

# Experiencing Psalm 22: A literary approach.<sup>1</sup>

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## ABSTRACT

Jesus' cry from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" has a rich history that began long before Golgotha. Who first voiced this question and in what context? When was it put to paper? Why does Jesus cry out these particular words? How should we understand this heart-rending question from Jesus' mouth? Whose words are these: the psalmist's, Jesus', or someone else's? What do the gospel writers mean to communicate when they include so many allusions to Psalm 22 in the passion narratives? Is Jesus' crucifixion the climactic use of the Cry of Dereliction? Is it, and if so, when is it appropriate for others to echo these same words? These questions and more arise from the synoptic Passion narratives. To answer them, one must return to the "original" source of Psalm 22. When practiced in isolation, however, historical- and literary-critical methods suffer from the frustrating ambiguity found in much of poetic literature, including that of the Bible. This study involves a close reading of Psalm 22, with a particular eye to the gospels' use of that psalm in the Passion narrative. Historical-critical methods are useful when formulating ideas for the referent of the psalm and the original audience. Literary-critical methods are particularly helpful when studying the structure of the psalm, a fascinating study in and of itself. Drawing on insights from these two fields of research, this study attempts to move beyond their limitations to celebrate the ambiguity revealed by both. Embracing the ambiguity of Psalm 22 encourages solidarity of experience and faith among the people of God across the centuries, including the ancient Israelite, ancient Christian, and modern Christian contexts.

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## Introduction

“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”

Jesus’ cry of desolation from the cross is perhaps one of the most well-known psalm quotations in the New Testament. The visceral anguish of the psalmist is painfully appropriate for the dying, innocent Son of God. In fact, many may know this question only from the mouth of Jesus, not as the opening line to an ancient and complex song. Given that the New Testament use of the verse has in some cases eclipsed the context of ancient Israel, how might a modern Christian understand Psalm 22?

This article will take a broad literary approach to Psalm 22 and New Testament allusions to the psalm. While drawing on the conclusions of historical-critical analysis, such a literary methodology raises further questions of structure, intertextuality, and the experience of the audience. What does the structure of the psalm tell us about how its words function? What connections do we see in the shape and content of the psalm? What connections exist between the psalm and the other texts that allude to it? How do these texts affect each other? How did they affect the ancient audiences? As interpreters and ministers of the word of God, our questions expand to our understanding and use of the psalm today. How do intertextual connections impact our interpretation of the psalm, or the later texts? Can we use the psalm in the same way without usurping inappropriate authority or doing damage to the text?

To explore these questions and more, we will examine Psalm 22 in its ancient context from a literary perspective. Having allowed the psalm to speak in the world of the ancient Israelite, we will consider the ways in which New Testament authors used the psalm, shifting to the context of the apostolic church. With these observations in hand, we will then evaluate the responsibilities and possibilities a Christian interpreting Psalm 22 in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The goal of this chapter is to demonstrate how a literary approach allows us to hear and experience Psalm 22 in each of these contexts clearly and responsibly, for the purpose of understanding how the word of God intertwines with the lives of the people of God.<sup>2</sup>

### Psalm 22 in Ancient Israelite Context

#### *Primary Referent for Psalm 22*

Identifying the primary referent of the psalm is a task complicated by the poetic genre as well as uncertainty surrounding the historical context. The superscription provided in the text today tells us that Psalm 22 is a psalm “of David”, but our task is not as simple as that. The prefix *le* often translated “to” David may be variously translated “to”, “for”, or “according to” David, and

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<sup>2</sup> As indicated above, this article was written for the educated layperson in the local church. As such, it contains minimal footnotes, and it draws on previously published scholarship. A full list of consulted sources may be found in the bibliography.

the superscriptions were later additions to the psalms. Even more importantly, the life of the psalm began long before its inclusion in the psalter. It is to this history we must turn in our discussion of the primary referent. The tension we deal with here is inherent in the psalm itself: the psalm switches from individual to communal, and from lament to thanksgiving. Considering the psalm to be a royal psalm raises questions about the appropriateness of the content – as “king” is the psalmist allowed to express this kind of vulnerability? Would a king be able to speak like this in public? In a liturgical setting?

In addition to David, Psalm 22 has been associated with a number of royal figures, including Moses, Hezekiah, Esther, and Jesus. The psalm’s language, however, does not necessitate a royal speaker. In fact, the words of the psalm seem to be the cry of the common person. Perhaps we see here a connection between King David, for instance, and the common person, in the sense that the king was representative of his people. As king of Israel, David is considered God’s adopted son in part because Israel has already been adopted as God’s chosen people. Unlike many other cultures around them, Israel recognizes that her king is merely human – a human anointed by God, to be sure – but the Old Testament makes clear that the king is like everyone else. Continuing with the example of David, we see David sin egregiously, repent, and receive forgiveness, a process experienced by every follower of God. In this sense, perhaps the king was allowed to speak like this in public; he was a man, just like every other in the kingdom of Israel. If the psalm began as a composition for the king, the perception that the king was “just a man” may have contributed to the freedom felt by future singers/tellers of the psalm – the psalm is applied not only to other royal figures, but also to the common person, to all who find themselves afflicted and feel without hope.

The specific details of the psalmist’s affliction remain unclear, but the metaphors used in the psalm leave little doubt that the suffering is great and very present. The psalmist asks for deliverance from wild animals, the sword, and illness. The actual circumstances that could be represented metaphorically by these three threats are numerous. Dogs, bulls, and lions are common metaphors for those who attack, not only physically, but also economically and personally. “The sword” is certainly representative of physical danger, harm, or death in any number of circumstances. Illness comes in many forms in the ancient world, but what is certain is that illness threatens the life not only of the sick person, but of others as well. All three threats are immanent: the bulls circle and stretch wide their mouths; the sword swings; illness creeps into the psalmist’s bones and heart. Yet it seems that the speaker is innocent. The singer does not protest innocence *per se*, but there is no hint of confession of sin or repentance in this psalm as there is in others. The psalm depicts the suffering of the faithful innocent – one who can expect salvation from God based on the character of God as revealed in the past. Beyond the fact that the psalm speaks of the ongoing suffering of a faithful innocent, however, the language of the song remains vague and non-specific. This ambiguity creates in the psalm its flexibility. Stereotypical images of the affliction of an

innocent person allow for the psalm to apply to the original referent, to King David, to Esther, to Jesus, and to the common person. The “I” in the psalm can apply to an infinite number; anyone who suffers may sing this song.

Thus far, we have assumed that the psalm was written first for the king, likely David, and was then reappropriated for use by the common person. It is possible, however, to move in the other direction, considering the psalm written first for common use, and then adopted for and connected to the situation of the king. If this is the case, then the psalms may give us very early evidence of “re-lecture” or the re-reading of a text, because by the time the superscription was added to Psalm 22, the re-assignment of the referent had already taken place. A song written for ordinary individuals to sing in a worship setting now comes to be viewed through the historical lens of the life of a particular person, and not just any person: David, the ideal king and the man after God’s own heart. Such a movement impacts the way that hearers experience the psalms over time. When Psalm 22 becomes a “Psalm of David”, we may see a distancing between ordinary people and the words of the psalm. Certainly it remains that ordinary people suffer, but the psalm itself may be placed on a pedestal, with David – out of reach of the common person.

When reading from a literary-critical perspective, however, while the historical question of the referent does not disappear, what comes into clearer focus is what the psalmist (whoever he or she is<sup>3</sup>) does *in the psalm* as we have it. Historically speaking, we assume the psalmist to be a faithful, suffering Israelite. Literarily speaking, however, the psalmist can be multivalent – the singer can use or even be many different people. The central question of referent then becomes not “Who is the psalmist who wrote the psalm?” but “Who is the psalmist *in* the psalm?”<sup>4</sup> The question that follows will be taken up later in the chapter: “What is the psalmist *doing* through the psalm?”

Who, then, is the psalmist in Psalm 22? From the first verse of the psalm, the hearer understands that the psalmist is one who feels forsaken by God. The psalmist is a descendent of those to whom God has been faithful in the past (vv. 3-5), and in fact the psalmist is one to whom God has been faithful in the past (vv. 9-10). At present, however, the psalmist is one who does not even feel human (v. 6), one who is scorned, despised, and mocked (vv. 6-7). Not only that, but the psalmist is in immediate danger (vv. 12-13) and in a weakened state (vv. 14-18). The singer desperately needs assistance and makes the assumption that only God can provide it (vv. 19-21).

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick Miller suggests that some psalms may have been written by women. See Patrick D. Miller, *They Cried to the Lord: The Form and Theology of Biblical Prayer* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 233-243.

<sup>4</sup> Nathan Maxwell, “The Psalmist in the Psalm: A Persona Critical Reading of Book IV of the Psalter” (Ph.D. diss., Baylor University, 2007).

The shift from lament to thanksgiving comes somewhere between vv. 21 and 22. Some see v. 21b, "From the horns of the wild bull you have rescued me" as the tipping point. Others see a temporal gap between vv. 21 and 22, during which, perhaps, an oracle of salvation is proclaimed or actual salvation comes about in the speaker's life, resulting in the following thanksgiving. However, this shift occurs, the psalmist – though the same person – speaks with a different voice in vv. 22-31. Now the psalmist is also a person who speaks to the congregation of God's people (v. 22), praises God (v. 22), fulfils vows (v. 25), and confesses the greatness of God (vv. 26-31). By the end of the psalm, the psalmist is the one who has been answered and helped by God; indeed, "God has done it" (v. 31).

When viewed from this perspective, the possibilities of the identity of the psalmist open wide. The psalmist in the psalm is an actual, historical person, but is not constrained by historical location, a finally unknowable or at least improvable claim. Instead the psalmist is defined by the words of the psalm itself. In the end, the text of the psalm is what we have to work with. Historical reconstruction is enlightening and helpful, but the surest claim that can be made regarding the "I" in the psalm is supported by the content of the psalm itself. The "I" is at various times an unknown, obscure Israelite poet; a priest; a king; a commoner; an ancient Hebrew; a 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian. The "I" in the psalm is open to any person who finds him or herself in the world of this psalm, which insists on the faithfulness of God in the midst of crisis and even in the face of God's absence. The possibilities for the singer of this song are as numerous as those who lament and praise.

### *Historical Setting for Psalm 22*

Determining the historical setting for Psalm 22 is as problematic as identifying the original referent, but a general discussion of the topic is helpful as we explore this psalm. It is commonly accepted that Psalm 22 is an individual lament and that it had some function within public worship. J. Clinton McCann outlines a modified version of Hermann Gunkel's form: 1. Opening address, often including a vocative, such as, "O LORD"; 2. Description of the trouble or distress (the lament proper); 3. Plea or petition for God's response (the prayer for help), often accompanied by reasons of God to hear and act; 4. Profession of trust or confidence in God (Gunkel's "certainty of being heard"); and 5. Promise of vow to praise God or to offer sacrifice.<sup>5</sup> Psalm 22 includes all five of these characteristics, and in fact, it contains a remarkably strong emphasis on the fourth and fifth elements.

The occasion for singing Psalm 22 could be a penitent's *emergence* from a long period of suffering and distress. Verses 1-21 in this case are the very real and recent memory of the threat suffered by the singer. The suffering is re-membered, re-experienced, by the speaker. The singer is now expressing thanksgiving through the song and the offering of a sacrifice,

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<sup>5</sup> J. Clinton McCann, "The Book of Psalms: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections," in *The New Interpreter's Bible: 1 & 2 Maccabees, Job, Psalms* (vol. 4; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 644-645.

publicly acknowledging the faithfulness of God. On the other hand, Psalm 22 would also be appropriate as a song of one who is *currently* in the midst of suffering. In this case, the suffering is the present condition rather than the past. Verses 22-31 anticipate the expected salvation of God. The singer makes real the response of God by speaking of it as if it is already accomplished; in some sense, these words of confidence create the circumstances they describe.

As mentioned above, the psalm contains contrasts that raise questions regarding historical identification: the shift between individual and communal language and between lament and thanksgiving being two main points of contention. Other questions continue to revolve around the speaker and setting: was the speaker a supplicant or a priest? Was the psalm intended to be antiphonal – performed by more than one person? Or was it to be performed by one person, in more than one voice? Was the setting a formal liturgical service in the Temple or a more informal, smaller setting, for instance of family worship? These questions cannot be answered with confidence, a reality that is, on one hand, unfortunate. To correctly understand the historical setting of the psalm would help us understand the worship practices of ancient Israel more clearly and would give insight into the intention of the original author/singer. On the other hand, ambiguity regarding the setting of the psalm yields the same benefit of the ambiguity of the referent: the psalm becomes multi-functional, appropriate for use in formal and informal settings, on the lips of ordained and the lay worshippers. The setting of the psalm, like the referent of the psalm, is loosed from particular historical constraints and is freed to become the words of God's people throughout time and space. McCann asserts that the "really pertinent questions in approaching the laments are *not*, What was wrong with the psalmist? Who were her or his enemies? Rather the crucial interpretive questions are these: What is wrong *with us*? Who or what are *our* enemies?"<sup>6</sup>

One fears, however, that when granting such a multitude of possibilities for the historical aspects of a psalm, there are no restrictions on the purpose and meaning of the psalm. There is a concern that the psalm becomes relative to the reader in the sense that meaning in the psalm becomes guided solely by the reader or speaker. A responsible literary reading of the psalm does allow for a myriad of possibilities and applications, but should remain within the historical, literary, and canonical boundaries of the text. Within these boundaries one finds not inflexible and restrictive bonds but creative and dynamic room for the psalm's words to play through various circumstances.

### *Ancient Israelite Experience of Psalm 22*

As 21<sup>st</sup> century Christian readers of Psalm 22, we cannot help but hear Jesus' words from the cross interposed on the first verse of the psalm. We hear the abuse that Jesus suffered in the

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<sup>6</sup> McCann, "Psalms," 646. Italics original.

cry of the psalmist, and we picture the callous casting of lots as the soldiers divide Jesus' clothes. The gospels' allusions to Psalm 22 colour our experience of the psalm. In fact, some have suggested that the psalm was intended to be messianic from the very beginning, finding it unlikely that this psalm can refer to David or any other human being or king. At the end of the psalm, the hyperbolic language is so strong that it cannot refer to the nations' response to Yahweh at the time of Israelite kings: a response like this simply never occurred in ancient history.

On the contrary, others, such as Gerald Wilson,<sup>7</sup> argue that if we only hear Psalm 22 as words spoken by and prophecies pertaining to Jesus, we limit the effect of the psalm. The history of Psalm 22, established long before the Passion, is what gave its words the depth and richness that is so effective on the lips of Jesus as he hung on the cross. Without understanding that history, we are less able to comprehend what Jesus is saying. Similarly, as important as Jesus' crucifixion is in salvation history, limiting Psalm 22 to one historical situation restricts the psalm's effectiveness as God's continuing word *to us*. Wilson suggests that the power of the psalm reaches both backward and forward. Hearing the psalm in its own right allows modern hearers to draw on the richness of the psalm's history *and* bring it forward in application for Jesus and later our own lives. To appreciate the full depth of the psalm, then, we must learn as much as we can about the historical context of the psalm *and* the current context of our own community. The psalm's connection to Jesus' Passion serves as a bridge, connecting us to the experience of the ancients and the divine.

Before discussing details of the form and structure of the psalm, we should note that scholars have observed that Psalm 22, like some others in the psalter, combines the forms of lament and thanksgiving. At first glance, these two seem unlikely partners. In fact through the years some have suggested that Psalm 22 is actually two separate psalms (vv. 1-21 and vv. 22-31), and others have argued that vv. 22-31 in some combination were added later in an attempt to relieve the harsh forsakenness of the earlier verses. Most now, however, read Psalm 22 as a unified whole, based on verbal and thematic connections between the two sections and the recognition that, as Gunkel has said, lament and thanksgiving both "speak with a different mood about the soul's journey to the underworld."<sup>8</sup> McCann succinctly discusses the relationship between prayer and praise in the introduction to his Psalms commentary in the New Interpreter's Bible commentary. He writes that ultimately, both lament or prayer and praises of thanksgiving are expressions of "complete dependence upon God."<sup>9</sup> He encourages interpreters of the Psalms to not force the lament and thanksgiving pairing into chronological or even liturgical sequence. Instead, prayer and praise are "an expression of

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<sup>7</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *Psalms* (NIV Application Commentary Series; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1:413-424.

<sup>8</sup> Hermann Gunkel, *Introduction to Psalms. Genres of the Religious Lyric of Israel* (trans. James D. Nogalski; Mercer Library of Biblical Studies; Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998), 133.

<sup>9</sup> McCann, "Psalms," 669.



the perennial reality of the life of faith.”<sup>10</sup> In this chapter, we will assume the unity of Psalm 22 and the reality reflected therein: that suffering and praise are woven together in the lives of the commoner and the king.

The structure of the psalm is important when discussing how an ancient heard the psalm because through the structure we can begin to trace the movement not only of the words themselves, but the progression of the hearer as the psalm is experienced. Some of this discussion will tie into later comments on the content and audience of the psalm, but in this section, our goal simply is to determine the main sections of the psalm. We will consider several proposals for structure, recognizing that a piece of poetry is a fluid text; it is quite possible that the psalm’s flow can be represented in multiple ways.

The central conflict of Psalm 22 is that God is far away. The psalmist’s heart-rending cry echoes in vv. 1, 11, and 19. “Why are you so far?” “Do not be far!” The psalmist keenly feels God’s absence in the midst of suffering, an absence demonstrated in the structure of the song itself. By the end of the psalm, however, the speaker is praising God for God’s faithfulness and urging all people of all time to do the same. The two expressions are held together by a common theme: dependence upon God. God’s absence is all the more terrible because the psalmist depends upon God; the psalmist’s worship is all the more passionate because the psalmist depends upon God. The pattern of the psalm, as well as the words themselves, reflect these central themes.

The structure reflected here is a combination of proposals from the work of John Kselman, James Mays, and Gerald Wilson.<sup>11</sup> The psalm is arranged in two large sections (vv. 1-21 and vv. 22-31), which are divided into two smaller sub-sections (vv. 1-11, 12-21; and vv. 22-26, 27-31). Verses 19-21 function as the central pivot point, which allows for the shift from lament to thanksgiving.

The first major movement of the psalm (vv. 1-21) is the Prayer Section. In its first section (vv. 1-11), the psalmist tells of the forsakenness and distance of God in an anguished tone. In vv. 1-2, we hear God’s deafening silence. The psalmist, as we will see, has many words. But the reply that is needed is *God’s*; that is the one that is missing. The verb “forsaken” in v. 1b is a perfect verb, which in this case seems to indicate completed action. The forsakenness of God is complete, done. As v. 1b progresses, the psalmist leaves out an increasing number of words, making translation difficult but capturing the anguish of the speaker: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? ...so far from my deliverance?... the words of my groaning?” Then, in v. 4, God’s silence is compounded by absence. Not only does God not

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<sup>10</sup> McCann, “Psalms,” 646.

<sup>11</sup> John S. Kselman, “Why Have You Abandoned Me: A Rhetorical Study of Psalm 22” in *Art and Meaning* (eds. David Clines, David M. Gunn, and Alan J. Hauser; Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1982), 172-198; James L. Mays, “Prayer and Christology: Psalm 22 as Perspective on the Passion” *Theology Today* 42.3 (1995): 322-331; Wilson, *Psalms*.



speak, but God, who was present and active in the past of the psalmist's ancestors, does not show up. God saved the ancestors, but one might argue that this was in the distant past. Has God been present recently? The psalmist says yes – God was present at the psalmist's birth, provided safety at his mother's breast (v. 9). God has been the psalmist's refuge from the very beginning (v. 10), and yet even in light of God's presence and protection in the recent past, God is now absent. Remembering the past faithfulness of God makes the psalmist's current situation even worse. In the middle of remembering the past, the psalmist describes the present plight (vv. 6-8): she is stripped of her humanity – a worm – scorned, despised, mocked. Those who abuse her use her dependence on God against her: "If the LORD delighted in you, he would save you" (v. 8). Here in the words of the mockers, God's personal name, Yahweh, is used for the first time. God is the God of the psalmist (v. 1), and it is painful irony that the personal name of God is used to scorn her reliance upon God. The psalmist knows that God is capable of action. The divine silence and absence is a choice. The psalmist cries out in v. 11, "Do not be far from me, for trouble is near and there is no one to help!" This verse forms an *inclusio*, or bookends, with v. 1, repeating the idea that God is far away. Only God can help, but God is not here.

The psalm could end with v. 11, and in fact some have suggested that what follows is a later addition to the first section of lament. This option is, however, less likely because of the strong literary links between the sections. In addition to concluding the first sub-section, v. 11 introduces the next, which we might call "Trouble is near" (vv. 12-21). The speaker's tone shifts from one of anguish to fear and despair. These verses expand upon the plight of the psalmist, which stands in stark contrast to the safety and comfort described in vv. 9-10. He is verbally abused by the humans around him, but his affliction, his need for help, goes further than that. Having described himself as a worm in v. 6, the psalmist now uses animal metaphors for his opponents as well. Oppression dehumanizes not only the victim, but also the perpetrators.<sup>12</sup> The conflict the psalmist describes is not a fair fight - a worm can hardly stand up to bulls, lions, and dogs! The oppressing animals are arranged chiasmatically: bulls (v. 12), lion (v. 13), dogs (v. 16); dog (v. 20), lion (v. 21a), oxen/bull (v. 21b). Even in the language of the poem, the vicious animals form an ever-tightening circle. The psalmist does not stand a chance against these enemies. The psalm does not include any hint of fighting or resistance; the psalmist is immediately overcome. Verses 14-15 use common word pictures to describe weakness and fear, pairing phrases (v. 14a and b; v. 14c and d; v. 15a and b) until the verses culminate in the worst possible climax: "you lay me in the dust of death" (v. 15c). The section continues, describing the scene as the psalmist lies near death. The psalmist is physically defeated. The enemies have won. They remove the psalmist's clothing and in the casting of lots, a common appeal to the divine, even God seems complicit in their gloating (v. 18).

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<sup>12</sup> Wilson, *Psalms*, 426.

We come now to the pivot point. In vv. 19-21, something changes. The psalmist speaks with strength that seems unwarranted, insistently calling to the LORD. We can see the pattern in the words themselves. The psalmist calls out to God again in v. 19, the now familiar refrain, "Do not be far away!... Come quickly!" These pleas connect what follows to what has come before. But in vv. 20-21, the psalmist switches to imperative forms of address: "Deliver!" "Save!" And in v. 21b, the psalmist uses a perfect verb to speak positively of God's action. As mentioned above, in Hebrew, the perfect verb may indicate completed action, but not necessarily the time at which the action is completed. The action may have been completed in the past, or it may be completed in the future. Nevertheless, the psalmist's choice of the perfect tense expresses confidence in God's action: "From the horns of the wild oxen, *you have rescued me.*" The completeness of God's forsakenness (v. 1) is followed by the completeness of God's rescue (v. 21b). Ellen Davis describes these pivot verses as a "resymbolization" of reality. The psalmist's view is reoriented in a way that creates "a new symbolic order capable of encompassing the vastly expanded territory of the psalmist's experience."<sup>13</sup> Before this point of crisis, perhaps the psalmist's more limited understanding of God's provision had been enough. But now, for this psalmist, circumstances have stretched and expanded what it means to praise God, as God's rescuing presence is more sharply experienced in light of God's earlier absence.

Now that the psalmist's world has been resymbolized and stretched sufficiently, the psalmist moves into the final main section of the song (vv. 22-31), singing now not in anguish or fear, but with confidence. Beginning in the first sub-section (vv. 22-26), the brokenness of the first part of the psalm is restored, beginning with the psalmist's humanity. She has moved from "not human" to one who has "brothers and sisters" (v. 22) among God's people. She is no longer alone, singing a song of Individual Lament; now she participates with others in a song of Communal Praise. Instead of crying out in despair, she urges the congregation to cry out in praise, glory, and awe (v. 23). The community offers praise as a group for the faithfulness of God to the individual. The forsakenness and abandonment felt by God's silence and absence are replaced by God's presence; the psalmist sings, "he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him" (v. 24bc). The language in vv. 22-26 is personal: the psalmist uses first-person pronouns and calls his own community into action. Rather than oppressors and enemies, the psalmist sees now brothers and sisters, offspring of Jacob, those who fear God, the poor that God has satisfied, and those who seek the LORD surround the psalmist. As the anguish of v. 1 overflowed in a cry of desolation, now joy in God's faithfulness and among God's people overflows in the psalmist's cry of blessing, "May your hearts live forever!" (v. 26c).

In the final sub-section of the psalm, the praise and worship of God continues, spiralling out to universal and infinite proportions. Future verbs describe the actions of the people in these

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<sup>13</sup> Ellen Davis, "Exploding the Limits: Form and Function in Psalm 22" *JSOT* 53 (1992): 99.

verses. While the present circumstances may not align with God's will and intention, the psalmist is certain that in the end, God's will *will* be done. The memory that was cause for despair in vv. 3-5 will be cause for worship in v. 27. Not only Israel and the individual psalmist, but the ends of the earth and all the nations will remember who God is; they will turn and worship the LORD as their true ruler. The psalmist, who God had laid down "in the dust of death" (v. 15), who was as good as dead, now declares that even the dead will praise God (v. 29). The psalmist's call to praise expands from his own personal context in vv. 22-26, building in a 3-2-3 pattern. First, he tells of the ends of the earth, the families of the nations, and the nations who will praise the LORD (vv. 27-28). Then he declares that all who sleep in the earth, all who go down to the dust will bow before God (v. 29). Finally, as the psalm reaches its climactic end, the psalmist sings of posterity, future generations, and a people yet unborn who will serve God (vv. 30-31). In the midst of this ever-expanding multitude of praise, we still find the psalmist standing, small but faithful: "I shall live for him," the speaker declares (v. 29c).

The final line of the psalm takes us back to the beginning, to the question of God's silence and absence in time and space. The psalmist simply declares, "He has done it" (v. 31b). God has shown up. God has spoken and acted righteously. The character trait of righteousness carries a judicial connotation that evaluates a person's actions. Rather than by abstract principles or even historical accounts, God's righteousness is demonstrated by God's present action. The pattern of pleading – Why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far? Do not be far! Do not be far away! Come quickly to my aid! – is answered. God has done it. The details of what God has done are as elusive as the problem the psalmist faced. What exactly did God do? God answered. Whatever help the psalmist needed, God has provided. As the ambiguity of the psalmist's plight opens the psalm to everyone's affliction, so the ambiguity of God's provision allows innumerable possibilities for the graciousness and faithfulness of God.

The literary personae in the psalms often shift between audiences, a structural movement that contributes to our understanding of how the Old Testament audience as a whole perceived the psalms. Taking into account the discussion of structure just completed, a brief discussion of shift in audience provides an overlay that further illuminates the psalm.

The psalmist addresses God in the first part of the psalm, extending this address to v. 22. For most of the song (vv. 1-21a), the psalmist protests God's silence and absence in light of his suffering and affliction. He argues that because of God's righteous character, God *should* answer. The final verse addressed to God, v. 22, reflects the reorientation that occurred in v. 21a. Here the psalmist makes a commitment to God, which is fulfilled in vv. 23-31.

The audience shifts in v. 23 as the psalmist begins to carry out his vow. Instead of speaking to God, the psalmist now speaks to the congregation. This shift raises several questions.

Have these brothers and sisters been there since v. 1? Or is the psalmist envisioning a shift in setting as well as audience? Are they newly arrived? Or have these people been listening in all along? However long they have been present, the congregation now plays an important role. The psalmist needs the congregation to hear his declaration of God's righteous action, but he goes a step further. The brothers and sisters do not stand merely as witness to the psalmist's testimony, but they are active participants in the praise of God that sweeps up the psalmist, his community, those dead and yet to be born, and finally the ends of the earth.

Verse 25a provides an interesting translation challenge when considering audience. Most modern translations read something like, "From you comes my praise in the great congregation." Kselman, however, takes a different reading of the Hebrew, and translates the phrase, "Over and over I will sing my praise in the great congregation."<sup>14</sup> If the majority of translations are more correct, then the psalmist shifts her attention, again addressing God briefly. Given the speaker's excitement and the context in which all good things come from God, this shift in audience is understandable. If Kselman's translation is more correct, however, the psalmist does not shift back to God. Verse 25a stands as a declarative statement that may still be addressed to the great congregation. Different translations of v. 25a may point to different audiences, but the root of the phrase remains the same: the psalmist is fulfilling the promise made in v. 22, based on the righteous action of God.

The general change in audience at v. 23 occurs at the same time as the change from individual to communal focus. The shift of address hints at a theological truth that lies behind Psalm 22. Suffering and affliction makes the psalmist feel alone – isolated even from God. But the reality is that a great congregation surrounds the singer – a family of sorts that comes more clearly into view in the context of praise. The suffering of and through affliction grants the psalmist the authority to command the congregation to praise and glorify God, and the experience of the one becomes the basis of the worship of the many. The faithfulness of the LORD moves back and forth between the individual and the community. In one sense, we might hear Psalm 22 as a song in which the congregation testifies of God's faithful response to the psalmist. On the other hand, the poem may indicate an occasion in which the praise of the congregation validates and supports the psalmist's steadfast belief that God *will* respond faithfully, regardless of how bad the present situation might appear. The poetic genre again creates the flexibility that allows the song to apply to multiple situations, while maintaining the trajectory of the psalm, which insists on the faithfulness of God, upon whom we are all finally dependent.

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<sup>14</sup> Kselman, "Why Have You Abandoned Me?", 181.

## Psalm 22 in Post-Israelite Context

Given the multivalency allowed by our study so far, it is not surprising that Psalm 22 has been appropriated by various communities for various situations. Psalm 22 is not quoted directly in the Qumran hymns, but the hymns do borrow imagery of eschatological victory, especially from vv. 27-31.<sup>15</sup> These images, however, were rather common, and the hymn writers incorporate details not found in Psalm 22, indicating that the authors were not simply copying Psalm 22, but retooling it to their particular situations. When the Targum uses similar imagery, its authors assume that the enemies described are Gentile kings and that the nations who acknowledge God's dominion and rule in v. 28 are Gentile nations. It does not, however, seem that authors in the intertestamental period interpreted Psalm 22 in a predictive messianic sense, specifically. Certainly the suffering described in Psalm 22 was a common experience for God's people. Perhaps the most well-known midrash using Psalm 22 is found in *Midrash Tehillim*, a medieval Jewish text, in which the prayer of Psalm 22 is appropriated for Esther's affliction and steadfastness in the face of the Persian king. Such suffering, however, was not deemed appropriate for God's Messiah.

It is not until after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection that people began to connect the suffering of the psalmist in Psalm 22 with the suffering of God's Messiah. The psalms in general provided ample fodder for the New Testament authors. The theological center of the psalms, "God reigns,"<sup>16</sup> aligns neatly with the main content of Jesus' message, particularly in the Synoptic Gospels: the inbreaking of the Kingdom of God. Specifically in the Passion accounts, the gospel's authors, the "evangelists," draw upon lament psalms to tell the story of Jesus' final days. Psalm 22, with its movement from lament to thanksgiving and its central theme of dependence upon God, becomes closely connected to Jesus' suffering on the cross. The New Testament refers to Psalm 22, 23 times in the New Testament – four direct quotations and 19 allusions or verbal parallels. Three of the four direct quotations and 13 of the 19 allusions are found in the Passion narratives. All of the quotations and allusions in the Passion narratives come from the first 18 verses of Psalm 22, firmly located within the section of lament. The casting of lots for garments is the only allusion to Psalm 22 contained in all four gospels (Ps. 22:18; Mark 15:24; Matt. 27:35; Luke 23:34; John 19:23-24). All three Synoptic Gospels refer to the mockery of bystanders (Ps. 22:7-8; Mark 15:29-32; Matt. 27:39-43; Luke 23:35-36). Finally, Mark and Matthew include Jesus' quotation of Ps. 22:1 as one of the sayings from the cross. In each instance, of course, the New Testament authors tailored elements of Psalm 22 according to the rest of the gospel.

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<sup>15</sup> See Tg.Ps. 22:27-32; y.Seb. 4, 35c; Midr. Ps. 22, 32; b.Sahn. 110b.

<sup>16</sup> See Gerald Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter* (SBLDS, 76; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 215.

We turn next to the questions that arise from the intersection of Psalm 22 and New Testament texts. How do New Testament authors use Psalm 22? What hermeneutic lies behind their practice? What purpose?

### **Psalm 22 in Christian Context**

Given the number of times the psalm is used in the New Testament and the fact that it appears in narrative, epistle, and apocalyptic genres, it is not surprising that the psalm is used differently depending on author, audience, and context.<sup>17</sup> At various times the authors introduce and quote the psalm directly, allude to the psalm directly, and allude to the psalm indirectly.

Out of the 23 quotations or allusions to Psalm 22, only twice do authors directly quote the psalm with a formal introduction. In John 19:24, the evangelist introduces Psalm 22:18 with the words, “This was to fulfil the Scripture which says, ‘They divided my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots.’” John implies here first that Psalm 22 was a prophecy, and second that this prophecy was fulfilled ultimately in Jesus. This usage fits with John’s portrayal of Jesus as the king who is fully aware and in control of the unfolding Passion events and John’s image of the crucifixion not as an event of desolation but as royal enthronement.

The author of Hebrews, often referred to as the Preacher, also introduces a direct quotation from Psalm 22, this time verse 22: “That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers, saying, ‘I will tell of your name to my brothers; in the midst of the congregation I will sing your praise’” (Heb. 2:12). The Preacher explicitly puts these words in the mouth of Jesus, something not done by other authors, for the purpose of offering rhetorical proof for the claim that Jesus is closely related to his followers. In this way, the Preacher does not seem to be ignoring completely the context of Psalm 22, though some of the finer details have shifted. The speaker in Psalm 22 is one who has endured suffering, been rescued by the LORD, and now declares praise for the LORD’s answer within the community. Jesus in Hebrews 2 is one who endured suffering (vv. 10, 14ff.), was rescued by God (vv. 9, 10), and now experiences intimate community with other people of God through the telling of God’s name and singing of God’s praise, and also through shared experience (v. 14) and the offer to help the community (vv. 15-16, 18).

These allusions from John and Hebrews are the most explicit, given the introductory formulae. In contrast, other NT authors use imagery common to Psalm 22 and other texts to describe the relationship between suffering and confidence in God’s rescuing action. In these

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<sup>17</sup> According to Appendix III in Nestle-Aland28, Psalm 22 is referred to 23 times in the New Testament, and we find 13 of the 23 occurrences in the Synoptic Gospels. The rest occur in John, Romans, Philippians, 2 Timothy, Hebrews, 1 Peter, and Revelation.

instances, there is no introductory formula, no direct quotation, and in many cases little confidence that the authors had Psalm 22 particularly in their minds. For example, in the parable of the judge who neither feared God nor respected people (Luke 18:2-8), Jesus teaches that God will give justice and implies that God will not delay long in giving it. This idea is loosely connected to Ps. 22:2, in which the psalmist pleads to God to answer. In the psalmist's case, however, God is *not* answering. Also, Mark 9:12 refers to the Son of Man who will "suffer many things and be treated with contempt." Very loosely, this idea is connected to Ps. 22:6, in which the psalmist reports that he is "scorned by humankind and despised by the people." In Matt. 26:37, the narrator describes Jesus' entry into Gethsemane: "Jesus began to be sorrowful and troubled." This general statement has been connected to Ps. 22:15, in which the psalmist says, "I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax; it is melted within my breast." Here we see no verbal connection at all, but an emotional and conceptual connection that is informative but neither obvious nor necessary for the understanding of Matt. 26:37. In the next chapter of Matthew, soldiers mock Jesus (v. 29), a derisive action linked to Ps. 22:7. The action matches the psalmist's experience, but the words are quite different. Matthew will reference Ps. 22:7 more specifically in 27:39, when the passers-by mock Jesus and "wag their heads." Finally, in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' words in 20:17 have been connected to Ps. 22:22. The verbal link between the two verses is "my brothers." In John 20:17, Jesus tells Mary Magdalene, "go to my brothers, and say to them, 'I am ascending to my Father...'", and in Ps. 22:22, the psalmist promises to tell "my brothers" about the LORD's name or reputation. Though a tenuous verbal connection exists, once again the details and the common phrase "my brothers" leave open the question of whether or not the author intended to evoke Psalm 22. Thus, one must use caution when connecting these NT texts directly to Psalm 22. What one can say, however, is that the content shared between Psalm 22 and these NT texts draws on common themes and metaphors that are part of the shared knowledge of the listening communities.

The epistles also contain examples of very loose allusion to Psalm 22, usually in the case of suffering. Paul refers to Ps. 22:5 ("to you [God] they [our ancestors] cried and were rescued; in you they trusted and were not put to shame") in both Rom. 5:5 and Phil. 1:20. In both instances, not being put to shame is the common tie to Psalm 22. In particular, Paul expresses the idea found in Psalm 22 that those who are suffering and who hope in God's future deliverance will not be shamed. Paul (along with the ancestors and the psalmist) is confident that hope in God will not be proved wrong. In other words, God's faithfulness is assured. Another example of a very loose connection is Heb. 5:7, in which the words "he was *heard*" (referring to Jesus' cry to God to save him from death) allude to Ps. 22:24, which declares that the LORD has *heard* the cry of the afflicted. The Preacher's connection between Psalm 22 and Jesus may have been influenced by the oral traditions reflected in the gospels. Additionally, both 2 Tim. 4:17 and 1 Peter 5:8 draw on the image of a dangerous lion: being rescued from the lion's mouth and the description of the devil as a prowling and roaring lion,



respectively. Psalm 22 also describes opponents who “open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion” (v. 13), and the psalmist later pleads to the LORD, “save me from mouth of the lion!” (v. 21a). These three texts share the same image, but several other texts in the Hebrew Scriptures also refer to the dangerous lion. Indeed, the image is found in the literature of many peoples who share space with lions. It is certainly possible that the authors were thinking of Psalm 22, but the connection is not necessarily there. Finally, the book of Revelation includes two loose allusions to Psalm 22. In Rev. 11:15, when the seventh angel blew his trumpet, loud voices from heaven declared that God will reign forever and ever. This verse has been tied to Ps. 22:28, which declares that the LORD rules over the nations. Revelation 19:5 refers to rejoicing in heaven, during which a voice comes from God’s throne saying, “Praise our God, all you his servants, you who fear him, small and great!” In Ps. 22:23, likewise, those who fear the LORD are urged to praise him.

In these instances of loose allusion, one can see conceptual and sometimes even verbal connections, but I find it difficult to demonstrate conclusively that the New Testament author intended to reference Psalm 22 specifically. Nevertheless, for an engaged and informed audience, drawing connections to Psalm 22 only enhances the texture of New Testament texts that tend to deal with the difficult theology of suffering and hope in God’s deliverance.

The rest of the occurrences of Psalm 22 in the New Testament appear in the Passion narratives of the Synoptic Gospels: dividing of the garments and casting of lots (from Ps. 22:18, see Matt. 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; and also John 19:25, discussed above); mocking and sometimes wagging of heads (from Ps. 22:7-8, see Matt. 27:39, 43; Mark 15:29; Luke 23:35); and the cry of desolation (from Ps. 22:2, see Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). These allusions to Psalm 22 are not introduced or presented as direct quotation, but neither are they what we might call loose or indirect allusions. These instances of direct allusion to Psalm 22 in the New Testament exhibit significant verbal and conceptual connection to Psalm 22, particularly in light of the allusions’ literary contexts in the gospels’ Passion narratives.

In these three Passion narratives, the quotations from Psalm 22 come from the first section of the psalm. No reference is made to vv. 21b-31, the portion of the psalm that shifts from lament to thanksgiving. This choice is appropriate for the genre of the Passion; the authors are highlighting the suffering of Jesus. Allusion to the deliverance of God at this point would distract from the very real agony of the cross. Did the gospel writers have the entirety of Psalm 22 in mind, when they alluded to the first section? If there are two sides to the coin of lament: lament proper and thanksgiving, should we expect God’s rescue to be in view as we see Jesus on the cross? This question deserves further attention.

Considering in particular the cry of desolation, Loren Fisher suggests that the first lines of psalms sometimes functioned as a kind of short hand, using just one line to evoke the entirety

of the psalm. Fisher argues that Jesus vocalized the entirety of Psalm 22 from the cross, but Matthew and Mark saved space when writing the narrative by including only the first line or title.<sup>18</sup> Certainly ancient authors were concerned with saving space, given the expense of writing materials. Also, the frequent use of Psalm 22 in the Passion narratives suggest that the authors did indeed have more than Ps. 22:1 in mind as the stories unfolded – reference to v. 7-8 and 18 tell us as much. External evidence offered for this claim, however, appears in instructions, not in exclamations as we have in Jesus’ words from the cross. We also encounter internal problems when experiencing the Passion narratives from a literary perspective. If Jesus quoted the entire psalm, why did the bystanders misunderstand Jesus as calling for Elijah? Would they not have understood? For that matter, even if Jesus only spoke the first verse of Psalm 22, it is surprising that the passers-by did not recognize it.

Here we encounter one of the complexities of literary analysis. There are many audiences for a narrative: the actual audience, authorial audience, implied audience, and ideal audience, to name only a few. What the passers-by heard that afternoon on Golgotha may be different than what Mark’s first century audience heard, and both of those interpretations may be different from what a modern community hears, *even if the words remain the same*. The noise of the crowd may have caused ancient misunderstanding; the recognition that this story was shaping a newly formed Christian community may have influenced Mark’s audience; the ease of flipping to the cross-referenced Psalm 22 may colour modern communities’ experience.

Theologically speaking, considering the whole of Matthew and Mark, Jesus’ lament from the cross is answered by God’s faithful action, even if Mark leaves a tantalizingly open ending. Both the authors’ original audiences know the end of the story, as do most modern audiences. In that way, we may speak of the quotation on the cross evoking the rest of Psalm 22. Narratologically, however, the audience has not yet arrived at that point, regardless if they know the end of the story or not. The cry of desolation needs to be filled with the pain of abandonment, as the perfect tense “forsaken” rips through expectation and faith, without hint of praise and thanksgiving. The crucifixion is not the climax of the story, with the resurrection following as a theologically necessary denouement. The crucifixion is the act that directly precedes the climax of the good news of Jesus: that through the resurrection, God has conquered death. Without the experience of the agony and desolation of Jesus’ crucifixion, the telling of the resurrection loses some of its effect. God’s faithful action of deliverance through the resurrection is that much greater because of the anguish Jesus experiences on the cross.

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<sup>18</sup> Loren Fisher, “Betrayed by Friends: An Expository Study of Psalm 22” *Int* 18.1 (January 1964): 27. See also Holly Carey, *Jesus’ Cry from the Cross: Toward a First-century Understanding of the Intertextual Relationship Between Psalm 22 and the Narrative of Mark’s Gospel* (LNTS 398; New York: T&T Clark, 2009), ch. 7-8.

The Synoptic authors do not limit allusions to Ps. 22:1, and in fact, this first verse of the psalm is the last brought into the gospel accounts in which it is present. Structurally, the direct allusions in all three Synoptics move through Psalm 22 from later verses to earlier verses. For instance, in Matthew, the order of direct allusions is to Ps. 22:18, then vv. 7-8, then v. 1. The other Synoptics follow the same pattern. While the psalm begins with a cry of desolation, progressing from deepest feelings of abandonment and betrayal to highest expression of praise and thanksgiving, the gospel writers move in the opposite direction. Even Luke, the Synoptic that does not use the cry of desolation, moves “backward” through Psalm 22 in its direct allusions. The gospel authors draw on the cry of desolation as the climax of Jesus’ suffering and humiliation, building the sense of shame first from the division of his garments, then to the mocking and wagging of heads, and finally to Jesus’ cry from the cross in the case of Matthew and Mark.

Rhetorically speaking, the Synoptic authors move from general to specific when they quote Psalm 22. The affliction of the general person is applied to the specific person and experience of Jesus. This use was not uncommon. In fact, as discussed above, the ambiguity of the referent, language, and setting of the psalm makes it easy to use the words in varied situations. Perhaps the psalm was at one time used for the king, even King David. At other times, the psalm may have been used for a suffering person appealing to God in the context of public worship in the temple. At still other times, the words may have been sung by an afflicted one in the relative privacy of a small group worshipping in a home. Perhaps at one point a priest was present, pronouncing an oracle of deliverance between the lines of Ps. 22:21a and 21b. At another time, perhaps moments passed, or days, before the psalm was completed – whatever time was needed for divine catharsis to reach the heart of the singer, facilitating a shift of reality that allowed for the possibility of praise for deliverance. And at one time, it was Jesus the Christ whose life followed this path of suffering.

The ambiguity of Psalm 22 allowed New Testament authors to apply the words to a new sufferer, to put the words in the mouth of a different speaker, and to use the words as prophecy or as narrative and rhetorical proof. The authors remained within the trajectory set in the Israelite context, not straying outside boundaries shaped by historical, literary, and canonical context, perhaps because audiences who knew Psalm 22 would call foul on an inappropriate recasting of the song. The authors did feel freedom, however, to reuse the psalm in pieces or as a whole for various purposes and in various genres. Having been a song for the Israelite king and for the common Hebrew person, the New Testament reappropriates the song for Jesus. In light of Jesus’ exemplary life and ministry, the psalm comes full circle, once again appropriately sung by both the king and the common person. The psalm is understood and used as the Word of God for – and about – the people of God.

## Psalm 22 in the Modern Context

If we accept the ambiguous nature of Psalm 22 that allowed the New Testament authors to follow in a long line of reappropriation and recasting of the psalm, we may still consider Psalm 22 to be the Word of God for and about the people of God today. Just as the ancient renditions of the psalm were not meant to be the final use of Psalm 22, the New Testament writers' use should not be the final definition of the psalm's speaker and circumstance. Indeed, how could it be, as we have seen the New Testament use the psalm in multiple ways?

Hesitation over the freedom to recast the psalm into new circumstances is warranted. We are concerned that the psalm may be used in a way not intended by the author and the inspiring spirit of God. We worry that opening the psalm to multiple applications weakens the application to the ancient context. I propose that these concerns, however, are a result of a modern mindset, shaped by a print culture. Certainly, we cannot leave behind our cultural presuppositions. We are undeniably products of our culture, and we are grateful for it. We must also recognize the culture of which the biblical text is a product. Psalm 22 and the New Testament passages that make use of it are not products of a print culture. They were shaped, rather, by a rhetorical culture.<sup>19</sup> In a rhetorical culture, texts were meant to be experienced by the ear rather than the eye, they were stored in people's minds and hearts rather than on a page, and perhaps most importantly for this discussion, texts in a rhetorical culture belonged not to the author, but to the *community*.<sup>20</sup> The ambiguity of the psalm in the ancient world allowed the song to belong to the person or people of God who lived in the 11<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, *and* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century CE. In this sense, then, the answer to the question posed above is in the affirmative. New Testament authors used and reused the experience of Psalm 22 in new and varied contexts. Christians today may and perhaps even *should* re-perform Psalm 22 within the boundaries of historical, literary, and canonical context, recognizing the truth of the psalm's experience even in new contexts in which the people of God suffer, and in which they are delivered.

In conclusion, we return to the most common New Testament use of Psalm 22. Through the use of the psalm in the Passion narrative, Jesus' affliction and shame connects him to the ancestors who suffered and to those yet to be born who will suffer. The cry of desolation is not the ultimate and final use of the words of Ps. 22:1. Instead, the cry falls from Jesus' lips in

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<sup>19</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, "Progymnastic Rhetorical Composition and Pre-Gospel Traditions - A New Approach" in *The Synoptic Gospels: Source Criticism and the New Literary Criticism* (ed. Camille Focanta; Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1993). See also David M. Carr, *Writing on the Tablet of the Heart: Origins of Scripture and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> See also Kathy Maxwell, "From Performance to Text to Performance: The New Testament's Use of the Hebrew Bible in a Rhetorical Culture" in *From Text to Performance: Narrative and Performance Criticisms in Dialogue and Debate* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014).

anguished solidarity with those who have suffered and those who will suffer. The words do not remain on a static page or in a century long-passed. The words of Psalm 22 flow through time, forward and backward, touching and healing, through shared experience, all those who have been and will be stripped and beaten, mocked and rejected, and those who cry out, “My God, my God! Why have you forsaken me?”

#### **About the author**

Kathy Maxwell teaches New Testament at Palm Beach Atlantic University, in West Palm Beach, Florida. Her areas of research interest include performance criticism, interpretive methodologies, ancient rhetoric and narrative, characterization in the gospels, the role of the audience in ancient narratives, biblical storytelling and oral culture. Her dissertation project, *Hearing Between the Lines* (T&T Clark, Library of New Testament Studies, 2010), explores the audience's active role in receiving – and telling – the story of Luke-Acts. She is currently working on projects that consider the audience's formation and participation in hearing the biblical story, both in ancient times and the modern world. She has particular interest in biblical storytelling, and is certified through the Network of Biblical Storytellers.

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