

Psalm 22
“Anguish & Faith”

Introduction:

It is recorded in the Gospel of John, that when Pontus Pilate asked Jesus what He had done, and if He was actually a king (Jn.18:35, 37), Jesus answered by saying that He was a king, and added “*for this cause I was born, and for this cause I came into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth*” (Jn.18:37). Upon hearing this, Pilate uttered the rhetorical question, “*what is truth?*” (Jn.18:38). Pilate’s words have been interpreted in a number of ways, but the best interpretation is that Pilate was expressing that he doubted that objective truth existed. This cynicism likely arose from Pilate’s experiences in Roman politics and his exposure to numerous ethnic religions.

Pontus Pilate was neither the first, nor the last person to express uncertainty about the matter of objective truth. The use of the adjective “*objective*” has become necessary in our time because many express the belief that truth is something subjective (which refers to an individual’s perceptions, or feelings). But such an idea involves a re-defining of the traditional meaning of the word “*truth*”. Traditionally, what is now referred to as “*subjective truth*” was simply known before (more accurately) as opinion, taste, or preference. Given that qualification, what we discover is that throughout history people have debated about whether or not truth exists, and among those who believe that it does exist, there is a debate over what constitutes objective truth. The question then that humanity has been asking for centuries is what is the “*truth*”.

The Scriptures don’t include arguments that assert that truth exists, rather, the Scriptures simply assume that truth exists as a self-evident reality. And Jesus Himself expressed where truth can be found. In His prayer on the night before His crucifixion Jesus declared to God His Father, that “*Your Word is truth*” (Jn.17:17). Earlier in His ministry He had said to His Jewish disciples that if they would continue to abide in His teachings, they would “*know the truth*” (Jn.8:32). Therefore, God has revealed to us that actual truth exists, it can be found in God’s Word, and therefore, if we are diligent to learn God’s Word, we can know objective truth.

The conviction that truth can be known should be a core belief embraced by all those who are genuine Christians. And holding to this belief means that when we approach God’s Word, we do so with a focus on discovering what God intended to reveal in it, not with an inclination to find in it what we prefer. It doesn’t matter whether our biases are liberal or conservative, any ideas of our own that obscure our understanding of the Scriptures must be restrained, and we must seek only to know what God is saying in it.

This discussion relates to the Psalm before us, because there are many interpretations of it wherein previously held ideas are read into the Psalm to reinforce those beliefs rather than reading it to learn what it was that David was saying in it.

I. How Are We Meant to Read this Psalm?

When we read this Psalm in light of what is written in the New Testament it becomes very clear that the Apostles understood this Psalm to have messianic significance, specifically in relation to Christ's experience on the cross. However, as one reads the Psalm itself, it doesn't read like conscious predictive prophecy. If we were not aware of how this Psalm is quoted in the New Testament, we would assume that David was simply speaking of his own personal experiences. Therefore, these realities lead us to ask an important question. How precisely were the things expressed in this Psalm meant to anticipate Jesus' crucifixion? It is commonly asserted by a number of interpreters that in this Psalm David was giving a conscious prophecy of the future crucifixion of the Messiah. However, this conclusion doesn't fit either the language of the Psalm itself or the details we are given about David in the OT narratives. In the Psalm itself nothing is said to indicate that what is written applied in any way to anyone other than to the writer (David). And never is it suggested in the Old Testament that David functioned as a recognized prophet. If we are going to take what is written in the Psalm at face value, we must conclude that the Psalm was primarily a personal expression by David about his own experience of suffering. However, in light of Christ's quotation of the opening words of this Psalm, using those words to express His own anguish on the cross, we must also conclude that when David wrote the Psalm the Holy Spirit moved him to write what he did, to not only express hyperbolically his own feelings and situation, but also to write it in a way that David was unknowingly expressing what Christ would later feel and what He would later experience so that David in a way serves as a type of Christ, giving us insight into Christ's experience on the cross that we would otherwise not have. That the words of the Psalm find their greatest meaning in the suffering of Jesus in no way minimizes the suffering that David endured, nor the thanksgiving and praise that he expressed as a result of being delivered from death.

II. What Precisely Did David Express in this Psalm?

In a sense, this Psalm must be interpreted on two levels. First, we must discover what it reveals about what David himself was experiencing, and second, we must discover what the Spirit of God was revealing about what would be true of Christ on the cross. We will begin our interpretation with what these words meant for David.

The way in which the Psalm was composed reveals it has two distinct parts. The initial portion of the Psalm contains expressions of lament (vs.1-21) and the latter portion contains expressions of thanksgiving (vs.22-31). This has led a number of liberal scholars to conclude that at one time there were two separate psalms, but that eventually a later editor put them together into the form we have today. However, there is no manuscript evidence to support the theory that two separate Psalms ever existed, and the theory itself is unnecessary, because the Psalm is easily understood as a coherent whole. There is no internal conflict or contradictions in the Psalm, it simply records alternating expressions of questions,

laments, and protests on the one hand, and expressions of faith and confidence in Yahweh on the other, all within a single unified prayer.

No known specific incident in the life of David fits the details of this Psalm. Therefore, this most likely reflects David's feelings of dread and concern sometime during the period when Saul was pursuing him, a time (not specifically recorded in the Book of I Samuel) when David was in fear of being put to death by his enemies. David's language indicates that he was in mortal physical danger for some period of time, but was eventually rescued from that predicament by Yahweh in a way that was not recorded for us.

The reader should observe that in this Psalm there is no mention of any confession of sin, as if that were the cause of David's situation. Additionally, there isn't a plea of innocence, there is no claim of righteousness, and there is not a word expressed in the Psalm about a hope for vengeance upon David's oppressive enemies. These characteristics of this Psalm made it particularly appropriate to be used by Jesus and the Apostles in regard to His suffering on the cross.

The flow of thought in the first portion of the poem begins with questions (vs.1-2), moves to a portrayal of the anguish of suffering (vs.12-18), and then concludes with a prayer to God (vs.19-21). The second section of the poem has a symmetrical relationship with the first portion of the Psalm. The earlier mocking of the enemies (vs.6-8) is replaced by praise in the congregation among those who fear Yahweh (vs.22-24); and the experience of temporary abandonment (vs.1-2) is rewarded by generations who will tell of God's mighty acts of deliverance (vs.30-31), so that Yahweh's rule (vs.3) will be evident to all nations (vs.27-28). The nations then will join with Israel in giving praise to Yahweh their mutual King. The structural divisions of the Psalm are clearly marked by the emphatic use of "*my God*" and "*yet you*" (vs.1, 3), "*But I*" (vs.6), "*Yet you*" (vs.9), and "*But you*" (vs.19). From this flow of thought it becomes clear that the fundamental theme of the Psalm is about David seeking and then finding God.

The title inscription includes the words, "*the deer of the dawn*". There is not much agreement among scholars regarding how to interpret these words, except that the prevailing belief is that this phrase referred to a tune or a way of singing the Psalm.

In verse one we read, "*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me? Why are You so far from helping Me, and from the words of My groaning?*" The Psalm begins with a cry of anguish. Once again, we don't know what specific situation David was in, but we do know (from what is written later in the Psalm) that David was surrounded by his enemies and was fearing for his life. Meanwhile, though he called out to God for deliverance, he did so in the even greater fear that for some reason God had abandoned him.

In this verse we find the first combination of the complex ideas that are woven together throughout this Psalm. Though the main idea expressed in the verse is the feeling that God had abandoned him, this statement is complemented by the passionate plea, "*My God, My God*" which is a very distinct confession of David's ongoing faith in Yahweh in spite of those feelings. Therefore, those words indicate

that David had not lost his faith in God, he was merely expressing his intense feelings of abandonment in light of the suffering and persecution he was enduring, since God was not delivering Him from these things. In essence, David was struggling with a conflict between his theology (the things he knew from the testimony of Scripture), and his present experience of suffering where there was no immediate evidence that God would deliver him. In the prayer, David addressed God using the Hebrew title, “*El*”, which means “*mighty one*”. The use of this title, coupled with the assertion that Yahweh was his God, also represents a seeming conflict with the claim that he had been abandoned, for the Old Testament Scriptures in general assert that if an individual is in a relationship with the Almighty there would be no chance of that person being abandoned by God and left at the mercy of his enemies. However, David’s situation seemed to argue otherwise.

But in the intensity of his suffering, David knew that he had no other recourse than to cast himself on God.

The Old Testament reveals that the individual within the covenant community was not to believe that God’s commitment to His people was confined to them as a whole, rather His promises were also understood to apply to those individuals who were faithful to God’s covenant with Israel.

Feelings of abandonment or alienation are a particular type of suffering that one experiences when one hopes for deliverance, but no help is forthcoming. It was precisely because David was a child of the covenant that he had great expectations that Yahweh would come to his aid. When there was no evidence that this was going to happen, he felt himself abandoned by God.

In some modern theologies, the idea of a relationship with God is viewed as belief, and the perspective is human centered, in the sense that one either believes in God or not. However, the Psalms express a different perspective. In the Psalms, the perspective is God-centered. Therefore, a person’s perception, in this case David’s, is not to be assumed as true, rather, the reader is to understand such an expression within the context of God’s perspective, that in reality, God never abandons His own. Therefore, the expression here is important in that it reveals David’s genuine state of mind; however, it does not represent a statement of fact.

The Hebrew word translated as “*groaning*” literally conveys the idea of roaring. Therefore, the idea is that what David was expressing came out through the raspy scream of one in deep distress.

In verse two we read, “*O My God, I cry in the daytime, but You do not hear; and in the night season, and am not silent.*” The poetic parallelism in the verse expresses that David had been praying constantly (day and night) but there was no answer from God. The repetition in this verse of David’s assertion that Yahweh was his God emphasizes the contrast between what he understood about his relationship with God from the Scriptures, and how that belief was at odds with the experience he was enduring due to God’s silence in response to his prayers. The language in these first two verses make it clear that David’s sense of having been forsaken by God was the fundamental concern of David’s heart. It was a greater concern than the circumstances that were threatening him with death.

In verse three we read, “*But You are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel.*” When David asserted that God was holy in this context, he was expressing that Yahweh was distinct from all the false gods of the pagans in that He was genuinely alive and genuinely manifested His power in this physical world. David asserted that because of these realities, Yahweh was the object of Israel’s constant praise. The use of the pronoun “*You*” in the Hebrew text is emphatic and, together with the contrastive use of the connective particle (*but*), sets up the distance between God and David. He was pointing to the tension he felt in his relationship with God. The reference to God being “*enthroned*” is a confessional reference to God’s sovereign rule over creation. In this verse David was beginning a portion of the Psalm in which he rehearses the ways God had manifested His commitment to His people in the past (a reality that seemed to be at odds with how He was presently relating to David). In these initial verses David repeatedly made contrasts between who God is, and how his own situation was playing out that caused him to feel like God was distant from him:

He felt forsaken (1)	God was enthroned on Israel’s praise (3)
He was far from being saved (1)	God is the Holy One (3)
His groanings were unheard (1)	God is the object of Israel’s praise (3)

In this Psalm faith and distress are expressed as if David was experiencing something akin to a mental roller coaster. Faith ebbs at some points in the Psalm, and surges at others, and these contrasting expressions represent the clashing of feelings and belief in David’s heart. He knew what he believed, but he also knew what he felt, and these impulses were pulling him in different directions.

In verses four and five we read, “*Our fathers trusted in You; they trusted, and You delivered them. They cried to You, and were delivered; they trusted in You, and were not ashamed.*” In the midst of his torment and confusion regarding the silence of God, David turned to the fundamental beliefs that were the bedrock of his faith, foremost of which was the idea that God was just and righteous, a belief that was reinforced by the Old Testament accounts of God’s deliverance of Israel in the past. David’s ancestors, putting their trust in Yahweh, prayed in their distress and were delivered by Him. The idea being that the history of redemption reveals that God is faithful to His promises, and fully able to save. The language here seems to be an allusion to the Song of Moses (Ex.15), and thus David was referring to Israel’s faith in Yahweh at the time of the Exodus, and the deliverance that Yahweh provided for them at that time. God’s deliverances in the past were why God continued to be the object of Israel’s praise and adoration, and the reason that David had expected God to deliver him from his current distress. Poetically, David balanced his threefold references to Yahweh as his God (in verses 1-2) with a threefold reference to the “*trust*” that David’s ancestors had in Yahweh. This poetic form conveys the thought that the faith of the ancestors and the faith of David were one and the same, yet David’s experience was far different than what his ancestors had experienced. Though God delivered Israel in the past, he was being abandoned.

In verse six we read, “*But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people.*” As David reflected on his situation, God’s absence suggests depressing things about his existence. Linguistically there is a contrast between the emphatic use of the pronoun “*you*” in verse three, and his equally emphatic use of the pronoun “*I*” in this verse. He was saying that though God was exalted upon the throne of His people’s praises, he on the other hand was a worm and not a man. The phrase “*I am a worm, and no man*” is for a heightened poetic effect. Being compared to a worm conveyed the idea of being insignificant. David was expressing his feeling of having lost his sense of human dignity, since God is regularly praised for delivering His people, but David had not been delivered, but was instead an object of scorn and abandonment, making him feel meaningless in God’s sight.

In verses seven and eight we read, “*All those who see Me ridicule Me; they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, ‘He trusted in the LORD, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!’*” Part of David’s suffering came from how he was an object of derision and contempt by his enemies (whom we should assume were some of his fellow Israelites). In that age and culture, the gesture of shaking one’s head was an expression of scorn. The type of abuse that David specified that he was enduring here was that his enemies were mocking his faith since Yahweh was not rescuing him. Their reasoning was that if David truly trusted in Yahweh, then why was Yahweh not delivering him? Their implied conclusion was that either he had boasted of trusting in God, but was hypocritical, or that God did not approve of him. David’s antagonists, like Job’s friends, posed the issue of the problem of evil and suffering in a most painful way. They were saying that the only reason a person suffers is because they deserve it. The sarcastic mocking of those speaking here echoed the fear within David’s own heart. Perhaps God did not delight in him. Therefore, the real sting of the words of his enemies was the fear that what they were saying might have been true in light of what he was experiencing.

In verses nine and ten we read, “*But You are He who took Me out of the womb; You made Me trust while on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You have been My God.*” At this point in the Psalm David turned from reflecting on his enemies and returned to reflecting on God. This transition is expressed with the emphatic wording, “*and You*”. David’s confidence in God had been instilled in him from the time he was a small child. From the very beginning he was trained by his parents to trust in Yahweh, who had brought him out of the womb. All his life Yahweh had been his God. This reflection focused on God’s sovereign and providential acts of giving life and sustaining it by his mother’s care. All this demonstrated that God had a purpose for David’s life. The idea that is expressed is not simply that God caused David to be born because He set up the biological processes at the beginning, rather the idea here is that God was involved in his birth as an individual (as is the general teaching in Scripture regarding God’s people). Therefore, David regarded his birth as evidence of Divine intervention in his life, and that experience implanted within him a habit of reliance upon God. In using the word “*cast*” David was employing imagery that conveyed the idea of

entrusting Yahweh to take care of him. But, in the midst of his present crisis, the memory of his earlier experiences with God, seemed to confirm that God's abandonment of him implied that he was no longer in God's favor.

In verse eleven we read, "*Be not far from Me, for trouble is near; for there is none to help.*" David pleaded with God that He would not stay far away. In his past experiences, Yahweh had been close to him (vs.9-10), but now God seemed distant. The statement "*there is none to help*" implies that David had no human beings that were or could help him, and the statement was meant to underline David's need for God to stop keeping Himself at a distance from David, because God was his only real hope for rescue.

In verses twelve and thirteen we read, "*Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion.*" Though there were no human beings who were resources for help, it did not mean that no one was nearby. With these verses David turned from expressing his inner loneliness and began once again to write about his enemies, comparing them to a circle of savage faces that had enclosed around him like a ring of snarling animals. In the ancient Near East, the images of bulls and lions represented power and menace, indicating that David wasn't simply facing some random hostile people, rather these enemies were dangerous and powerful adversaries. A feeling of being abandoned by God often comes in the midst of some frightening situation. And the deadly intent of his enemies was part of the reason that David felt like he did. David specifically compared his enemies to bulls and lions. David said that these enemies were not like just any bulls but were like "*bulls of Bashan*". Bashan was a very fertile region east of the Jordan River, well known for its sheep and plump cattle. In this prime cattle-grazing area, one could find pampered cattle being raised for the market, as well as a breed of ferocious undomesticated cattle that roamed free. The bulls of Bashan were proverbial for their size because they were well fed on the lush vegetation of Bashan (Amos 4:1; Mic.7:14). Bashan is the region known today as the Golan Heights, located north of the Yarmuk River, east of the Sea of Galilee, and to the south of the Hermon Range. David also referred to the frightening nature of his enemies by writing that they "*they gape at Me with their mouths*". As verse fourteen goes on to make clear, this action describes the activity of lions and not of bulls. The strength, pride, and deadly intent of his enemies, likened to that of bulls, is matched by their cruelty, abuse of power, and hatred of godliness, which is likened to that of lions (7:2; 10:9; 17:12; Isa.38:13). There are several places in the Psalms where David spoke of his enemies as lions (Ps.7:2; 10:9; 17:12; 22:21; 35:17; 57:4; 58:6).

These words evoke the abject despair of one who was powerless, and surrounded by hateful enemies, with no avenue of escape available.

In verses fourteen and fifteen we read, "*I am poured out like water, and all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; it has melted within Me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death.*" Next, having described the dangerous intent of his enemies, David then went on to express how his fear and despair were impacting him

physically, how it had left him weak and exhausted. The translation “*out of joint*” is a somewhat interpretive rendering of the Hebrew wording. A better rendering would be “*scattered about*”, as when a predatory pack has devoured a victim and each member of the pack carries off its share of the prey. Though the idea of the tongue clinging to one’s jaws could in another context convey the idea of thirst, here it conveys an inability to speak (137:6; Job 29:10). These metaphorical expressions portray David as a broken man, whose strength has been drained away, and who is barely able to speak. The pronoun “*You*” in verse fifteen refers to God as the One who had providentially brought David to the point of death.

In verse sixteen we read, “*For dogs have surrounded Me; the congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet*”. David next compared his enemies to dogs. Being compared to dogs carried a different sense than being compared to lions. The difference in imagery lies in where dogs would be found in ancient Israel. They would be found at garbage dumps, eating whatever was thrown away. Because of this they carried diseases and transmitted them to humans. The dog was not man’s best friend in ancient Israel. They prowled about while snarling and looking for food (59:14–15). They licked the blood of those killed or unable to fend for themselves (68:23; I Kings 14:11; 16:4; II Kings 9:10, 36). Since dogs at the time were scavengers, to compare his enemies to dogs was to say that he was almost dead. For these reasons the term “*dog*” is often one of derision and contempt in the Bible.

The use of the Hebrew word translated as “*congregation*” indicates that these enemies shared a sort of religious connection to one another.

Interpreting the expression in the latter portion of verse twelve is problematic. The Hebrew verb, traditionally translated as “*pierced*”, occurs only here and can only be translated the way it is, if one assumes that the spelling needs to be emended. The closest similar word in other Semitic languages, conveys the idea of that which is shriveled or shrunken in some way. We cannot look to the reference found in the New Testament regarding the piercing of Jesus’ hands and feet to help us interpret this verse, because that reference was not meant as an allusion to this detail in this Psalm. It is clear that this final clause involves imagery that is intended to convey harm that David’s enemies were doing to him. Given that this is associated with the imagery of his enemies as dogs, it seems best to conclude that the word pictured wounds resulting from the biting and gnawing of dogs on his hands and feet.

In verse seventeen we read, “*I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me.*” David wrote in the first portion of the verse that in the midst of his enemies, he was weak and emaciated (he was nothing but skin and bones). His enemies saw his misery, but it did not result in compassion or empathy, instead it gave them fodder for gloating and entertainment. They were like scavengers anticipating how they would profit from David’s demise. The second clause in the verse continues the imagery of the dogs seeking to devour him, meaning here that they were looking at his body with the intention of devouring whatever was left of him.

In verse eighteen we read, “*They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots.*” The division of David’s garments by lots continues the same picture that was painted in verse fifteen, David was expressing again how he felt close to death, and in light of this his enemies were waiting to swoop down on him like vultures. In David’s time we do know that booty was sometimes divided by lot, so it is not difficult to understand a person’s clothing being divided that way on his demise. In the parallel lines of this verse, the second line explains how the action of the first line was put into effect. In other words, the casting of lots was the means by which they intended to divide up his garments.

In verse nineteen through the first portion of verse twenty-one, David recorded his prayer in light of the enemies that surrounded him, “*But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me! Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog. Save Me from the lion’s mouth and from the horns of the wild oxen!*” These verses demonstrate again that though David’s enemies had inflicted misery upon him, it was the silence of God that was at the heart of his heartache and sorrow. The prayer opens with the emphatic words “*but You*” to show that David was focusing once again on God. The use of the covenant name of God “Yahweh” indicates that despite the fears and doubts that had arisen because of his circumstances, David was clinging to his beliefs about his relationship with God and praying that Yahweh would deliver him from his enemies. The title, “*my Strength*” is equivalent to Yahweh, since the subject of both lines is God. We find this title for God used numerous times in the Psalms (28:7-8; 46:1; 59:9, 17; 81:1; 118:14). The words “*hasten to help me*” pointed to the urgency of his need for the deliverance for which he prayed. David implored God to listen to his prayer, because of the utter despair and meaninglessness of his situation. There was no way out. In view of the absence of any other alternative, he prayed that Yahweh would save his life, for only Yahweh could deliver him. Then David returned to the imagery of his enemies as dogs, lions, and bulls, but did so here in reverse order, expressing that they had caused him great anguish by the show of their “*power*”, “*mouth*”, and “*horns*”. This request makes it clear that David would not accept the idea of God’s silence but rather kept reaching out to Him for help.

In the latter part of verse twenty-one there is a transition from hopelessness to hope, as David declared “*You have answered Me.*” At this point in the prayer, although we are given no hint regarding what happened, David became assured that his prayer had been heard and that God would provide the deliverance David had been asking for.

In verse twenty-two we read, “*I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will praise You.*” David had been in despair calling out to God. He had continued to do so in spite of the ongoing silence he was experiencing in response. But now, he was praising God for the deliverance he had received and was promising that he would share with others what Yahweh had done so they could join with him in celebrating this expression of God’s goodness. David’s “*brethren*” and the “*assembly*” are one and the same, fellow Israelites who had the same faith in Yahweh that David did. The Hebrew word translated as “*assembly*”

refers to a collection of righteous people gathered in worship of Yahweh. The fact that David felt compelled to give testimony to others about God's deliverance implies that the worship and praise of God is essentially a corporate enterprise because it involves giving glory to God alongside other people.

In verses twenty-three and twenty-four we read, "*You who fear the LORD, praise Him! All you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and fear Him, all you offspring of Israel! For He has not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor has He hidden His face from Him; but when He cried to Him, He heard.*" Here David anticipated calling on his fellow righteous Israelites to join him as he gave praise to Yahweh. And in this verse, the "*assembly*" is further identified as "*You who fear the LORD*". Overall, the Old Testament reveals that the true sons of Jacob are those who fear Yahweh. They are inclined to honor him with devoted hearts. The verbs that David employed in these verses (praise, glorify, and fear) express the nature of the worship that God desires from His people. These words carry the following meanings:

- Praise-the word here suggests a wordless enthusiasm
- Glorify-a recognition of Yahweh's splendor
- Fear-an attitude of reverence and submission

Here David expressed why God deserved the praise he was giving to Him. It was because even at his lowest moment when feelings of fear and despair filled his heart, God did not abandon him. In times like that, when a person feels rejected and alone, there is hope even in the midst of God's short-term silence. The silence does not mean that God doesn't care, it means that the time for deliverance has not yet come. This testimony was intended to encourage all the godly, that Yahweh will never completely hide His face from his covenant children. He will, in His time, rescue those who trust in Him. It is helpful to bear in mind that when this was first expressed, David had not yet (in the midst of this prayer) received Yahweh's response to his pleas. Therefore, this expression of praise is rooted in the faith David had in God, based on what God had done in the past, and the veracity of His character.

In verse twenty-five we read, "*My praise shall be of You in the great assembly; I will pay My vows before those who fear Him.*" A vow was often made during a period of distress (50:14; 61:8; 66:13; 116:14, Jonah 2:9) and then one fulfilled the vow which one made after God had responded to the supplicant's request (65:1; Eccl.5:4). David's reference to paying a vow implies that he made a commitment to make some sort of thanksgiving offering to Yahweh. It is helpful to note that the Hebrew word translated as "*vow*" (*neder*) conveys the idea of making a solemn promise. In our modern English context, the word "*vow*" tends to convey the idea of entering into a legally binding commitment. Though the basic sense is the same as the Hebrew word, the Hebrew word does not include the more formal aspects the English term has. Also, in that culture, a vow was between the individual and God, the state would not be involved. These things are done in the company of others because the deliverance of each individual should be added to the overall story of

God's continuing provisions for His people, so everyone can benefit from the ever-growing account of God's faithfulness.

In verse twenty-six we read, "*The poor shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek Him will praise the LORD. Let your heart live forever!*" The Hebrew word that is translated as "*poor*" (anaw) does not signify poverty in a strictly financial sense, rather it expresses the idea of weakness in regard to one's social status. However, being in that situation in the ancient world was almost always associated with financial poverty, thus explaining why the weak would have need for Yahweh to supply food. The reference to eating and receiving satisfaction conveys the idea of the weak sharing a meal with David. The idea seems to be that when his deliverance came, David would organize a communal meal that would include a thanksgiving offering and a time of giving of praise to God. The expression "*let your heart live forever*" essentially means "*do not give up*".

In verses twenty-seven and twenty-eight we read, "*All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You. For the kingdom is the LORD's, and He rules over the nations.*" David foresaw a time when the sphere of those who worship Yahweh would widen to include all the nations of the world. David understood that God had revealed that a time would come when the Gentile nations would come to worship God in response to the wondrous things that He has done (Gen.12:1-3; Isa.40:7). So here the theme of God's lordship over all people is emphasized. The call to engage in an act of remembrance would involve submission and worship. David would render such worship. In the short term he would gather a small group of like-minded Israelites to join him in that worship, but eventually all the nations of the world will be involved in such worship of Yahweh. The Hebrew word that David used here that is translated as "*worship*" refers more properly to the physical act of prostrating oneself before someone else, rather than simply to the attitude that should accompany that act. David also gave an explicit reason why the nations would eventually submit to Yahweh. It is because He is a sovereign whose dominion covers the entire earth.

In verse twenty-nine we read, "*All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive.*" As David continued to write about who would join in the worship of Yahweh in the future, he said that it would include the "*prosperous*" (literally, the "*fat*"). The participial phrase "*all those who go down to the dust*" denotes those who are fainthearted, sickly, dying, and filled with anguish, even as David himself was once "*brought...to the dust of death*" (vs.15). Therefore, both the privileged and the needy, the powerful and the weak will join in the worship of God.

In verses thirty and thirty-one we read, "*A posterity shall serve Him. It will be recounted of the LORD to the next generation. They will come and declare His righteousness to a people who will be born, that He has done this.*" David foresaw that for generation after generation there would continue to be worshippers of Yahweh, and that the story of His great deliverances would be the permanent heritage of them all. One of the stories of God's deliverance would be the one that

David was experiencing here, a story about how Yahweh answered his prayer and rescued him, demonstrating that He can be trusted. The object of this ongoing proclamation will be God's "*righteousness*" (His acts of deliverance whereby He demonstrated his sovereign, gracious, just, and victorious rule). David was speaking about the ongoing history of redemption. When people who could not survive on their own, are enabled to survive because of the provisions provided by Yahweh, the result will not only be that they will survive, but it will result in their offspring learning the story of Yahweh's deliverance, and how their existence only came to be because of that deliverance.

III. What Does This Psalm Reveal About Christ's Experience on the Cross?

It needs to be asserted again that this Psalm is not direct prophecy, even though it includes some predictive or anticipatory elements in it. Neither is the Psalm clearly messianic, since it never refers to the anointed king. Instead, Jesus appropriated this Psalm to Himself at the time of His greatest sufferings, and because of this, the Apostles and the author of Hebrews saw the connections that Jesus made between His sufferings and this Psalm and included references to this Psalm in the New Testament. Therefore, for Christians, this Psalm is inseparably associated with the crucifixion of Christ, not only because the opening words were quoted by Jesus, but because the first portion of the Psalm (vs.1-21) seems to describe Jesus' bodily condition and emotional experience while He was on the cross. Yet the primary meaning of the Psalm must be found in the days when it was composed by David. This in no way diminishes the reality that the Spirit of God moved David to so frame his expressions that they acquired a significance beyond his own situation (Acts 2:30-31). The Psalm paints a picture of Christ's suffering and victory, because it mirrored what David had gone through (though Christ's experience involved far more suffering).

Christ quoted the first verse of this Psalm at three in the afternoon (the ninth hour), which was at the conclusion of His last three hours on the cross. He quoted the words in Aramaic "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*" (*My God, my God, why have you forsaken Me*) (Matt.27:46). On the cross our Lord was forsaken by and alienated from God the Father. In this experience, symbolized by darkness, He was alone, separated from God the Father and from His people. Therefore, that line in the Psalm was inspired by the Spirit of God to capture the isolation that Christ experienced when He was made sin, the object of God's wrath, so that He could make atonement for the sins of those He came to redeem (II Cor.5:21). He experienced judgment and separation from God to spare us from that fate.

David's words in verse eight were inspired to reflect what would be said by those who chose to mock Jesus during His crucifixion (Matt.27:42-43). But those who did this did not realizing that they were fulfilling this Divinely orchestrated pattern, nor did they realize that they were standing before the promised Messiah as He accomplished the salvation that God had promised to provide for His people.

Verse twenty-two of this Psalm was quoted almost verbatim in Hebrews 2:12, where it is written that it characterized Jesus' praise of God for the deliverance that

He received. Of course, Jesus' prayer to be delivered from death (Heb. 5:7) was answered in a different way than how God answered David's prayer. Jesus was delivered by being raised from the dead, while David was delivered by being spared from death.

The closing portion of the Psalm looks forward to the consummation of God's redemptive plan, when in the Millennial Kingdom all the nations of the earth are joined in the worship of the glorified Christ who will rule physically as sovereign over the entire earth.

Conclusion:

The question is how does what is written in this Psalm apply to us? The answer is that it teaches the following principles that should guide us in our relationship with God:

- It encourages us to trust in God when we are in frightening situations
- It teaches that there are times when we will experience the silence of God in response to our prayers,
- It teaches us that when we do experience God's silence, it is not forever, and it does not mean God is no longer with us
- It reminds us to reflect on the past deliverances that God has provided, both for us personally, and those that are recorded in Scripture
- It reminds us that at times, God calls us to endure the pain of the hostility of others even though we have done nothing to deserve it
- It reminds us to be conscious of our constant dependence on God's providence, both when we need deliverance, and when we don't
- It encourages us to maintain hope even when things seem hopeless
- It teaches us that present trials will eventually become the subject of our praise of God's goodness
- It reminds us to never cease praying
- It teaches us that experiencing deep emotional pain and fear is not incompatible with having a firm and genuine faith