

“My God, My God, Why Hast Thou Forsaken Me?”

Psalm 22 and the Mission of Christ

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My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1). “Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows” (Isa. 53:4). These two statements—one quoted from the Psalms by Christ as he hung upon the cross, and the other taken from Isaiah by Abinadi in the Book of Mormon—are familiar and dear to all Christians as prophecies that found their fulfillment in Christ’s grand atoning sacrifice. Perhaps no Old Testament texts as a whole exerted more influence on the New Testament understanding of Christ’s mission than Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53. Psalm 22 was quoted or alluded to at least eleven times by New Testament authors,¹ while Isaiah 53 was used at least ten times.² Indeed, these texts could be considered the twin pillars of Old Testament prophecy regarding Christ. How could early Christians make sense of the torture and ignominious death of their Messiah? How could Jesus be the

1. See John 12:38; Romans 10:16; Matthew 8:17; 1 Peter 2:22; 1 Peter 2:24 (three different allusions); Acts 8:32–33; Mark 15:28; and Luke 22:37. John W. Welch and John F. Hall, *Charting the New Testament* (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2002), chart 2-5.

2. Uses of Psalm 22 in the New Testament will be discussed below in the paper. Other Old Testament passages that were used frequently include Exodus 20 (the Ten Commandments), eleven times; Psalm 110 (employed primarily by Paul), ten times; and Psalm 118 (with prophecies of Christ), ten times. As can be seen, only one of these passages—Psalm 118—was used primarily as a witness of Christ’s ministry. No other Old Testament passages rival these with regard to frequency in the New Testament. Welch and Hall, *Charting the New Testament*, chart 2-5.

My interest in Psalm 22 began when I was working on my master's thesis, which I wrote on Psalm 22:16. The version of that verse found in the Greek Septuagint reads, "They pierced my hands and my feet," but the Masoretic text gives the same phrase as "like a lion [they are at] my hands and my feet." Because of the Christological focus of the Septuagint rendering, the interpretation of the phrase has created heated debate throughout the centuries.



As I tried to sort through the various textual witnesses and interpretations of Psalm 22:16, I discovered that a small fragment found at Nahal Hever near Qumran was the only attestation of Psalm 22:16 among the Dead Sea scrolls. This fragment, the most ancient Hebrew witness of Psalm 22:16, actually provides a Hebrew word that could be most accurately translated as "they pierced," supporting a Christ-centered view of that text. This reading also supports teachings of Christ's crucifixion found in modern scriptures of the Restoration. A shortened version of my thesis was included in *BYU Studies* 44, no. 3, as "The Psalm 22:16 Controversy: New Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls."

This in-depth analysis of one verse of Psalm 22 formed the foundation for my interest in the entire psalm, all of which can be read as an extended prophecy of Christ's suffering, crucifixion, and eventual triumph over death. The paucity of Latter-day Saint commentary on Psalm 22, especially when compared with commentary on the other great, extended prophecy of Christ in the Old Testament—Isaiah 53—indicated to me a need for a closer look at the entire psalm. That search revealed a long history of Christ-centered interpretation surrounding Psalm 22 and profound connections with modern scripture, especially D&C 138, that I had not expected. The discoveries of that study are found in this article.

long-awaited Christ if his life ended without triumph or acclaim? Both of these chapters provided comfort that the Messiah's suffering was fore-known. Even more importantly, both scriptures show that his suffering and death were not the end but indicate that Christ would rise above the suffering and triumphantly save his people.

Notwithstanding the strength of these dual witnesses, Isaiah 53 has held place among Latter-day Saints as the preeminent Old Testament prophecy of Christ.³ Following Abinadi's example and the Book of Mormon's encouragement to "search . . . the words of Isaiah" (3 Ne. 23:1), each verse of Isaiah 53 has been dissected, analyzed, and mined by LDS scholars for any connection that would provide an ancient support for or additional understanding of Christ's mission.⁴ An entire Sunday School lesson during the Old Testament year of study centers on Isaiah's discussion of the Atonement,⁵ and the Old Testament institute manual devotes a lengthy section to it as well.⁶ Meanwhile, these two LDS resources include Psalm 22 as only one among a list of several Psalms that testify of Christ, with little or no explanatory discussion provided.⁷ A brief survey of biblical passages quoted in general conference in reference to

3. The title of an article by Keith Meservy is instructive: "Isaiah 53: The Richest Prophecy on Christ's Atonement in the Old Testament," in *A Witness of Jesus Christ: The 1989 Sperry Symposium on the Old Testament*, ed. Richard D. Draper (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1990), 156–57.

4. See, for example, Meservy, "Isaiah 53: The Richest Prophecy," 156–57; Victor L. Ludlow, *Isaiah: Prophet, Seer, and Poet* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1982), 447–57; Donald W. Parry, Jay A. Parry, and Tina M. Peterson, *Understanding Isaiah* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret Book, 1998), 470–78. Because LDS commentary on Isaiah 53 is so extensive, the authors of a bibliographic survey on Isaiah in the Book of Mormon chose to devote an additional eight pages to the observations of these commentaries in a verse-by-verse format. John S. Thompson and Eric Smith, "Isaiah and the Latter-day Saints: A Bibliographic Survey," in *Isaiah in the Book of Mormon*, ed. Donald W. Parry and John W. Welch (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1998), 495–502.

5. *Old Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2001), 187–89.

6. *Old Testament Student Manual: 1 Kings–Malachi* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 197–99.

7. *Old Testament: Gospel Doctrine Teacher's Manual*, 117–22; *Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis–2 Samuel* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003), 309–15. The institute manual does contain a lengthy excerpt from Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 530–34, part of which is quoted at the conclusion of this paper, in which he provides numerous Old Testament prophecies of Christ.

the Atonement indicates that speakers have discussed Christ's sacrifice in terms provided by Isaiah 53 sixty-one times since 1949. This compares with only eight references to Psalm 22 during the same time span.⁸

If the New Testament writers, however, connected their messages to Psalm 22 even more frequently than to Isaiah 53, perhaps this important passage should receive a more thorough treatment in LDS understanding as well. This paper aims to illuminate the powerful, Christ-centered nature of Psalm 22. In order to do so, it will first discuss Psalm 22 in detail, demonstrating its prophetic connections with Christ's ministry, including early Christian insights regarding the psalm. It will then discuss the importance of Christ's quotation from the cross of Psalm 22:1—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—and analyze LDS

Psalm 22 figures prominently among these and is linked by Elder McConkie with prophecy from Isaiah 53.

8. One of the primary reasons for this discrepancy is the Book of Mormon focus on the writings of Isaiah. Christ, like Moroni, provided direct encouragement in his teachings to study the words of Isaiah (see 3 Ne. 20:11; 23:1; Morm. 8:23), leading most LDS studies of the Old Testament to devote considerably more time to the teachings of Isaiah than to the Psalms. Additionally, the Book of Mormon quotes Isaiah 53 directly in Abinadi's teachings to the priests of Noah, and Abinadi connects that chapter explicitly to the mission of Christ with such forcefulness that LDS readers are strongly encouraged to view it through a Christ-centered lens. Other Book of Mormon prophets either quote directly from Isaiah 53 or appear to be influenced by its view of the suffering Christ. For example, Nephi appears to quote Isaiah 53:6 when he states that "all [have] gone astray" (2 Ne. 28:14). Alma explicitly refers to the text of Isaiah 53:4 when he states that Christ's suffering happened "that the word might be fulfilled which saith he will take upon him the pains and the sicknesses of his people" (Alma 7:11). Jacob does not clearly quote Isaiah but seems to echo an Isaianic view of Christ's sufferings when he says that Christ will suffer "the pains of all men" (2 Ne. 9:21). Other Nephite prophets, such as King Benjamin (quoting the angel in Mosiah 3:7, 9), reflect a similar understanding of and focus on Christ's suffering as that found in Isaiah 53. In contrast, there appear to be no references to Psalm 22 in the Book of Mormon, although the Book of Mormon view of a suffering Messiah does connect with Psalm 22 just as well as with Isaiah 53, and prophecies regarding Christ's crucifixion (1 Ne. 19:10; 2 Ne. 10:5; and Mosiah 15:7) and the wounds in his hands and feet (3 Ne. 11:15) connect more closely to Psalm 22 than to Isaiah 53 (see Ps. 22:16).

A search at <http://scriptures.byu.edu/> indicates that Psalm 22 has been referenced only 13 times in all recorded general conference talks and all speeches included in the *Journal of Discourses*. By contrast, Isaiah 53 has been referenced 111 times in these sources.

statements regarding it. This discussion of Psalm 22 builds throughout upon an earlier insightful LDS study provided by Paul Hoskisson.⁹

Psalm 22 and Christ's Atonement

(1) My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring? (2) O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

Most Latter-day Saints and other Christians are either unaware that Christ was quoting Psalm 22:1 when he made this well-known statement from the cross (in bold text), or they see it simply as the fulfillment of an isolated prophecy from the Old Testament. When seen from a broader view, this verse introduces all of Psalm 22. The complete text of this psalm follows a pattern found in other psalms known as “Psalms of Lament,” moving from a sufferer’s cries of anguish because of his trials (vv. 1–18), to a request for aid (vv. 19–21), and ending in a note of triumph as the sufferer anticipates the assistance he will receive from God or expresses gratitude that the desired assistance has come (vv. 22–31).¹⁰ Verse one begins the lament with the cry that would later be spoken by Christ. As will be seen, the subsequent verses of Psalm 22 continue to describe the events of Christ’s suffering and crucifixion in stunning detail, providing image after image that the Christ-centered reader recognizes as vividly accurate portrayals of the Atonement, and that would have provided comfort to early Christians as they reflected upon Christ’s statement forever linking his suffering with that chapter. Indeed, as will be seen, the full import of Christ’s quotation will be missed by modern readers if its connection with the rest of Psalm 22 is not understood.

Both Matthew and Mark included this opening sentence as Christ’s only statement while upon the cross (Matt. 27:46; Mark 15:34). Since this verse has been so central to a Christian understanding of Christ’s

9. Paul Y. Hoskisson, “The Witness for Christ in Psalm 22,” in *Covenants, Prophecies, and Hymns of the Old Testament* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2001), 290–301.

10. Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1981), 64–79; Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms of Lament in Mark’s Passion: Jesus’ Davidic Suffering*, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 2–8; James Limburg, “Book of Psalms,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 531–32. Psalms of lament include Psalms 44, 60, 74, 79, 80, 83, 85, 90, 94, 123, and 137.

sacrifice, the implications of the statement will receive a full treatment in a separate section below, which will also analyze doctrinal concerns expressed by early Christians regarding the cry of forsakenness. Although in these Gospels no other words from Christ were indicated, both Gospels teach that at the time of his death Jesus uttered a “loud” cry (Matt. 27:50; Mark 15:37), providing a connecting image with “the words of my roaring” in the second half of Psalm 22:1.

Psalm 22:2 continues the theme that God has not answered the prayer of the supplicant in the way he would have hoped. Although the unanswered “cry in the daytime” and “in the night season” could be read as poetic parallelism indicating a complete sense of forsakenness, Latter-day Saint readers could also see these time indications as references to Jesus’s dual periods of suffering, in the daytime upon the cross and in the nighttime at the Garden of Gethsemane. It was in that location where he pled that the “cup pass from [him]” (Matt. 26:39), but the Father in one sense “hear[d] not” (Ps. 22:2), allowing his Son to suffer the full effects of that bitter draught. According to this unique LDS understanding of the atoning nature of Christ’s suffering in Gethsemane, some LDS prophets, as will be seen below, have taught that Christ was left alone to a certain degree, not only on the cross but also in the garden, notwithstanding the fact that he was strengthened for a time by an angel (Luke 22:43).

Interestingly, Justin Martyr, a very early Christian commentator writing in the first half of the second century, also connected the sufferer’s cry in Psalm 22:2 with Jesus’s prayer in Gethsemane.¹¹ The well-known Christian theologian Augustine, however, writing about 250 years later, completely avoided any mention of Gethsemane in his commentary,¹² possibly indicating a theological shift in the Christian understanding of the garden experience. Accordingly, modern Christians have generally

11. Writing in the first half of the second century, Justin Martyr (AD 100–ca. 165) offered a verse-by-verse commentary on Psalm 22, showing how it was fulfilled in Christ. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 97–106. Quotations from Justin Martyr in this paper come from Thomas B. Falls, ed., *Saint Justin Martyr: The First Apology, The Second Apology, Dialogue with Trypho* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1965).

12. Augustine (AD 354–430) is known as one of the most influential Christian theologians throughout history. Quotations from Augustine in this paper are taken from Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms: Psalms 1–29*, trans. Scholastica Hebgin and Felicitas Corrigan, 2 vols., *Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation* vol. 29 (New York: Newman Press, 1960), 1:200–28.

seen the suffering in Gethsemane as due primarily to a concern for the impending ordeal on the cross, rather than as an atonement for the sins of mankind.¹³ For Latter-day Saints, these verses describe a dual understanding of garden and cross in a way that has been largely missed in Christianity since the times of Justin Martyr.

(3) But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel. (4) Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and thou didst deliver them. (5) They cried unto thee, and were delivered: they trusted in thee, and were not confounded.

These verses nuance the cry of abandonment expressed by Christ on the cross, and indicate that he trusted God even while feeling the overwhelming burden of his mission. As Hoskisson has written, the trust indicated in Psalm 22:4 was shown in the second half of Christ's Gethsemane prayer, in which he requested the bitter cup to be removed: "If this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, *thy will be done*" (Matt. 26:42, emphasis added). Jesus knew, both in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, that God could be trusted to deliver him in the end, even if the possibilities appeared dark in the present. As will be seen below, echoes of this nuanced understanding of Christ's great cry have also been expressed by Latter-day Saint prophets and leaders. On the one hand, it is important to recognize that Jesus's feelings of forsakenness expressed in Psalm 22:1 support the understanding that Christ "[trod] the winepress alone," as prophesied in Isaiah 63:3, in part so that he could understand the feelings of aloneness that his people would suffer. On the other hand, it is also important to know that Christ took strength from his trust in God even during his feelings of utmost suffering. This concept allows modern-day disciples to recognize that feelings of aloneness are temporary and can be softened by an overarching trust in the Father's love for them, no matter how forsaken they may feel at times.

The sufferer's expression of hope in deliverance (Ps. 22:5), recorded hundreds of years earlier, again demonstrates a surprisingly specific connection with the details of Christ's crucifixion. On the preceding day, Jesus had celebrated a Passover meal, the Last Supper, with his disciples at precisely the time of year when Jews throughout the Mediterranean world were celebrating Israel's deliverance from bondage in Egypt, in which the angel of death passed them by (Ps. 22:4). In Christ's day, the

13. See Donald A. D. Thorsen, "Gethsemane," in Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 2:997.

Jews continued to mark their doorposts with the blood of the Passover lamb to show their own hope for deliverance during the struggles of their time. Although that Jewish hope was likely centered in Jesus's day on salvation from Rome, Christ knew that the most important deliverance was the rescue from death and sin, as had been taught in Isaiah 53.

(6) *But I am a worm (Heb. tola'at), and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people (Heb. uvzuy 'am).*

These verses connect textually with the description provided by Isaiah of the Messiah as one “despised (Heb. *nivzeh*) and rejected of men (Heb. *'am*)” (Isa. 53:3), both using the same root for “despised . . . of men” (Heb. *b-z-h* . . . *'am*). Both passages teach of a suffering Messiah who would not be received by worldly society at large but would remain a rejected outsider. Augustine's description of the suffering Christ as prophesied in Psalm 22 is particularly moving: “Our Lord was scourged and there was none to help; He was defiled with spittle and there was none to help; He was struck with blows and there was none to help; He was crowned with thorns, there was none to help; He was raised on the tree, there was none to rescue Him.”¹⁴

That the psalmist described Christ as a “worm, and no man” may have a significant dual meaning. In one sense, Christ, who “descended below all things” (D&C 88:6; see also Eph. 4:9–10), was considered as less than any other human being, having become in a manner guilty of the darkest sins of all humankind through his atoning sacrifice (2 Cor. 5:21). He was treated as the lowest of creatures, as a “worm,” and was crucified on the cross like the vilest of sinners. Job 25:4–6 demonstrates the connection between sin-induced suffering and the “worm” to which Psalm 22:6 is referring. Job's friend Bildad uses the word “worm” to suggest that Job's suffering is due to his sins, a state of uncleanness that is common to all of humankind: “How then can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold even . . . the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm (Heb. *tole'ah*)?” Psalm 22:7 follows the same reasoning as that provided by Bildad. Just as Bildad accuses Job of being a sinful worm, providing Job's suffering as evidence, so Christ—“a worm”—is mocked because his suffering on the cross demonstrates to them his cursed, sinful status.

14. Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:214.

However, a second possibility remains. Hoskisson has demonstrated the duality of this phrase by indicating that the word “worm” in Hebrew (*tola’at*) is a variant name for the creature (Heb. *tole’ah*) used to provide the color scarlet in the ancient world. Only royalty or the rich could afford the dye from this worm, and scarlet became identified with kingly authority and wealth. The soldiers at Christ’s crucifixion, for example, placed upon him a robe of scarlet (see Matt. 27:28; a purple robe in John 19:2) to mock him as “King of the Jews.” The coloring for this robe would have come from the *tola’at*, thus teaching that the Messiah is “a worm, and no man,” because he is more than man; he is of kingly heritage, the Son of God. This view was expressed in Augustine’s commentary on Psalm 22, which stated that Christ is no man, “because He is God.”¹⁵

(7) *All they that see me laugh me to scorn (Gr. exemyktērisan; Eng. deride; scorn): they shoot out the lip, they shake the head (Gr. ekinēsān kephalēn), saying, (8) He trusted (Gr. hēlpisen) on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver (Gr. sōsatō) him, seeing he delighted in him.*

The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke each pointedly allude to Psalm 22:7–8 (in bold text) in their passion narratives to show that Christ’s derision did not disqualify him as the Messiah, because it fulfilled biblical prophecy. Matthew’s account reflects most of the textual connections found in the other two Gospels as well, “They that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads. . . . Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, . . . He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him” (Matt. 27:39–43). The Greek version of Psalm 22:7–8 from the Septuagint (hereafter LXX),¹⁶ which was the version most frequently used by the New Testament authors,¹⁷ shows several points of connection with these verses. The LXX root for “laugh to scorn” (Psalm 22:7 in the KJV, but Psalm 21:8 in LXX) is the same as that for “derided” in Luke 23:35 (Gr. *exemyktērisōn*). The LXX phrase “wagging their heads” uses the same Greek roots as those found in Matthew 27:39 and Mark 15:29

15. Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:213.

16. The Greek Septuagint (LXX) was the earliest translation of the Hebrew Bible into any other language. It is so-named because of its miraculous translation, which, according to the story, was accomplished by seventy-two Jewish men (six from each of the twelve tribes) in seventy days. See Lancelot C. L. Brenton, ed., “Introduction,” in *The Septuagint with Apocrypha: Greek and English* (London: Hendrickson, 1999), ii.

17. Brenton, *Septuagint with Apocrypha*, vi.

(Gr. *kinountes tas kephalas*). The LXX for “deliver” mirrors that found in Luke 23:35 (Gr. *sōsatō*). The word for “trusted” in the LXX is a different root than that in Matthew 27:43 (Gr. *pepoithen*), but the similarity of the entire phrase strongly suggests a purposeful allusion.

In the psalm, these verses of scorn logically follow the preceding verses: the sufferer openly expressed trust in God in verses 3–5 and is subsequently mocked when his continued suffering appears to contradict the value of that reliance. Similarly, the emphasis in the Gospels on the mocking derision incurred by Jesus on the cross logically follows the connection with the Father that Jesus had expressed during his intercessory prayer just prior to the Crucifixion (see John 17:22). Those deriding Jesus viewed with delight the predicament of the cross that indicated to them that Jesus’s trust had been misplaced and that his belief that the Father “honoure[d him]” (John 8:54) was incorrect.

(9) But thou art he that took me out of the womb: thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts. (10) I was cast upon thee from the womb: thou art my God from my mother’s belly.

Christ’s divine Sonship is in these verses prefigured by the image of the Father himself removing Jesus from the womb so that he could be nurtured by his mother, Mary. The need for the child to receive nourishment reveals him as a mortal being, while God’s involvement in the process indicates a unique relationship between the two. The next statement reveals that Christ was not only nurtured by his mother but also relied deeply upon the assistance of the Father. Both statements show that Jesus began to understand this unique relationship from a very early age, indicating the type of maturity demonstrated by Jesus at age twelve when he taught his own mother that he “must be about [his] Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). This special hope in and reliance upon God is expressed even more fully in the Joseph Smith Translation at Matthew 3:24–25: “And it came to pass that Jesus grew up with his brethren, and waxed strong, and waited upon the Lord for the time of his ministry to come. And he served under his father, and he spake not as other men, neither could he be taught; for he needed not that any man should teach him.”¹⁸

18. The wording of this JST addition appears to leave the identity of the father—either Joseph or Heavenly Father—somewhat unclear. This ambiguity is heightened when examining the two extant manuscripts of the JST. While both versions show “father” in this passage with a lowercase letter, in the

According to Augustine, verses 9–10 refer to the virginal birth of Christ and to the fact that he was born of the “womb” of the Jewish people. The Jewish people had “rejected [Christ] instead of bearing [him]; and if [he] did not fall, it was because” God had upheld him.¹⁹ Christ was no mere infant but had a unique relationship with the Father from his earliest days. The phrases “But thou art he that took me out of the womb” and “I was cast upon thee from the womb” could be understood as symbolizing God’s role in Jesus’s birth as a midwife figure (or even a father figure, although fathers were not typically present at birth),²⁰ one who would catch, support, and comfort the newborn infant as it emerged from the womb and began to be fed and nourished by its mother. These verses could also indicate that God provided a unique protection and support from Jesus’s earliest days in the role typically filled by a father. Justin Martyr used these verses in Psalm 22 to teach that Christ’s atoning sacrifice was not carried out only at his death, but instead began at the beginning of his life, when he was called “from the womb.”²¹ In connection with John the Revelator’s testimony that Jesus had been called “from the foundation of the world” (Rev. 13:8), Latter-day Saints would trace Christ’s calling as the Messiah back even further to the premortal Council in Heaven (see Moses 4:1–4; Acts 2:23; and 1 Pet. 1:20). Psalm 22:9–10 could likewise indicate that Jesus was called as the Messiah even before he was born.

JST manuscript NT1, scribe Sidney Rigdon also did not capitalize “father” in Christ’s injunction to be perfect as the Father is (Matt. 5:48) or in the Lord’s prayer (Matt. 6:9), both of which were capitalized in the KJV and the 1828 Phinney Bible that Joseph Smith consulted during his translation efforts. For further information about Joseph’s Bible translation, see Kent P. Jackson, “Joseph Smith’s Cooperstown Bible: The Historical Context of the Bible Used in the Joseph Smith Translation,” *BYU Studies* 40, no. 1 (2001): 41–70. On the other hand, in the JST manuscript NT2, scribe John Whitmer *did* capitalize the word “father” in Matthew 5:48 and throughout Matthew 6 whenever the text referred to God the Father. A close reading of the Gospels, however, demonstrates that Jesus never referred to Joseph as his father (see Luke 2:48–49). These JST verses, then, can be taken to mean that Jesus served under his true Father and relied upon heavenly training from a very young age, as Psalm 22 illustrates.

19. Brenton, *Septuagint with Apocrypha*, 203.

20. See Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendricksen, 1991), 73–74.

21. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 98.

(11) *Be not far from me; for trouble is near; for there is none to help.* (12) *Many bulls have compassed me: strong bulls of Bashan have beset me round.* (13) *They gaped upon me with their mouths, as a ravening and a roaring lion.*

The passion narratives emphasize that some of Christ's feelings of forsakenness occurred because his Apostles did not always stand by him throughout his greatest hours of need. When he prophesied of his crucifixion, Peter had early on sought to dissuade him from his atoning mission (see Matt. 16:22–23; Mark 8:32–33). While suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ repeatedly returned to Peter, James, and John to express his concern that they were unable to stay awake and “watch with [him]” (Matt. 26:38–40). Notwithstanding their expressed intention to stand with Christ no matter what the difficulty, when Jesus was betrayed by Judas and taken captive, “all [his] disciples forsook him, and fled” (Matt. 26:56; Mark 14:50). Luke does not explicitly describe this abandonment but instead includes Peter's threefold denial, adding the detail that Jesus “turned, and looked upon Peter” (Luke 22:61). These details are correctly prophesied in the psalmist's exclamation that “there is none to help.”

Both Justin Martyr and Augustine saw verses 12 and 13 as continuing the passion narrative. Justin understood the calves and strong bulls (Ps. 22:12, translation according to LXX) that had “besieged [him] round”²² as representations of the Pharisees and Sadducees who surrounded Christ at his trial, slapping and spitting upon him. He equated the “roaring lion” with King Herod.²³ Augustine instead equated the roaring lion with the Jewish people as they screamed, “Crucify Him, crucify Him!”²⁴ From the viewpoint of biblical imagery, the lion—the symbol of the tribe of Judah—is an appropriate representation of the Jewish leaders who cried for Jesus's death. Since Bashan was used by Israelite prophets as a symbol of haughty pride (see Jer. 22:20; 50:19; Ezek. 27:6), the bulls of Bashan appropriately represented the self-vaunting, self-protecting strength of the Jewish leaders.²⁵

(14) *I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax; it is melted in the midst of my bowels.*

22. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 103.

23. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 103.

24. Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:203.

25. See Hoskisson, “Witness for Christ in Psalm 22,” 294.

Surprisingly, neither Justin or Augustine connected this description with its most obvious fulfillment—the water mingled with blood that flowed from the spear-wound in Jesus’s side (see John 19:34). According to Elder James E. Talmage, this event signaled that Christ had died of a broken heart.²⁶ If so, then the psalmist used very appropriate imagery for that experience when he described Christ’s heart like wax melted in heat and his life as being poured out “like water.” Although he did not connect this verse with Christ’s heart, Justin used it to point to Christ’s suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane, a connection possibly again indicating an early understanding of Gethsemane that was later lost to the Christian world. “His perspiration poured out like drops of blood as He prayed, . . . His heart was like wax melting in his belly.”²⁷ Justin also connected the phrase “all my bones are out of joint” (Ps. 22:14) with the challenges of Gethsemane.²⁸ A different but equally appropriate fulfillment, however, was seen by Augustine, who understood this prophecy as being fulfilled in the painful posture of the Crucifixion.²⁹

(15) *My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death.*

All four Gospel writers included the detail that Christ was offered vinegar while upon the cross (see Matt. 27:48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:29). Only John explicitly provides a reason for the proffered drink in Christ’s statement “I thirst” (John 19:28). As described by Hoskisson, “There is no better poetic imagery for extreme thirst than a potsherd, a broken piece of pottery. In those days, everyday pottery was not glazed. Therefore, if a drop of water was put on a broken piece of unglazed pottery, the drop would be soaked up almost instantly. Severe dehydration also causes the mouth to become dry and the tongue to swell up so that it ‘cleaveth’ to the jaws.”³⁰ For the Psalmist, this suffering thirst was directly connected to being brought “into the dust of death,”

26. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 668–69, n. 8. For a nuanced medical understanding of Jesus’s death, see W. Reid Litchfield, “The Search for the Physical Cause of Jesus Christ’s Death,” *BYU Studies* 37, no. 4 (1998): 93–109. Litchfield states that the best explanation for Jesus’s death is cardiac arrhythmia, according to him a figurative equivalent to the “broken heart.”

27. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 103.

28. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 103.

29. Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:203.

30. Hoskisson, “Witness for Christ in Psalm 22,” 295.

with dust again evoking feelings of dryness and a lack of water. With characteristic accuracy, this depiction in Psalm 22 perfectly matches John's account, as he links Christ's thirst with his death, stating, "When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished: and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost" (John 19:30). Dust is also associated with death in Genesis 3:19, in which Adam is told that he will "return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." This intertextual connection may indicate that the psalmist associated the fate of the sufferer with the fate of Adam (and his posterity), providing another point of contact between Psalm 22 and the early Christian understanding of Christ as the "second" or "last" Adam (see 1 Cor. 15:22, 45–47).

(16) For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. (17) I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me.

The psalmist's description of the assembly of the wicked as dogs, a derisive term often reserved in the Bible for the ritually impure,³¹ points to Christ's illegal trial before the Jewish leaders and his subsequent crucifixion in the presence of his enemies, who "look and stare upon [him]." In fact, the Greek LXX for "assembly" in verse 16 is *synagōgē*, the same word used for the Jewish place of worship. Both Augustine and Justin Martyr equated the "assembly of the wicked" with the gathering of Jews who cried to Pilate to "crucify him!"³² According to Augustine, the stretching posture of the Crucifixion placed strain upon Jesus's body in a way that allowed his very bones to be counted or "told."

Even more importantly, verse 16 provides what may be the clearest prophecy of Christ's crucifixion anywhere in the Old Testament, stating that "they pierced my hands and feet." The King James Version translation actually follows the Greek LXX in this case rather than the Hebrew Masoretic text. The Masoretic text instead offers the problematic "like a lion (Heb. *ca'ari*) [they are at] my hands and my feet." This one word—"they pierced" in LXX or "like a lion" in the Masoretic text—was one of the most significant points of Jewish and Christian controversy over biblical interpretation for many centuries. Jewish scholars maintained

31. See Michelle Ellis Taylor, "Dog," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), 352.

32. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 104; Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:215.

that the Masoretic text was the most correct version, and Jews were known to open a new Bible translation to this very verse in order to ascertain the bias of the translators. Christians, on the other hand, accused the Jewish people of tampering with the text and continued to aver that the translation “pierced” reflected the oldest understanding.³³ In the past few decades, the Dead Sea Scrolls have finally offered some assistance and clarity on the subject, supporting a reading found in a minority of ancient Hebrew manuscripts. A small Psalms fragment from Nahal Hever (5/6 Hev-Se4Ps, Fragment 11) replaces the final *yod*, which would give the reading “like a lion,” with a final *waw*, creating a verb most likely translated as “pierced” and thus providing “they pierced my hands and my feet,” supporting the LXX witness. The *yod* and *waw* are the two letters most easily confused in Hebrew, explaining how the variant may have originated.³⁴

Although the passion narratives do not specifically mention the piercing of Christ’s hands and feet, this was a typical mode of crucifixion. When Jesus appeared to the disciples, he told them to “behold [his] hands and [his] feet” (Luke 24:39). The Book of Mormon further strengthens this witness. When Christ appeared to the Nephites, he asked them to “feel the prints of the nails in [his] hands and in [his] feet” (3 Ne. 11:14). Doctrine & Covenants 6:37 offers the same witness of the fulfillment of Psalm 22:16 in Christ’s crucifixion: “Behold . . . the prints of the nails in my hands and feet.” Following the emphasis in Paul’s writings, when Christians throughout the world ponder the sacrifices of the suffering Christ, they connect those sufferings with crucifixion upon “the cross of Christ” (Gal. 6:12; see also Gal. 6:14, Philip. 3:18, Heb. 12:2), an event prophesied with great detail centuries earlier by the LXX version of Psalm 22:16 and supported by the Dead Sea Scrolls. The use of this verse in early Christian accounts will be discussed further below.

(18) *They part my garments* (Gr. himatia) *among them, and cast lots* (Gr. ebalon klêron) *upon my vesture* (Gr. himatismôn).

This verse of Psalm 22 was alluded to in all four of the Gospel passion narratives. Each of the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) share the same connections, mentioning that the persecutors

33. See Gregory Vall, “Psalm 22:17B: ‘The Old Guess,’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 116, no. 1 (1997): 46–48.

34. Shon Hopkin, “The Psalm 22:16 Controversy: New Evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls,” *BYU Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 161–72.

“cast lots” (Gr. *ebalon klēron*) in order to divide the garments or raiment (Gr. *himatia*) of the sufferer. John’s gospel, however, goes further. Although the verse in Psalms could be interpreted as simple Hebrew parallel structure—they “cast lots upon my vesture” is a poetic restatement of the equivalent phrase “they part my garments among them”—John instead saw a nuance in the parallel phrases that closely connected with Christ’s experience. Not only did the persecutors divide Jesus’s garments, but John also mentions that there was a second “vesture” or “raiment,” a special “coat . . . without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment (Gr. *himatia*) among them, and for my vesture (Gr. *himatismōn*) they did cast lots” (John 19:23–24). Once again, Psalm 22 points to Christ’s sacrifice with detailed precision.

(19) But be not thou far from me, O Lord: O my strength, haste thee to help me. (20) Deliver my soul from the sword; my darling from the power of the dog. (21) Save me from the lion’s mouth: for thou hast heard me from the horns of the unicorns.

These verses contain the middle section of the Psalm, moving from the lament into the plea for help. The sufferer’s cry in verse 1, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” shifts to a plea in verse 19, “But be not thou far from me, O Lord . . . haste thee to help me,” indicating his continued faith and hope in God’s willingness to rescue him. The mention of the sword connects well with the spear thrust into Jesus’s side. Even that spear thrust, however, shows that God had spared Jesus from being killed by the Romans. Jesus had power of life and death and had already given up his life when the wound came, trusting to God that he would be able to “break the bands of death” (Mosiah 15:8). The spear, then, like the sword of verse 20, is a symbol for the greater weapon from which Christ was rescued, the sword of death. Accordingly, the psalmic plea was not to deliver Christ’s body from the sword, but instead to deliver his “soul” (Gr. *psychēn*). In the subsequent parallel phrase, that which the KJV renders as delivering “my darling” from the power of the dog could be better translated as delivering my “only-begotten” or my “only begotten-ness” (Gr. *tēn monogenē mou*). Seen in this light, both of these phrases emphasize Christ’s desire to finish his mission in a sinless, perfect fashion, with his worthiness, power, and authority from the Father completely intact.

The symbols of the dog (the Gentile Romans?) and the lion (the wicked Jewish leaders?) again surface in this section. Justin Martyr saw

a clear allusion to the Crucifixion in verse 21 that would be missed by most modern readers. For him the “horns of the unicorn” (a KJV translation better rendered as “horns of the wild ox”) are a visual reminder of the arms of the cross to which Christ was nailed.³⁵ God had indeed heard Christ’s laments and pleas “from the horns,” or from the cross.

(22) I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee. (23) Ye that fear the Lord, praise him; all ye the seed of Jacob, glorify him; and fear him, all ye the seed of Israel. (24) For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. (25) My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

These verses begin the final section of the psalm, in which the sufferer’s prayer has changed from lament and plea into praise for God’s deliverance. The shifting perspective of the psalmist, a feature of Hebrew poetry found regularly in passages from Psalms and Isaiah,³⁶ creates a challenge for modern readers. Notice how the text seems to change from first person in verse 22—usually described in LDS understanding as “speaking Messianically”—to third person in verse 23, with a possible shift back to first person again in verse 25. Paul Hoskisson has stated, “The reason for this change may be that the rest of the Psalm, which contains a poetic description of the postmortal mission of Christ, contains no parallels with the mortal life of [the psalmist]. Thus, the psalmist must now wax poetic about Christ’s visit to the spirit world, the Judgment, and the eternal rewards of the faithful, and he must describe these events as if he were watching them instead of personally experiencing them.”³⁷ The time perspective of the Psalm also appears to shift, promising in verse 22 to praise God in a congregation of the sufferer’s brethren after the trial has concluded. Verses 23–25 speak of the trial as already having passed, declaring that God has already “heard” and responded to the cry of the sufferer (Ps. 22:24), a very different image than that found in the first two sections of the psalm. As connected to Christ’s sacrifice and subsequent victory over death and sin, these triumphant

35. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 105.

36. See, for example, Isaiah 42:1–4; 49:1–6; 50:4–9; 52:13–14; 53:1–12, commonly known as the servant songs. See also Psalms 2, 8, 9, 21, 40, 45, 67, 68, 69, 89, 91, 110, 118, and 132.

37. Hoskisson, “Witness for Christ in Psalm 22,” 297.

lines can only refer to events subsequent to Christ's sacrifice and death on the cross.

Both Justin Martyr and Augustine struggled in connecting these sections with Christ because of doctrinal difficulties. Since both partook of the developing Christian belief that Christ and God would no longer speak from the heavens after Jesus's ascension, they were not able to see continuing revelation in the statement "I will declare thy name unto my brethren" (Ps. 22:22). Augustine, in a solution that would be comfortable for most Latter-day Saints, saw the continued witness of Christ as an allusion to the Holy Communion (known as the sacrament in Latter-day Saint terminology), since in that rite the Catholics believed that Jesus descends from heaven to connect man with the Father again.³⁸ Justin Martyr took a more surprising route, devoting considerable space to a description of how God had changed the names of Old Testament patriarchs and New Testament Apostles.³⁹

The LDS belief in both the reality of Christ's preaching in the spirit world and the reality of Christ's living voice and continued witness to the world in modern days equips them to understand this beautiful section more fully than any other people.⁴⁰ The sufferer's statement, "I will declare thy [the Father's] name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee" beautifully reflects Christ's important witness immediately after his death when visiting those waiting for him in the spirit world. Doctrine and Covenants 138 describes this gathering

38. Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:221–22.

39. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 106.

40. An alternate interpretation of these verses could be that the Psalmist at this point chooses to break away from speaking in the voice of the sufferer (Christ) in order to bear witness among his brethren of God's goodness and of the sufferer's eventual triumph. Although this interpretation would negate the ability to see these verses in connection with Christ's own teaching efforts after his death, and would instead associate them with the witness of God's prophetic messenger, it would still demonstrate the triumphant message of the psalm to which Christ appears to have been referring when he quoted Psalm 22:1 from the cross. This alternate interpretation does not solve the difficulties of shifting voice and time any better than the explanation given in this paper. One effect of this poetic shifting of voice and time could also be to provide a sense of universality and timelessness to the witness that would be given, so that it cannot be easily attached to any one individual or to any one time.

in terms reminiscent of the “congregation” mentioned in Psalm 22.⁴¹ “And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just. . . . While this vast multitude waited and conversed, . . . the Son of God appeared, declaring liberty to the captives who had been faithful; and there he preached to them the everlasting gospel” (D&C 138:12–19). In this context, the psalmist’s statement that God had not “despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from [them]; but when [they] cried unto him, he heard” not only refers to God hearing Christ in the midst of his affliction but also fits Joseph F. Smith’s description of the congregation assembled waiting for Christ, whose cries God had also heard. Smith states that this group “had offered sacrifice in the similitude of the great sacrifice of the Son of God, and had suffered tribulation in their Redeemer’s name. . . . I beheld that they were filled with joy and gladness, and were rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand. They were assembled awaiting the advent of the Son of God into the spirit world, to declare their redemption from the bands of death” (D&C 138:13–16). Since these verses indicate that the sufferer, Christ, would continue to testify of the Father’s goodness after the conclusion of his ordeal, they also support the Latter-day Saint understanding of Christ’s voice as it would continue to speak from heaven to God’s people in future times, including the vision in the Sacred Grove and the many revelations recorded in Doctrine and Covenants. Christ’s encouragement to trust in the Father in the midst of tribulation, found in Doctrine and Covenants 78:17–18, is just one of numerous examples of modern revelation in which Christ continued to testify of God’s goodness and his willingness to save sufferers from trials, as promised in Psalm 22: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye are little children, and ye have not as yet

41. Other LDS scholars have noted the similarities between the final third of Psalm 22 and Christ’s visit to the spirit world, as described in Doctrine and Covenants 138. According to LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen D. Ricks, “The final third of the 22nd Psalm . . . tells that after the Savior left the cross, he descended in triumph into the Underworld. The last third of that psalm takes place ‘in the midst of the congregation’ of the dead—just as in D&C 138. It is remarkable how closely the psalm’s account maps to the concepts found in President Joseph F. Smith’s revelation. Both teach the same things.” LeGrand L. Baker and Stephen Ricks, *Who Shall Ascend into the Hill of the Lord? The Psalms in Israel’s Temple Worship in the Old Testament and in the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2009), 435–36.

understood how great blessings the Father hath in his own hands and prepared for you; and ye cannot bear all things now; nevertheless, be of good cheer” (D&C 78:17–18). As evidenced by these latter-day doctrinal connections with Psalm 22 when compared with the doctrinal challenges of Augustine and Justin Martyr in their discussion of the psalm, a belief in modern-day prophecy and revelation strengthens a belief in ancient biblical prophecy and revelation.

(26) The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live for ever. (27) All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. (28) For the kingdom is the Lord's: and he is the governor among the nations. (29) All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul.

The first phrase of verse 26, “The meek shall eat and be satisfied,” contains the message of two verses in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5) and “Blessed are they which hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled” (Matt. 5:6). This allusion may indicate yet another way in which Psalm 22 prophesied that Christ would one day declare God’s name and truth “in the midst of the congregation” (Ps. 22:22) during his mortal ministry and beyond. For Latter-day Saints, these verses continue to witness of the powerful blessings that would come as Christ trusted in his Father, suffered for the sins and pains of the world, and broke the bands of death. Because Christ suffered faithfully, he and all of the meek with him “shall eat and be satisfied” (Ps. 22:26). These words apply especially to those living in the last days who, thanks to the restoration of the gospel, are able to appropriately “eat” the sacrament under proper priesthood authority and feast upon the words of Christ revealed in the last days. And further, they provide a witness of the judgment day and resurrection, when all those in the spirit world who have suffered and turned unto Christ will see their spirits and bodies “united never again to be divided, that they might receive a fulness of joy” (D&C 138:17). Indeed, not only the righteous, but “all they that go down to the dust” (Ps. 22:29), or all who have been born of the dust of the earth and will return to it in death (see Gen. 3:19), will eventually be led to “bow before [God]” in acknowledgement of the blessings of the resurrection.

None of these—none of us—is able to “keep alive his own soul” (Ps. 22:29), but in the end, they will receive a fullness of joy because the

suffering Messiah *was* able to keep alive his soul (see v. 29). As the Only Begotten, he was able to choose death (John 10:17), and he also had power to break the bands of death as he rose from the dead (Alma 7:12). Because of this, as Philippians 2:10–11 testifies, “Every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth . . . [and] every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.” Or, as Psalm 22:27 and 29 describe the future universal worship of Christ, “All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. . . . All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him.” Christ would indeed become “the governor among the nations” (Ps. 22:28; see also Isa. 9:6–7). The psalmist’s statement “for the kingdom is the Lord’s” prophesies of the reality that the sarcastic plaque—“this is Jesus the King of the Jews” (Matt. 27:37)—that had been placed above the crucified Christ would one day be acknowledged as a reality by all living beings.

(30) A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation. (31) They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.

The final verses of Psalm 22 again connect with that other twin pillar of Old Testament prophecy about Christ. Isaiah 53:10 also teaches that when Christ suffered for the sins of mankind, he would “see his seed.” That seed, those spiritually begotten (Mosiah 5:7) through Christ’s Atonement, “shall serve him” (Ps. 22:30), both in this life and throughout the eternities. In the last days, Peter, James, John, and other saints from ages past—a portion of Christ’s seed—“[should] come, and . . . declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born” (Ps. 22:31), those of the latter-day Restoration who are spiritually alive in Christ. The same is occurring in the spirit world, where “from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men[.] . . . to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound, even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel” (D&C 138:30–31). According to the concluding statement of Psalm 22:31, what do these messengers proclaim on earth and in heaven? They declare “the gospel” (D&C 138:30); they teach that “[Christ] hath done this” (Ps. 22:31).

Thus concludes one of the most accurately detailed descriptions of Christ’s Atonement and of its everlasting consequences found anywhere

in scripture. Both Augustine and Justin Martyr saw in the entirety of the psalm a strengthening affirmation of their faith in Christ and a potent tool to teach of Christ's atoning sacrifice to others. Their Christ-centered explanations of the psalm reveal a deep religious fervor regarding the passion of Christ, expressed in beautifully crafted prose, and provide a moving and powerful witness of his atoning sacrifice. Notwithstanding the strength of their witness, however, a more complete understanding of Psalm 22 is possible only through the lens of the restored gospel. Teachings revealed by modern-day prophets regarding Gethsemane, continuing revelation, the restoration of the gospel from apostasy, and the reality of the spirit world enable the Latter-day Saint reader to see the full value of this inspired text.

To draw together the New Testament references in the foregoing commentary, the following table summarizes the direct allusions to Psalm 22 found in the Gospel narratives. It also includes the noncanonical Gospel of Peter (separated by a bold line), which will be discussed below.

Psalm 22 (LXX Psalm 21)	Matt	Mark	Luke	John	Peter
22:1—"My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"	27:46	15:34	—	—	5:19
22:7–8—"All they that see me . . . shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him."	27:39–43	15:29–32	23:35–39	—	3:6–9
22:18—"They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture."	27:35	15:24	23:34	19:24	4:12
22:16—"They pierced my hands and my feet."	—	—	—	—	4:13–14

As can be seen, all four canonical Gospels allude to Psalm 22. Although John does so only once, his allusion to Psalm 22:18 is more pointed than those provided by the synoptic Gospels, since he includes both the dividing of Christ's garments and the casting of lots for his seamless coat as fulfilling that verse in detailed ways. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each connect the derision heaped upon Jesus with Psalm 22:7–8, but only Matthew and Mark include the opening line of the Psalm as stated by Christ upon the cross. That the Gospel writers each used Psalm 22, and that those allusions were drawn from the beginning, middle, and end of

the lament section, indicates that the entire Psalm, rather than just the opening line, provided a lens for the passion narratives.

There is significant scholarly debate surrounding the Gospel of Peter,⁴² a noncanonical Gospel purportedly written by Simon Peter that was preserved in the vicinity of Syria. According to early interpretations, the gospel was written no earlier than the first half of the second century. That dating would indicate that the Gospel of Peter was probably dependent on the other, canonical gospels and that it reflects a continuing and possibly growing effort to understand the story of Christ's life in terms of Psalm 22. More recent scholarship claims that the gospel may preserve the earliest seeds of the passion narratives, possibly being written—in its first form—as early as the first half of the first century A.D.⁴³ This fascinating assertion would indicate that Christians understood Christ's suffering in terms provided by Psalm 22 very early on. The Gospel of Peter is written in such a way that almost every concept discussed therein points to one of the psalms, and Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of many of the psalmic prophecies.

As can be seen in the chart, there are four clear textual allusions to Psalm 22 found in the Gospel of Peter, more than are contained in any of the canonical gospels. In this Gospel, an altered version of Psalm 22:1 is given as Christ's final (and only, as in Matthew) statement from the cross: "My power, (my) power, you have abandoned me."⁴⁴ Gospel of Peter 3:4 contains a connection with the taunting in Psalm 22:7–8, and 4:3 offers a clear allusion to the parting of the garments in Psalm 22:18, the only intertextual allusion contained in each one of the Gospel accounts: "And they piled his clothing in front of him; then they divided it among themselves and gambled for it." The most fascinating allusion in the Gospel of Peter, since it is not found in any of the canonical Gospels, is 6:1, which indicates that nails were pulled from Christ's hands, connecting with the piercing of the hands in Psalm 22:16. Its inclusion in the Gospel of Peter, whether early or late, and its absence in the canonical Gospels, may indicate a reticence by the other Gospel authors to use the text because of the existence of the two variants discussed above. Or the authors of the canonical

42. All quotations and references to the Gospel of Peter are from Robert J. Miller, ed., *The Complete Gospels: Annotated Scholars Version* (Sonoma, Calif.: Polebridge Press, 1992), 399–407.

43. For a review of these scholarly views, see Miller, *Complete Gospels*, 399–401.

44. Gospel of Peter 5:5.

Gospels, who could not include all possible allusions in their narratives, may have felt that they had already pointed clearly to the Christ-centered witness of Psalm 22 and chose instead to allude to the text of Zechariah 12:10: “They shall look upon me whom they have pierced” (see John 19:34–37), an allusion not included in the Gospel of Peter. Later Christian authors and commentators would show little hesitancy in using Psalm 22:16 to demonstrate the prophesied reality of Christ’s crucifixion.⁴⁵

To the New Testament literary allusions in the chart must be added Hebrews 2:12—“I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee”—an exact quote of Psalm 22:22 in LXX 21:23: “I will declare thy name unto my brethren: in the midst of the congregation will I praise thee.” The author of Hebrews is describing how Christ put himself in subjection to all things and was then raised to a position in which all things are under his feet. In his use of Psalm 22, as he wrote long after Jesus’s suffering and resurrection, the author of Hebrews chose to emphasize the victorious nature of Jesus’s Atonement by quoting from the final section of the psalm, showing how later Christians gained comfort and understanding from the full text.

The Importance of Christ’s Cry from the Cross⁴⁶

Before discussing the importance of Jesus’s cry from the cross, it is necessary to first address a possible reason why Luke and John chose not to include Psalm 22:1 in their narratives. Both of these Gospel authors described Jesus making statements that demonstrated his continuing reliance upon and connection with the Father—“Father, into thy hands I commend my Spirit” (Luke 23:46)—and his awareness of those around

45. Other early Christian authors who referred to the piercing of the hands and feet were Justin Martyr, Tertullian (AD 160–225), and Cyprian (AD 200–258), each writing at early dates, although they used various Latin words such as “pierced,” “exterminated,” “tore,” or “dug” to translate the LXX. See Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, 1.35.5–7; Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, 97, 104; Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 8:17; 10:4, 11; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3:19; *Apologetical Works: Tertullian*, trans. Rudolph Arbesmann (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 1962); and Cyprian (AD 200–258), *The Treatises of Cyprian* 12.2.20, 13.10–11 in *Ante-Nicene Fathers, Volume 5: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Caius, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994).

46. Many issues connected to Psalm 22, and especially Psalm 22:1, can be found in the excellent discussion provided in Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1044–62.

him—“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). In their purposeful description of Christ upon the cross, his cry showing a stark separation from the Father may not have been the image they wanted to emphasize.

Later Christians struggled to reconcile their theological beliefs with Psalm 22:1. One of the primary reasons for this concern can be found in a significant difference that exists between the LXX version (actually 21:2 in LXX) and the Masoretic text. While the Masoretic text states, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me and from the words of my roaring?” the LXX used by early Christians states, “O God, my God, attend to me: why hast thou forsaken me? The account of my transgressions is far from my salvation.” The LXX could thus be read as implying that the sufferer is in difficulty and is far from salvation because of his transgressions or sins. While this connection actually fits well with Paul’s identification of Christ as the cursed one (Gal. 3:13), who became sin for us (2 Cor. 5:21), some theologians were loath to connect Christ’s innocent suffering with the guilty suffering of a true sinner.⁴⁷

The second theological concern came from Trinitarian theologians such as Augustine who struggled to understand how Christ could be completely separated from or forsaken by God while he himself was God.⁴⁸ Under certain Trinitarian viewpoints, the manifestation of God in Christ could theoretically be separated from the presence of God in the rest of the universe, but this separation would not change the divinity of Christ—that Christ is the same God from which he is being separated. As a result of this challenge, these theologians have seen Christ’s statement not as a doctrinal or historical statement, but as a statement made by Christ (or, more often, as a statement introduced later by Mark and Matthew) solely for the purpose of showing Jesus as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. Since Latter-day Saints understand Christ as the Son of God and a distinct being from the Father, this theological challenge for Trinitarians is not an issue for them. Still, the issue of whether the Father would truly “abandon” his Son remains a significant issue for Latter-day Saints as well and will be discussed further below. As stated above, Luke and particularly John, who always showed the closeness between the Father and the Son, may have

47. Augustine seems to have been the first to mention this concern, speaking to the people of Hippo on March 23, 395. See Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:210.

48. Augustine, *St. Augustine on the Psalms*, 1:210–11.

chosen not to include a statement that might be misconstrued by future readers as a disconnect between the two.

Why, then, did Mark and Matthew include that statement, both Gospels offering it as the only thing Jesus said while upon the cross? Recognizing that the cry was not just a quotation of one biblical verse but was instead the opening line of a psalm, we may assume that Christ was not simply fulfilling prophecy and expressing his feelings of loss while hanging on the cross but, in addition, was still lovingly teaching his people by communicating to them the many concepts contained in Psalm 22—including his final victory over suffering—while uttering only one short phrase. In the midst of his own suffering, perhaps he was attempting to pierce the fog of confusion and shocked doubt that surrounded his followers, who never expected to see their Messiah tortured and killed, and to provide them with some scriptural context that his suffering was foreknown and that he would eventually be exalted in triumph.

Matthew and Mark are clear that Jesus was speaking to a certain degree in coded language, sharing a message that was completely misunderstood by some present, who thought that he was calling for Elijah (Matt. 27:47, 49). Those familiar with the psalms, however, would have immediately recognized the reference and would have connected the statement with the entire psalm, much as Latter-day Saints who hear the phrase “Come, come, ye Saints” will immediately recall the tune and the following line—“No toil nor labor fear.”⁴⁹ Subsequent pondering upon this famous Latter-day Saint hymn would reveal even more messages indicated by simply quoting the opening line. Those not familiar with the hymn would be left not understanding that the call to “come, ye saints” encapsulates an entire sermon on enduring trials with courage through the support of God.⁵⁰ In a similar way, the scripturally illiterate at Christ’s crucifixion would not have been aware of this evidence of Christ’s love for his disciples and would have missed his message to them that he would triumph in the end. Instead, they would have seen his cry only as another demonstration of his failure and his cursed status before God.

49. William Clayton, “Come, Come, Ye Saints,” in *Hymns of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1985), no. 30.

50. It is possible that Christ actually quoted more of Psalm 22 while on the cross, but that Matthew and Mark recorded only the first line. Considering the misinterpretation of the solitary line by many who were present, however, this possibility seems unlikely. A quotation of a significant portion of the hymn would have been difficult to misconstrue.

Notwithstanding the clarity of the allusion, while many of those present at the Crucifixion had the scriptural knowledge to recognize it,⁵¹ most would not have been in a position to understand the full import of the connection until much later when they had time to ponder the meaning of Jesus's words and actions. The quotation of Psalm 22:1 would have given them a place to look after Christ's death and would have begun to provide a scriptural understanding for why the Crucifixion happened and what its result would be. Indeed, Mark's quotation of Psalm 22:1 (including the allusions to Psalm 22:7–8 and 18 as well) has been considered by at least one biblical scholar to be the foundation upon which the entire passion narrative was presented by the authors of the synoptic Gospels.⁵² The Gospel of Luke demonstrates this burgeoning understanding with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: "Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself" (Luke 24:25–27). Jesus's description that the prophesied Messiah would suffer all things and then enter into glory fits the pattern of Psalm 22 precisely.

Two important questions remain for biblical scholars. First, was the quotation of Psalm 22:1 truly intended to reference all of Psalm 22? Numerous biblical scholars have seen it this way.⁵³ As has been said,

51. For a discussion of the scriptural knowledge of Mark's readers, see Ernest Best, "Mark's Readers: A Profile," in *The Four Gospels*, ed. F. Van Segbroeck (Leuven: Peeters, 1992), 2:839–58. See also Donald Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994), 133–39. Although these scholars are referring to the readers of Mark, rather than those present at the Crucifixion, according to Geza Vermes this statement had likely become an Aramaic proverbial expression of lament that would have been commonly identified with Psalm 22. Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis: Christological Interpretation of the Old Testament in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 115. Loren Fisher discusses the way in which the first lines of the Psalms acted as titles of the entire Psalm during New Testament times. Loren R. Fisher, "Betrayed by Friends: An Expository Study of Psalm 22," *Interpretation* 18 (1964): 22–25.

52. "[This] gives evidence of the widespread influence and fundamental significance of the psalm in the passion tradition. It is difficult to conceive the passion narratives without allusions to Psalm 22. It is as difficult to explain allusions to the psalm as secondary." Juel, *Messianic Exegesis*, 116.

53. For examples of scholarly discussion that see Christ's statement as an allusion to the full text of Psalm 22, see Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, *The Psalms*

the first line was typically used as the title for the entire psalm.⁵⁴ The Gospel authors do not just allude to the first line of the psalm but include references from the beginning (Ps. 22:1), middle (Ps. 22:7–8), and near the end (Ps. 22:18) of the lament section. One scholar has suggested that the entire psalm was first used as a whole by Christians of the first century who gathered for a day of thanksgiving, during which they recited Psalm 22 in order to prepare to partake of the Lord's Supper.⁵⁵ Tertullian, writing in the second half of the second century, indicated plainly the common Christian view when he stated, "If you ask for further prophecy of our Lord's Cross, you can find complete satisfaction in the twenty-[second] psalm, which comprises the whole passion of Christ, who was even at that date foretelling of his own glory."⁵⁶ Writing even earlier, in the first half of the second century, Justin Martyr gave a verse-by-verse commentary on Psalm 22 that has already been quoted extensively above, as has Augustine's commentary, written much later in the second half of the fourth century. In AD 553, when Theodore of Mopsuestia averred that the psalm did not refer to the crucifixion of Christ, he was censured by the Second Council of Constantinople and condemned by Pope Vigilius.⁵⁷

Additionally, Jewish authors also connected Psalm 22:1 and its introductory statements with famous salvational figures such as David and

of Lament in Mark's Passion: Jesus' Davidic Suffering, Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118–48; Stephen P. Ahearne-Kroll, "Challenging the Divine: LXX Psalm 21 in the Passion Narrative of the Gospel of Mark," in *The Trial and Death of Jesus: Essays on the Passion Narrative in Mark*, ed. Geert Van Oyen and Tom Shepherd (Leuven: Peeters, 2006), 119–70; Juel, *Messianic Exegesis*, 114; Beth LaNeel Tanner, *The Book of Psalms through the Lens of Intertextuality*, ed. Peter Lang, Studies in Biblical Literature, vol. 26 (New York: Studies in Biblical Literature, 2001), 80–82; E. Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1950), 166; Joseph Schmid, *The Gospel according to Mark*, trans. K. Conden (New York: Mercier Press, 1968), 295–96; and Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel according to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1952), 593–94.

54. See footnote 50.

55. Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Appropriation of the Psalms of Individual Lament," in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, ed. C. M. Tuckett (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1997), 223–41.

56. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 3.19.5. See note 44 above.

57. See J. C. Basset, "Le Psaume 22 (LXX 21) et la croix chez les pères," *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 54 (1974): 383–89.

Moses, and even the entire Israelite people,⁵⁸ and then went on to show how the entire psalm connected to key events in their lives or history. The most complete Jewish effort to connect Psalm 22 with a salvational figure besides David was to the life of Esther, quoting Psalm 22:1 during Esther's time of anguish and concern in order to prefigure her eventual triumph as indicated at the end of Psalm 22.⁵⁹ Indeed, some Ashkenazi Purim

58. See Midrash *Tehillim* 22:8, 22:1, and 22:17 for examples of these verses being attributed to David, Moses, and all of Israel, respectively.

59. Babylonian Talmud *Megillah* 15b adds some elements to the biblical story of Esther to emphasize her feelings of forsakenness (connected to Psalm 22:1) just prior to requesting the audience of King Ahaseurus (Esther 5:1–3). Esther's success with Ahaseurus allows her to live when her death appeared almost certain. That victory over death in turn allowed her to successfully become a savior figure for the Jewish people. Esther's final victory was prefigured by her quotation of Psalm 22:1, which pointed to the victorious conclusion of Psalm 22.

The Babylonian Talmud *Yoma* 29a also connects Esther with Psalm 22, quoting the inscription that opens that Psalm—"To the chief musician upon Aijeleth Shahar [Heb. 'hind of dawn'], a Psalm of David"—in order to describe Esther's glory after the deep challenges of her afflictions. As the passage states, the purpose of the opening inscription is "to tell you that just as the dawn is the end of the whole night, so is the story of Esther the end of all the miracles." This Talmudic passage again demonstrates that in rabbinic literature the literary allusion to one verse was regularly intended to point to the entire passage as an interpretative lens. Indeed, this is the regular pattern in Jewish synagogue worship services.

Midrash *Tehillim* 22 contains a verse-by-verse commentary on Psalm 22, referring multiple times to events in Esther's life that coincided with the psalm, including Esther being identified as the psalm's principle subject. In this commentary, Psalm 22 becomes the prayer of Esther, although it is broken up into numerous different prayers offered at different times of need or of triumph.

Interestingly, while Esther is seen as a deliverer or savior figure throughout this commentary, the title "the Hind of Dawn" is also given to God (22:4–5), who saves Israel. While there is no overt connection of God with the suffering portions of the hymn, other Jewish identifications for this title, connected to this psalm, indicate that the triumphant one will bring salvation only after a period of suffering. In a similar vein, another Jewish translator of Psalm 22, Aquila, provided a reading for the Hind of Dawn as "For the Maker of Victory." Some pieces of Jewish literature could be read as indicating that Psalm 22 was applied by the Jews to a suffering but eventually triumphant Messianic figure. See Pesiqta *Rabbati* 34–37; Yalqut *Shimoni* on Psalm 60:1.

It is unclear whether this Jewish connection of Psalm 22 with Esther, and the connection of the first verse with the entire storyline, preceded or postdated the Christian passion narratives. Some scholars have asserted that Esther began to be connected with Psalm 22 only in the third to fifth centuries AD,

services (a festival commemorating the story of Esther) still include a reading of Psalm 22 today.⁶⁰ Understanding Jesus's quotation of Psalm 22:1 in isolation from the rest of the psalm obscures all that the statement would have meant to his Jewish-Christian audience.

The second question remaining for biblical scholars is whether the statement was truly made by Jesus on the cross, or whether the quotation of Psalm 22:1 was simply placed in his mouth by later Gospel authors in order to attach his sacrifice to biblical prophecy. Although it is impossible to fully ascertain the historicity of words in a text that was written decades after the event and that is received in modernity through a distance of centuries, a number of details strengthen the argument that Christ really spoke the statement as he hung upon the cross.

possibly as a response to Christian claims. See, for example, Esther M. Menn, "No Ordinary Lament: Relecture and the Identity of the Distressed in Psalm 22," *Harvard Theological Review* 93, no. 4 (2000): 317. Others, however, have posited that Esther was already connected with Psalm 22 during the time of the Second Temple, and that Psalm 22 would have been read during the celebration of Purim, which was originally on the 14th of Nisan. D. Simonsen, "Le Psaume XXII et la Passion de Jesus," *Revue des études Juives* 22 (1891): 283–85. The Christians then simply switched from Esther to Christ during their commemoration of the Crucifixion, which was celebrated on the 14th of Adar. Whichever direction the influence tended, however (if one tradition did influence the other), the fact that the Jewish tradition associated the statement in Psalm 22:1 with the entire psalm and connected it to a foundational salvation narrative is a strong supporting argument for a similar understanding in Christian usage.

60. Another example of this practice is demonstrated by Midrash *Tehillim* 22:1–32, which starts by using the standard synagogue practice called proems. Proems are a method of introducing the scripture narrative to be liturgically read in the synagogue service with a single verse of scripture, usually from the Writings (in the Hebrew scriptures, these are Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Esther, Lamentations, Ruth, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, Daniel, Ezra, and the Chronicles). That single verse is then followed by commentary that connects directly with the scripture passage to be read that day. The reading for the day does not just connect to the single introductory verse read but typically connects to the broader theme following that verse. Midrash *Tehillim* 22:1–17 contains a number of these proems, almost all of them introduced by Psalm 22:1. This inclusion of proems in the text likely indicates that Psalm 22 was read in synagogue worship from very early dates. A medieval source from the eleventh century is the earliest source indicating that Psalm 22 was indeed read during the feast of Purim (commemorating Esther's victory) on the 14th of Adar. Other sources, particularly Ashkenazic documents, clearly state that Psalm 22 was used in this way. Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History* (New York: Jewish Publication Society, 1993), 110.

Two of the evidences that both believing and unbelieving biblical scholars use to determine the possibility of historicity in ancient texts are called “embarrassment” and “inherent ambiguity.”⁶¹ These two theories indicate that the authors of the Gospels would have desired to downplay or eliminate any actions or words of Christ that either seemed to diminish his power and might or were not easily explained. Thus, if an event appears in the narrative that would have been “embarrassing” to early Christians (Peter’s denial of Jesus, for example) or that might have worked against their message of Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, then that event is even more likely to have happened.⁶² The entire narrative of Jesus undergoing the death of a cursed criminal would have gone against the cultural sensibilities of Jews and Christians of the time, as is often evidenced by statements in the Gospels.⁶³ This would also have been true of any statement making his relationship with the Father ambiguous. Ironically, the existence in the narrative of an event that would prove doctrinally problematic for some Christians actually works to strengthen modern confidence in that event’s reality.

Another tool used to determine biblical historicity, while still not conclusive, is titled “Hebrew and Aramaic traces” and is found in the effort that Mark and Matthew used to provide the original Aramaic for Jesus’s statement.⁶⁴ This language, the spoken language of Jews in Christ’s day, was not readily accessible to Mark’s Gentile audience and was even translated by Matthew for his primarily Jewish audience (Matt. 27:46). Hebrew or Greek would have connected the statement most clearly to its Hebrew or Greek scriptural antecedent in Psalm 22:1. Greek was the lingua franca of the day and was the primary language of the Gospels. For these reasons, this instance of Aramaic usage in Matthew and Mark is noteworthy as one of the few examples from any of the Gospels. Much as with Jesus’s other plea in the Garden of Gethsemane, in which he refers to the Father as “Abba,” the Aramaic lends a feeling of authenticity to the statement and strengthens the possibility that Jesus truly spoke those words from the cross. The historicity of the account

61. Darrell L. Bock, *Who Is Jesus? Linking the Historical Jesus with the Christ of Faith* (New York: Howard Books, 2012), 21, 23.

62. Examples of this in the Book of Mormon could include Nephi’s bemoaning of his own weakness (2 Ne. 4), or Corianton’s sin (Alma 39:3).

63. Examples include Peter’s refusal to accept Christ’s prophecy of his crucifixion (Matt. 16:22) or the certainty with which the disciples on the road to Emmaus have abandoned their belief in Jesus as the Messiah (Luke 24:20–21).

64. Bock, *Who Is Jesus?* 22–23.

is further strengthened by the recorded nuance that some present actually misunderstood Jesus's statement. This detail that seems of relative unimportance in the passion narrative again works to indicate that Matthew and Mark were recording a real event.

Latter-day Saints and Psalm 22:1

What, then, have Latter-day Saint prophets, apostles, and scholars thought of Psalm 22:1?⁶⁵ All statements in modern scripture and by modern prophets and apostles indicate that the cry was strictly historical. An early revelation affirms the prophecy of Isaiah 63:3, indicating that Christ had, of necessity, "trodden the wine-press alone" (D&C 76:107). Elder Erastus Snow's comments support this concept: "It was necessary that the Father should thus measurably forsake his Son, leaving him to his enemies, otherwise they never could have fulfilled what had been prophesied concerning him."⁶⁶ Elder Melvin Ballard's well-known statement maintains a similar viewpoint: "In that hour I think I can see our dear Father behind the veil looking upon these dying struggles until even he could not endure it any longer, and . . . so he bowed his head, and hid in some part of his universe, his great heart almost breaking for the love that he had for his Son."⁶⁷ Elder James E. Talmage referred to the cry in his enduring commentary *Jesus the Christ*, "What mind of man can fathom the significance of that awful cry? . . . In that bitterest hour the dying Christ was alone, alone in most terrible reality. That the supreme sacrifice of the Son might be consummated in all its fulness, the Father seems to have withdrawn the support of His immediate Presence, leaving to the Savior of men the glory of complete victory over the forces of sin and death."⁶⁸ In more recent times, Elder Robert D. Hales has affirmed, "The Savior of the world was left alone by His Father to experience, of His own free will and choice, an act of agency which allowed Him to complete His mission of the Atonement."⁶⁹

65. LDS commentary on Psalm 22 has been so minimal that only verse one requires (or allows) extended discussion.

66. Erastus Snow, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 21:26, October 1879.

67. Melvin J. Ballard, quoted in Bryant S. Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1949), 147–57.

68. James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), 661.

69. Robert D. Hales, "Behold, We Count Them Happy Which Endure," *Ensign* 28 (May 1998): 75.

Like Justin Martyr hundreds of years earlier, Brigham Young connected Christ's physical suffering in Gethsemane to the aloneness mentioned by Psalm 22:1, although not overtly referencing that verse. As he stated it, "The Father withdrew Himself, withdrew His Spirit, and cast a vail over [Jesus]. That is what made him sweat blood."⁷⁰ Later on, Latter-day Saint biblical scholar Stephen Robinson connected this withdrawal in the garden with Paul's teaching that Christ was made to be sin for us: "Christ had become guilty of the sins of the world, guilty in our place. . . . In Gethsemane the best among us vicariously became the worst among us and suffered the very depths of hell. And as one who was guilty, the Savior experienced for the first time in his life the loss of the Spirit of God and of communion with his Father."⁷¹ Elder Neal A. Maxwell was also drawn to the power of Christ's statement of loss while on the cross, but seemed to equate that aloneness with sufferings typically associated by Latter-day Saints with the Garden of Gethsemane as much as with the cross: "All our infirmities and sicknesses were somehow, too, a part of the awful arithmetic of the Atonement. . . . His sufferings—as it were, *enormity* multiplied by *infinity*—evoked His later soul-cry on the cross, and it was a cry of forsakenness."⁷²

Christians and Saints alike have taken comfort that even Christ at times suffered feelings of aloneness. From the depths of Liberty Jail, Joseph Smith wrote a letter expressing sentiments connected to Jesus's cry, penning the phrase "O God, where art thou?" (D&C 121:1). Later in the letter, Joseph recorded God's response, teaching him that even if Joseph had felt alone, he needed to remember that Christ had descended even lower: "The Son of Man hath descended below them all. Art thou greater than he?" (D&C 122:8).

In a well-known sacramental hymn, Latter-day Saints sing, "Although in agony he hung, no murmuring word escaped his tongue."⁷³ As discussed above, Christ's cry not only expressed true feelings of suffering but also was intended as a loving lesson of hope for his followers. This understanding tempers the suggestion that he was hurling any type of accusation against his Father. Later verses in Psalm 22 emphasize that Christ would continue to trust in God, notwithstanding his extreme

70. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 3:206, February 17, 1856.

71. Stephen E. Robinson, *Believing Christ* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1992), 118–19.

72. Neal A. Maxwell, "Willing to Submit," *Ensign* 15 (May 1985): 73.

73. Eliza R. Snow, "Behold the Great Redeemer Die," in *Hymns*, no. 191.

difficulties, and that he knew with certainty that God would deliver him in the end. The LXX text of the very verse that Jesus quoted also provides this nuanced understanding as it shifts the emphasis more toward a plea than an accusation: “O God my God attend me, Why [for what purpose (*hinati*)] have you forsaken me?” (LXX for Psalm 22:1). Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has taught that although Christ was alone, he was never truly abandoned by the Father. Referring to the agonies of Gethsemane, he stated, “This is such a personal moment it almost seems a sacrilege to cite it. A Son in unrelieved pain, a Father His only true source of strength, both of them staying the course, making it through the night—together.”⁷⁴ Thus, although the Father, of necessity, suffered apart from his Son for a time, in another sense he suffered with him, feeling his pains and sufferings acutely, loving him and longing to give comfort to him. According to Elder Holland, Christ relied upon his knowledge of the Father’s love and support, helping him to make it through the awful sacrifice. One of Elder Holland’s purposes in making this statement may have been to indicate that so does the Father love us and long to comfort us, although at times we might suffer intense trials and feel alone or abandoned.

This appears to have been the dual message of Christ’s cry upon the cross. On the one hand, that cry showed that Christ had truly “descended below all things” (D&C 88:6), so that he could understand and succor his people (Alma 7:12), giving them a sense of comfort in their moments of aloneness. On the other hand, it demonstrated that Christ’s suffering—and by implication, our own—was foreknown by God, and that on the other side of his suffering, Christ would emerge triumphant in order to redeem the spirits in prison and proclaim the goodness of God in “the midst of the congregation” (Psalm 22:22; see also D&C 138:16, 38).

I conclude this article with the stirring words of Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who clearly taught the importance of Psalm 22 as a witness of Christ’s sacrifice and resurrection:

The Holy Ghost, through David, said: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Ps. 22:1)—thus revealing aforetime the very words Jesus would speak on the cross in that moment when, left alone that he might drink the dregs of the bitter cup to the full, the Father would entirely withdraw his sustaining power. . . . The Psalmist speaks of our Lord’s birth, of his reliance on God, of his troubles, and then . . . the mob at the foot of the cross. . . .

74. Jeffrey R. Holland, “The Hands of the Fathers,” *Ensign* 29 (May 1999): 14.

Following this is the promise that the Lord shall be praised “in the great congregation,” and that “all the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is the Lord’s: and he is the governor of the nations.” Clearly this has reference to the final millennial triumph of truth, a triumph that is to be when the gospel brought by the Messiah is restored again and carried according to his will to all men. Finally, in this Psalm, it is of the Messiah that the account speaks in these words: “A seed shall serve him; it shall be accounted to the Lord for a generation”; that is, the Seed of David, generated by the Father, shall serve in righteousness, with this result: “They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.” (Ps. 22:22–31.) And in harmony with this prophetic assurance, we now declare unto all people born after Messiah’s day, the righteousness of the Father in sending his Son and the righteousness of the Son in doing all things for men that needed to be done to bring to them both immortality and eternal life.⁷⁵

In proclaiming these central Easter lessons of suffering swallowed up in the triumph of the resurrection, Psalm 22 takes its place for Latter-day Saints alongside Isaiah 53 as one of the twin pillars of Old Testament prophecy of Christ.

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75. Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1995), 530–32.