

Unforsaken

Psalm 22:14-21

"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"

I've taken a stand on this - that God the Father did **not** "forsake" His Son.

I think verse twenty four of Psalm 22 proves it - or, at least, it gives my argument credibility.

Psa 22:24 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**.

Since it seems so controversial to say Jesus was unforsaken, let me marshal three other passages of Scripture:

John 10:30 "I and my Father are one."

John 16:32 "You [disciples] will leave me all alone. Yet I am not alone, for my Father is with me."

2 Corinthians 5:19 "...God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."

Regardless the position we take, the psalm proceeds, and in these middle verses we have a description of the crucifixion itself.

Crucifixion did not begin with the Romans; it was a method of execution that had developed centuries earlier in the ancient near East.

The Medes and the Persians practiced this gruesome torture method as well as the Carthaginians and the Egyptians, and later it was adopted among the Greeks and finally the Romans in the first century.

Crucifixion was mentioned in history from about the 6th century BC to the 4th century AD.

The Roman emperor, Constantine, banned crucifixion out of reverence for Jesus Christ.

The Romans called it by its Latin word *crucifixus* which means to "fix on a cross." The first century Roman cross consisted of two large wooden beams, a stake and a crossbeam (*patibulum*). The crossbeam was locked into place at the very top of the perpendicular stake, or near the top.

There were various methods of performing the execution. Usually, the condemned man, after being whipped, or "scourged," dragged or carried on his shoulders the crossbeam of his cross to the place of punishment, where the upright shaft was already fixed in the ground. Stripped of his clothing either then or earlier at his scourging, he was bound fast with outstretched arms to the crossbeam or nailed firmly to it through the wrists. The crossbeam was then raised high against the upright shaft and made fast to it about 9 to 12 feet from the ground.

Next, the feet were tightly bound or nailed to the upright shaft. A ledge inserted about halfway up the upright shaft gave some support to the body; evidence for a similar ledge for the feet is rare and late.

Over the criminal's head was placed a notice stating his name and his crime. Death, apparently caused by exhaustion or by heart failure, could be hastened by shattering the legs (*crurifragium*) with an iron club, so that shock and asphyxiation soon ended his life.

David, the psalmist, was born, we think, 1040BC. That means his writings predated crucifixion by several centuries.

It makes Psalm 22 all the more remarkable in that he accurately described the physical experiences of Jesus on the Cross way **before** crucifixion was conceived as a form of execution.

Psa 22:14 I am poured out like water, And all My bones are out of joint; My heart is like wax; It has melted within Me.

Psa 22:15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws; You have brought Me to the dust of death.

Psa 22:16 For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me. They pierced My hands and My feet;

Psa 22:17 I can count all My bones. They look and stare at Me.

A few of these comments could apply to any number of things. But some are quite specific to the agony of crucifixion.

"I am poured out like water." We would label this dehydration. Blood loss from His Roman scourging would, by itself, cause severe dehydration. Remember, too, some hours earlier Jesus had sweat great drops of blood while wrestling in prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane. Then, too, He would have perspired profusely on the Cross.

Dehydration is serious. It leads to any number of physical symptoms, including delirium and unconsciousness if left untreated.

"All my bones are out of joint." Some years ago, a medical doctor, David Terasaka, wrote an article, *Medical Aspects of the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ*. It's a classic, and I highly recommend it if you want to get into the details way deeper.

Regarding Jesus' out-of-joint bones, the good doctor wrote, "when the cross was erected upright, there was tremendous strain put on the wrists, arms and shoulders, resulting in a dislocation of the joints."

"My heart is like wax." I'm not sure what to make of this wax heart analogy. J. Vernon McGee says,

He died of a broken heart. Many doctors have said that a ruptured heart would have produced what John meticulously recorded - "but one of the soldiers with a spear pierced his side, and forthwith came there out blood and water" (John 19:34).

Let me paraphrase that. "I saw that Roman soldier put the spear in His side and there came out blood and water - not just blood but blood and water."

John took note of that and recorded it. May I say to you, Jesus died of a broken heart.

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, And My tongue clings to My jaws." No surprise here - that the Lord would be thirsty, and have a lack of moisture.

"They pierced my hands and my feet." Whoa! Definitely crucifixion.

"I can count all my bones." The stress on the hanging body, and the dislocation of the joints, would accentuate the presence of the bones.

And, gruesomely, some of His bones would have been exposed by the scourging He'd received.

There was a prediction that not a bone of His would be broken (Psalm 34:20 & John 19:36). It was possible to drive the nails in such a way as to avoid breaking any bones.

You'd be hard-pressed to identify another form of execution that had all these elements.

No, David was definitely prophesying the Cross of Jesus Christ.

"For dogs have surrounded Me; The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me." Jews regularly called Gentiles "dogs," but I hardly think that this expression would ever be found on the lips of Jesus.

True, the Syrophonecian woman, who came seeking a healing from Jesus for her child, was referred to as a dog. But the word Jesus chose was one that described a cherished pet - not a mongrel.

This might be still another reference to demonic forces surrounding the Cross.

We don't really know what goes on in the realm we cannot see. We get an occasional glimpse of the angelic/demonic realm in the Bible:

- We know from Daniel that angels oppose each other.
- We know from the Revelation angels war against each other.
- We know angels wield swords.

Who can say what was happening, spiritually, to the sinless Son of God while He was surrounded by demons?

Psa 22:18 They divide My garments among them, And for My clothing they cast lots.

Most of the secular historical sources I consulted say this was **not** a regular custom. It was, quite simply, a prophecy that we see fulfilled at the Cross.

BTW: Christians cite this as a prohibition on gambling or games of chance. While I think gambling is stupid, and can be sin for individuals, casting lots was something believers did, with God's blessing.

Let's be careful the conclusions we draw; let's be thoughtful. Let's always first try to understand the Bible in its original context.

This scene of almost indescribable suffering and horror and shame suddenly has a declaration of hope:

Psa 22:19 But You, O LORD, do not be far from Me; O My Strength, hasten to help Me!

Psa 22:20 Deliver Me from the sword, My precious life from the power of the dog.

Psa 22:21 Save Me from the lion's mouth And from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered Me.

Since He died, physically, it seems that the "sword," the "power of the dog," the "lion's mouth," and the "horns of the wild oxen" must all refer to spiritual things, to spiritual foes, from whom He **was** delivered.

Jesus died, but His death, as we saw on Sunday, was a victory over death. The devil would have been better served keeping Jesus off of the Cross.

Indeed, as we've pointed out, Satan tried to kill Jesus in many other ways, throughout history, and during His lifetime.

Satan started by trying to prevent the promised Savior from being born:

- Perhaps thinking Adam and Eve's son, Abel, was the promised Seed, Satan incited Cain to kill his brother.
- Satan next tried to corrupt the human race during the times of Noah, by having demons produce unnatural offspring with human women.
- Satan tried genocide when Pharaoh ordered the midwives to kill the Jewish babies.
- The Book of Esther records a second attempt at genocide of the Jews.
- When Jesus was born, Satan incited King Herod to kill all the infants under two years of age.
- When Jesus began His public ministry, the crowd at His synagogue wanted to throw Him off a cliff.

Then He tempted Jesus to avoid the Cross - first, in the wilderness temptation by offering Jesus the kingdoms of the world

without having to die. Second, by inciting Peter to discourage Jesus from completing His mission.

Satan might have been hoping the Sanhedrin would stone Jesus for blasphemy; but they, by God's providence, urged Pilate to have Jesus crucified.

Having failed for some four thousand years to prevent the first coming of Jesus, he is trying to thwart His Second Coming, primarily by again seeking the genocide of all Jews.

According to the scholars, the last part of verse twenty-one breaks off from the rest and is a separate exclamation, "You have heard!"

Jesus was certain He'd been heard; and that His deliverance was certain.

From an earthly perspective, He was forsaken, abandoned, cursed.

Nothing could be further from the truth! God was, at that very moment, in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself.

Death was being defeated; the devil and his forces vanquished.

When you are suffering in any way... From an earthly perspective, you seem forsaken, abandoned, even cursed.

Something else is going on; something spiritual is always going on.

You must believe, in your heart, that God could never leave you; never forsake you.

Cry out, and believe, "You have heard!"