

A Plea for Deliverance

Devotional Reading: Psalm 107:23–32
Background Scripture: Psalm 22; Daniel 3

Psalm 22:1–11

To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David.

1 My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; And in the night season, and am not silent.

3 But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

4 Our fathers trusted in thee: They trusted, and thou didst deliver them.

5 They cried unto thee, and were delivered: They trusted in thee, and were not confounded.

6 But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised of the people.

7 All they that see me laugh me to scorn: They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying,

8 He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: Let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

9 But thou art he that took me out of the womb: Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts.

10 I was cast upon thee from the womb: Thou art my God from my mother's belly.

11 Be not far from me; for trouble is near; For there is none to help.

Key Text

My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?—Psalm 22:1

Worship in the Covenant Community

Unit 2: Songs of the Old Testament

Lessons 6–9

Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify the New Testament significance of Psalm 22.
2. Compare and contrast David's experiences with his trust in God.
3. Identify an area of personal trial and offer a prayer for God's help or rescue.

Lesson Outline

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I. Petition by David (Psalm 22:1–5)

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II. Insult from Enemies (Psalm 22:6–8)

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- B. Always Near (v. 11)

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- A. Space for Lament
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

How to Say It
Aramaic *Air-uh-may-ik*.

cherubims *chair-uh-bimz*.

Corinthians *Ko-rin-thee-unz* (*th* as in *thin*).

Eloi (*Aramaic*) *Ee-lo-eye*.

lama (*Aramaic*) *lah-mah*.

lament *luh-ment*.

sabachthani (*Aramaic*) *suh-back-thuh-nee*.

Introduction

A. Hymns of Lament

Most modern-day hymnals include indices that list hymns according to their themes and emphases. Such lists allow users to find hymns based on specific doctrinal topics. Possible motifs include *praise* (example: "Come, Thou Fount"), *thanksgiving* (example: "All Creatures of Our God and King"), *personal testimony* (example: "Blessed Assurance"), and *hope* (example: "In Christ Alone").

The book of Psalms served as the hymnbook for the Old Testament people of God. In that book, we find psalms of praise, thanksgiving, and hope, but we also see another side to worship: psalms of lament, grief, guilt, doubt, and anger.

Most often, it seems that our congregations' songs of worship focus on thanksgiving and praise, and rightly so: "For the Lord is great, and greatly to be praised" (Psalm 96:4). Rarely, however, does it seem that we are eager to sing songs and hymns that reflect the lament and sadness that we might feel. Perhaps it would do our congregations good to follow the book of Psalms and recover hymns and songs of lament for corporate and personal worship.

B. Lesson Context

By one estimate, there are six types of psalms in the Old Testament book of Psalms: lament, thanksgiving, wisdom, praise, psalms of Zion, and imprecatory. Most students categorize Psalm 22 as a lament psalm. Such psalms are characterized by the psalmist's attitude of personal anguish and the psalmist's petitions to God in response to some felt suffering.

Lament psalms typically contain a threefold structure, demonstrated by Psalm 13. First, lament psalms begin with a complaint or question, such as "How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord?" (Psalm 13:1). Second, the psalmist petitions or cries for help from the Lord, such as "Consider and hear me, O Lord my God" (13:3). Finally, the psalmist concludes with praise and worship to God: "I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me" (13:6).

Psalm 22 contains these same elements. It begins with the psalmist's question (Psalm 22:1), transitions into a set of his petitions and cries for help (22:2, 11, 19–21), and concludes with his worship of God (22:22–23). Some students see aspects of both lament psalms and praise psalms in Psalm 22. As a result, these students divide the psalm into two parts: a lament psalm (22:1–21) and a praise psalm (22:22–31). Regardless of how we categorize and divide this psalm, it depicts the sadness and worship of someone suffering.

The psalm's superscription provides some information regarding context. First, it directs "the chief Musician" to sing this psalm to a tune apparently known to the psalm's original audience. Second, the superscription also tells us that Psalm 22 was "A Psalm of David." Like most psalms, this psalm does not indicate the situation that led David to compose the psalm (contrast Psalms 18; 51). One possibility is that David wrote this psalm while hiding from Saul (see 1 Samuel 23:7–29). Whatever the situation, we know from the verses after today's lesson text that David felt abandoned, isolated, and in danger. His body was failing and on the verge of death (Psalm 22:14–15, 17). His enemies had surrounded him like wild animals (22:12, 16), eager to attack (22:13, 21) and strip him of his clothing (22:18).

The writers of the New Testament connected the suffering of the psalmist and his prayer for help with the suffering of Jesus and His prayers during the crucifixion. Of New Testament quotations of and allusions to Psalm 22, most occur in the passion narratives of the Gospels:

- Psalm 22:1, quoted in Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34
- Psalm 22:7–8, alluded to in Matthew 27:39; Mark 15:29; Luke 23:35–36

- Psalm 22:8, alluded to in Matthew 27:43
- Psalm 22:18, quoted in John 19:24
- Psalm 22:22, quoted in Hebrews 2:12

Some students have called this psalm “The Psalm of the Cross” because of its connections to Jesus’ suffering and the lament He expressed to His heavenly Father while on the cross.

We may be drawn to interpret Psalm 22 only in light of Christ’s suffering—and understandably so! But if we do, we will miss how it, in its original context, can inform our spiritual growth.

I. Petition by David (Psalm 22:1–5)

A. God’s Distance (vv. 1–2)

1a. My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

David was surrounded by enemies who mocked him and were eager to see him destroyed (Psalm 22:12, 16). In light of this seemingly hopeless situation, David cried out to God. His cries were notably not directed to any random pagan god. Instead, he called on the God with whom he had a relationship: *my God* (compare 31:14).

By using this term of intimacy, David demonstrated confidence that the God who had entered into a covenant relationship with Israel would also be faithful and present to him. But David’s situation was so dire that he felt compelled to ask *why* God seemed distant. Throughout the history of Israel, God had promised His presence with His people (example: Deuteronomy 31:6–8). The promise of God’s presence anchored the hope of the psalmists (examples: Psalms 9:10; 37:28; 94:14).

While suffering on the cross, Jesus quoted this half-verse in Aramaic: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34). In the lead-up to and during His crucifixion, Jesus was mocked, attacked, and forsaken as He was handed over to death (examples: Matthew 27:27–31; Mark 15:29–32). The suffering led Jesus to feel abandoned by His heavenly Father. By quoting this psalm as a prayer, Jesus expressed anguish regarding the rejection that He experienced on the cross.

1b. Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

Any hope of rescue seemed *far* away (compare Psalm 22:19, not in our printed text). The kind of *helping* that David desired was deliverance from his enemies. All other avenues of deliverance had been exhausted; only the strength of the almighty Lord could save David (compare 10:1; 28:8).

The phrase *the words of my roaring* reflects the depths of David's despair. He was left to groan and cry out for any means of rescue. The sense of being abandoned by God led David to cry out as a last resort. His cries were like the roar of a wild animal in anguish (compare Psalm 32:3; Isaiah 5:29).

What Do You Think?

How would you respond to the claim that believers should not question God?

Digging Deeper

What Scripture texts support your answer?

2. O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

David's cries for rescue were not a one-time occurrence; he petitioned God *in the daytime* and *the night season* for deliverance. It is understandable for God's people to cry out to God and question whether or not He hears those petitions (examples: Psalm 42:3; Lamentations 3:8, 44). However, unlike the experience of other psalmists, it seemed to David that God *hearest not* the man's cries (compare Psalm 88:1).

Sleepless Nights

The experiences of parenthood will inevitably include many sleepless nights! After my children were born, I awoke most nights for midnight feedings. As they grew older, my sleepless nights differed. Sometimes, I was awakened by a crying child, fearful of a nightmare. Other times, a child crawling into my bed would startle me awake.

As my children became teenagers, my sleepless nights took a different flavor. I stayed awake to welcome them home from competitions, dates, or jobs. Once they moved to college and would come back to visit, I kept vigilant watch through the early hours of the morning to confirm their safe arrival.

People experience sleepless nights for various reasons, including mental turmoil and spiritual anguish. The next time you face a sleepless night, will you consider praying to God about your fears? We can sleep with the promise that

God will be with us—even in our slumber (Psalm 4:8). We can trust Him because He is the one who “neither slumber[s] nor sleep[s]” (121:4).

—L. M. W.

B. God’s Deliverance (vv. 3–5)

3. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

Although David had questioned why God seemed distant (Psalm 22:1, above), he still affirmed the unique characteristics of God. Notably, he proclaimed that God is *holy*, meaning He is totally perfect and free of any blemish of sin (1 Samuel 2:2; Isaiah 40:25; Habakkuk 1:13; Revelation 15:4; etc.). There would be none other who could save God’s people. God’s holiness is often the foundation of worship in the psalms (examples: Psalms 29:2; 99:3, 5, 9; 145:21).

For ancient Israel, God’s presence was represented by the ark of testimony. He would reveal His presence “from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubims which are upon the ark of the testimony” (Exodus 25:22; compare Psalms 80:1; 99:1). However, in the verse before us, God’s presence is in the midst of His people as He *inhabitest the praises of Israel*. Even in distress, David could worship God—the only one who is holy, faithful, and present in the midst of suffering.

What Do You Think?

In what ways can you emphasize God’s holiness in your personal and corporate worship?

Digging Deeper

How will your worship address other attributes of God, such as His love, mercy, faithfulness, or righteousness?

4–5. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.

The history of God’s work with His people gave David confidence in God’s faithfulness. Such reflection anchored David’s worship and provided encouragement regarding God’s active and all-powerful presence (compare Psalm 44:1–8). Other psalmists shared this view (examples: 78:53; 107:6).

Perhaps David was reflecting on the exodus from Egypt. While enslaved in Egypt, the people *trusted* God’s promises to their ancestors—promises of blessing, descendants, and land (Genesis 15:14–18; 17:4–8; 26:2–6, 24; 28:13–15;

46:2–4). Trusting these promises and God’s faithfulness, the people cried out that God would bring freedom from their enslavement (Exodus 2:23–24). God saw the people in their suffering, took pity on them (2:25), and *delivered* them from their oppression (12:31–42).

The word *confounded* typically means to be confused or perplexed. However, that is not its meaning in this verse. The underlying Hebrew word is translated elsewhere as “ashamed” (Psalms 25:2; 31:1; etc.), and that is the sense here. Those who hope in the Lord and trust His promises have hope that He will someday remove shame once and for all (Isaiah 28:16; Romans 9:33; 1 Peter 2:6).

The three uses in these verses of a form of the word *trust* reveal the tension between trust and suffering. Feelings of sadness, anger, and fear are often associated with grief—such are normal human emotions. However, in those moments, we can also trust that God is present and with us and will be faithful to us. Such tension reveals a “both-and” situation: we can *both* cry out in our suffering *and* trust that God will provide comfort (see 2 Corinthians 1:3–4).

What Do You Think?

Who is an ancestor of yours who demonstrated trust in God during a season of suffering?

Digging Deeper

How will you demonstrate trust in God so that you can be an example to future generations?

The Example of Ancestors

Sensing sadness from my teenage daughter, I went to her room to check on her. I lay in her bed beside her, hearing her sadness pour from her heart. When she finished, and we lay there in the quiet, I began telling her stories of her great-grandmother, a woman my daughter had never met. I told my daughter about her ancestor’s passion, tenacity, and faith. I concluded by saying, “Your great-grandmother was a strong woman, and you remind me a lot of her.” I hoped that the example of her great-grandmother would strengthen my daughter’s faith and character.

In the midst of the psalmist’s trials, he reflected on the examples of his ancestors, specifically their faith and trust in God. Who is a “spiritual ancestor” for you—someone whose faith example you can follow? How can their legacy of faith strengthen your faith today?

II. Insult from Enemies (Psalm 22:6–8)

A. Despised (v. 6)

6. But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

Worms are associated with destruction, death, and decay (examples: Deuteronomy 28:39; Job 21:26; Isaiah 51:8). David's self-identification as *a worm* and not a *man* reveals the extent of his negative self-assessment (compare Job 25:6). His enemies had treated him as though he was worthless and on the verge of death. He began to believe that their threats and vile hopes would come true.

The Lord had delivered David's ancestors (see Psalm 22:5, above), thus freeing them from feelings of shame. However, as David waited for rescue, he became *despised* by others and the object of their *reproach*. The Lord would need to intervene for David to experience freedom from his dishonor and shame.

B. Mocked (vv. 7–8)

7. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying.

Although God seemed silent, David's enemies were not. They took advantage of David's situation to make a spectacle of his suffering. They ridiculed David and heaped *scorn* and insult on him because he trusted God. Mockery and insult led them to *shake* their heads out of disdain and disgust (compare Psalm 109:25).

What Do You Think?

How should believers respond to perceived mocking and ridicule for their faith and obedience to God?

Digging Deeper

What steps can you take to ensure you do not respond to these incidents with contempt or mockery?

8. He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.

This verse reveals that David's enemies quoted his prayers back to him. However, they did so with a harsh and sarcastic tone (compare Psalm 42:10). The

confidence of David's enemies is displayed as they sarcastically invited God to *deliver* David. They refused to believe that God would miraculously intervene for the good of David (compare 3:2; 71:11). To the suffering psalmist, their mocking words seemed to have a kernel of truth; their sarcastic invitation likely reinforced the psalmist's doubts and lament.

God's people often face scorn and ridicule from the unrighteous (examples: Psalms 31:11–18; 35:15–16; 69:7–20). Even Jesus faced ridicule (Matthew 27:39) and sarcastic incitements (27:43) while suffering, adopting Psalm 22:1 as His own in the process (Matthew 27:46); see above. In those moments of testing, we can trust that God will be faithful to us, even amid ridicule and mockery. This trust is our hope as believers (Hebrews 10:23).

III. Presence of God (Psalm 22:9–11)

A. Since Birth (vv. 9–10)

9–10. But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother's breasts. I was cast upon thee from the womb: Thou art my God from my mother's belly.

David's delight in the Lord came from the ways that God had provided for him—a provision that began while David was still in his mother's *womb*. While "covered" in his mother's womb, he was "fearfully and wonderfully made" by a caring God (Psalm 139:13–14). God's care continued after David was born and received his mother's love, care, and provision. God's care for His servant was on display from that man's conception to his birth and childhood. In another psalm, the psalmist proclaimed, "By thee have I been holden up from the womb: Thou art he that took me out of my mother's bowels: My praise shall be continually of thee" (71:6).

By reflecting on God's provision during his conception, birth, and upbringing, David demonstrated the reason for his *hope*. A form of the underlying Hebrew word translated *hope* is also translated as "trusted" elsewhere in this passage (Psalm 22:4–5), and that is the sense in the verse before us. David's trust in God was not based simply on any good feelings that David felt. Instead, David's confidence came from the certainty he had because of God's previous demonstrations of provision (see Isaiah 46:3–4). Although David experienced suffering and felt doubt, he demonstrated trust that God would provide, leading the psalmist to proclaim in worship: *thou art my God*.

B. Always Near (v. 11)

11. Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.

David's petition *be not far from me* is repeated later in the psalm (Psalm 22:19, not in our printed text). The petition to God reflects David's deep need for urgent deliverance from his enemies and his situation. The psalmists frequently petitioned for the nearness of God's presence when they faced trials and suffering (examples: 35:22; 38:21; 71:12). They knew that God is always-present (omnipresent; example: 139:7–12). Surrounded by trouble, the psalmists desired to experience God's presence through their deliverance from suffering.

The sort of presence that David desired was an act of deliverance from the *trouble* brought on by his enemies (compare 69:18). David sought the *help* that *none* other could provide, a deliverance that only God could give (see 142:4–6).

What Do You Think?

How could you use this verse to encourage other believers facing troubling circumstances?

Digging Deeper

What steps do you need to take to prepare yourself to respond to such a situation?

Conclusion

A. Space for Lament

Psalm 22 consists of David's lament and petition balanced with his praise and adoration. His questioning "Why?" (Psalm 22:1) resulted in his praise to God. David's cries of suffering turned to worship because of the belief that God would ultimately be faithful and bring deliverance. And David hoped that he would praise God and that all nations and people would someday praise God (22:27–31).

The lament songs of the Psalter give us an example of how we might express our fears, frustrations, sadness, and petitions to the Lord. These psalms model how believers can enter the presence of God and proclaim their concerns and frustrations. Even though God already knows our wants, needs, and fears, He invites us to express those things to Him through our prayers and songs.

Jesus modeled lament for us when, on the cross, He quoted this psalm. The Son of God asked His heavenly Father, "Why?" (Matthew 27:46). We, too, can ask

"Why?" to our heavenly Father when we experience suffering and hardship. Therefore, our personal and corporate times of worship can include prayer, lament, and petitions to the Lord. But there are two cautions here. First, we should not let our *why* lead to questioning God's justice. Second, we cannot flourish by remaining in an endless loop of *why, why, why*. An answer to that may never come. Eventually, we have to move from *why* to *what's next?*

Further, our congregations should be communities that encourage expressions of lament. Perhaps we can sing hymns of lament and hope, like "O God, Our Help in Ages Past." Another way to do so is through listening and supporting those suffering and grieving.

The psalms invite us to consider the role of lament in our worship. When we open our hearts to God and acknowledge our sadness and suffering, we depend entirely on Him. The psalms also model how we might praise God for His power and deliverance, even if our situations seem hopeless. How will the psalms be your hymnbook the next time you are in a season of suffering?

B. Prayer

Holy God, You are all-powerful and always present. You know us when we are experiencing joy and gladness and when we are experiencing sadness and grief. In seasons of lament, remind us to call out to You, even if all we can proclaim is our grief. We trust in Your unfailing love and Your faithfulness to us. Hear the cries of our hearts and come quickly to our aid so that we might experience the comfort and deliverance only You provide. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

Cry out to God!