

Editor: Hugh Walton
Email: skooks57@att.net

*"Like the cold of snow in time of harvest
Is a faithful messenger to those who send him,
For he refreshes the soul of his masters"*
(Proverbs 25:13)

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The Gospel Messenger

"My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?"

by Andy Sochor

M*y God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matthew 27:46). Jesus uttered these words as He hung on the cross. But what do these words mean? Some believe Jesus asked this question because the Father had actually forsaken Him. They say the Father "turned His back" on Christ. This idea is so common, you might expect to see those actual words used in the text. They are not. The Bible does not say the Father turned His back on His Son. But was Jesus in fact "forsaken" by the Father? Or do these words have another meaning?

Let us first notice the context surrounding Jesus' words. The text says, *"They came to a place called Golgotha"* (Matthew 27:33). This was where Jesus was to be crucified. While on the cross, Jesus endured the mocking and abuse of the crowd that was present. They *"divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots"* (Matthew 27:35). Those who passed by *"were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross'"* (Matthew 27:39-40). The chief priests, scribes, and elders also mocked Him: *"He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He*

trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, for He delights in Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God'" (Matthew 27:42-43). The robbers *"were also insulting Him"* (Matthew 27:44). It is at this time that Jesus uttered the words:

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

Assume for a moment that the Father did turn His back on Christ. Usually the reason given why the Father forsook Jesus was because the sins of the world were placed upon Him. Since *"God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all"* (1 John 1:5), He would have had no choice but to turn His back on Jesus. [The Bible does not teach that our sins were placed upon Christ, although many believe that it does. But that is a subject we will have to address at another time.] If that were the reason why the Father turned His back on Christ, why would Jesus ask this question on the cross? Did He not know why He was on the cross? Did He not understand that God cannot fellowship sin? Was He hoping everyone would see the fracture in the Godhead? Was this just an emotional exclamation? Did Jesus not expect the Father to forsake Him? This interpretation leads to more questions than answers.

When Jesus uttered the phrase—

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

—He was actually quoting the beginning of Psalm 22. This psalm is a prophecy of how the Christ would suffer. An examination of this psalm will explain the meaning of Jesus' words on the cross.

The beginning of this psalm (Psalm 22:1-6) shows how Jesus' death would have appeared to the average onlooker. One could have easily thought, upon witnessing the crucifixion and the events surrounding it, that God had "forsaken" Christ (Psalm 22:1). He would "not answer" despite the fact that Jesus might *"cry by day...and by night"* (Psalm 22:2). The psalmist reminded us that God *"delivered" "our fathers"* at various times in the past (Psalm 22:3-5). But Jesus was *"a worm and not a man"* (Psalm 22:6), so it seemed, because He was left alone on the cross. One who was ignorant of, or simply ignored Psalm 22 specifically, and the Old Testament in general, would have easily come to this conclusion seeing what happened to Jesus in His death. It appeared that the Father turned His back and forsook the Son when you consider no other Bible passages.

What we need to remember is that Jesus' death on the cross was part of God's eternal plan. Peter told the crowd on Pentecost:

"This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death" (Acts 2:23).

Psalm 22 is one passage that shows how specifically this was determined and known by God. Notice the proph-

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ecies in this psalm and specific fulfillments in the gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion:

- *“All who see me sneer at Me; they separate with the lip, they wag the head, saying, ‘Commit Yourself to the Lord; let Him rescue Him, because He delights in Him’” (Psalm 22:7-8).*

“And those passing by were hurling abuse at Him, wagging their heads and saying, ‘You who are going to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross.’ In the same way the chief priests also, along with the scribes and elders, were mocking Him and saying, ‘He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe in Him. He trusts in God; let God rescue Him now, if He delights in Him; for He said, ‘I am the Son of God’” (Matthew 27:39-43).

- *“Many bulls have surrounded Me; strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They open wide their mouth at Me, as a ravening and a roaring lion” (Psalm 22:12-13).*

“Pilate then took Jesus and scourged Him. And the soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and put a purple robe on Him; and they began to come up to Him and say, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’ and to give Him slaps in the face. Pilate came out again and said to them, ‘Behold, I am bringing Him out to you so that you may know that I find no guilt in Him.’ Jesus then came out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Pilate said to them, ‘Behold, the Man!’ So when the chief priests and the officers saw Him, they cried out saying, ‘Crucify, crucify!’” (John 19:1-6).

- *“My strength is dried up like a*

potsherd, and My tongue cleaves to My jaws; and You lay Me in the dust of death” (Psalm 22:15).

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, ‘I am thirsty’” (John 19:28).

Also, the International Standard Bible Encyclopedia explains that crucifixion caused “[strain] of the body and insufferable thirst.” The suffering was so severe, it says, “the victim of crucifixion literally died a thousand deaths.”

- *“They pierced My hands and My feet” (Psalm 22:16).*

“So the other disciples were saying to him [Thomas], ‘We have seen the Lord!’ But he said to them, ‘Unless I see in His hands the imprint of the nails and put my finger into the place of the nails...I will not believe’” (John 20:25).

- *“They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Psalm 22:18).*

“And when they had crucified Him, they divided up His garments among themselves by casting lots” (Matthew 27:35).

There are many prophecies in the Old Testament regarding Christ and His death. These are just some from this psalm. The prophecies and their specific fulfillment are remarkable. Certainly, all these things were done *“by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God”* (Acts 2:23).

In Psalm 22, we have already noticed that the beginning of the psalm shows how the death of Jesus would have appeared to those unfamiliar with God's word. It appeared as if He had been *“forsaken.”* The middle part of the psalm prophesies of Christ's death and the events surrounding it. Later, we see the response of the one this psalm is talking about:

“I will tell of Your name to my brethren; in the midst of the assembly I will

praise You. You who fear the Lord, praise Him; all you descendants of Jacob, glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him, all you descendants of Israel. 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 for help, He heard” (Psalm 22:22-24).

Instead of Jesus being forsaken by the Father, this passage teaches just the opposite. Jesus was “not despised nor abhorred.” The Father had not “hidden His face from Him.” Verse 23 says we ought to “praise Him” and “glorify Him, and stand in awe of Him” because of the fact that He did not forsake Jesus on the cross.

Why then did Jesus say—

“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”

—if it was not because the Father actually forsook Him? The answer is simple: **to produce faith in those who witnessed those events.** Many of the people who saw Jesus' crucifixion were Jews. They would have or should have been familiar with the prophecies about Christ since they were *“read every Sabbath”* (Acts 13:27). **When Jesus uttered those words, it should have sounded familiar to them.** Those who were honest, would have been able to go back, search the Scriptures, and be reminded of this passage. They would have been able to clearly see that the prophecies in Psalm 22 pointed directly to Jesus and the events they just witnessed. This statement by Jesus was not an emotional reaction to the Father turning His back on Him. The Father did not forsake Jesus and Jesus never thought that He did. Jesus did not unwittingly fulfill prophecy on this or any other occasion. **Instead, Jesus was deliberately pointing the ones present to this passage in order to produce faith. It should produce the same in us today!** Ω