Psalm 22

Did God Abandon Jesus At The Cross?

"Now from the sixth hour until the ninth hour there was darkness over all the land. And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?' that is, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" (Matthew 27:45–46)

David Padfield

'Tis midnight; and, for others' guilt,
The Man of Sorrows weeps in blood;
Yet He that hath in anguish knelt,
Is not forsaken by His God.

William B. Tappan, 1822

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Abbreviations

Primary Sources

Ant.	*Jewish Antiquities*, by Flavius Josephus
b.	*Babylonian Talmud*
Ber.	Tractate *Berakhot* in the Talmud
J.W.	*Jewish War,* by Flavius Josephus
Ketub.	Tractate *Ketubbot* in the Talmud
m.	*The Mishnah*
Pesah.	Tractate *Pesahim* in the Talmud
Sanh.	Tractate *Sanhedrin* in the Talmud
Sheqal.	Tractate *Sheqalim* in the Mishnah
y.	*Jerusalem Talmud*

Translations of the Bible

CJB	Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
ESV	English Standard Version (2016)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible (2003)
JPSS	Jewish Publication Society Tanakh (1985)
NET	NET Bible (2019)
NETS	A New English Translation Of The Septuagint (2014)
NIV	New International Version (2011)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
RSV	Revised Standard Version (1971)

I have followed the guidelines provided in *The SBL Handbook of Style* as closely as possible. However, their handbook has not kept pace with electronic media sources as much as I would like, so I have adopted a system that allows serious students to find my sources with relative ease. In addition, SBL does not always adhere to the rules of modern typography, so for the sake of clean graphic design, I have also bent a few other rules.

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Introduction

I. The Old Testament contains between 250 and 300 prophecies concerning the Messiah's life, work, death, burial, resurrection, and reign.
   A. Some Old Testament passages are obviously direct predictive prophecy.
      1. A virgin would bear a child (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:22–23).
      2. The Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judea (Mic 5:2; Matt 2:5–6).
      3. A forerunner would prepare the way of the Lord (Isa 40:3; Matt 3:1–3).
   B. Other prophecies were not understood as such until they were fulfilled.
      1. "Out of Egypt, I have called my son" (Hos 11:1; Matt 2:14–15).
      2. Rachel weeping for her children (Jer 31:15; Matt 2:17–18).
      3. Galilee of the Gentiles would see a great light (Isa 9:1–2; Matt 4:13–16).
   C. Peter informs us that there were times when the Old Testament prophets "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow," and did not understand how or when their prophecies would be fulfilled (1 Pet 1:10–12).
      1. "Peter affirms that the prophets recognized that some of their prophecies applied to the Messiah who would suffer and be exalted, and that they knew that many details would make sense to people only once the details happened." (Walton and Keener, *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, on 1 Pet 1:12)
      2. "We need not think that the prophets foresaw the actual man Jesus. What they did foresee was that someday there would come one in whom their dreams and visions would all be fulfilled." (Barclay, *The Letters of James and Peter,* 209)
      3. Peter also affirmed that those prophets were not writing for their own benefit, but for the benefit of those who would be the recipients of the gospel.
      4. Even the angels of heaven "desired to look into" this mystery!

II. The last words of Jesus on the cross, as recorded in Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34, were, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"
   A. Jesus quoted these words from Psalm 22:1 at "about the ninth hour" (3:00 PM), after the three-hour period of darkness (Matt 27:46).
   B. Were the words of Psalm 22:1 predictive prophecy, or were they an expression of David's deep anguish as he penned them?
   C. Various theories have emerged to explain what Jesus intended to convey as He quoted this ancient psalm of David.
   D. Many have suggested that the Father in heaven "abandoned" or "turned His back" on His Son as Jesus died on the cross for the sins of all mankind.
   E. The usual explanation goes something like this: "As Jesus was on the cross, He took upon Himself the sins of all mankind. It was such a hideous sight that the heavenly Father darkened the skies to shield heaven from its view, and God turned His back on His own Son. This is the real agony of the cross."

1. This thought is reflected in the popular hymn *Ten Thousand Angels Cried,* written by David Patillo and made famous by LeAnn Rimes.
2. In describing the cross, the song says, "God turned His head away, He couldn't bear the sight, It must have looked like rain, When ten thousand angels cried."
3. "Jesus endured this suffering and abuse for three hours, from 9 A.M. until noon. Then, at noon an even worse torture fell upon Jesus. The Father turned his back on his own Son. The perfect communion of eternity past (cf. Matt. 11:27) was broken. The Father, in essence, had to say, 'I do not know you' to the Son (cf. 7:23; 25:12). The king had been betrayed and denied by Judas and all the rest of his friends, by the shepherds of his people, and by the Roman authorities. Now he was left alone by his own Father. At that point he began to bear the hell (separation from God) of punishment for a world of sins." (Weber, *Matthew,* 1.465)
4. "Jesus' loud shout (*My God...forsaken me*) is taken by some to mean that Jesus believed God had abandoned him at this moment. Others take into consideration the entire Psalm, especially verses 24 and 26, and see here the prayer of one who still trusts in God to vindicate him." (Newman and Stine, *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew,* on Matt 27:46)

F. John Calvin did not view this psalm as messianic, but instead explained it in its original context, with David as the sufferer, and then applied it to Christ (Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries,* on Ps 22:1).

G. I would like us to consider how Psalm 22 was understood by those who sang it for nearly 1,000 years before Christ came into the world, and then look at how Jesus used it on the cross.

H. As John Phillips has observed, we must "approach this psalm like Moses at the burning bush, feeling we should, as it were, remove our shoes for the place whereon we stand is holy ground" (Phillips, *Exploring Psalms,* 168).

Discussion

I. David's Lament

A. Psalm 22 begins with the anguish of a single individual, *seemingly abandoned* by God, yet concludes with a worldwide assembly bowing before God in worship.
   1. David might have penned this psalm in the Wilderness of Maon, while hiding from King Saul (1 Sam 23:25–29), or when he was fleeing from Absalom and sought refuge at Mahanaim (2 Sam 17).
   2. However, this psalm graphically describes a worse situation than David ever experienced.

B. The first stanza focuses on pain and trust (Ps 22:1–11).
   1. The writer is a despairing man who feels "forsaken" by God (Ps 22:1–5).
      a) "The psalmist, as a child in the presence of his father, pours out his heart. In the intensity of his suffering, there is no other recourse than to cast himself on God." (VanGemeren, *Psalms*, on Ps 22:1)
      b) Why has God "forsaken" him? No answer is given.

c) This is not the only time David felt as though God had "forgotten" him or "hid His face" from him (Ps 13:1; 10:11).
d) Throughout the Psalms, the word "forsaken" never conveys the idea that God had "abandoned" the righteous—only that His presence was removed or not felt (Ps 9:9–10; 37:28–29, 33; 71:10–11; 94:14).
e) David has cried out to God, but God has been silent (so far).
f) However, he knows that God is holy and worthy of praise.
g) His ancestors trusted in the Lord and were delivered when they cried out to Him (Ps 22:4–5).
h) "Here the Psalmist assigns the reason why God sitteth amidst the praises of the tribes of Israel. The reason is, because his hand had been always stretched forth to preserve his faithful people. David, as I have just now observed, gathers together the examples of all past ages, in order thereby to encourage, strengthen, and effectually persuade himself, that as God had never cast off any of his chosen people, he also would be one of the number of those for whom deliverance is securely laid up in the hand of God. He therefore expressly declares that he belongs to the offspring of those who had been heard, intimating by this that he is an heir of the same grace which they had experienced. He has an eye to the covenant by which God had adopted the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people. It would be of little consequence to know the varied instances in which God has exercised his mercy towards his own people, unless each of us could reckon himself among their number, as David includes himself in the Church of God. In repeating three times that the fathers had obtained deliverance by trusting, there is no doubt that with all modesty he intends tacitly to intimate that he had the same hope with which they were inspired, a hope which draws after it, as its effect, the fulfillment of the promises in our behalf." (Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries,* on Ps 22:4)
i) "The opening words of this psalm have become so familiar to us from Jesus' use of them (in an Aramaic version) from the cross that it is difficult for us to separate them from that much later context and read them as an integral part of Psalm 22. If we read these words *only* as words about Jesus, we ignore the original and continuing word of God to us this psalm in its entirety represents. These opening words encapsulate the thematic agony of the first two-thirds of this psalm." (Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1,* 413)

2. David was despised by his fellow men (Ps 22:6–11).
a) He felt like a "worm," a term used in Isaiah 41:14 to describe Israel as she was trampled underfoot by more powerful empires.
b) David was reproached, despised, and mocked.
c) Part of the mockery was that men admitted this man trusted in God, but took delight in what they perceived as God forsaking this righteous man.
d) However, David acknowledges that God took him "out of the womb," that is, God had been with him since before he was born (Ps 22:9–10).
e) David concludes that no one else can help him (Ps 22:11).

C. The second stanza focuses on pain and prayer (Ps 22:12–21).
   1. David compares his enemies to bulls, lions, and dogs (Ps 22:12–16).
      a) Bulls are strong, fierce, and known for their anger.
      b) Lions are loud, cruel, and can devour a man.
      c) Dogs are often prone to hunting in packs and attacking without warning.
      d) David's strength had vanished like poured-out water; his joints were racked with pain; his heart (courage) was like melted wax; he had lost his desire to resist; he was at the brink of death (Ps 22:14–15).
      e) "They pierced My hands and My feet" figuratively describes a tearing as if by animals (Ps 22:16).
      f) The original text of Psalm 22:16c ("They pierced My hands and My feet" in the NKJV, HCSB, NIV) is unclear, which has led translators to render this passage in various ways.
         (1) "Like a lion they pin my hands and feet…" (Ps 22:16 NET).
         (2) "My hands and feet have shriveled…" (Ps 22:16 NRSV).
         (3) "Like a lion [at] my hands and feet…" (Ps 22:16 CJB).
         (4) "Like lions [they maul] my hands and feet…" (Ps 22:16 JPSS).
         (5) "They gouged my hands and feet…" (Ps 22:16 NETS).
      g) "Now if the original psalm text had read 'they pierced my hands and feet,' then it is surprising that no evangelist cites this verse in their Passion narrative. Thus I suggest that we take it in its most natural sense and translate, 'like a lion they beset me, hands and feet,' that is, all around or completely. The image could be of hands and feet being gnawed or mauled. Since the lion metaphor had already been used, it is natural to see a development of it here." (Witherington III, *Psalms Old and New,* 75)
      h) "In Psalm 22, verse 17 of Jewish versions reads, 'Like a lion [at] my hands and feet,' while the corresponding verse 16 of Christian versions says, 'They pierced my hands and feet.' If this passage prophesies Yeshua's crucifixion, as Messianic Jews and Christians believe it does, the prophecy is certainly clearer in the Christian versions, since the *B'rit Hadashah* reports that Yeshua's hands and feet were nailed to the execution-stake (as the *CJB* calls the cross), but says nothing about lions at his hands and feet. How can two such different meanings arise from the same text? They don't; the texts are different. The Masoretic text has the Hebrew word *k'ari* (hrtf, 'like a lion'); while the Christian versions make use of the Septuagint, where the Greek word implies an underlying Hebrew text with the word *karu* (urf, 'they pierced'). The differences—the presence in the Masoretic Hebrew of the letter *alef* (t), and of the letter *yud* (h) instead of *vav* (u)- are both easily explainable as scribal errors (in one direction or the other)." (Stern, *Complete Jewish Bible Notes,* Introduction, § VIII, ¶ 6)

i) "*They have pierced* (16) or, simply, 'piercing', is the most likely translation of a problematic Hebrew word. A strong argument in its favour is that the LXX, compiled two centuries before the crucifixion, and therefore an unbiased witness, understood it so. All the major translations reject the Masoretic vowels (added to the written text in the Christian era) as yielding little sense here (see margin of RV, RSV, NEB), and the majority in fact agree with LXX. The chief alternatives (e.g., 'bound' or 'hacked off') solve no linguistic difficulties which 'pierced' does not solve, but avoid the apparent prediction of the cross by exchanging a common Hebrew verb (dig, bore, pierce) for hypothetical ones, attested only in Akkadian, Syriac and Arabic, not in biblical Hebrew." (Kidner, *Psalms 1–72: An Introduction and Commentary,* 125)

2. He was surrounded by trouble (Ps 22:17–19).
   a) His enemies considered him as good as dead.
   b) His enemies "are gloating over me in triumph" (Ps 22:17 NET).
   c) His enemies plundered his goods, casting lots to determine the share which belonged to each.
3. His prayer for deliverance (Ps 22:20–21).
   a) David prayed to God and was confident of His help (Ps 22:21).
   b) "As his miseries had reached the utmost height, and as he saw not even a single ray of hope to encourage him to expect deliverance, it is a wonderful instance of the power of faith, that he not only endured his afflictions patiently but that from the abyss of despair he arose to call upon God." (Calvin, *Calvin's Commentaries,* on Ps 22:19)

D. The third stanza expresses David's thanksgiving and praise to God in the light of answered prayer (Ps 22:22–31).
   1. "Having been isolated and abandoned, David now declares the wonders of God's name within the worshiping congregation (22:22–26) and then throws open the doors of the feast to people from every nation (22:27–31)." (Futato, "The Book of Psalms," *CBC*, 7.100)
   2. "The last third of the psalm stands in contrast to the first two-thirds, in that the first two-thirds includes much material that suggests hopelessness, but the last third is so confident of Yahweh's deliverance that it can speak of that deliverance as if it has already happened." (Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone,* 73)
   3. "The darkness which filled the worshipper's soul has vanished and, rejoicing with great joy, he begins to sing a song of thanksgiving. He has become assured that his prayer has been answered and that God has helped him. He also calls upon the congregation to praise God—which presupposes that the congregation, too, has satisfied itself about the actual giving of the divine help." (Weiser, *The Psalms,* 224)

4. After praying to God and being confident of His aid, David promises to praise God's name in the assembly (Ps 22:22)!
    a) The bulls, lions, and dogs would not be victorious!
    b) The crowd of angry men who gloated in his defeat was wrong!
    c) David would survive and praise God in the congregation of the righteous once again!
    d) After his deliverance, David realizes that God had *not* "hidden His face from Him" (Ps 22:24).
    e) Instead, "when he cried to Him, He heard."
5. In celebration, David promises to provide a feast for the poor (Ps 22:26).
6. He looked forward to the day when the whole world, "all the ends of the earth," would worship the Lord (Ps 22:27; cf. Isa 45:22).
7. David now saw the Lord as the King who ruled over the nations (Ps 22:28–31).

E. The Book of Psalms was the "hymn book" for Jews during the Old Testament age.
1. David wrote Psalm 22 nearly 1,000 years before the birth of Jesus Christ.
2. C. S. Lewis observed, "the Psalms are poems, and poems intended to be sung: not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons" (Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, 2).
3. Thus, Jews sang this psalm in public worship for nearly 1,000 years before Jesus quoted from it on the cross.
4. While the Synoptic Gospels all understood Psalm 22 to be a prophecy about the cross, there is scant evidence that Jews ever regarded it as messianic in character prior to the time of Jesus.
5. "Matthew 27:35ff.; Mark 15:34; John 19:24; and Heb 2:12 prove that Ps 22 has been interpreted in the Christian church from the beginning as a reference to Christ. On the other hand, there is no evidence in the older Jewish literature of the interpretation of Ps 22 as a reference to the Messiah." (Strack and Billerbeck, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash,* 2.660)
6. During the period of Rabbinic Judaism (*Talmudic Judaism*), which spanned from the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 to around AD 600, various rabbis applied Psalm 22 to either the nation of Israel or to Esther.
7. "Jewish tradition interprets this psalm as a lament by David over the future exile (Rashi), more specifically the threat against the Jews by Haman in the book of Esth. (various Rabbis). For that reason there is a custom to read it on Purim (Sephardic custom reads it on the Fast of Esther and on Purim)." (Berlin and Brettler, *The Jewish Study Bible,* 1290)

II. From The Upper Room To Calvary

A. On the Thursday evening before His betrayal, Christ partook of His last Passover meal with His disciples in an upper room somewhere in Jerusalem (Matt 26:26–29).
B. After the Last Supper, He walks through the Golden Gate, crosses through the Kidron Valley, illuminated by a full moon, and enters the Garden of Gethsemane to pray (Matt 26:36–39).

C. Judas arrived in the garden sometime after midnight, leading four groups of authorities to arrest Jesus (John 18:1–2).
   1. The "chief priests and elders of the people" (Matt 26:47).
      a) These chief priests were "those who belonged to the privileged families from which the high priests were usually taken" (Strack and Billerbeck, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Midrash,* 1.87).
      b) "The *chief priests* consisted of the present ruling high priest, those who had formerly occupied this high office, and other dignitaries from whose ranks the high priest was usually chosen" (Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew,* 166).
      c) "He assembles a meeting of the chief priests, which evidently would include the present and former high priests, the heads of the twenty-four main divisions of priests (cf. Luke 1:5, 8), and temple officers" (Turner, *Matthew*, 82).
      d) Joachim Jeremias devotes a great deal of time to proving that the phrase "chief priests" included not only the high priestly families, but also the captain of the temple, the director of the weekly course, the director of the daily course, the temple overseer, the treasurer of the temple (Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus,* 160–181).
   2. There was also "a great multitude with swords and clubs" (Matt 26:47).
      a) "Armed men sent from the local elite were probably the Levite temple guards..." (Walton and Keener, *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*, on Matt 26:47).
      b) "The rabble was predominantly composed of temple guards and various riff-raff" (Blomberg, *Matthew,* 398).
      c) "Levitical temple police and personal security of the chief priests and Sanhedrin carrying clubs would have made up another large detachment in the arresting crowd" (Wilkins, *Matthew, Mark, Luke,* 1.166–167).
   3. The servants of the high priest (Matt 26:51).
   4. At least some portion of a Roman cohort assisted (John 18:3, 12).
      a) The phrase "detachment of troops" is from the Greek word *speira*.
      b) "Concerning the various aspects of this band, first, the Greek *speiran*, rendered 'detachment' in the NRSV and NIV, is normally used to refer to a cohort of six hundred Roman soldiers who would usually be under the command of a senior officer such as a *chiliarchos* (note 18:12), but it could also refer to a smaller band such as a *maniple* or detachment of about two hundred soldiers." (Borchert, *John 12–21,* 217–218)

D. Jesus underwent a preliminary hearing before Annas, the former high priest (John 18:12–14, 19–23).
   1. Annas was no longer in office but was still a powerful and influential "behind the scenes" figure.
   2. Like politicians of our day, he retained his title long after he left office, which explains how Luke 3:2 can speak of the time when "Annas and Caiaphas were high priests."
   3. Apparently, the Roman soldiers were now allowed to return to their barracks, for their work was done.

E. After this preliminary hearing, "Annas sent Him bound to Caiaphas the high priest" (John 18:24; cf. Matt 26:57; Mark 14:53; Luke 22:54).
   1. This event took place at the "high priest's house" (Luke 22:54), not in the courtrooms on the Temple Mount.
   2. While in the house of Caiaphas, "the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death" (Matt 26:59).
   3. According to Matthew's account, it appears that many members of the Great Sanhedrin were present at the house of Caiaphas, possibly a group consisting primarily of the Sadducees.
   4. During this mockery of a trial, our Lord was struck, beaten, spat upon, and mocked (Matt 26:67–68) while blindfolded (Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63–64).

F. Very early on Friday morning, Jesus was formally condemned by the Great Sanhedrin (Matt 27:1).
   1. Mark tells us "the chief priests consulted with the elders and scribes and the whole council," and plotted to put Jesus to death (Mark 15:1).
   2. Jesus had been condemned by the "whole Sanhedrin" (Mark 15:1 HCSB).
   3. Luke tells us that this part of the trial took place in the formal meeting place of the Great Sanhedrin (Luke 22:66).
      a) However, the Romans had taken away the right of capital punishment from the Jews (John 18:31).
      b) "Forty years before the destruction of the Temple the right to judge capital cases was withdrawn…" (y. *Sanh*. 1.1, 18a).
      c) Therefore, after He was condemned to death by the Great Sanhedrin, "the whole multitude of them arose and led Him to Pilate" (Luke 23:1).

G. After His preliminary hearing before Pilate, Jesus was then taken to Herod Antipas, the tetrarch of Judea (Luke 23:5–11).
   1. Jesus remained silent before Herod (cf. Isa 53:7), but "the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him" (Luke 23:10).
   2. He is then sent back to Pilate.

H. Pilate told the chief priests and rulers of the Jews that he found "no fault" in Jesus and wanted to release Him (Luke 23:13–16).

I. But the "voices of these men and of the chief priests prevailed," and Pilate condemned Jesus to be crucified (Matt 27:26; Luke 23:23–25; Matt 27:26; Mark 15:15; John 19:16).

J. Before His crucifixion, Jesus was *scourged* (Matt 27:26; Mark 15:15).
   1. In the Roman Empire, *scourging* (also known as *flagellation*) was a common preliminary punishment before crucifixion, intended to weaken the condemned, inflict severe pain, and serve as a public humiliation.
   2. The scourging was typically conducted by Roman soldiers or trained *lictors* (official attendants to magistrates), under the supervision of a centurion.
   3. The process involved stripping the prisoner naked, binding their hands to a low pillar or post to bend their back forward, and then flogging them with a specialized whip known as a *flagrum* or *flagellum*.

4. This whip typically consisted of a wooden handle with multiple leather thongs embedded with sharp objects such as iron balls, bones, lead weights, or metal hooks to lacerate the flesh.
5. The flogging targeted the back, shoulders, buttocks, and legs, causing deep contusions, lacerations, and profuse bleeding.
6. The third-century church historian Eusebius of Caesarea said that in a scourging, "the bystanders were struck with amazement when they saw them lacerated with scourges even to the innermost veins and arteries, so that the hidden inward parts of the body, both their bowels and their members, were exposed to view" (Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History,* 4Euseb. 15:4).
7. During the siege of Jerusalem by Titus, Josephus records one man who "was whipped till his bones were laid bare" (Josephus, *J.W.* 6:304).
8. David felt as if he were "a worm, and no man" (Ps 22:6), which reminds us of Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah that "His visage was marred more than any man" (Isa 52:14).
9. If there was ever a time a condemned man would fight his captors, being led into the presence of the column and flagrum would be it!
10. Even at this point, Jesus could have called for "more than twelve legions of angels" to save Him (Matt 26:53), but He chose not to do so.

K. After the soldiers mock and scourge Jesus, He is led to "the place called Calvary," and "there they crucified Him" (Luke 23:33; Matt 27:31; Mark 15:20; John 19:17).

L. Jesus was placed on the cross about the third hour (9:00 AM) and died shortly after the ninth hour (3:00 PM) (Mark 15:25, 34–37).

III. The Crucifixion Through The Eyes Of The Jewish Leaders

A. When the procession finally arrived at Golgotha, someone offered Jesus "sour wine mingled with gall to drink" (Matt 27:33–34).
1. This mixed wine apparently served as a pain-killing narcotic, and Jesus did not want His mind or words to be clouded while on the cross, so He refused it.
2. According to the *Babylonian Talmud,* when a man was on his way to be executed, "they give him a glass of wine containing a grain of frankincense, so as to distract him, as it is said, 'Give strong drink to him who is ready to perish and wine to the bitter in soul' (Pro. 31:6)" (b. *Sanh.* 43a).
3. It is also possible that this "sour wine mingled with gall" was offered to Jesus by the Roman soldiers.
4. "Because crucifixion was designed to inflict maximum pain, the gall, or myrrh, was not offered as an act of mercy on the part of the soldiers. It was simply used to stupefy a victim to keep him from struggling violently as the nails were driven into his hands and feet." (MacArthur, *Matthew 24–28,* 253–254)
5. While reflecting on how potent—and gruesome—the reality of crucifixion was to those who had seen it firsthand, C. S. Lewis wrote, "It did not become a frequent motive of Christian art until the generations which had seen real crucifixions were all dead" (Lewis, *Letters to Malcom: Chiefly on Prayer,* 85)

B. Though none of the Gospel writers explicitly state it, our Lord's hands and feet were nailed to the cross.
   1. However, the nailing to the cross is forcibly implied by our Lord's own words after His resurrection (Luke 24:39–40), the words of Thomas (John 20:25), and implied in the teachings of Paul (Col 2:14).
      a) Under normal circumstances, once a condemned man reached the execution site, he was thrown to the ground, his arms stretched along the *patibulum* (cross-beam), and spikes (5 to 7 inches long) were driven through the wrists (between the radius and ulna bones) or forearms.
      b) The soldiers tried to avoid nailing the spikes through major arteries, but they caused excruciating pain and nerve damage.
   2. What did the chief priests think as they watched the Roman soldiers drive the nails into our Lord's hands and feet?
      a) Did they remember the words of Psalm 22:16?
      b) I highly doubt it.
      c) They undoubtedly had seen this happen dozens, if not hundreds, of times before—nailing a condemned man to a cross was to be expected.
   3. Modern readers are often unaware of the prevalence of crucifixion during the days of the Roman Empire.
      a) Crucifixion as a form of capital punishment had been used for centuries in nearly all of the areas that would later fall under the dominion of Rome.
      b) "Crucifixion was and remained a political and military punishment. While among the Persians and the Carthaginians it was imposed primarily on high officials and commanders, as on rebels, among the Romans it was inflicted above all on the lower classes, i.e. slaves, violent criminals and the unruly elements in rebellious provinces, not least in Judaea." (Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 86–87)
      c) In 4 BC, the Roman governor Quintilius Varus crucified 2,000 Jews on the hills around Jerusalem for rebellion (Josephus, *Ant.* 17.295; *J.W.* 2.75)
      d) Historical sources suggest that a very large number of Jews were crucified during and after the Second Jewish Revolt (also known as the Bar Kokhba Revolt, 132–136 AD), especially during the brutal suppression by the Roman Emperor Hadrian.
      e) "In Judea countless thousands went to the cross during the wars against Rome. Hadrian is said to have crucified 500 a day after the second revolt." (Connolly, *The Jews in the Time of Jesus,* 51)
      f) Appian of Alexandria (c. 95–c 165 AD) was a Greek historian of Roman history who lived during the height of the Roman Empire.
         (1) Appian claims that after the slave rebellion led by Spartacus (also known as the Third Servile War, 73–71 BC) was put down, 6,000 men were "crucified along the whole road from Capua to Rome" (Appian, *Civil Wars* 1.120).
         (2) This mass crucifixion was carried out along the Appian Way (Via Appia), stretching from Capua to Rome, a distance of about 120 miles, and was intended as a public warning.

4. The Roman Stoic philosopher, Seneca the Younger (05 BC–AD 65), suggested that suicide was preferable to crucifixion.
    a) He argued that prolonged suffering, such as that caused by crucifixion, was so severe and degrading that a man would be justified in committing suicide beforehand to escape it.
    b) "Can anyone be found who would prefer wasting away in pain, dying limb by limb, or letting out his life drop by drop, rather than expiring once for all? Can any man be found willing to be fastened to the accursed tree, long sickly, already deformed, swelling with ugly tumours on chest and shoulders, and draw the breath of life amid long-drawn-out agony? I think he would have many excuses for dying even before mounting the cross!" (Seneca, *Moral Epistles* 101.12–14)

C. The first words of Jesus from the cross were "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do" (Luke 23:34).
    1. It is entirely possible that Jesus uttered these words as the nails were being driven into His hands and feet.
    2. On the other hand, unlike many modern paintings depict, Roman crosses were not very tall; the feet of the victim may have hung just two feet above the ground, which suggests the soldiers would have been able to hear our Lord's prayer for their forgiveness after He had been "lifted up" (John 12:32).
    3. As the Jewish leaders were gloating over their victory, I don't imagine they had ever heard words like this coming from the mouth of one being crucified.
    4. As the temple police had told the chief priests and Pharisees on a different occasion, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" (John 7:45–46).
    5. "Christ's words must have had an electrifying effect. These people had seen many criminals crucified. They had seen them resist their executioners and attempt to escape. They had heard them howl and scream with pain. They had listened to them curse their tormenters and snarl at them in impotent rage as they spat at them. What a different scene met their eyes on Calvary! Throughout his sufferings, Jesus maintained a majestic calm." (Gorman, *The Last Hours Of Jesus,* 232–233)

D. Shortly after Jesus was nailed to the cross, the Roman soldiers "divided His garments, casting lots for them to determine what every man should take" (Mark 15:24; Matt 27:35; Luke 23:34; John 19:23–24).
    1. Matthew says this was done "that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet," and then quotes the words of David from Psalm 22:18 (Matt 27:35).
        a) Did the casting of lots for His garments cause the Jewish leaders to recall Psalm 22:18?
        b) Again, I doubt it, for the dividing of the garments of a condemned man was a common practice.
    2. The Roman historian Tacitus informs us that "people sentenced to death forfeited their property" (Tacitus, *Annals* 6.29).
    3. "Romans completely stripped the person being executed. Roman law permitted the execution squad any minor possessions the executed person carried…" (Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament,* 121).

4. The soldiers who were gambling for His garments "also mocked Him, coming and offering Him sour wine, and saying, 'If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself'" (Luke 23:36–37).
5. "He was aware that people stared and gloated over him. Here is the shame and indignity Christ felt because of his nakedness before the crowd, his mother, and the other women." (Lawson, *Psalms 1–75,* 117–118)

E. Jesus was crucified between two thieves (Matt 27:38; Luke 23:33; John 19:18).
1. Mark says this was done to fulfill prophecy (Mark 15:27–28).
2. Did our Lord's being "numbered with the transgressors" make the religious leaders think of the "suffering servant" of Isaiah 53:12?
3. Again, I doubt it.
4. Groups of men were often crucified together, and often in far larger groups.

F. As Jesus was hanging on the cross, "those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads" (Matt 27:39–40; Mark 15:29–30).
1. The writer of Hebrews tells us that Jesus "suffered outside the gate" (Heb 13:12), so "those who passed by" would have included those visitors coming to Jerusalem for the Passover.
2. An anonymous second or third-century Roman writer said that "When we crucify criminals the most frequented roads are chosen, where the greatest number of people can look and be seized by this fear. For every punishment has less to do with the offense than with the example." (Pseudo-Quintilian, *Declamationes Minores* 274.13 (LCL translation))

G. Without doubt, the vilest of those who mocked Jesus at the cross were the chief priests, scribes, and elders (Matt 27:41–43; Mark 15:31–32; Luke 23:35).
1. As David felt rejected by men (Ps 22:6–8), so did Jesus (Isa 53:3).
2. The religious leaders taunted Jesus with the words of Psalm 22:8, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him" (Matt 27:43).
   a) Why did they quote Psalm 22:8?
   b) Matthew records that it was because Jesus said, "I am the Son of God."
3. "The scorn of man was shown in the ill treatment that Jesus suffered at the hands of satanic men who spit upon him (Matt. 26:67), struck him (Matt. 26:67–68), spoke blasphemous words against him (Luke 22:65), flogged him (Matt. 27:26; Mark 15:15; Luke 23:16; John 19:1), and beat him with a staff (Matt. 27:30). The hatred and reproach shown by those who crucified Jesus were prophesied by Isaiah (Isa. 53:3–4, 7–8)." (Lawson, *Psalms 1–75,* 116)
4. Truly, a "gang of evil men" stood at the foot of the cross (Ps 22:16 NET).
5. As David had said centuries before, these enemies were "gloating over me in triumph" (Ps 22:17 NET).
6. "By the public display of a naked victim at a prominent place—at a crossroads, in the theatre, on high ground, at the place of his crime—crucifixion also represented his uttermost humiliation, which had a numinous dimension to it. With Deuteronomy 21.23 in the background, the Jew in particular was very aware of this." (Hengel, *Crucifixion*, 87)

H. To the penitent thief, Jesus said: "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43).
   1. I imagine the Jewish leaders met these words with scorn.
   2. How could a man dying on a Roman cross hope to offer anything to another?
   3. Here we see the "friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matt 11:19) in action.
   4. The chief priests had probably never considered how the "suffering servant" of Isaiah 53 would make "intercession for the transgressors" (Isa 53:12).
   5. Amazingly, some of these men had witnessed Jesus' miracles—including raising the dead—yet remained unbelievers, whereas the penitent thief on the cross believed while seeing Jesus crucified.
   6. "Some saw Jesus raise the dead, and did not believe. The robber sees Him being put to death, and yet believes" (Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke,* 535).

I. As Jesus hung upon the cross, His mother stood nearby (John 19:25).
   1. We need to see Mary like we would any normal mother—weeping uncontrollably as she stands at the foot of the cross watching her Son die.
   2. Her Son, naked and writhing in excruciating pain, was close enough to look into her eyes.
   3. Jesus says, "Woman, behold your son!" and then, to grief-stricken John, "Behold your mother!" (John 19:26–27).
   4. If Jesus repeated all of Psalm 22 on the cross, do you suppose He looked at Mary as He quoted Psalm 22:9–10?

IV. From Noon Till Three

A. A supernatural darkness covered the entire land from the sixth hour until the ninth hour (noon to 3:00 PM) (Matt 27:45).
   1. This could not have been a result of a solar eclipse since the Jewish Passover always occurred during the time of the full moon.
   2. The gospel records are silent as to what happened during most of the three hours of darkness.
   3. "From nine o'clock until noon Calvary had been a very busy place. The soldiers had performed their various tasks, as was shown in verses 33–38. Bypassers had blasphemed. Chief priests, scribes, and elders had scoffed. Robbers had reviled, though one of them had repented. Jesus had uttered his first three words. Then, at twelve o'clock, something of a very dramatic character takes place. Suddenly the land becomes dark. Cf. Amos 8:9. The very fact that this darkness is mentioned shows that it must have been intense and unforgettable. Moreover, it occurred when least expected, at high noon, and lasted three hours." (Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew,* 969)
   4. The *Babylonian Talmud* cites numerous rabbis who clearly viewed eclipses, especially the darkening of the sun, as omens of divine judgment, particularly associated with grave sins (b. *Sukkah* 29a).
      a) Rabbi Meir taught, "When the lights of heaven are in eclipse, it is a bad omen for Israel, for they are used to blows. It is to be compared to a teacher who came into the school house and said, 'Bring me the strap.' Now who gets worried? The one who is used to being strapped.'"

b) Another rabbi said, "When the sun is in eclipse, it is a bad omen for the nations of the world."
c) Another rabbi said, "When the moon is in eclipse, it is a bad omen for Israel, since the gentiles reckon their calendar by the sun, and Israel by the moon."

5. In the Old Testament era, darkness often accompanied God's judgment.
   a) For example, the ninth plague inflicted on Egypt was three days of darkness (Exod 10:21–23).
   b) In the days of the prophet Amos, God spoke of a day when He would make "the sun go down at noon, and I will darken the earth in broad daylight…" (Amos 8:9; 5:18, 20).
   c) As Joel urged a sinful nation to repent, he spoke of the day of God's judgment as a day when "The heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness" (Joel 2:10).
   d) Zephaniah had also spoken of the "day of the LORD" as "a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness" (Zeph 1:14–15).
6. Did the chief priests think about those past judgments of God as they gazed upon the bleeding body of Jesus as He hung upon the cross?
   a) Did they consider the sins *they* had committed by condemning an innocent man to death?
   b) Or, did they think this darkness might have been God's stamp of approval for their actions?
   c) After all, in their minds, they were silencing a blasphemer!

B. After six hours on the cross, Jesus spoke His final words at "about the ninth hour" (3:00 PM) (Matt 27:45–46; Mark 15:34).
1. The Law of Moses required the sacrifice of two lambs every day—one in the morning and one in the afternoon (Exod 29:38–39; cf. 2 Chr 13:11).
2. Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC–AD 50) said, "it is commanded that every day the priests should offer up two lambs, one at the dawn of day, and the other in the evening; each of them being a sacrifice of thanksgiving; the one for the kindnesses which have been bestowed during the day, and the other for the mercies which have been vouchsafed in the night, which God is incessantly and uninterruptedly pouring upon the race of men" (Philo, *Laws* 1:169).
3. At the temple in Jerusalem, the afternoon sacrifice "was slaughtered at half after the eighth hour [after dawn, about 2:30 p.m.] and offered up at half after the ninth hour [about 3:30 p.m.]" (b. *Pesah.* 5:1, 58a).
4. Josephus says that the afternoon sacrifice was offered "about the ninth hour" (Josephus, *Ant.* 14.65).
5. Therefore, at the same time the priests at the temple were offering the afternoon sacrifice, Jesus was making those sacrifices obsolete by His death on the cross (Heb 10:12–13).

C. When Jesus cried out, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" quoting Psalm 22:1 (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34), to whom was He speaking?
   1. Was He crying out to His Father in desperation because He thought the Father had abandoned Him?
      a) Was Jesus full of doubt and confusion in this dark hour?
      b) Did the One who had been with the Father from all eternity suddenly forget God's eternal plan when He asked, "*Why* have You forsaken Me?"
      c) Did Jesus forget how He had taught His disciples, "I lay down My life that I may take it again" (John 10:17–18)?
      d) Did Jesus forget how Psalm 22 turned out?
      e) David, while still suffering, rejoiced in God, "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" (Ps 22:24).
   2. Those who teach that God "abandoned" Jesus at the cross and "turned His back on Him" often appeal to passages that speak of God "hiding His face from sin," such as Isaiah 59:2 or Habakkuk 1:13.
      a) Those passages speak of sin creating a barrier between God and His people in general.
      b) However, Isaiah, in the "suffering servant" passage, talks explicitly about Christ's death on the cross and says that God "shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied" (Isa 53:10–12).
      c) Instead of "turning His back" on Jesus at the cross, God would both *see* and *be satisfied* by His death.
   3. The Synoptic Gospels all emphasize that Jesus spoke His final words "with a loud voice" (Matt 27:50; Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46).
      a) Did He speak "with a loud voice" for the benefit of His Father in heaven, or to ensure that the Jewish leaders would hear and remember His words?
      b) Did these words make the Jewish leaders consider Isaiah 53:4–5, "Yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities…"?
      c) Jesus showed His faith in the Father in these dark hours.
      d) When our Lord "offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death," the fact that He "was heard because of His godly fear" (Heb 5:7) proves that the Father had not "turned His back on Him."
      e) "What we are seeing in the words of Jesus is his humanity. He was experiencing what most of us face to a lesser degree in our lives: a moment when the silence of God is so deafening that we feel forsaken by him." (Hamilton, *24 Hours That Changed the World*, 109)

f) "In some sense Jesus had to be cut off from the favor of and fellowship with the Father that had been his eternally, because he was bearing the sins of his people and therefore enduring God's wrath (cf. Isa. 53:6, 10; Hab. 1:13; Rom. 3:25; 2 Cor. 5:21; Gal. 3:13; 1 John 2:2). And yet, in quoting Ps. 22:1 Jesus probably has in mind the remainder of the psalm as well, which moves on to a cry of victory (Ps. 22:21–31); and he expresses faith, calling God 'my God.' Surely he knows why he is dying, for this was the purpose of his coming to earth (cf. Matt. 16:21; 20:18–19, 28). And surely his cry, uttered with a loud voice, is expressing, not bewilderment at his plight, but witness to the bystanders, and through them to the world, that he was experiencing God-forsakenness not for anything in himself but for the salvation of others." (Dennis and Grudem, eds., *The ESV Study Bible,* on Matt 27:46)

g) In the impassioned words of Charles H. Spurgeon, "He knows the Lord to be the all-sufficient support and succor of his spirit, and therefore appeals to him in the agony of grief, but not in the misery of doubt" (Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David,* on Ps 22:1).

h) "Jesus was not abandoned by God in the sense that God was not present at his execution. God was there all right, as is implied by the fact that Jesus prays; you can't address someone who has gone off. God is watching steadfastly as Jesus is executed, suffering as profoundly in his spirit as Jesus is suffering in body and spirit. Indeed, it is hard to imagine the depth of the agony involved in watching your son be executed when you could stop it. As some of the witnesses at the execution declare, it would be appropriate for God to rescue Jesus if Jesus is really God's son. But God doesn't do so. God listens to Jesus asking, 'Why have you abandoned me?' and does nothing. God's abandonment lies not in going away but in being present and yet doing nothing." (Goldingay, *Psalms for Everyone,* 70)

4. Christians often forget that Jesus was a *rabbi*, and He taught as such (Matt 26:25, 49; Mark 9:5; 11:21; 14:45; John 1:38, 49; 3:2, 26; 4:31; 6:25; 9:2; 11:8).
   a) Jewish rabbis would often employ a *remez* in their teaching.
   b) Remez is the practice of mentioning a keyword or phrase in a teaching that would "hint" at a passage from the Hebrew Scriptures.
   c) The assumption was that the audience would know its broader meaning and context from the Old Testament and import that context into the current teaching moment to add greater significance and clarity.
   d) "*Remez* is a Semitic word meaning 'hinted meaning' or a harkening back to something that needs no further elaboration because the hearers all know its obvious context. Since most first-century observant Jewish young men had memorized much of the Hebrew Scriptures at the local synagogue school as part of their childhood education, rabbis were able to speak and teach in this *remez* (shorthand) manner because everyone knew the complete (longhand) version of the portion of Scripture being referenced." (Greenwold, *Encounters With Jesus,* 9)

5. Matthew and Mark record Jesus quoting Psalm 22:1 while on the cross.
   a) Some authors suggest that Jesus quoted all of Psalm 22 from the cross.
   b) While this is possible, it is highly improbable due to the difficulty individuals had in breathing while nailed to a Roman cross.
   c) A more likely scenario is that Jesus quoted the first few lines, knowing that a Jewish audience would understand that one must consider the entire passage in context.
   d) "The ideas that Christ spoke aloud the entire psalm, perhaps also the following psalms, or that he spoke aloud only the first line and silently went through the rest, are without support and destroy the force of Christ's cry." (Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Matthew's Gospel 15–28,* 2228)
   e) "In Judaism, when a Bible verse is cited its entire context is implied, if appropriate. Thus Yeshua refers all of Psalm 22 to himself; other of its verses are cited at 27:35, 27:39, Yn 19:28 and MJ 2:12." (Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary,* on Matt 27:46)
   f) "On the affirmative side we can definitely point out that in New Testament times for one to cite the opening words of an Old Testament passage such as Psalm 22 was equivalent to citing the entire passage. We can be sure that these words of Jesus would have been understood by His disciples as equivalent to His saying, 'Remember the 22nd Psalm.' Christ's enemies had just quoted another saying from this Psalm in taunting Him, 'He trusted in God, let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God' (Matthew 27:43; quoting Psalm 22:8). This fact would give added weight to Jesus' citing this Psalm." (Buswell, *A Systematic Theology of the Christian Religion,* 2.68)
   g) "The best-known connection between Psalm 22 and the passion narrative is Jesus' great cry, 'Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani,' a quotation of the prayer's first sentence (Mark 15:34; Matt. 27:46). But it is not just the opening words that are involved. Citing the first words of a text was, in the tradition of the time, a way of identifying an entire passage." (Mays, *Psalms*, 105)
   h) "The opening words of the psalm on the lips of Jesus on the cross point us, therefore, to the almost unbearable tension tearing apart one wrestling with both the closeness of his relationship with his heavenly Father and the grim darkness of evil, suffering, and alienation. We may never be able fully to understand the intensity of that darkness, but the psalm in its entirety was surely there. Through the darkness and through death, God's purposes were to be fulfilled." (Davidson, *The Vitality of Worship: A Commentary on Psalms,* 82)

i) "***Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani*** is a quote from Ps 22:1 in the Aramaic language Jesus commonly spoke. Matthew's crucifixion scene has already alluded to this psalm several times (27:35, 39, 43). In quoting Ps 22, Jesus expresses intense suffering. He identifies himself with the psalmist, who was ridiculed and abused by his enemies and felt as if God had abandoned him. However, the psalmist goes on to express tremendous trust in God in the midst of this trial, confident that God will rescue him. By quoting the opening line of this psalm, Jesus evokes the whole of Ps 22, which describes God's rescue of his suffering righteous one. Therefore, Jesus' words **My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?** do not represent despair but anticipate the confident hope of the suffering psalmist that God will rescue him and vindicate him in the end." (Mitch and Sri, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 360)

D. John saw Christ's thirst as the fulfillment of Scripture (John 19:28–29), which can hardly refer to any other passage than Psalm 22:15.
   1. Earlier that day, Jesus had rejected the "sour wine mingled with gall" (Matt. 27:34), as it was an analgesic and might have clouded His judgment.
   2. The "sour wine" offered in Matthew 27:48 "refers to cheap wine that was called in Latin *posca*, a cheap vinegar wine diluted heavily with water. It was the drink of slaves and soldiers, and was probably there for the soldiers who had performed the crucifixion." (Harris, *The NET Bible Notes,* on Matt 27:48)
   3. Apparently, Jesus had not tasted a drop of water since He partook of the Passover meal with His disciples the night before.
   4. After six hours on the cross, when Jesus said, "I thirst," did the religious leaders think that request was a fulfillment of Psalm 22:15?
   5. Did they consider His thirst to be a fulfillment of Psalm 69:21 ("They also gave me gall for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink")?
   6. Again, I doubt it.
   7. Any man who had been beaten, scourged, and hung on a cross for six hours would be thirsty!

E. With His final breath, Jesus once again pushed against the nails with His feet and cried out with a loud voice, "Father, 'into Your hands I commit My spirit.' Having said this, He breathed His last" (Luke 23:46).
   1. Our Lord borrowed these words from Psalm 31:5, another psalm of David.
   2. When David uttered those words a thousand years before, he was expressing his total trust in God.
   3. Though the sun was still darkened, God was still present.
   4. "Jesus echoes Ps 31:5; a Jewish tradition says that this prayer was recited during the evening offering, roughly the time that Jesus died" (Walton and Keener, eds., *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible,* on Luke 23:46).
   5. Rabbinic Judaism of a later age suggests that this plea from Psalm 31:5 be used as an evening prayer upon one's bed as you commit yourself into God's care as you sleep (b. *Ber.* 5a).

6. "To commit one's 'spirit' to God is not simply to trust for physical deliverance of the physical being or *nepeš*, but it is to make the ultimate surrender of the very animating force of life into the care of the God from whom it comes and who may sustain or remove it as he pleases. The psalmist's act of commitment, coming as it does at the end of the opening plea, reflects complete surrender of self-control and submission to God's will." (Wilson, *Psalms Volume 1,* 530)
7. However, Jesus did not quote the second half of Psalm 31:5, where David said, "You have redeemed me, O LORD God of truth," for as the sinless Son of God, He needed no redemption.

F. When Jesus breathed His final breath, "the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split" (Matt 27:51).
   1. Were any of the religious leaders still standing near the cross when this happened, or had they gone back into the city to observe the afternoon sacrifice?
   2. It is roughly six-tenths of a mile between the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the Dome of the Rock (the presumed locations of Calvary and the temple, respectively), which is about a ten- to twelve-minute walk.
   3. Regardless of where they were, they must have felt the earthquake!
   4. Furthermore, what did they think when they heard the veil of the temple had been torn "from top to bottom" (Matt 27:51)?
      a) The *Babylonian Talmud* claims, "There were thirteen curtains in the second Temple, seven for the seven gates, one for the entrance to the entry, one for the entrance to the porch, two at the entrance of the holy place, and two above them, corresponding to them on the second floor…" (b. *Ketub.* 106a)
      b) While the temple had many veils, by referring to "the veil of the temple," Matthew implies the veil that separated the Holy Place from the Holy of Holies (cf. Heb 10:19–20).
      c) Josephus describes this elaborate "Babylonian curtain" and says it was sixty feet high and thirty feet wide (Josephus, *J.W.* 5.212–219).
      d) The *Mishnah* claims that this veil was "a handbreadth thick," which would be 2.5 to 4 inches thick, and when it needed to be cleaned, it took "three hundred priests (to) immerse it" (m. *Sheqal*. 8:5).
      e) "Perhaps the priest, who offered the incense that evening, was in the Temple at the very moment when this miracle happened: and when he went out amazed to the people, and should tell them, *The veil of the Temple is rent* it would easily be understood of a passage broken into the Holy of Holies by some as astonishing and miraculous rending of the hangings." (Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the Gospels From the Talmud and Hebraica,* on Matt 27:51).
      f) The tearing of the veil separating the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple demonstrated that "a new and living way" (Heb 10:20) would provide access to God for all mankind.

g) "When Jesus died everything the Old Testament sacrifices pointed to was fulfilled. There was no need for further sacrifices, and the way to God was open for all who would put their trust in Jesus. God showed this in a dramatic way by tearing the veil." (Boice, *The Triumph of the King,* 624)
h) However, for the moment, only the temple aristocracy would be aware of this dramatic event, but they would have been unaware that this event coincided with the death of Jesus.

V. "It Is Finished"

A. The last words of Jesus on the cross in John 19:30 are, "It is finished!"
   1. In Psalm 22:31, the final phrase is "He has done this."
   2. This English phrase in Psalm 22:31 is from the Hebrew word *asah,* and its verb form is "perfect 3rd masculine singular," which means that the other way to translate it is, "It is finished!"
   3. Matthew and Mark quote the first verse of Psalm 22, and John records the last!
B. Jesus quotes the beginning *and* end of Psalm 22, and any good Jewish audience would understand that you need to consider the whole Psalm in context.
C. Christ's words on the cross should have caused the jeering crowds below Him to realize that the Father had not abandoned His Son!
D. "*It is finished* is in English three words; but in Greek it is one — *Tetelestai* — as it would also be in Aramaic. And *tetelestai* is the victor's shout; it is the cry of all those who have completed their task; it is the cry of those who have won through the struggle; it is the cry of those who have come out of the dark into the glory of the light, and who have grasped the crown. So, Jesus died a victor with a shout of triumph on his lips." (Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 2.431–432)
E. "In the hour when he seemed forsaken by God Jesus remained faithful by uttering the opening words of this psalm whilst he was enduring the agony of the Cross; by constant prayer he overcame the grievous hour of his trial. Guided by the psalm, he entered upon the way which led him through his most bitter Passion, but ended in the triumph of faith and in the victory of the Kingdom of God." (Weiser, *The Psalms,* 226)
F. "He did not whisper, 'It is finished,' as one who is battered to his knees and forced to admit defeat. He shouted it like a victor who has won his last engagement with the enemy and brought a tremendous task to triumphant conclusion. 'Finished!' was the cry of the Christ, crucified yet victorious." (Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke,* on Luke 23:44–49)

VI. The Sun Starts Shining Again Over Jerusalem

A. Mark informs us that a Roman centurion was facing our Lord ("stood opposite Him") as Jesus breathed His last breath (Mark 15:39).
   1. Upon hearing the final words of Jesus, the centurion cried out, "Truly this Man was the Son of God!"
   2. This centurion, a hardened military veteran, must have witnessed many crucifixions during his long military career, but he had never seen one like this.
   3. Without the benefit of Old Testament prophecy, without seeing the miracles or hearing the teachings of Jesus, this pagan was able to deduce His true identity by the events he witnessed at the cross.

4. In all likelihood, this centurion had been with Jesus since the Jewish leaders had "delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor" (Matt 27:2).
   a) If so, he was there in Pilate's judgment hall when Jesus had proclaimed, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36).
   b) He would have heard Pilate repeatedly pronounce that he thought Jesus was innocent of any crime (John 18:38; 19:4, 6).
   c) He would have accompanied Jesus as He was sent to Herod Antipas, and marveled at how He kept silent while "the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him" (Luke 23:10).
5. At the very least, since the centurion was in charge of the execution squad, he was present when Jesus was scourged (Matt 27:26).
   a) He had witnessed his soldiers humiliate, belittle, and degrade Jesus, even to the point of bowing before Him in mockery after placing a crown of thorns on His precious head (Matt 27:27–30).
   b) Of course, he was unaware of Isaiah's prophecy about the Messiah: "I *gave* My back to those who struck Me, and My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting" (Isa 50:6).
      (1) "The verb **gave** indicates his willingness to undergo suffering. It does not mean that the servant literally offered or exposed his back so that the people who opposed him could strike him there." (Ogden and Sterk, *A Handbook on Isaiah,* 14223)
      (2) "The reaction of the Servant is amazing, for he voluntarily allowed himself (lit. "I gave" *nātattî*) to suffer this degrading abuse. In the midst of this abuse there appears to be no cries of innocence, no lamentation or weeping, and no calling for God to have vengeance on his persecutors (in contrast to Jeremiah). He accepts this mistreatment and does not hide his face to avoid it or protect himself from such abuse." (Smith, *Isaiah 40–66,* 382)
      (3) This centurion saw our Lord's godly demeanor in the worst of circumstances.
   c) After compelling Simon of Cyrene to bear the cross of Jesus (Luke 23:26), he heard the women of Jerusalem who "mourned and lamented Him" as He made His way to Calvary (Luke 23:27).
   d) He must have been fascinated as Jesus turned to those women and said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children" (Luke 23:28).
6. While at the cross, he saw our Lord's forgiveness extended to the very soldiers who nailed Him to the cross and then gambled for His garments (Luke 23:34).
   a) He saw His compassion for the penitent thief (Luke 23:43).
   b) He heard the howling mob taunting Jesus (Matt 27:39–43), yet Jesus ignored their cruelty.
   c) The centurion had also experienced the three hours of darkness, something for which there was no logical explanation.
   d) He also felt the earth tremble and shake when Jesus died.

e) "Only one conclusion could force itself on his mind. It was that which, we cannot doubt, had made its impression on his heart and conscience. Jesus was not what the Jews, His infuriated enemies, had described Him. He was what He professed to be, what His bearing on the Cross and His Death attested Him to be: 'righteous,' and hence, 'the Son of God.'" (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah,* ch. 15)

7. While Mark only mentions the centurion's belief, Matthew informs us that the entire squad of soldiers "saw the earthquake and the things that had happened, they feared greatly, saying, 'Truly this was the Son of God!'" (Matt 27:54).
8. The centurion's confession also marks the beginning of the fulfillment of Psalm 22:27, "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You."

B. The chief priests and elders of the people, men well-versed in the Old Testament and who had heard Jesus teach with their own ears, still did not believe.
   1. "The Gospel has come full circle: again the religious leaders of Israel have missed the significance of Jesus, whereas the pagans one would expect to be most hostile to Christ have understood and embraced his true identity (2:1–12)." (Keener, *Matthew*, 391)
   2. Three days later, what did these Jewish leaders think when they heard that many of the righteous dead were now alive once again and walking the streets of the holy city? (Matt 27:52–53)
   3. Just three days before, they had crucified a man, a rabbi, who claimed to be the Son of God.
   4. A short time before that, in the nearby city of Bethany, this same itinerant rabbi had claimed to be "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25), and then proceeded to raise a man from the grave who had been dead for four days (John 11:43–44).
   5. "The Jews had a fancy that the kingdom of the Messias would begin with the resurrection of the dead, as we have noted before; vainly indeed, as to their sense of it; but not without some truth, as to the thing itself: for from the resurrection of Christ the glorious epoch of the kingdom of God took its beginning, as we said before (which he himself also signifieth in those words Matthew 26:29); and when he arose, not a few others arose with him." (Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the Gospels From the Talmud and Hebraica,* on Matt 27:52)
   6. Why couldn't they see that Jesus had fulfilled all that Moses and the prophets had predicted concerning the long-awaited Messiah?

VII. Interpreting Psalm 22 After The Cross

A. One clue to correctly interpreting Psalm 22 might be what Jesus told the disciples on the road to Emmaus on the evening of the resurrection (Luke 24:13–32).
   1. These two disciples had three days to ponder the crucifixion of Jesus and the rumors of His resurrection.
   2. They heard about the women who found His tomb empty and their claim that an angel of God had appeared to them and asserted that Jesus was alive.

3. They also knew that Peter and John, two of Jesus' closest disciples, had rushed to His tomb and found it empty.
4. These weary disciples were on their way home, and now, with the sun in their eyes, they walked down the road to Emmaus, trying to make sense of it all.
5. Then, out of nowhere, Jesus walks up to them and inquires about their conversation—but they did not know it was Him.
6. You might have expected Jesus to say to those disciples, "Hey, look, it's Me! I died, but the grave couldn't hold Me."
7. Instead, Jesus taught them that Moses and all the prophets pointed to Him!
8. "And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27).
9. You have to wonder if, when Jesus got to "the Prophets," whether He expounded upon the words David penned in Psalm 22.

B. Peter affirms that the Jewish leaders crucified Jesus "in ignorance" (Acts 3:17).
   1. Peter went on to say that "those things which God foretold by the mouth of all His prophets, that the Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled" (Acts 3:18).
   2. Paul, in his sermon to the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia, said that "those who dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they did not know Him, nor even the voices of the Prophets which are read every Sabbath," fulfilled the Scriptures by condemning Jesus to death (Acts 13:27).
   3. Had they truly understood the teaching and message of Christ, "they would not have crucified the Lord of glory" (1 Cor 2:8).

C. Is it possible that Psalm 22 could only be fully understood *after* the horrible events at Calvary had played out?
   1. So, we return to where we began this study: the prophets "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow," but did not understand how or when their prophecies would be fulfilled (1 Pet 1:10–12).
   2. Many of those prophecies concerning the death of the Messiah would only make sense after the events at the cross had transpired.
   3. We are reminded of how Paul went into the synagogue at Thessalonica, and "for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, 'This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ'" (Acts 17:2–3).

D. When Jesus quoted "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" and "It is finished" on the cross, it became evident that Jesus wanted those who heard Him to reflect on Psalm 22 in its entirety.
   1. Jesus read, studied, memorized, sang, prayed, taught, and lived Psalm 22.
   2. Ultimately, He sacrificed Himself in the fulfillment of it.
   3. David had foretold His rejection by men, His unbearable pain, and looked forward to His triumph, "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" (Ps 22:24).

E. While speaking about when He would be "lifted up" on the cross, Jesus confidently affirmed that He would not be alone (John 8:28–29).
   1. Like David before Him, Jesus affirmed that God would be with Him to the end (Ps 22:24; John 16:32).
   2. As Douglas Moo observed, "If Jesus quotes Ps. 22:1 contextually, it is reasonable to expect that the first verse has direct reference to his present experience, and that the triumphant conclusion alludes to the circumstances of the Resurrection and its consequences" (Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives,* 272).
   3. Augustine, in reflecting on Jesus' voluntary death, said, "Who can thus sleep when he pleases, as Jesus died when He pleased? Who is there that thus puts off his garment when he pleases, as He put off His flesh at His pleasure? Who is there that thus departs when he pleases, as He departed this life at His pleasure?" (Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John,* Tractate 119, §6)
   4. Or, as some have paraphrased Augustine's words, "He gave up His life because He willed it, when He willed it, and as He willed it."
   5. The cross, like Psalm 22 itself, begins in deep pain but ends in triumph!
   6. Like David, Jesus manifested a total trust in God's ultimate vindication of Him.

F. Jesus goes beyond saying that the Father would not leave Him; He declares that His death would prove "that I am He" (John 8:28 NKJV).
   1. The Greek phrase, translated as "I am He," is *egō eimi* and probably refers to God's declaration to Moses in Exodus 3:14, "I AM WHO I AM."
   2. Instead of being abandoned by the Father at the cross, the cross would ultimately prove His deity—it would prove that "I am He."

G. The author of the Book of Hebrews quotes the words of Psalm 22:22 ("I will declare Your name to My brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will sing praise to You") and applies them to Christ (Heb 2:11–12).
   1. In their unbearable pain, both David and Jesus sought comfort in God.
   2. In their triumph after their suffering, both David and Jesus declared God's name and praised Him for their deliverance.
   3. However, the Hebrew writer makes it plain that Jesus was the *speaker* in Psalm 22:22—He was not just "quoting" the words of another.
   4. This fact alone tells us how to interpret Psalm 22—it was indeed a prophecy about Jesus, though for 1,000 years it had not been understood as such!

H. In God's redemptive plan, "all the families of the nations" (Ps 22:27) are invited to bow down before the Son of God (Ps 72:8–11; 96:10–13; Rev 5:9).
   1. During His earthly ministry, Jesus gave His apostles a limited commission to go and preach to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt 10:5–6).
   2. Later, after His death, burial, and resurrection, He gave them the Great Commission and sent them "into all the world" (Mark 16:15).
   3. As the apostles went out preaching, we see the fulfillment of David's vision: "All the ends of the world shall remember and turn to the LORD, and all the families of the nations shall worship before You" (Ps 22:27).

I. The second chapter of Acts records the establishment of the Lord's church on the day of Pentecost, which occurred just 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave.
   1. In the first sermon preached in the name of our risen Lord, Peter affirmed that the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus were a fulfillment of prophecy and a part of the "determined purpose and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:22–24).
   2. In that sermon, Peter did not just *read* the prophecies from Joel and David about Jesus—he had to *explain* them to his audience.
   3. Peter's audience had read passages like Joel 2:28–32 and Psalm 16:8–11 all of their lives, but until Peter explained them, they had never understood them.
   4. On that Pentecost, "those who gladly received his word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41).

J. A short time after the church was established, "a great many of the priests were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).
   1. Joachim Jeremias estimates that there were "round about 18,000 priests and Levites" in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus (Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus,* 204).
   2. Don't confuse these rank-and-file priests with the Sadducean priestly aristocracy found in the Great Sanhedrin.
   3. These ordinary priests were usually poor, and many of them led lives of quiet and humble devotion to God, like Zacharias, the father of John the baptizer (Luke 1:5–25, 67–79).
   4. "They labored in a trade most of the year, except for two weeks when they officiated at the temple. In their hometowns, they could declare lepers cleansed and work in local courts. So a large number from within the priesthood would represent a significant additional number of disciples for the new community." (Bock, *Acts*, 265)
   5. What was behind the conversion of these priests?
   6. Did the tearing of the veil of the temple when Jesus died have anything to do with their conversion?
   7. Could it be that after a period of contemplation and reflection, "a great many of the priests" were finally able to put the pieces of the prophetic puzzle together and see how Jesus of Nazareth was the fulfillment of all their messianic hopes?

Conclusion

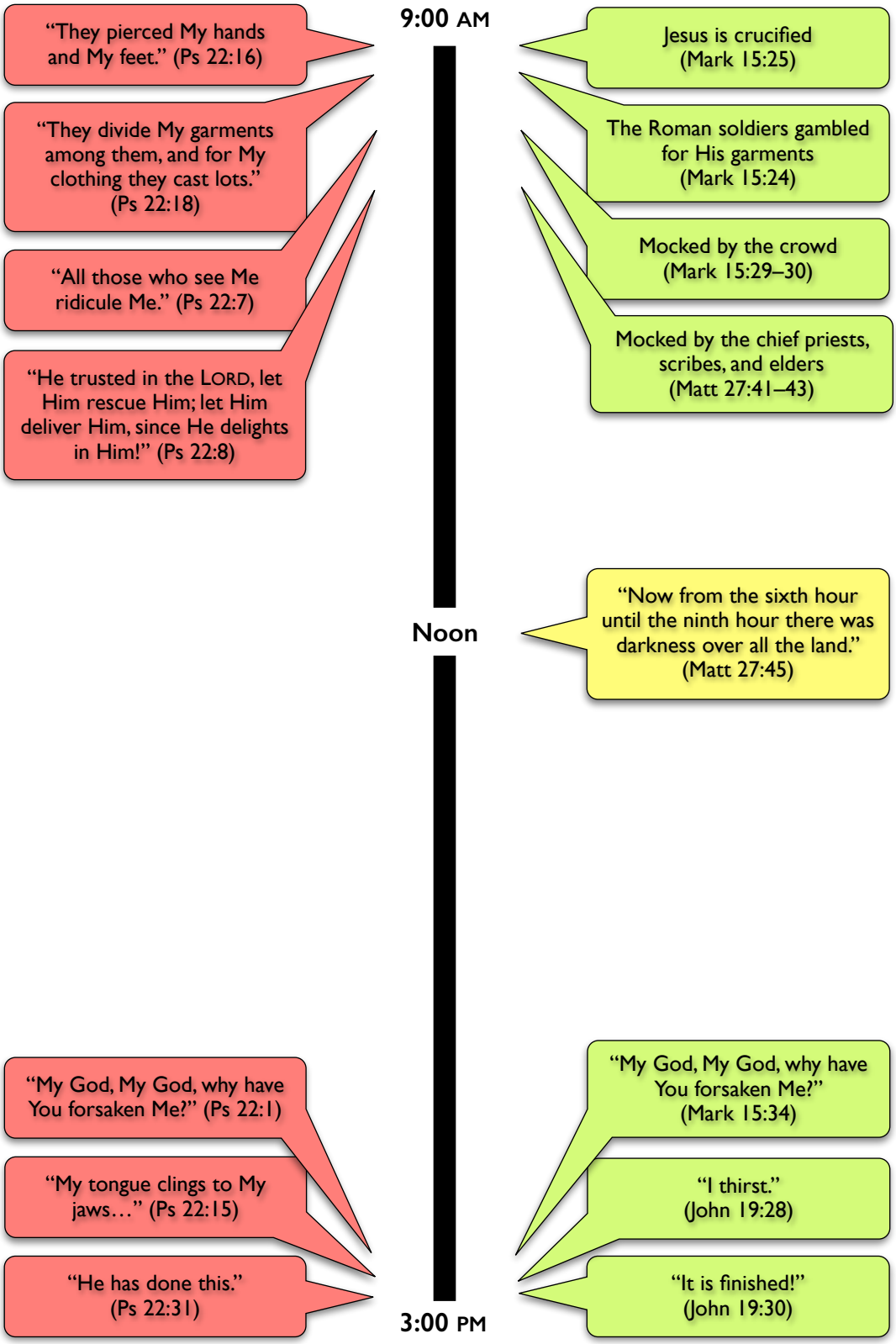
I. No psalm is quoted more in the Gospels than Psalm 22.

II. "Written one thousand years before the first coming of Christ, this psalm reads as if it were actually recorded by a person standing at the foot of the cross. The very words spoken by Christ from the cross, as well as his thoughts and the injuries he suffered, are recorded here. David, the sweet psalmist of Israel, set forth in this psalm a graphic portrayal of the cross hundreds of years before crucifixion was even invented as a form of capital punishment. With the precision of an eyewitness observing the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ, David, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, wrote the most detailed description of the cross found anywhere in Scripture. Here is David's preview of the cross, a masterpiece that has been called 'the fifth gospel,' and 'the gospel according to David.'" (Lawson, *Psalms 1–75,* 113–114)

III. Before going to the cross, Jesus knew that His death would not be the end of the story (Matt 20:17–19; Mark 8:32–34; 10:34; Luke 18:31–33).
   A. "Indeed the hour is coming, yes, has now come, that you will be scattered, each to his own, and will leave Me alone. And yet I am not alone, because the Father is with Me." (John 16:32)
   B. Twelve legions of angels could have saved Him from this death, but He was determined to fulfill His mission (Matt 26:53).
   C. He knew death was not the end because He trusted His Father and the Father never abandoned Him!

IV. On many occasions, I have heard congregations sing the touching hymn "Tis Midnight, and On Olive's Brow" before partaking of the Lord's Supper.
   A. This song by William Tappan includes the line: "'Tis midnight; and, for others' guilt, the Man of Sorrows weeps in blood; yet He that hath in anguish knelt, is not forsaken by His God."
   B. Then, after singing that hymn, the same congregation will often hear a brother at the Lord's Table speak of how "God turned His back on His only Son" at the cross.
   C. I doubt that we will ever come to a universal agreement on what Jesus meant as He loudly quoted Psalm 22:1 just before taking His final breath.
   D. As we contemplate the scene of the cross, we weep at the price that was paid there and rejoice at the benefits now received through the blood of Christ.
   E. We stand in awe at how the Father "made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Cor 5:21; cf. Gal 3:13).
   F. Or, as the words of a famous hymn by Elvina M. Hall suggest, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; sin had left a crimson stain; He washed it white as snow."

Psalm 22 In The Crucifixion Timeline



This chart is not intended to show all of the events at the cross

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