you desolate. (Matthew 23:37-38)

#### b. Pauline – Suffering over sin (cf., Psalm 39)

O What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? (Romans 7:24)

#### c. Johannine – Imprecatory Lament (cf., Psalm 137)

And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rev 6:10)

### III. Background - Lament in the New Testament: Why does it occur less frequently?

#### a. Canonical Context: from original composition to "liturgized" recitals

#### b. Progressive Revelation: Questions like "why" and "how long" had *better* answers

#### i. 1 Peter and James on the suffering of the righteous and the prosperity of the wicked

For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich will fade away even while they go about their business. Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him. (James 1:11-12)

ii. 2 Peter on why the Lord has not acted but has delayed the Parousia

Above all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation....But the day of the Lord will come like a thief (2 Peter 3:3-10)

IV. Matthew 27:24-54 and Psalm 22

Dependence of Matthew 27 on Psalm 22			
Psalm 22:18	<b>they divide my garments among them,</b> and for my clothing <b>they cast lots.</b>	And when they had crucified him, they <b>divided his garments among them by casting lots</b>	Matthew 27:35
Psalm 22:7	All who see me mock me; they make mouths at me; they <b>wag their heads</b>	And those who passed by derided him, <b>wagging their heads</b>	Matthew 27:39
Psalm 22:8	<b>“He trusts in the Lord; let him deliver him;</b> let him rescue him, for he <b>delights in him (θέλει αὐτόν LXX)!”</b>	<b>He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him (θέλει αὐτόν).</b> For he said, ‘I am the Son of God.’”	Matthew 27:43
Psalm 22:1	<b>My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?</b> Why are you so far from saving me, from the words of my groaning?	And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, <b>“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”</b>	Matthew 27:46

Besides these direct quotes, what other “echoes” of Psalm 22 appear in Matthew’s Crucifixion account?

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**V. What is the relationship between these two texts?**

- a. Prophetic – Inspiring Holy Spirit working through the Psalmist
- b. Literary – Inspired Evangelist reading and reapplying his sacred scripture
- c. Dramatic – Incarnate Son “acting out” his identity through an understandable script

**VI. What does this “echoing” mean for our understanding of Jesus and Crucifixion?**

- a. The Crucifixion was not a surprise ending to God but part of his everlasting plans.
- b. The genre of lament gave the earliest Christian community a model for how to respond to their greatest trial imaginable—that their messiah was crucified by the Romans.
- c. Psalm 22 is an interpretive key for
  - i. Jesus’s own messianic Identity as the suffering-son of David
  - ii. Jesus’s own understanding of the purpose of the crucifixion
  - iii. Jesus’s own emotional state as he prepared to die

**VII. The narrative/emotional arch of Psalm 22**

- a. *Address* (vv. 1-2) Acknowledgement of God and his distance from the afflicted one
- b. *Lament* (vv. 3-18)
  - i. *Trust* (vv. 3-5) God has saved faithful Israel in the past
  - ii. *Complaint* (vv. 6-8) God has not yet demonstrated his faithfulness to deliver the afflicted one
  - iii. *Trust* (vv. 9-11) God as the creator and sustainer of the afflicted one established previous trust
  - iv. *Complaint* (12-18) extended description of relational, emotional, and physical sufferings inflicted by the enemies of the afflicted one
- c. *Petition* (vv.19-21) Request for God to finally come and act to vindicate the afflicted one
- d. *Praise* (vv.22-31)
  - i. *Vow of Praise* (22-25) The afflicted one vows to make the name of the Lord known to Israel for rescuing the afflicted one
  - ii. *Declarative praise* (vv. 26-31) Doxology and praise as the afflicted one fulfills the vow of trust. Proclaiming God’s faithfulness not just to Israel but also to the nations, the past dead, and the yet unborn.

**VIII. Observations when Psalm 22’s narrative arch is applied to the crucifixion**

**IX. Application - Jesus and Psalm 22 as a model for our lament**

- a. If our king Jesus, the lion of Judah, who is God from God, can express lament towards God the father, then it is commendable action in the face of suffering.
  - b. Acknowledging and experiencing confusion at God's inactivity can be part of the process of a righteous sufferer.
  - c. In our suffering, trust applies not just to "how" God will act but "when" God will act.
  - d. Knowledge of sacred history informs our trust and waiting upon the Lord.
  - e. With Jesus and the NT authors, we can see that final vindication and comfort may come beyond the veil of death.
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