

## Unit 1: Major Messianic Prophecies

### Lesson 7 | January 12, 2025 Jesus' Crucifixion and Suffering

#### Study Text

Psalm 22:1–31; Matthew 27:1–66; John 20:24–29

#### Central Truth

Jesus' suffering is part of God's prophesied plan to heal the world.

#### Key Verse: Luke 24:26–27

Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he [Jesus] expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself (KJV).

“Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?” Then Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself (NLT).

#### Learning Objectives

- Students will compare David's vivid prophecies in Psalm 22 to the details of Jesus' crucifixion.
- Students will acknowledge and worship Jesus as the Son of God and Savior of the world.
- Students will cultivate an ever-increasing faith in Jesus, despite never having seen Him.

#### Introducing the Lesson

**Say:** The Gospel accounts of Jesus' crucifixion are some of the most dramatic and gut-wrenching passages in all of Scripture. After reading about Jesus' glorious birth and compassionate ministry, we then witness His betrayal by a friend, His unjust trial, and His physical and spiritual agony on the cross. One of the most challenging moments is when Jesus cries out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

#### Discussion Starter—Abandoned and Alone

**Say:** Have you ever felt completely alone in a time of crisis? If so, how did you deal with those feelings?

**Say:** During our darkest times, we might be tempted to ask questions. Jesus can empathize with such pain. And because of His sacrifice, we are never truly alone. “Be sure of this,” Jesus said, “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20).

Psalm 22 is a messianic psalm of David that uniquely focuses on suffering and ultimate triumph. For those of us who love and follow Jesus, it's nearly impossible to read and

analyze this psalm without considering His crucifixion. But we can understand it more deeply by considering its original context.

## **Part 1—Feeling Forsaken by the Father**

### **David Felt Abandoned**

Psalm 22:1–3

**Say:** Placed between Psalms 21 (a celebration of victory) and 23 (a celebration of provision), Psalm 22 strikes a much darker tone. It begins with the familiar words quoted by Jesus on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”

David’s words in Psalm 22:1 resonate with Christians who have endured distress yet remain dedicated to God. The Psalmist’s cry of anguish acknowledged his commitment to “my God” while also lamenting his circumstances. From David’s perspective, reality seemed to contradict what he had learned about God’s character.

- David knew God promised to be near His people (34:18), but He felt far away.
- David knew God answers those who call upon Him (4:3), but He seemed silent.
- David knew God would never forsake the righteous (37:25), but where was He?

Following the pattern of repeated questions that often appears in the Old Testament, David then asked why God was so far away and why He seemed not to hear his cries. David had been calling out for help both day and night, but God had not responded (22:2). There had been no answer and no relief to David’s suffering.

Scripture does not tell us the context of Psalm 22, so we do not know exactly how David was suffering when he wrote these words. But throughout his psalms, he teaches us the value of bringing our pain honestly to God.

Verse 3 makes it clear that, even amid his sorrow and sense of abandonment, David’s faith in God’s character did not waver. “Yet you are holy, enthroned on the praises of Israel.” David looked back to the way God’s presence had dwelt among His people and rescued them when they cried out to Him (verses 3–5). Would God not intervene again?

### **Resource Packet Item 1: Supporting Fellow Christians**

While Psalm 22 teaches us to pour out our hearts to God, it also reminds us how loneliness can make hard times seem even harder. Students will read case studies and discuss how fellow Christians could offer help and support in each situation.

#### Discuss

? What is the value of Christian community when we are suffering?

? How do we sustain our faith while bringing our honest, raw questions to God?

### **Jesus Felt Abandoned**

Matthew 27:45–47

**Say:** Just as David experienced victory in the second half of Psalm 22, Jesus would triumph over death and the grave. But first, He would suffer. Reading the details of His crucifixion, we catch a glimpse of Jesus' raw emotion as He suffered both physical and spiritual agony. (***Play the Lesson 7 video “Why Have You Forsaken Me?” You can download it for free at [radiantlifecurriculum.com/resources](http://radiantlifecurriculum.com/resources).***)

Matthew records that darkness fell between noon and three o'clock on the day Jesus died (27:45). Darkness in the daytime was considered a sign of God's judgment in the Old Testament (Exodus 10:21–22; Amos 8:9–10). In this case, judgment was not just falling upon the people who had rejected Jesus, but upon Jesus himself. His purpose in coming to earth was to deal with the sin that had created a barrier between people and God (Matthew 1:21; Romans 3:25). To accomplish this, He carried our sin (2 Corinthians 5:21) and bore our curse (Galatians 3:13).

While we cannot fully grasp the transaction taking place on the cross, we can (to a degree) understand the anguished emotion behind His words as the darkness of that afternoon came to an end: “*Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?*” which means ‘My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?’” (Matthew 27:46). The sinless Son of God felt the weight of sin and the separation from the Father it brings.

Jesus' choice of words in that moment was fully intentional and likely carried the larger message of Psalm 22. By quoting His ancestor David's prophetic statement from centuries earlier, Jesus was proclaiming that His own unjust suffering would end in salvation—not just for the Jews, but for the Gentiles. “The whole earth will acknowledge the LORD and return to him. All the families of the nations will bow down before him” (verse 27).

Matthew records the people's reaction to Jesus' words: “He's calling Elijah” (27:47). While it's possible that this response was mockery, it seems as though the bystanders misunderstood Jesus' words and associated them with a Jewish tradition of the time. It was believed by some that Elijah was able to come at any time to help righteous people (see verse 49).

### Discuss

? While David's suffering was on his own behalf, Jesus suffered for us. How can we express our gratitude to Jesus for His sacrifice?

## **Part 2—Jesus Mocked and His Garments Divided**

### **David Scorned**

Psalm 22:6–8, 17–18

**Say:** Have you ever been told that some tragedy in your life was a punishment from God? This can be especially hurtful when you love God and are serving Him with your whole heart. Both David and Jesus experienced that pain firsthand.

As we move forward in Psalm 22, David's words so closely mirror the crucifixion that it can be tempting to see them only from a New Testament perspective. Although the prophetic nature of the psalm is undeniable, we should also acknowledge the anguish David felt.

Verses 3 and 9 each begin portions of this psalm (3–5, 9–10) with “yet you” and describe God's faithfulness. But nested between these passages, verses 6–8 (beginning with “but I”) contrast God's high and holy status with David's utter lowliness. David feels dehumanized by his enemies' insults and dismissal. They even mockingly reminded him of God's apparent abandonment: “If the LORD loves him so much, let the LORD rescue him!” (verse 8). This attitude reflects the incorrect, age-old belief that suffering is always a result of sin (the theme of many psalms and the entire Book of Job).

In Psalm 22:17–18, David describes the dread that he would die as his enemies looked on, not even waiting until he was gone to divide his possessions among themselves. Again, we cannot know to what degree David was intentionally prophesying or simply describing his own situation. But as we will see in the next section, each detailed metaphor became a reality at Jesus' crucifixion.

### Discuss

? How can we find hope and strength in the Lord when we are under attack?

? Why is it so important to support fellow Christians in times of distress?

### **Jesus Scorned**

Matthew 27:31–43

**Say:** Because it is so familiar, we can lose sight of the horrifying reality of the Cross. Not only was crucifixion a painful way to die, but it was also a disgrace (Deuteronomy 21:23; Galatians 3:13).

Roman crucifixion was intentionally cruel, designed to brutalize criminals and discourage revolt. The condemned were forced to carry their own crossbeams to the place of execution, likely north or west of Jerusalem in Jesus' case. Yet He was so weakened by torture that the soldiers forced a man named Simon to carry it for him.

Psalm 22:18 is fulfilled in Matthew 27:35 when the Roman soldiers divided Jesus' clothes among them. All clothing was removed from people being crucified, adding to their shame. Their clothes—likely an inner and outer garment, sandals, and a belt—became the property of the executioners. John's Gospel explains that Jesus' robe was “seamless, woven in one piece from top to bottom So they said, ‘Rather than tearing it apart, let's throw dice for it’” (19:23–24).

The Roman soldiers were not the only antagonists unknowingly fulfilling messianic prophecies right there at the foot of the cross. The taunts Jesus endured from all sides unmistakably matched up with David's words.

- People passing by shook their heads at Him (Matthew 27:39), an expression of insult and mockery common in the Old Testament (Isaiah 37:22; Lamentations 2:15) and a direct fulfillment of Psalm 22:7.
- The Jewish leaders who traveled outside the city to witness Jesus' crucifixion and hurl insults at Him seemed to be following David's script from Psalm 22:8 when they said, "He trusted God, so let God rescue him now if he wants him!" (Matthew 27:43). Although the prophecies they had studied their entire lives were unfolding right before their eyes, they were spiritually blind. They mocked Jesus for His suffering, failing to realize that it was one of the many proofs that He was truly the Messiah.
- Even the criminals hanging alongside Jesus ridiculed Him, although one came to believe in Him soon afterward (Luke 23:39–43). This is another example of the Romans unwittingly fulfilling messianic prophecy: He "was numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12, KJV).

Repeatedly, Jesus' mockers challenged Him to come down from the cross (Matthew 27:40, 42; Luke 23:35, 37, 39). They were Satan's mouthpiece as, in the last hours of Jesus' life, He was tempted to disobey the Father and call off His redemptive mission. The enemy employed his age-old tactic of casting doubt. Just as he had caused Eve to question whether God was really good (Genesis 3:1–5), he now echoed his words from Jesus' temptation: "If you are the Son of God..." (Matthew 4:3, 6; 27:40, 43).

Of course, Jesus did not relent. "Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame" (Hebrews 12:2). As He had explained to the disciples, "No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down when I want to and also to take it up again" (John 10:18).

### **Resource Packet Item 2: Jesus' Words from the Cross**

This information sheet shows the words Jesus spoke from the cross and lists the events that took place just before and after His crucifixion.

#### Discuss

- ? What does it mean to you that Jesus suffered so willingly?
- ? How can we respond to ridicule and mockery like Jesus did?

### **Part 3—Hands and Feet Pierced Surrounded by Enemies**

Psalm 22:11–16

**Say:** David next compared his enemies to dangerous animals—a familiar threat to a shepherd who had killed lions and bears while protecting his flock (1 Samuel 17:34–36). His descriptions of the physical pain he was enduring are strikingly similar to what Jesus would endure on the cross.

After crying again for God’s help (Psalm 22:11), David described how his enemies were surrounding him on the outside (verses 12–13) and his strength was draining away on the inside (verses 14–15). Anyone who has ever gotten close to a herd of half-wild cattle can understand David’s description of being helplessly surrounded. David then elevated the stakes by describing an attack by hungry lions. Dealing with danger on every side has left him exhausted—poured out, disjointed, melted, dried up, left for dead.

In verse 16, David again describes the “evil gang” closing in on him, describing them as “a pack of dogs,” much less noble than cattle or lions. The word translated “pierced” is difficult to understand in Hebrew, but it was rendered this way in the Septuagint (*Sep-TOO-uh-jint*, the Greek translation of the Old Testament started over two hundred years BC), indicating that it is an accurate translation. Other prophecies also refer to the Messiah being pierced (Isaiah 53:5; Zechariah 12:10) while David added the detail that these wounds would be inflicted on the Messiah’s hands and feet.

We cannot leave Psalm 22 without telling the end of the story. Between verses 21 and 22, David experienced a complete turnaround. He burst forth with praise, affirming that God “has not ignored or belittled the suffering of the needy. He has not turned his back on them, but has listened to their cries for help” (verse 24). Although David could not have known the details, he prophesied the ultimate triumph of the Messiah: “Future generations will hear about the wonders of the Lord. His righteous acts will be told to those not yet born. They will hear about everything he has done” (verses 30–31).

### Discuss

? Has stress or danger ever left you feeling utterly exhausted? Looking back, how can you see that God was helping you?

? What do you think could have happened to David that caused his change of perspective in the second half of Psalm 22?

### **Seeing and Believing**

John 20:24–29

**Say:** David’s prophecy that the Messiah’s hands and feet would be pierced (Psalm 22:16) was fulfilled at Jesus’ crucifixion (Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:33; John 19:18). Several days later, those wounds would be the sign that caused the apostle Thomas to believe Jesus had risen.

The day He rose from the dead, Jesus appeared to the disciples in the room where they were hiding from the Jewish leaders (John 20:19). He showed them the wounds in His hands and side (verse 20), and they were filled with joy. Thomas wasn’t with the other



disciples, and when they later described what had happened, he refused to believe they had seen Jesus.

Thomas was extremely loyal and had rallied the other disciples to follow Jesus to the death (11:16). It's possible he was naturally skeptical (14:5) or perhaps he was distraught because he had deserted Jesus at His arrest (Mark 14:50) and could not let himself believe the Master was alive. Whatever his motivation, he insisted on seeing physical proof (like the other disciples had already seen) before believing Jesus had risen from the dead.

Eight days later, Jesus again appeared to the disciples (John 20:26). Immediately, His attention went to Thomas. Before the disciple could say a word, Jesus relieved his doubts. He didn't need to be told what proof Thomas had demanded; He already knew and invited the disciple to touch the wounds in His hands and side. "Don't be faithless any longer," Jesus told him. "Believe!" (verse 27).

Scripture doesn't indicate whether Thomas touched Jesus' wounds or whether seeing them was enough. But we do know Thomas' response: "My Lord and my God!" (verse 28). Not only did Thomas recognize Jesus as Messiah, but he grasped the truth that Jesus is God.

Jesus explained that the disciples believed because they had seen Him, triumphantly risen from the dead. But those who came later, who believed in Him sight unseen, would be especially blessed (verse 29). Millions of Christians throughout the centuries have been partakers of that blessing. There may be times we wish we had heard Jesus preach or seen Him heal and deliver or simply looked into His face. But how blessed we are to have seen the truth with eyes of faith and declared Him to be our Lord and our God!

### **Resource Packet Item 3: The Joy of Faith**

Jesus said those who believed in Him without ever seeing Him would be especially blessed (John 20:29). Students will read and reflect on several passages about the joy of having faith. This handout would work best as a small-group project or a take-home page for personal devotions.

#### Discuss

? Why do you think Thomas insisted on seeing Jesus' wounds before he would believe He was alive?

? In what sense are we blessed because we have not seen Jesus?

### **What Is God Saying to Us?**

**Say:** Psalm 22 was birthed out of David's suffering and his willingness to continue pouring out his heart even when God seemed silent. Under the Spirit's inspiration, he declared extremely detailed messianic prophecies that were fulfilled centuries later by Jesus. How could our suffering be part of God's larger redemptive plan? How might our steadfast faith be leading others to Jesus? We may never know until eternity.

## **Living It Out**

### Ministry in Action

- Remain faithful in prayer and diligent in Bible study so you are ready to proclaim the gospel despite the enemy's attacks.
- Pray that God will lead you to a fellow believer who is struggling in their faith. Remind them of the blessing of John 20:29.

### Daily Bible Readings

#### Monday:

God Will Never Abandon His People.

Deuteronomy 31:1–6

#### Tuesday:

God Never Forsakes His Saints.

Psalms 37:27–29

#### Wednesday:

Take Refuge in God.

Psalms 57:1–11

#### Thursday:

Blessed in Mockery.

Matthew 5:1–12

#### Friday:

Hated by the World.

John 15:18–25

#### Saturday:

Christ's Sufferings Foretold.

Acts 26:19–23