

Psalms: Petition Psalms, Lament, Psalm 22

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Abstract

In this lecture, Dr. Bruce Waltke examines the structure, theological significance, and messianic implications of Psalm 22, a prime example of an individual lament psalm. He begins by addressing the Elohistic Psalter (Psalms 42–83) and its shift in divine name usage from Yahweh to Elohim, highlighting the number 42's connection to judgment. Turning to Psalm 22, Waltke demonstrates how David's personal suffering prophetically reflects the exact details of Jesus Christ's crucifixion on the cross, including feelings of abandonment, bodily distress, and mocking enemies. The lecture concludes by exploring how Christ's agony transitions into triumphant universal praise and eternal salvation spanning all generations.

Outline

I. Introduction & Overview of the Elohistic Psalter (Psalms 42–83)

A. Background and Textual Context

1. Reference to lecture notes (pp. 332, 334, 335)
2. Explanation of the Elohistic Psalter collection

B. Statistical Shift in Divine Names

1. Psalms 1–41 & 84–150: Yahweh ('I Am') used 584 times; Elohim used 94 times
2. Psalms 42–83: Yahweh used 45 times; Elohim used 210 times
3. Reversal of divine names in A/B verse parallelism
4. Synoptic comparison: Psalm 14:2 ('Lord/Yahweh') vs. Psalm 53:2 ('God/Elohim')

C. Theological Significance

1. Shift in priority toward the transcendent God (Elohim) over the covenant-keeping God (Yahweh)
2. Significance of the number 42 in Near Eastern poetry and biblical themes of judgment, premature death, and exile
3. Context of exile and dark lament transitioning to redemption and divine forgiveness (e.g., Psalm 51)

II. Introduction to Psalm 22: Messianic Lament

A. Genre and Position

1. Categorized as an individual lament psalm (following Psalms 3 and 51)

2. Clearly messianic character portraying Jesus Christ and His death

B. Connection to the Crucifixion

1. Fourth of the seven words of Christ on the cross ('My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?')
2. Theological challenge of apostasy: Waltke's reflection on a former student who lost faith over this verse
3. Spiritual discernment in addressing skepticism and avoiding futile debate

C. Prophetic Typology

1. Typical-prophetic nature: David's experience inspired by the Holy Spirit prophetically transcends David's life
2. Specific historical details match the crucifixion of Jesus Christ rather than David's biography

III. Structural Analysis and Symmetry of Psalm 22

A. Three Main Stanzas

1. Stanza 1 (vv. 1–10): Alternating mixture of lament, confidence, and praise (10 verses)
2. Transitional Verse (v. 11): Bridges initial lament to upcoming petition (1 verse)
3. Stanza 2 (vv. 12–21): Detailed physical lament and urgent petition (10 verses)
4. Stanza 3 (vv. 22–31): Sudden shift to praise and thanksgiving (10 verses)

B. Poetic Control and Design

1. Symmetrical balance (10, 10, 10 structure) demonstrating emotional restraint and rational passion
2. Jesus reciting the entire psalm upon the cross as fulfilled scripture

IV. Detailed Exegesis: Stanza 1 – Mixture of Lament and Confidence (vv. 1–10)

A. First Cycle: Abandonment by God and Confidence in History (vv. 1–5)

1. Cry of divine abandonment and unceasing prayer day and night (vv. 1–2)
2. Feeling abandoned as a normative Christian testing experience
3. Confidence grounded in God's past faithfulness to the patriarchs/fathers (vv. 3–5)

B. Second Cycle: Abandonment by Man and Confidence in Personal Experience (vv. 6–10)

1. Scorned as a worm and mocked by spectators who shake their heads (vv. 6–8)
2. Foreshadowing Christ's physical disfigurement and suffering on the cross
3. Confidence grounded in God's past faithfulness from infancy and mother's womb (vv. 9–10)

V. Detailed Exegesis: Stanza 2 – Physical Agony and Petition (vv. 11–21)

A. Zoomorphic Imagery and Physical Suffering (vv. 12–18)

1. Enemies depicted as strong bulls of Bashan, roaring lions, and encircling dogs (vv. 12–13, 16)
2. Explicit crucifixion details: poured out like water, bones out of joint, heart melted like wax, extreme thirst (vv. 14–15)
3. Personal illustration: Waltke's experience of extreme heat and thirst in Hatra, Iraq
4. Prophetic details: pierced hands/feet, countable bones, casting lots for garments (vv. 16–18)

B. Urgent Petition and Chiastic Structure (vv. 19–21)

1. Direct plea for Yahweh to draw near and deliver His life
2. Chiastic reversal of enemy threats: sword, dogs, lions, wild oxen

VI. Detailed Exegesis: Stanza 3 – Triumphant Praise and Universal Scope (vv. 22–31)

A. Praise Within the Covenant Community (vv. 22–26)

1. Proclaiming God's name to the brothers in the great assembly (fulfilled in Christ's resurrection)
2. Messiah's banquet: inviting the poor and afflicted to eat and live forever

B. Universal and Eternal Scope of Praise (vv. 27–31)

1. Geographic scope: all ends of the earth and all nations bowing before Yahweh
2. Social scope: rich and poor, all who go down to the dust kneeling before Him
3. Temporal scope: message passed down to future generations yet unborn ('He has done it!')

C. Conclusion and Illustration

1. Story of Duke Wellington at the Battle of Waterloo ('Wellington defeated...' vs. '...defeated the enemy')
2. Summary: Good Friday fog versus Easter Sunday resurrection triumph over death