



(To the chief Musician upon Aijeleth Shahar, A Psalm of David)

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. 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. 6 But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.

Suppose one beautiful, sunlit morning, your father called you into his study to make a very unusual request: he desired you to go to a far-away land to a people hostile to all foreigners and carry a message of peace and forgiveness for past offenses. But, he informed you, these people are quite treacherous and will not accept your platitudes of peace and love – in fact, they will publicly beat you, strip you of all your clothes and nail you to a tree until you are dead. Then, you may ask, *But why should I go to such a people if they reject our message?* Your father responds, *It is for the benefit of all our family here that you do so. These people will forever remain our enemies unless some one of us makes the maximum sacrifice to open their eyes to mercy and truth. Then, there shall be peace between our families and those many who respond to your sacrificial action; and you, too, shall be reunited with the family in God's own time at the resurrection.*

How would you respond to being sent by your beloved father to such a hateful and treacherous land and people to suffer deprivation, torture and death? I am sure you would not go *silently into that good night*. But this is only a very weak human example of the love and mercy of the Son of God in coming to this far country, falling among thieves and murderers and dying for their own benefit and at their very hands.

We will cover only the first six verses of this great Messianic Psalm today. It is an inspired account of our Lord's suffering on the cross – but it is more. Though the first 21 verses describe our Lord's travail on the cross, the last nine verses (beginning at verse 22) describe His resurrection joy! We will reserve that portion at a later date.

Our Lord's first utterance from the cross is the hallmark of the first verse of this Psalm: *Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?* which is, being interpreted, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Our Lord was willing, from the Heavenly Council of Eternity Past, before the worlds were made, to come down from the opulent mansions of His Father's home and become a man like unto us, though remaining God incarnate. He had feelings of modesty and love, and he felt pain of greater intensity than any other can endure. He did it all without hesitation. Imagine the one Man of greatest virtue and modesty being stripped completely naked and nailed to the cross for all to behold! It was an event that He alone could endure or complete. No other was worthy to pay the wages of sin for others for no other was sinless. But He endured that cross all alone. The pain and suffering were so horrific that even the Father turned His face away – and there was darkness over the land for the final three hours. All alone, Christ cried out in despondency, *My God, My God, what hast thou forsaken me?* It was the most painful moment of his eternal Being. His Father could not suffer so with Him, nor could the Holy ghost – He alone could satisfy the sin burden of the elect of God. It was the cry – not of our Lord alone – but of all lost humanity!

Below is a quote taken from Matthew Henry's Concise commentary concerning these verses from Psalms 22:

The Spirit of Christ, which was in the prophets, testifies in this psalm, clearly and fully, the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. We have a sorrowful complaint of God's withdrawal. This may be applied to any child of God, pressed down, overwhelmed with grief and terror. Spiritual desertions are the saints' sorest afflictions, but even their complaint of these burdens is a sign of spiritual life, and spiritual senses exercised. To cry out, My God, why am I sick? why am I poor? savours of discontent and worldliness. But, Why hast thou forsaken me? is the language of a heart binding up its happiness in God's favour. This must be applied to Christ. In the first words of this complaint, he poured out his soul before God when he was upon the cross, #Mt 27:46|. Being truly man, Christ felt a natural unwillingness to pass through such great sorrows, yet his zeal and love prevailed. Christ declared the holiness of God, his heavenly Father, in his sharpest sufferings; nay, declared them to be a proof of it, for which he would be continually praised by his Israel, more than for all other deliverances they received. Never any that hoped in thee, were made ashamed of their hope; never any that sought thee, sought thee in vain. Here is a complaint of the contempt and reproach of men. The Saviour here spoke of the abject state to which he was reduced. The history of Christ's sufferings, and of his birth, explains this prophecy.

The one human being who had never once sinned was disrobed before the multitudes and displayed above them all on the cross. His modesty stung his face in shame. The pain of the nails was excruciating. In fact, the term comes from the Latin 'ex' 'crucis' – literally 'from' the 'cross.' When we describe insufferable pain, we call it excruciating (as if from the cross).

2 O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent. The Lord uttered the cry of all of us who have walked in darkness. There are times when we feel abandoned by God, but do not realize that He is right beside. The Lord may not promptly answer our prayers because it may not be the most opportune time to provide our want. So we are left bewildered . . . *why does He not answer me in my troubles?* His timing is perfect – ours is clouded with doubt and impatience.

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. In our times of despondency, let us remember the former works of the Lord in being always sufficient to our needs and always faithful to come to our rescue on the turbulent seas of life.

When I was young, no minister could satisfy my curiosity about verse 6. It made no sense to me, and their explanations fell short. Why would the Lord of Glory refer to

Himself as a worm? Yes, the Lord put Himself down in order that we might be raised up; but the illustration of a crawling worm under foot did not satisfy my curiosity. My understanding was not satisfied until many decades later while living in Iran. Iran is known for its beautiful gardens, and they still existed there before the Muslim hordes trampled them underfoot following the Revolution.

The opposite lanes of the boulevards were divided by beautiful gardens of flowers and trees. I often observed white-oak trees with a large bloody spot on them, much like a man was shot there. I asked my driver what made these red splotches. He told me it was the Crimson Worm. This spurred my curiosity. I researched the matter and learned the Crimson Worm has traditionally been used in the Middle East to dye cloth crimson red. The red dye is emitted when these worms are boiled. It was used for that purpose in the time of Christ. The scientific term for the Crimson Worm is '*Coccus illicius*.' When the mother is ready to produce her young (which she does only once in her life), she attaches herself to a tree or fence post in such a manner that she cannot be removed without tearing her body apart. When her young hatch, they feed upon her living body until able to survive without her. At that point, she begins to die. Her usefulness has ended. As she does so, she emits a crimson dye which covers her little ones. From that moment forward, these remain crimson red like their mother. *6 But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

Out of a strong urge, I went back to the Hebrew text of Psalms 22:6 and discovered the term for worm to be '*tolah - ath*' which means (you guessed it) Crimson Worm. That is what Christ is to the believer. His blood covers us and changes us – we become like unto Him in our Way and Walk. There on the cross, His death gave birth to His people. All of the family of God are children of their Heavenly Father, and of the King of Kings. If we are so, we must be Princes and Princesses. A Prince or a Princess will do nothing to bring shame upon the name of their Father, nor upon the Throne which He occupies.

Do we quit ourselves as Princes and Princesses of the Most High God? *13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.* (1 Corinthians 16:13)