

A Liturgy for One Threatened with Death (22:1-32)

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Translation

- ¹ For the musical director. According to "Doe ^a of the Dawn." A psalm of David.
- ²⁽¹⁾ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (4+4)
My moaning ^a is of the distance of my salvation!
- ³⁽²⁾ O my God, I cry out by day, but you don't answer,
and by night, but there is no rest for me. (4+3)
- ⁴⁽³⁾ But you are holy, ^a
enthroned upon the praises of Israel. (2+3)
- ⁵⁽⁴⁾ Our fathers trusted in you;
they trusted and you delivered them. (3+2)
- ⁶⁽⁵⁾ They cried out to you and were delivered;
they trusted in you and were not disappointed. (3+3)
- ⁷⁽⁶⁾ But I am a worm, and not a man;
scorned by mankind and despised by people. (4+4)
- ⁸⁽⁷⁾ All that see me deride me;
they curl their lips, ^a they shake their heads. (4+4)
- ⁹⁽⁸⁾ "He trusted ^a in the Lord! Let him deliver him.
Let him rescue him, since he takes delight in him!" (4+4)
- ¹⁰⁽⁹⁾ You are the one who drew me forth ^a from the belly,
the one who made me safe upon my mother's breasts. ^b (3+3)
- ¹¹⁽¹⁰⁾ I was cast upon you from the womb;
from my mother's belly, you have been my God. (3+3)
- ¹²⁽¹¹⁾ Don't be distant from me, (2+2+2)
for trouble is near;
there is certainly ^a no helper! ^b
- ¹³⁽¹²⁾ Many bulls have surrounded me; (3+3)
mighty bulls of Bashan have encircled me.

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- ¹⁴⁽¹³⁾ They have opened their mouths against me,
like ^a a lion about to rend and roar. (3+3)
- ¹⁵⁽¹⁴⁾ I have been poured out like water,
and all my bones have become disjointed;
My heart was like wax;
it melted within my inwards. (2+2)
(3+3)
- ¹⁶⁽¹⁵⁾ My strength ^a dried up like a potsherd,
and my tongue was fused ^b to my jaws,
and you deposited ^c me in death's dust. (3+3+3)
- ¹⁷⁽¹⁶⁾ For dogs have surrounded me;
a pack ^a of thugs have encompassed me;
my hands and my feet were exhausted. ^b (3+3+3)
- ¹⁸⁽¹⁷⁾ I count all my bones;
They stare and look at me! (2+3)
- ¹⁹⁽¹⁸⁾ They divide my garments among themselves
and cast lots for my clothing. (3+3)
- ²⁰⁽¹⁹⁾ But you, O Lord—do not be distant!
O my Help ^a, hasten to my aid! ^b (3+3)
- ²¹⁽²⁰⁾ Deliver my soul from the sword,
my life ^a from the paw of the dog. ^b (3+3)
- ²²⁽²¹⁾ Save me from the mouth of the lion,
from the horns of wild oxen,
You have answered me! ^a (3+2,1)
- ²³⁽²²⁾ Let me tell of your name to my brethren;
I will praise you in the midst of the congregation. (3+3)
- ²⁴⁽²³⁾ You who fear the Lord, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
And all you descendants of Israel, stand in awe of him! (3+3+4)
- ²⁵⁽²⁴⁾ For he has not despised and has not detested
the affliction of the afflicted;
and he has not hidden his face from him, ^a
but when he ^a cried for help, he heard him. ^a (3+2)
(3+3)
- ²⁶⁽²⁵⁾ From you comes my praise in the great congregation.
I will fulfill my vows before those who fear him. (4+4)
- ²⁷⁽²⁶⁾ The afflicted shall eat and shall be satisfied;
those who seek him shall praise the Lord—
may your ^a hearts live forever! (3+3+3)
- ²⁸⁽²⁷⁾ All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the Lord,
and all the clans of the nations shall worship before you. ^a (4+4)
- ²⁹⁽²⁸⁾ For the dominion belongs to the Lord,
and he ^a is the one ruling over the nations. (3+2/3)
- ³⁰⁽²⁹⁾ Indeed, ^a all those about to sleep ^b in the earth
shall bow down ^c to him
all those about to descend to the dust shall bend down to him.
And he who did not keep ^a his life— (4?+4)
(3+2)
- ³¹⁽³⁰⁾ his descendants ^a shall serve him. (3+2)
It shall be told concerning the Lord to a generation
that will come; ^b (4+4+2)

³²⁽³¹⁾ and they shall declare his righteousness to a people about to be born^a—
what he^b has done!

Notes

1.a. "Hind" or "doe" (תִּלְלִי) is rendered by G as "help" (תִּלְלִי); if this is the correct reading, the expression in the psalm title might be taken as an indication of the content of the psalm which follows. Alternatively the expression may designate the name of the tune to which the psalm was to be sung. The association of *deer* with the sun-god (in archaeological data from Anatolia) has suggested to Jirku (*ZAW* 65 [1953] 85-86) that originally the title was associated with sun-god Šahar, also known from the Ugaritic texts.

2.a. Literally, "the words of my roaring." The translation of this verse as a whole presents problems. G renders v 2b by: "the account of my transgressions is distant from my salvation," apparently reading תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ ("transgressions") for MT's תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ; but G was probably working from a different text, for it also contains an additional clause after "My God," namely: "attend to me" (πρόσχεσθε μοι). It is preferable to retain MT, though G's syntax is followed, taking v 2b as a separate line, not governed by לָמָּה "why" in v 2a (as is implied in rsv and other translations).

4.a. The translation of this line is difficult and depends in part upon the location of the *athnah*; the translation above follows MT, but it would be possible to place the *athnah* under וְשׁוֹי. C (cf. Vg) assumes such a division of the line, but also renders שׁוֹי as "sanctuary" (ἐν ἁγίῳ): "but you dwell in a sanctuary, the praise of Israel."

8.a. Literally, "they separate with a lip"; the idiom refers to sneering.

9.a. Reading לָּ (perf.: cf. G and S) for MT's imperative form. The literal sense of the verb is "to roll"—viz. "he rolled (his burden) to the Lord."

10.a. The etymology of תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ is uncertain, though it appears to be a participle from תִּנְחַל. A possible emendation is suggested by Leveen (*VT* 21 [1971] 53), who reads תִּנְחַל "my rest, security," though it is best to retain MT.

10.b. There is some ambiguity in v 10b; G (with some support from Heb mss) translates: "my hope (apparently reading תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ) from my mother's breasts (reading תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ)."

12.a. The second ׀ is interpreted as serving an emphatic function: GKC 159 ee.

12.b. Alternatively, the nuance of וְלֹאֵיִךְ may be "(to) deliver"; for a discussion of the etymology and meaning, see B. Q. Baisos, "Ugaritic *ḥr* and Hebrew *ḥr* 1," *UF* 5 (1973) 41-52.

14.a. Reading כִּאֲרֵי (after G). כִּאֲרֵי (in v 17) may originally have been a marginal gloss to indicate the absence of the preposition ׀; see further v 17, note b.

16.a. תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ: "my strength." Alternatively, to provide better parallelism with "tongue," it is possible to read תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ, "my palate" (on the assumption that accidental metathesis has occurred).

16.b. מִדְּבַק (Hoph. ptc. of דָּבַק): literally, "was made to ding."

16.c. תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ: a denominative verb (from תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ), though it is probably not related to Ugaritic *tpd*, as suggested by Dahood (*Psalms* I, 140) and other scholars. On the etymology of Ugaritic *tpd*, see Craigie, *JOSOT* 2 (1977) 41-42.

17.a. On the nuance "pack" for עָדַד, see Dahood, *Psalms* I, 140.

17.b. MT's תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ ("like a lion") presents numerous problems and can scarcely be correct. One must suppose that incorrect vocalization of the consonantal text occurred, perhaps through association with a marginal gloss at v 14; see note a at v 14 and L. C. Allen, "Cuckoos in the Textual Nest," *JTS* 22 (1971) 148-50. It is probably best to read a consonantal text תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ or תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ; see the massive discussion of the manuscript evidence in De-Rossi, IV, 14-20. G's translation, "they pierced my hands and feet" (ώρυξαν), may perhaps presuppose a verb כָּרַח, "to dig," or כָּרַח (III), "to pierce, bore" (though the latter verb is dubious). Some scholars have supposed a verb תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ ("to pluck, pick clean"), prefixed by ׀; for different approaches to this solution of the problem, see Dahood, "The Verb תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ, 'pick clean,'" *VT* 24 (1974) 370-71, and Tournay, *VT* 23 (1973) 111-12. Still another solution is the proposal of a verb כָּרַח (V), "to be shrunken, shriveled" (on the basis of Akk. and Syriac), as proposed by Roberts, *VT* 23 (1973) 247-52. The starting point for the translation which is adopted above is provided by E. J. Kissane (*The Book of Psalms*, 97-101). He proposes an original text כָּרַח, changed to כָּרַח (noting the occasional interchange of ל and ר), and translates "consumed." This is basically the position adopted above; on the consonantal interchange, see A. Fitzgerald, "The Interchange of L, N and R in Biblical Hebrew," *JBL* 97 (1978) 481-88. Thus the verb is a form of כָּרַח (3 plur. perf.); on the nuance "to be exhausted," for this verb, see BDB, 477.

20.a. תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ "my help" is a *hapax legomenon*; on the meaning, see BDB, 33. On the basis of Ugaritic *ḥul*, Dahood (after Ginsberg) translates: "O my army" (*Psalms* I, 141). But Ug. *ḥul* means more generally "might, strength" (Aistleitner, *WUS* #186, Gibson, *CML*, 143, and others); in the text adduced by Dahood (*UT* Krt. 38), it may either have this sense (see Caquot, et al., *Textes ougaritiques* I, 517) or it may have the sense "freeman" (cf. Akk. *awilu*; Gray, *The Krt Text in the Literature of Ras Shamra*, 1964, 13, 39-40). The specific sense "army" is not clearly attested in Ugaritic, so that (given the nature of the Hebrew evidence) the precise sense of the word in this verse must remain uncertain.

20.b. Or, "to my rescue"; see Baisos, *UF* 5 (1973) 41-52, and v 11, note b (above).

21.a. Literally, "my only one."

21.b. Dahood, finding the parallelism "sword // dog's paw" to be curious, understands לָּ to be a by-form of כַּלְפֹּת "axe," and translates: "from the blade of an axe" (*Psalms* I, 141). But in v 17, there is the parallelism "dogs // hooligans" and the present parallelism refers back to that verse. The metaphor of the dog is continued with further animal imagery in v 22. Thus, it is better to stick with the conventional translation, which demonstrates more clearly the poet's striking use of poetic language.

22.a. MT עֲנִיתִנִּי "you have answered me"; but the overall sense of MT is unclear. G renders תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ תִנְחַלְשׁוּ מוֹי, "my lowliness," apparently reading a noun (עֲנִיתִי?). The parallel in grammatical structure between vv 21 and 22 lends some support to G's rendition. But the structure of the psalm as a whole implies that the text and meaning of MT should be retained: see the structure (below) in *Form/Structure/Setting*.

25.a. In each case, G presupposes the first person singular suffix ("me"), but the opening lines of the verse make the third person suffix more appropriate.

27.a. Two Heb mss (cf. G and S) indicate a 3 m. pl. suffix: בָּבָב, which is possible in the light of v 27 a-b, though not necessary.

28.a. Or, "before him" (cf. S and Vg).

29.a. Reading מִשְׁלַח הַדָּם (cf. G), thus providing a balanced line 3+3.

30.a. MT reads אֲכָלוּ, "they have eaten." The translation above assumes two words (accidentally joined in the text represented by MT), namely לוֹ וְאָר.

30.b. Reading יִשְׁנִי ("these that sleep") for MT's יִשְׁנֵי ("fat ones"), thus providing a more appropriate parallel to יִרְדְּדוּ ("those who descend") in the following parallel clause. The participle, from שָׁן ("sleep"), serves to express the immediate future ("about to . . ."), as does the participle in the following clause: cf. GKC, 116 p.

30.c. The verb is treated as a simple imperfect form (יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ), the initial *waw* being a dittography, presumably arising as a consequence of the confusion noted in note a (above).

30.d. תִּנְחַלְשׁוּ (Pi'el perf.), "to keep, preserve life."

31.a. Literally, "(a) seed."

31.b. יִבְאוּ is taken with v 31 (cf. G) and read either as יִבְאוּ (the *aleph* and *waw* having been accidentally interchanged) or יִבְאוּ, the final *waw* being a dittography.

32.a. נוֹלַד: Niph. ptc. from נָלַד, designating the immediate future: see v 30, note b (above).

32.b. G adds ὁ κύριος, viz. "what the Lord has done," but the short line of MT may provide a more fitting climax.

Form/Structure/Setting

The initial problem in determining the form of Ps 22 lies in the fact that the psalm contains at least three different kinds of material: (a) *lament* (vv 2-22), within which there are elements of (b) *prayer* (vv 12, 20-22), and finally (c) *praise and thanksgiving* (vv 23-32). The sharp distinction between the two main sections (vv 2-22 and 23-32) has prompted some scholars to suggest that originally there were two separate psalms which were fused into one; while this view is a possibility with respect to the pre-history of the psalm, it fails to take into account the evident unity of the psalm as it now exists. The mixture of forms and types of language suggests strongly that the text of Ps 22 is the basis of a liturgy, in which the worshiper moves from lament to prayer, and finally to praise and thanksgiving. The psalm should probably

be interpreted primarily as an *individual* psalm, though the liturgy sets the problem of the individual in the context of the community as a whole; thus, the liturgy was clearly a communal affair.

The liturgical dimension of the psalm emerges most clearly from an analysis of its structure, which may be set out as follows:

- I. *Lament* (vv 2-22b): the sick declares his sorrow.
 1. Forsaken by God and mankind (vv 2-11).
 2. Prayer for help (v 12).
 3. Surrounded by trouble (vv 13-19).
 4. Prayer for deliverance (vv 20-22b).
- II. *Response* (v 22c): presupposing an oracle.
- III. *Thanksgiving* (vv 23-27): declared by the sufferer.
- IV. *Thanksgiving* (vv 28-32): declared by the congregation.

There are several clues to the liturgical structure of the psalm as a whole. The most distinctive one is the declaration of trust and confidence by the worshiper at the end of v 22: "You have answered me!" The words come in such striking contrast to the preceding lament and prayer, that one must presuppose the declaration of an oracle (cf. Killian, *BZ* 12 [1968] 172-85) announcing healing and health, after the prayer (vv 20-22b), which gives rise to this sudden declaration of confidence. In the praise which follows, the individual worshiper twice makes reference to the congregation (vv 23, 26) that forms the larger context of the liturgical proceedings. The change of person and of tone in the final section (vv 28-32) indicates the congregational response and conclusion to the liturgy.

The words of the lament imply the worshiper's deep state of distress prior to the liturgy; although in their original composition, the words presumably indicated the particular experience of a particular person, in the normal use of the liturgy they are simply words spoken by individuals whose personal circumstances may have differed. Consequently, it is difficult to determine the precise purpose and setting of the liturgy. In all probability, the liturgy was used for those persons who were severely sick and threatened by death; they participated in the liturgy, in the context of the community as a whole, who gathered as a congregation in the temple; see further Schmid, *Wort und Diens*: 11 (1971) 119-40. In participating in such a liturgy, the worshiper hoped for a priestly oracle favorable to his plea, which would enable the great declaration of confidence (v 22c). In the concluding portion of the ritual, the worshiper would fulfil his vows (v 26), both through offering praise to God and through participating in the sacrificial feast (v 27). It is probable that a liturgy such as this was used for any person who was sick and threatened with death, though it is possible to interpret the liturgy as a *royal ritual* (cf. Eaton, *Kingship and the Psalms*, 34-36); the evidence for such a view, however, is at best indirect, and the royal hypothesis must remain uncertain.

Comment

Forsaken by God (22:2-6). The worshiper begins by expressing the darkest mystery of his suffering, namely the sense of being forsaken by God. It is a

mystery because it appears to be rooted in a contradiction, namely the apparent contradiction between theology and experience. Theology, based upon the tradition and experience of the past, affirmed unambiguously that *trust* (the verb is used three times, for emphasis, in vv 5-6) resulted in deliverance. Indeed it was of the essence of the covenant faith that those who trusted in the holy God would not be disappointed—hence the praise of Israel upon which God was enthroned (v 4). But experience was altogether at odds with theology; whereas the fathers trusted and were delivered, the essence of the psalmist's complaint ("my moaning," v 2) was "the distance of my salvation." The God of covenant, who was believed not to have deserted his faithful people, appeared to have forsaken this worshiper who, in sickness, faced the doors of death. And it was the sense of being forsaken by God that was the fundamental problem—more grave than the actual condition of sickness and the threat of death.

Despised by fellow human beings (22:7-11). Whereas the problem of God is expressed most powerfully in the divine silence (v 3a), the problem of fellow human beings arose from the derisory words which they addressed to the ailing person. Scorned and despised by fellow human beings, the worshiper is treated as a *worm*, implying both a state of decay and unpleasantness (cf. Exod 16:20), and by implication the nearness of death itself (cf. Isa 14:11). Again it is clear that the primary problem was not sickness or death as such; the primary problem was the silence of God (v 3) and the secondary problem was the terrible reaction of fellow human beings, who—rather than offering comfort and consolation—spurned the sick person as if an object less than human, tainted already with corruption and death. But the secondary problem of the scornful fellow humans reintroduces the primary problem of God; their taunting words (v 9) remind the sufferer that God appears to have deserted him. Though the words are spoken in derision, they strike home in the heart of the worshiper precisely because they appear to have the essence of truth in them. Now the sufferer perceives a further contradiction; this time, the contradiction lies in his own experience from birth onward to the present moment. From the moment of his birth and his mother's initial care, the sufferer had been dependent ultimately upon God (vv 10-11); but now in the time of crisis, that past experience seemed like a hollow mockery of reality. The only reality was the distance of God, aggravated by the taunting nearness of fellow human beings.

A prayer for help (22:12). In such desperate straits, the psalmist is compelled to move from lament to prayer; the substance of the prayer illustrates the true nature of his condition. There is no explicit prayer for healing or deliverance from death (though such may be implied); the prayer begins with the request for the removal of the divine distance. Feeling forsaken by God, the worshiper asks that God be no longer distant. While it is true that the sense of distance would disappear in an act of healing, there is something more immediate in the desire of this prayer; more than anything else, the worshiper requires to know once again the intimate presence of God. If such presence brought with it healing, so much the better, but even if it did not, sickness and death could be faced squarely in the presence of God, who would be a *helper*.

Surrounded by trouble (22:13-19). As the lament continues, it is the awareness of enemies which dominates the psalmist's thought. He is trapped; his experience is presented dramatically as one who is "surrounded, encircled" (v 13), "surrounded, exhausted" (v 17). The words evoke the abject terror of one who is powerless, but surrounded, with no avenue of escape; those who look upon him in his miserable estate assume the proportion of beasts (in the language of the poetry). They are like bulls (Bashan, v 13, produced the fattest and largest cattle in the territory), like a lion hungry for its supper (v 14), like dogs sniffing about for something to eat. It is these enemies, devoid of comfort, who confound the physical malady with spiritual terror, for though the sick person is not yet dead, they are already dividing up his clothes (v 19), as if he were deceased. In each case, the description of the threatening dominance of enemies (vv 13-14, 17) is followed by a description of the fear instilled in the sufferer (vv 15-16, 18). The words of vv 15-16 should not necessarily be taken as indicative of the disease as such; rather, they describe the fear evoked by enemies who are waiting and watching for death to come. The sufferer feels as if "poured out like water" ("completely washed out," in modern idiom) 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*; "you deposited me" (v 16c) implies that the psalmist understood God to have set him in this mortal predicament, so although it is the derisory enemies that surround him, it is God who is at the root of his dilemma.

Prayer for deliverance (22:20-22b). Again, the desperate situation pushes the psalmist to prayer and again he begins the prayer in a similar fashion, pleading for the removal of the divine distance (v 20; cf. v 12). But then he prays specifically for deliverance, not explicitly from sickness and death, but rather from the enemies (again, animal metaphors are introduced) that stand around him, awaiting his death with such morbid anticipation.

The sufferer's response to an oracle (22:22c). "You have answered me"; the perfect tense expresses the worshiper's confidence (cf. Killian, art. cit.). His confidence is based upon the faith that God would answer his prayers, but specifically it was elicited by the oracular statement declared by a priest (or perhaps by a prophet) that God would answer. The oracular proclamation presupposed by this statement of confidence is implied, not stated; presumably it could not be stated in the text of the liturgy, for the officiating priest (or prophet) would be waiting for the divine word and would proclaim only the word that was given to him. Since the substance of the divine word, in cases such as sickness and the nearness of death, could not always be anticipated, it was not written as a formal part of the liturgy. But faith was such that the response was included. (One may suppose that the general use of such a liturgy presupposed in the first instance a particular situation and a particular outcome; viz., it was derived from a situation in which a sufferer did receive a favorable Word from God and did proclaim this statement of confidence.)

Thanksgiving of the one about to be delivered (22:23-27). The opening words of praise and thanksgiving are addressed to God (v 23); the remaining and major portion of the declaration is addressed to the congregation as a whole (vv 24-27). Because the worshiper has received the assurance of God's re-

sponse in the context of a congregational liturgy, his immediate response is to say to God that he will offer him praise in that same congregation. Thus, the praise of God that follows is not addressed to God in a vacuum; it is addressed to God through the congregation, with the invitation that they too honor and praise God. The psalmist's invitation to the congregation (viz., the "descendants of Jacob . . . of Israel") is taken up in vv 28-32, where the whole congregation joins in the praise.

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. 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. Specifically, the answer to his prayer came in the proclamation presupposed by the statement of confidence contained in v 22c. It is this priestly (or prophetic) proclamation which is again presupposed in the words: "from you comes my praise . . ." (v 26); it was the Word which came from God, promising deliverance, that prompted the praise offered in the midst of the congregation. God's faithfulness, in promising deliverance, required also faithfulness from the sufferer; he was to fulfil those vows and commitments made to God in the earlier time of distress. "The afflicted shall eat" (v 27): though the psalmist speaks of all the afflicted who are promised relief from their affliction, he speaks also of himself as one just relieved. The reference to *eating* and consequent satisfaction implies the worshiper's participation in a communal meal which formed a part of the ritual; though his previous experience was one of being "scorned by mankind" (v 7), he now sits with his fellow human beings and participates in a feast which symbolizes fellowship with God. And perhaps the last words he speaks, "May your hearts live for ever!" (v 27), should be interpreted as a toast to his fellow diners—a significant toast from one who stood so recently on the threshold of death!

Thanksgiving of the congregation (22:28-32). In the concluding words of thanksgiving, there is a move away from the individual perspective of the earlier portion of the liturgy to a more cosmic perspective. Although at first the change seems abrupt, it is entirely appropriate; it sets the particular event of deliverance into a broader and more balanced perspective, and yet it is still related intimately to the earlier liturgy. Hence, it is unnecessary to suppose that the last section is not an integral part of the original psalm, as proposed, for example, by Martin-Achard (*VCaro* 65 [1963] 78-87). Ultimately God is king and controls the affairs of all mankind and all nations (v 29); all persons need to remember that and to worship—the psalmist who forgot it in his sense of desolation (v 2), the enemies who implied that God was not in control (vv 8-9). The particular incidents of desolation and deliverance need to be set in the larger perspective—"dominion belongs to the Lord" (v 29). But the concluding praise also ties in with another theme of the liturgy, namely the nearness of death. Though the psalmist had been delivered from death, its nearness was no excuse to cease from worshipping God; those about to die should also bow down in worship before the God of the universe (v 30). Survival is not so much important for its own sake as it is important for providing a further opportunity for participation in the worship of God,

so that if one died, there was at least the possibility of descendants worshipping God (v 31). "He who did not keep his life" (v 30)—these words, in context, may refer to those who did not receive a positive oracle from God, who did not escape death; see further the discussion of v 22c above. The deliverance of a sufferer was ground for praise, but the death of a sufferer was not the end, for God's mighty acts would still be told in the future, beyond the funeral, to generations yet unborn (vv 31-32). It is this sentiment which sets the perspective for the whole liturgy, regardless of the specific will of God for the individual sufferer. Death, after all, comes to all mankind sooner or later, but the mighty acts of God will continue to be told from generation to generation.

Explanation

To Pascal has been attributed the saying that at the end of life, "one dies alone" (*"on mourra seul"*). The psalmist begins his lament with an expression of the loneliness of dying; it is loneliness in the absence of God, compounded by the presence of evil human beings who offer neither companionship nor consolation. Thus, at its beginning, the psalm supplements those other writings in the OT which express profound desolation—the dreadful curse of Job (3:1-26) and the lament of Jeremiah (20:14-18). And like both Job and Jeremiah, the psalmist thinks back to the time of his birth and wonders why life has come to this (22:10-11). Yet the psalm differs finally from the record of the experiences of Job and Jeremiah by virtue of its liturgical character; the liturgy immediately sets the loneliness of dying into the context of a caring community. And the worshiper, who begins his words in utter desolation, ends by inviting his fellow worshipers to join in the praise of God (22:23). The agent of deliverance from desolation is God himself, but the context in which that deliverance is declared is none other than the community of God's people.

Though the psalm is not messianic in its original sense or setting (though some scholars would interpret vv 28-32 as a messianic *relecture*: see Martin-Achard, art. cit.), it may be interpreted from a NT perspective as a messianic psalm par excellence. It is clear, from the recorded words of Jesus on the cross, that he identified his own loneliness and suffering with that of the psalmist (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). And it is clear that the evangelists interpreted the crucifixion in the light of the psalm, utilizing its words in their description of the scene (Matt 27:39; Mark 15:29; cf. Luke 23:35; Ps 22:8). Indeed, the psalm takes on the appearance of anticipatory prophecy; the high priests, scribes and elders employ the modes of words of the psalmist's enemies against Jesus (Ps 22:19; cf. John 19:24; Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34). It is not without reason that the psalm has been called the "Fifth Gospel" account of the crucifixion (Frost, *CJT* 8 [1962] 102-15).

What is most significant about the NT perspective is the self-identification of Jesus with the suffering psalmist, for it provides an insight into one part of the meaning of the crucifixion. The sufferer of Ps 22 is a human being, experiencing the terror of mortality in the absence of God and the presence of enemies. In the suffering of Jesus, we perceive God, in Jesus, entering

into and participating in the terror of mortality; he identifies with the suffering and the dying. Because God, in Jesus, has engaged in that desolation, he can offer comfort to those of us who walk now where the psalmist walked. But there is also a remarkable difference between the experience of the suffering psalmist and that of Jesus. The psalm concludes with praise because the sufferer escaped death; Jesus died. Yet the latter half of the psalm (vv 22-32) may also be read from a messianic perspective. The transition at v 22 is now understood not in deliverance *from* death, as was the case for the psalmist, but in deliverance *through* death, achieved in the resurrection. And it is that deliverance which is the ground of praise, both for the sufferer (vv 23-27) and for the "great congregation" (vv 28-32).