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# The Relationship Between Psalm 22 and the Passion Narrative

HARVEY D. LANGE

[The author suggests that Jesus' use of Ps. 22 in His cry of dereliction from the cross is best understood as an example of typological rather than rectilinear fulfillment of an Old Testament word. On the basis of extensive research in connection with his dissertation at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, he concludes that a typological approach underscores several theological emphases that are important for our day, but that are overlooked or obscured when one sees the cry as simple rectilinear fulfillment.

He assumes that our Lord was like many of His Jewish contemporaries in His regular, almost instinctive use of the Psalms in his own devotional life. He then points out that the evangelists recognized the relationship between Ps. 22 and the passion and crucifixion, and that each in his own way used the material from Ps. 22 to shape his account of the events.

In his concluding section, Dr. Lange points out the values of his study for the parish pastor. He points to the fact that the evangelists' use of Ps. 22 underscores their conviction Jesus Christ indeed fulfilled the Scriptures. Then, too, their use of the psalm shows that they were men of the Word. Furthermore, the evangelists' use of Ps. 22 demonstrates their Christocentric approach to interpreting the Old Testament.

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The Lutheran Church — Missouri Synod professor and pastor have traditionally described the relationship between Ps. 22 and the passion narrative with a single

word — prediction: in Ps. 22 David prophesied in a direct way certain events within the passion history. Dr. Walter A. Maier, an influential Old Testament professor at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, in the 1930s and 1940s, expressed such a view: "The cumulative description of the suffering and deliverance of the subject of Psalm 22 cannot be referred to David or to other individuals also because of the intricate detail which often finds its literal fulfillment in the suffering and deliverance of the Messiah."<sup>1</sup> Maier rejected a typological or representative exposition of Ps. 22 as too subjective and rationalistic, particularly because such an approach eliminated the predictive element.

An interpretation of the relationship between Ps. 22 and the passion narrative as rectilinear prophecy has its origins in Christian antiquity. Such interpretation was put to several theological uses.<sup>2</sup> First of all, fulfilled prediction made it clear that Jesus Christ was the center of Old Testament promise and truly the Messiah. Fulfilled prediction emphasized that God's salvation plan included the cross and suffering of Christ. Now that those events had taken place on Golgotha, God's salva-

<sup>1</sup> Personal class notes from Dr. Maier's seminary lecture on Ps. 22 shared with the writer by his colleague.

<sup>2</sup> The *Epistle of Barnabas* and Justin Martyr, both second-century witnesses to the Christian faith, interpreted Ps. 22 as direct prophecy of Christ's suffering; in fact fulfilled prediction was an important proof to them that Christ was the promised Messiah.



tion plan was complete. Forgiveness and life belonged to the believer through Jesus Christ.

The interpretation of Ps. 22 as direct prediction also served to reinforce a particular view of the meaning of the inspiration and function of Scripture. The inspiration of the Holy Spirit made it possible for David to predict in detail specific aspects of Jesus' passion. How could a man foretell Jesus' cry of woe or the casting of lots for His garments a thousand years before they happened except by inspiration of the Holy Spirit? Here was one more proof that Holy Scripture was indeed the inspired Word of God.

While the writer respects the traditional exposition of Ps. 22 as rectilinear prediction, his own study<sup>3</sup> of the Biblical and extra-Biblical material suggests that a typological interpretation of Ps. 22 has much textual support and in no way weakens one's commitment to Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah or to Holy Scripture as the inspired Word of God. A typological interpretation also underscores certain theological emphases not always stressed when the direct predictive approach is used, emphases which are vitally needed in our time. Furthermore, an examination of the Qumran materials together with contemporary studies in rabbinic principles of interpretation point in the direction of a typological understanding of Ps. 22 employed by the evangelists.

The basic building block for this study is the historicity of Jesus' use of Ps. 22 as His personal prayer during His crucifixion.

<sup>3</sup> Harvey D. Lange, "The Interpretation and Use of Psalm 22 in Biblical and Extra-Biblical Sources," Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation: Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, Mo., 1970.

As a pious Jew, Jesus turned to the Psalter for words to express His cry to God. He chose a lament psalm, one of the most powerful in the Old Testament, a lament poignant with pathos and woe, yet radiant with faith and triumphant in praise. Once Jesus Himself had linked Ps. 22 with His passion by His own prayer, the evangelists used the language and imagery of this psalm to describe various happenings connected with Jesus' crucifixion. In this way the gospel writers not only described events which took place on that first Good Friday, but also directly and indirectly witnessed to Jesus Christ as the promised one who fulfilled God's Old Testament promise.

That Jesus would use a psalm in His hour of need is understandable, especially in the light of contemporary psalm research. Modern psalms studies have underscored the role of the Psalter within the Jewish community. Besides identifying various categories of psalms, form-critical analysis has indicated that many of the psalms began as the poetry of pious individuals. As these prayers were shared over the years they achieved a permanent place in the religious tradition of the entire nation. In this community context the Israelites did not use the psalms so much as a way to remember a particular historical experience in the life of one Israelite of the past, but rather used them to express their own personal prayers and praise in their own situations. Thus successive generations found the psalms to be rich and meaningful expressions of faith and devotion.

The *Hodayot* (*Hymns of Thanksgiving*) from Qumran demonstrate such psalm influence and use. The *Hodayot*, a mosaic of Biblical language, indicate how at least one



person in the second century B.C. interpreted and used Ps. 22. Listed below in parallel columns are a few passages of the *Hodayot* with pertinent verses from Ps. 22.

*Hodayot*

To traitors Thou hast made of me a mockery and scorn, . . . the scoffers have gnashed their teeth. I have been a by-word to traitors, the assembly of the wicked has raged against me. (1 QH I, 9—12)

As for me, shaking and trembling seize me and all my bones are broken; my heart dissolves like wax before fire and my knees are like water pouring down a steep place. (I QH IV, 33—34)

I am clothed in blackness and my tongue cleaves to the roof of my mouth. (I QH V, 31)

For Thou hast not forsaken me in my soul's distress, and Thou hast heard my cry in the bitterness of my soul; and when I groaned, Thou didst consider my sorrowful complaint. Thou hast preserved the soul of the poor one in the den of lions which sharpened their tongues like a sword. (I QH V, 12—13)

For Thou hast known me from [the time of] my father, and hast chosen me from the womb. From the belly of my mother Thou hast dealt kindly with me, and from the breast of her who conceived me have Thy mercies been with me. (1 QH IX, 29—31)

It must be granted that many of the metaphors and figurative expressions found in Ps. 22 are commonplace: "poured out like water," "bones out of joint," "dried up like a potsherd," "melted like wax." The Qumran psalmist's own experience may have suggested them. However, the evidence that Ps. 22 was the more likely source of these particular metaphors is twofold.

These passages not only reflect the influence of Biblical imagery but also the Qumran psalmist's interpretation and use of Ps. 22 as shown below.

*Psalm 22*

scorned by man, and despised by the people. All who see me mock at me. (Ps. 22:6-7)

dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encircle me. (Ps. 22:16)

I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint; my heart is like wax, it is melted within my breast. (Ps. 22:14)

my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws. (Ps. 22:15)

For he has not despised or abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; and he has not hid his face from him, but has heard, when he cried to him. (Ps. 22:24)

thou art he who took me from the womb; thou didst keep me safe from my mother's breasts. Upon thee was I cast from my birth, and since my mother bore me Thou hast been my God. (Ps. 22:9-10)

On the one hand the Psalter belonged to the religious literature and life of the Qumran community. The commentaries on Psalm 37 clearly demonstrate the importance of the psalms for the religious life of the Essenes at Qumran. The Covenanters conscientiously studied and used Scripture, including the Psalter. Moreover, the language and thought of Ps. 22 are echoed



in other phrases in the *Hodayot*. The threat of mocking enemies, the agony of physical distress, trust in God's past and present care are expressed in Ps. 22 as well as in the *Hodayot*. Furthermore the *Hodayot* are saturated with Biblical phraseology, reflecting the serious study of Scripture at Qumran and the influence of such study.

Whether the Qumran psalmist consciously used the phraseology of Ps. 22 remains an open question. The free manner in which Biblical language was woven into the *Hodayot* does not suggest direct copying from the text of Scripture. What does seem evident is that the Qumran psalmist knew the Scriptures. He had used the psalms in his own personal prayer life. He identified himself with the sufferer portrayed in Ps. 22 and found the language of Ps. 22 appropriate for describing his own situation. There is no indication that the Qumran psalmist regarded Ps. 22 as a prediction either of his own affliction or of some coming Messiah who would suffer. In fact the Qumran psalmist's personal use of Ps. 22 argues against a directly predictive interpretation of this psalm and underscores individual use of the Psalter within the Jewish community.

Ideas expressed in the *Hodayot* but not found in Ps. 22 further support the view that the Qumran writer did not view Ps. 22 as prediction, but used this psalm to describe contemporary experience. These ideas include the sinfulness of man (1 QH IV, 27, 29—30, 33—35; 1 QH XII, 18 to 20; 1 QH XIII, 13—17; 1 QH XVIII, 18 to 30), divine punishment via chastisement (1 QH I, 31—34; 1 QH V, 15—18; 1 QH IX, 23—28; 1 QH XI, 8—14), apocalyptic salvation involving condemna-

tion of the wicked and rescue for the chosen (1 QH IV, 20—22; 1 QH VI, 29 to 33), specific identification of threatening enemies (1 QH V, 23—25), and new emphases in the expressions of praise (1 QH II, 13—15; 1 QH IV, 27—28; 1 QH XVIII, 6—12). The adaptation of the language of Ps. 22 expressing ideas common to Qumran rather than the literal use of the psalm itself indicates that the Qumran psalmist used psalmic language to describe his own historical situation and theological outlook.

Jesus was a man of the Word (Luke 4: 16-21; 9:28; 11:1-13; Matt. 5:17-20), and a man of prayer (Matt. 6:5-14; Luke 6:12; 22:39-46; John 17). It was therefore more than appropriate that Jesus, a pious Jew, would draw upon the Psalms for his own personal prayer in the hour of death. Like the Qumran psalmist, Jesus made Ps. 22 His own cry to God in that last tragic hour. Jesus' use of Ps. 22 in His passion linked this psalm with His last hours. Once this identification was made, the evangelists found other language from Ps. 22 to portray various aspects of the crucifixion event.<sup>4</sup>

The passion narrative reflects the influence of Ps. 22 at four points: the cry of godforsakenness, the mockery from those around the cross, the casting of lots for Jesus' clothes, and the word, "I thirst." These four details deserve a closer look.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Lohse, *History of the Suffering and Death of Jesus Christ*, translated from the German by Martin O. Dietrich (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 102—103. "Only the language of Scripture allows for appropriate expression of what really takes place in the passion of Jesus, namely, that God's hidden purpose, his promise and covenant, are here fulfilled."



## THE CRY OF DESOLATION

Mark 15:34

καὶ τῇ ἐνάτῃ ὥρᾳ ἐβόησεν  
ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ,  
ἐλωὶ ἐλωὶ  
λαμὰ σαβαχθάνι;  
ὃ ἔστιν  
μεθερμηνευόμενον,  
ὁ θεὸς μου ὁ θεὸς μου,  
εἰς τί ἐγκατέλιπές με;

Matt. 27:46

περὶ δὲ τὴν ἐνάτην ὥραν  
ἀνεβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς  
φωνῇ μεγάλῃ λέγων,  
ἦλι, ἦλι λεμὰ σαβαχθάνι;  
τουτ' ἔστιν, θεέ μου  
θεέ μου ἵνατί με  
ἐγκατέλιπες;

LXX/Ps. 21:2

Ὁ θεὸς  
ὁ θεὸς μου,  
πρόσχες μοι,  
ἵνα τί  
ἐγκατέλιπές με;

This cry from the cross is an authentic word of Jesus. Individual lament psalms within the Psalter and other Old Testament books provide numerous examples of similar outcries to God in times of distress. (Ps. 13:1; 42:9; 74:1, 11; 77:1, 2, 7-10; 88:14; Jer. 15:18; Job 13:24; 16:7, 9; 19:7-8)

However, there is no evidence that intertestamental Judaism ever understood or used Ps. 22 as messianic prophecy in a predictive sense. Rather there is evidence that Ps. 22 was used in the manner of other psalmic material, namely, as one psalm within the Psalter which belonged to the

whole community of Israel. The church's explication of Ps. 22 to describe Jesus' suffering took place after the event of the crucifixion. Then the crucifixion, followed by Christ's resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Spirit, became decisive for the evangelists' understanding of the psalm.

Various studies have pointed out the role of memorization within Judaism.<sup>5</sup> Pious Jews prayed numerous passages of Scripture from memory. Jesus' knowledge of Ps. 22 could have come from the use of the Psalter in private and public worship.

The genuineness of this cry from the cross is further supported by the confusion among the bystanders as to what Jesus had actually said. Some of the bystanders thought that Jesus was calling for Elijah. Matthew hebraized the Markan Aramaic "eloi, eloi" (Mark 15:34) to "eli, eli" (Matt. 27:46) in order to make more understandable the name which Jesus had spoken. The reference to calling upon Elijah when in need reflects that tradition which regarded Elijah as a deliverer in time of trouble. It seems apparent that "the bystanders may have been serious in thinking that Jesus had invoked his [Elijah's] aid."<sup>6</sup>

Finally, the scandalous character of Jesus' cry of desolation made it unlikely that the evangelists would have invented this hap-

<sup>5</sup> J. A. Fitzmyer, "Memory and Manuscript: The Origin and Transmission of the Gospel Tradition," *Theological Studies* XXIII (1962), 442-457; Birger Gerhardsson, *Memory and Manuscript*, tr. by Eric J. Sharpe (Lund: C. W. K. Gleerup, 1961).

<sup>6</sup> A. Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1953), p. 399.



pening. The scandal arose from Jesus' reference to being forsaken by God. The fact that Luke and John did not include Jesus' prayer in their account may reflect this difficulty. Luke and John may have found Jesus' prayer quite mysterious and open to misinterpretation. In any event, they did not regard the recording of Jesus' prayer as essential to their Gospel even though they did draw on other material from Ps. 22. Luke and John also may be substituting other sayings of Jesus in place of the cry of dereliction: Luke inserts "Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46), and John records "It is finished" (John 19:30).<sup>7</sup> Some of the textual variants may reflect efforts to deal with the harshness of Jesus' cry.<sup>8</sup>

Much has been written on the original form of Jesus' word from the cross. The problem arises from the variation in the Markan and Matthaean texts. Some authorities regard Matthew as the more original. These scholars include Peter Dausch, Erich Klostermann, Joachim Jeremias, Theodore Zahn, Gustav Dalman, Vincent Taylor. Others, such as M. J. Lagrange and H. Schmidt, support the Markan account as Jesus' spoken word. In any case neither Matthew nor Mark shows any desire to quote literally either the Massoretic or the Septuagint text. A literal reproduction of Ps. 22:1 does not appear to have been a major concern for either evangelist. If one assumes that Mark is the more authentic reproduction of Jesus' words, then Mat-

thew's hebraic form may be understood as an effort to make more intelligible the confusion over the understanding of Jesus' cry as a call to Elijah. "If Mark is using Palestinian tradition, it is natural that he should give the saying in an Aramaic form."<sup>9</sup> Both Matthew and Mark go their own ways in recording Jesus' cry of desolation.

What about the question of Ps. 22 as prediction? There is no indication in the Biblical text that either Mark or Matthew used this word of Jesus as direct fulfillment of the passage. Neither of these evangelists introduced Jesus' quotation of Ps. 22 with an introductory formula such as "to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet" (Matt. 1:22; 2:15; 21:4) or "as it is written of him" (Mark 14:21). Their emphasis was clearly to witness to the event of Jesus' cry of woe of Ps. 22, leaving Jesus' prayer to speak for itself of ultimate suffering in tension with unwavering faith and commitment.

#### THE MOCKERY ABOUT THE CROSS

(Mark 15:29-32; Matt. 27:39-43;  
Luke 23:35-36)

Each of the first three gospels records the mockery about the cross. Mark and Matthew refer to three groups mocking Jesus: those passing by (Mark 15:39; Matt. 27:29), the chief priests and scribes (Mark 15:31; Matt. 27:41), and the other malefactors crucified with Jesus (Mark 15:44; Matt. 27:32). Luke has his own depiction of the scoffing at the cross. The rulers and some soldiers mock, while the people stand by watching, but do not speak (Luke 23:35). One thief mocks, and the other thief defends Jesus, praying also that

<sup>7</sup> Cf. D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark*, in *The Pelican Gospel Commentaries* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1963), p. 427.

<sup>8</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1955), p. 593.

<sup>9</sup> Taylor, p. 593.



Jesus remember him (Luke 23:39-43). Each synoptist therefore testifies to the mockery in his own way.

It would appear that the synoptists recognized the correspondence between Ps. 22 and the passion. Both the psalmist and Jesus suffer at the hands of threatening enemies (Mark 15:39-44; Matt. 27:27-32; Luke 23:35-37; compare Ps. 22:7, 12-21). Both find themselves scoffed and ridiculed (Mark 15:39-42; Matt. 27:29-32; Luke 23:35, 39). Both suffer physical anguish. (Mark 15:24; Matt. 27:35; Luke 23:33; John 19:18, 28; compare Ps. 22:14-16)

The synoptists' description of the mockery also reflects verbal parallels with Ps. 22. All three synoptists included the mockery which calls upon Jesus to save Himself (Mark 15:31-32; Matt. 27:42; Luke 23:35). Mark and Matthew refer to the "wagging of their heads" (Mark 15:32; Matt. 27:28; compare LXX/Ps. 21:8). Luke uses the word ἔξεμυκτήριζον for "scoffed," a term which is also found in the Septuagint (Ps. 21:8a). Matthew includes a second sarcastic word from the Jewish leaders in addition to the taunt common to Mark's account. Matthew's second taunt, unique to Matthew, is in part a direct quotation of Ps. 22, "He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!" (Ps. 22:8). Such parallels in thought and language demonstrate quite clearly that Ps. 22 provided material for the evangelists' description of the mockery.

Recognizing the evangelists' use of language from Ps. 22 to describe the mockery does not require calling into question the historicity of the mockery. Rather, the use of the language of Ps. 22 accomplishes two objectives. First, the evangelists witness to

particular happenings which happened at the crucifixion of Jesus. Secondly, by using the language of Scripture they indirectly point to Jesus as the fulfillment of God's salvation plan. They testify that this suffering one who stands in continuity with God's people is that one who, according to the Scriptures, lays down His life as a ransom for many.

Each synoptist described the mockery to support certain motifs within his gospel. In Mark the emphasis seems to be upon Jesus' utter loneliness and that strange hiddenness in His ministry.<sup>10</sup> The climax of Mark's gospel is the "must" of the cross (Mark 8:31; 9:12; 9:30-32; 10:32-34, 45; 12:1-12). By including Jesus' cry of distress and the mockery Mark stresses how the mystery of God's ultimate deliverance is hidden in the midst of suffering. At the very moment in which Jesus cries out in utter anguish and the surrounding people taunt and mock, God delivers sinful man from the bondage of devil and death through His suffering Son.

Matthew follows Mark's account closely but adds certain details to highlight the role of the religious leaders in plotting Jesus' death. Matthew stresses Jesus' innocence before Pilate by recording the message of Pilate's wife and Pilate's symbolic washing of hands (Matt. 27:19, 24). Matthew recounts how both leaders and people assume responsibility for Jesus' death with their reply, "His blood be on us and on our children." (Matt. 27:25)

At this point in his account of the mockery Matthew includes the second taunt, in

<sup>10</sup> A. M. Ramsey, "The Narratives of the Passion," *Studia Evangelica, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1964), II, 126-133.



part a direct quotation of Ps. 22, "He trusts in God; let God deliver him now, if he desires him; for he said, 'I am the Son of God.'" (Matt. 27:43)

Matt. 27:43

πέποιθεν ἐπὶ τὸν θεόν,  
ῥυσάσθω νῦν εἰ θέλει  
αὐτόν, εἶπεν γὰρ  
ὅτι θεοῦ εἰμι υἱός.

LXX/Ps. 21:9

ἤλπισεν ἐπὶ κύριον,  
ῥυσάσθω αὐτόν,  
σωσάτω αὐτόν  
ὅτι θέλει αὐτόν.

The verbal parallels are obvious. Matthew utilizes Ps. 22 as he describes the second taunt of the chief priests, the scribes, and elders.

At the same time it is also clear that Matthew is not quoting literally. He has changed the aorist ἤλπισεν to the perfect πέποιθεν. κυριον has become τὸν θεόν. ῥυσάσθω takes on an immediacy with the addition of the adverbial νῦν. The final clause is made more sarcastic with the change of the conjunction from ὅτι to εἰ.

This second taunt is aimed at Jesus' trust in God and His claim to be the Son of God.<sup>11</sup> The mockers demand an immediate proof to vindicate Jesus' trust. Had not this Jesus claimed the ability to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days (Matt. 26:61)? Matthew has sharpened the sarcasm in the priests' mockery by the additional citation of Ps. 22. By adding the phrase, "for he said, 'I am the Son of God,'" Matthew made clear that

the chief priests' scoffing was a direct assault upon Jesus' messianic claim to be the Son of God.

Thus Matthew's apologetic purpose comes through. These chief priests, scribes, and elders of the people claim to be learned in the Scriptures. However, their use of Scripture only exposed utter ignorance. These blind leaders of the blind did not understand the Scriptures at all. They even scorned the one who trusted God as only the Son of God can trust. At this point one can suggest that Jesus' cry of desolation in Matthew may be not so much a cry of despair, but rather a prayer of trust and commitment, especially as one remembers the whole psalm. In this way Matthew set forth the conflict between Jesus and the Jewish leadership. Both Jesus and the chief priests used Ps. 22, Jesus to express commitment to God, and the religious authorities to scoff the promised one Himself.

Luke emphasized that Jesus did not endure His passion alone. There were those who accompanied Him to share His burden and to experience in some way the redemptive meaning of His passion. Luke did not include among Jesus' words at the last supper the reference to the smiting of the shepherd and the scattering of the sheep as did Matthew and Mark (Matt. 26:31-35; Mark 14:27-31). Instead Luke described Jesus warning Peter that Satan would sift Peter as wheat (Luke 22:31-33). Luke recorded how an angel strengthened Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43), but did not record the actual kiss of Judas. He said only that Judas drew near to kiss Jesus. Then Jesus spoke, "Judas, would you betray the Son of man with a kiss?" (Luke 22:47-48).

<sup>11</sup> Walter Grundmann, *Matthäus* ThHKNT (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1968), I, 559.



What does this mean? A great multitude of the people followed Jesus as He bore His cross. Jesus was not alone on that trek to Golgotha. And then when Jesus was crucified between the two thieves, one of the malefactors testified, "We are receiving the due reward of our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong. . . . Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power" (Luke 23:41-42). Even in His passion Jesus drew the sinners and outcasts to Him. His ministry remained one of reconciliation and forgiveness to the end. Such was the Father's will: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. . . . Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:34, 46)

In summary one notes the following about the synoptists' description of the mockery. The synoptists testify to the drama unfolding on Golgotha. The crucified Christ was mocked by men, especially religious leaders, soldiers, and a malefactor. The synoptists utilize the language of Ps. 22 to describe this mockery, although each describes the taunting and scorn in his own way, shaping the Old Testament materials to fit the needs of his readers.

#### THE CASTING OF LOTS FOR THE GARMENTS

(Mark 15:24; Matt. 27:35; Luke 23:34;  
John 19:23-24)

All four evangelists included the lottery for the garments in their crucifixion accounts. As with the description of the mockery, each evangelist described the lottery in his own way. Mark wrote that "they crucified him and divided his garments among them, casting lots for them, to decide what each should take" (Mark 15:24). He placed the crucifixion and the

dividing of the garments in two main clauses, and reported that all of Jesus' garments were divided by lot, not merely the seamless robe.

Matthew's description of the lottery is slightly different in its syntactical structure. "When they had crucified him, they divided his garments among them by casting lots" (Matt. 27:35). By making the lottery the main clause and placing the act of crucifixion into a subordinate clause, Matthew gave more emphasis to the casting of lots. He also reported that all the garments were divided by the lottery.

Luke separated the dividing of the garments from the act of crucifixion. He placed Jesus' first word, "Father, forgive them," between the act of crucifixion and the dividing of the garments. After recording Jesus' prayer, Luke simply stated, "And they cast lots to divide his garments" (Luke 23:34b). Like Mark and Matthew, Luke reported that all of Jesus' garments were divided by lot. He too gave no indication of the number of persons involved in dividing the garments.

In John's gospel an interesting change takes place. John placed the lottery over the garments into a fulfillment context. John also followed Ps. 22:18 literally and described the dividing of the garments as two distinct actions.

When the soldiers had crucified Jesus they took his garments and made four parts, one for each soldier; also his tunic.

But the tunic was without seam, woven from top to bottom; so they said to one another, "Let us not tear it, but cast lots for it to see whose it shall be." This was to fulfill the scripture,

They parted my garments among them,  
and for my clothing they cast lots.

So the soldiers did this. (John 19:23-25a)



Fulfillment of Scripture is a vital aspect of John's passion account; John cited four passages with fulfillment formulae in connection with the crucifixion: "they parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots" (John 19:24; Ps. 22:18), "I thirst" (John 19:18; cf. Ps. 69:21; Ps. 22:15), "not a bone of him shall be broken" (John 19:36; Ps. 34:20), "they shall look on him whom they have pierced." (John 19:37; Zech. 12:10)

The question is, what does John mean by fulfillment?<sup>12</sup> Does John necessarily mean that some Old Testament direct prediction is now coming true in Jesus' passion? That kind of direct prediction does not seem indicated by John's flexibility in Scriptural quotation. At times the Septuagint is quoted directly. In other passages the author uses the Old Testament text more freely; in fact one may not even be able to identify the exact Old Testament reference to which the evangelist refers (John 19:18; cf. Matt. 2:23). Such use of the Old Testament suggests that fulfillment of Scripture was not understood in a mechanical fashion. What seems clear is that John witnesses that God's salvation plan moves forward in Jesus Christ. No human power, no demonic force, no evil plot could thwart God's promise of grace and truth which found climactic expression in the Word made flesh. The casting of lots for the garments testified to God's redemptive purpose. Scripture will be fulfilled.

But what about John's literalistic exposition of Ps. 22:18? Doesn't John's description of the lottery as two distinct actions support the idea of an exact correspondence

<sup>12</sup> This writer has found Richard Jungkunt's study of fulfillment most helpful. Cf. "An Approach to the Exegesis of John 10:34-36," *CTM*, XXXV (1964), pp. 556-565.

between an Old Testament predication and a New Testament event? Many Christian interpreters have so understood the text.

However an understanding of rabbinic hermeneutics suggests another approach, namely, that of midrashic interpretation. Rabbinic exegesis rested upon two basic principles:

1. One must interpret all the minute details in Scripture.
2. Each part or detail can be interpreted as an autonomous unit without reference to its context.

These principles reflected the Jewish attitude of awe toward the inspired text.<sup>13</sup> The rabbis gave meticulous attention to individual details, for even the detail contained "seventy" meanings.

Like a good rabbi, John noted the plural form in "clothes" ἱμάτια (LXX/Ps. 21:19 a) and the singular in "tunic" ἱματισμόν (LXX/Ps. 21:19 b), and he wanted to explain the significance of this detail. Therefore he interpreted the plural form as a reference to the four parts in which Jesus' clothes were divided and distributed among four soldiers. The singular referred to the seamless tunic. Since the soldiers did not want to ruin the seamless tunic by tearing, they cast lots for it. This is good midrashic exposition.

But what happens to the historicity of John's description? Does John describe what really took place? There is no need to question the historicity of the lottery, as, for example, Rudolph Bultmann did

<sup>13</sup> Addison G. Wright, *The Literary Genre Midrash* (New York: Alba House, 1967). William H. Brownlee, "Biblical Interpretation among the Sectaries of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *The Biblical Archaeologist*, XIV (1951), 54 to 76. Geza Vermes, *Scripture and Tradition in Judaism* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961).



when he said that "Mark derives the lottery for the garments from Ps. 21:19."<sup>14</sup> The evidence supports the basic facticity of the lottery and does not justify such scepticism. Erich Klostermann points to Petronius, *Satyricon* III, as evidence for such a lottery. According to the custom of the day the executioners claimed the possessions on the person of the condemned.<sup>15</sup> However the tension remains between the synoptists and John. The synoptists describe the casting of lots for all the garments without separating garments from seamless robe or identifying the number of parts. John is more intent upon interpreting specific details in Ps. 22:18. The plural, "garments," and the singular "tunic" both call for comment within the framework of a larger concern, namely, the fulfillment of Scripture in Jesus Christ.

In identifying John's interpretation of Ps. 22:18 as midrashic one ought also note an important difference in John's exposition in comparison with rabbinic and apocalyptic Judaism. With John the emphasis was not upon the interpretation of a specific Scriptural text as an end in itself, but rather upon its witness to God's salvation plan fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Rabbinic and apocalyptic Judaism searched the sacred text for its own sake. Scripture contained all truth. The single word held an infinite number of meanings. John's midrash did not focus on the text, but on Christ, and this is the decisive difference. In Jesus Christ men met the ultimate revelation of

the Father, the Word made flesh. (John 1:1-18)

#### IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

Interpretation of the Biblical text is not an end in itself, but ultimately serves the contemporary church in its desire to proclaim God's good news today. This writer sees the following implications in this study on the relationship between Ps. 22 and the passion narrative.

Ps. 22 is a messianic psalm. Like Moses and the Prophets this psalm finds its ultimate focus and meaning in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). A typological approach to Ps. 22 emphasizes the historical movement within God's salvation plan and makes clear that ultimately it is Jesus Christ Himself who makes the Father known. Men come to faith not by visible evidence or rational proofs but by revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

This study stresses the humanity of our Lord. Jesus' use of Ps. 22 as His personal prayer shows how completely Jesus identified with us in our need. Like the pious of His day, Jesus confronted pain and trial. Furthermore, when Jesus felt empty, alone, forsaken of God, He turned to the prayer book of His people and cried out to God in the words of an ancient lament psalm. Such a lament, however, was no empty cry in the dark. The Old Testament lament included an affirmation of faith and moved toward praise. So our Lord set before us the perfect example of steadfast trust. He trusted His Father even in that most bitter hour.

Through the use of Ps. 22 in their passion narrative, the evangelists directly and

<sup>14</sup> Rudolph Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, tr. by John Marsh (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), p. 281.

<sup>15</sup> Erich Klostermann, *Das Markusevangelium in Handbuch zum Neuen Testament* (4th Edition; Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1950), III, 164.



indirectly testified to Jesus Christ as the fulfillment of Scripture. Here was the long awaited Messiah, the Deliverer in whom all promise found its focus.

The evangelists made clear that they were men of the Word. For them there were no better words to use in their gospels than words of Scripture. The authority behind their witness to Jesus Christ was finally not their own, but the God who had spoken in many and varied ways by the prophets and now made Himself known in the person of His Son, inviting men to have life in His name.

This study is one more testimony of God's use of the individual evangelist. Each evangelist has his uniqueness, yet each was the instrument for God's proclamation of good news. God calls, equips, and works—in and through the dynamics of human personality. All those trying to live out a Christian life of service and proclamation can find encouragement in this fact.

This study also says much about the

Christian view of history. "To fulfill the scripture" denotes a process which did not stop with Jesus Christ. Rather, Christ moved the entire Biblical witness to another level, the last days. Christ's fulfillment picks up the tempo of God's salvation plan and calls to mission and ministry. The hour is late.

Finally, the use of Ps. 22 in the passion narrative makes clear that witness to Jesus Christ as the promised one shaped the evangelists' interpretation and use of the psalm. None of the evangelists sought to use psalmic material merely in the interest of literary style or historical accuracy. None was even intent upon proving the validity of Scripture, as though the Word of God ever stands in need of human verification. Each was a witness, a writer of the Gospel, a man intent upon pointing to the Christ in whom the Kingdom had come and through whom God held out forgiveness and life to every man for now and for the world to come.

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