

ABSTRACT

“Psalms 22, 23, and 24: A Messianic Trilogy?”—Scholars are studying the final form of the Psalter in its canonical context. In this article, Psalms 22, 23, and 24 are analyzed considering their canonical context and their final form. As a result of this research, the work/ministry of the Messiah is evident. Though these psalms are connected to the experience of David, hints pointing to the ministry of the Messiah are developed. It is concluded that Psalm 22 is the Psalm of the Cross, Psalm 24 is the Psalm of the Crown, and Psalm 23 is the Psalm of the Paschal Lamb.

Keywords: Psalter, Messiah, Cross, Crown, Paschal Lamb

RESUMEN

“Salmos 22, 23 y 24: ¿Una trilogía mesiánica?”— Los eruditos están estudiando la forma final del Salterio en su contexto canónico. En este artículo, Salmo 22, 23 y 24 son analizados considerando su contexto canónico y su forma final son analizados. Como resultado de esta investigación, la obra/ministerio del Mesías es evidente. Aunque estos salmos están conectados a la experiencia de David, las claves que apuntan hacia el ministerio del Mesías son desarrolladas. Se concluye que el Salmo 22 es el salmo de la Cruz, el Salmo 24 es el salmo de la corona y el Salmo 23 es el salmo del Cordero pascual.

Palabras claves: Salterio, Mesías, cruz, corona, Cordero pascual

PSALMS 22, 23, AND 24: A MESSIANIC TRILOGY?

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Introduction

In the history of Christian interpretation of the Psalms until about three decades ago, three major approaches had been taken toward messianism in the Psalms. First, Augustine (5th century AD) and others following him considered that all the Psalms (and especially David's psalms) are directly messianic. In that sense, for the name "David" the name Christ should be inserted; for the pronoun "I", insert Christ; and for the pronoun "we", insert "spiritual Israel." Conservative scholars still today point to such psalms as Psalm 110 as directly predictive of the Messiah.

Second, according to Hermann Gunkel (early 20th century), in his *Formgeschichtliche* approach to the Psalms, followed by critical scholars generally until very recently, any psalm is messianic. They are to be interpreted only on the historical level in terms of the historical events that gave rise to the various *Gattungen* or literary types found in the Psalter. The NT writers and the pre-critical Christian church re-interpreted various psalms as referring to the Messiah, but there is no prospective prefigurative aspect to the psalms themselves.

The third view regarding messianism and the Psalms is that they are indirectly messianic. The psalms are regarded as having a historical setting, but also many psalms have been seen to typologically prefigure the coming Messiah. This view is accepted by most conservative/evangelical scholars. Some conservative scholars find the prospective/predictive nature of the typology already inherent in the Psalms themselves, while others insist that the "anointed one" (the Davidic king) is later regarded as pointing toward a future Messiah when David and the other Davidic kings did not fulfill the expectations presented in the Psalms.

In the last three decades, a fourth view of messianism in the Psalms has developed in the wake of Gerald H. Wilson's landmark study *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*.¹ Some biblical scholars have begun to

1. Gerald H. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBLDS 76 (Chicago: Scholars Press, 1985).

analyze the final shape of the book of Psalms as a coherent whole, with careful attention to studying psalms in their context as compositional units, noting links between adjacent psalms, and recognizing clusters of psalms with a common theme.² One major organizing theme, which has been recognized as emergent throughout many if not all the psalms, and especially the Davidic psalms, is that of the Messiah.³

In this study, we will review some evidence that substantiates the recent approach of those who see the canonical shape of the Psalter as messianic, but this is not our main focus. As far as macrostructure, we build upon the recent shape analysis of the Davidic psalms done by Peter C. W. Ho in his 2019 *JETS* article, “The Shape of David Psalms as Messianic,” and in particular, his analysis of the shape of group 2 of Davidic psalms in Book I of the Psalter where sees a concentric structure involving Psalms 15-24.⁴ Our focus is on the last three psalms in that cluster of psalms, i.e., Psalms 22-24. The question we ask is simple: Is there evidence in these psalms themselves and their surrounding context that they are to be regarded as a messianic trilogy? Regarding the methodology of typology, which is assumed here, the reader is referred to other studies in which I have developed this methodology from Scripture.⁵ This study acknowledges that the psalms discussed call for in-depth analysis, reading them in their own terms, before connecting them to Jesus. However, due to space lim-

2. Jerome F. D. Creach, *Yahweh as Refuge and the Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, JSOTSup 217 (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1996); David M. Howard, Jr., *The Structure of Psalms 93-100*, BJSUCSD 5 (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1997); John C. Crutchfield, *Psalms in Their Context: An Interpretation of Psalms 107-118*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2011); W. Dennis Tucker, Jr., *Constructing and Deconstructing Power in Psalms 107-150*, AIL 19 (Atlanta: SBL, 2014); Christine M. Vetne, “The Function of ‘Hope’ as a Lexical and Theological Keyword in the Psalter: A Structural-Theological Study of Five Psalms (Pss 42-43, 52, 62, 69, 71) within Their Final Shape Context (Pss 42-72)” (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2015).

3. Jerry E. Shepherd, “The Book of Psalms as the Book of Christ: A Christo-Canonical Approach to the Book of Psalms” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1995); Christine M. Vetne, “El Mesías allana el camino: Un bosquejo de la forma y la estructura del Salterio,” in “*Me invocarás, y yo te responderé*”: *Estudios selectos en el Salterio*, IBTU 3 (Lima, Peru: Theologika, 2018), 3-51; and Peter C. W. Ho, “The Shape of Davidic Psalms as Messianic,” *JETS* 62, no. 3 (2019): 515-531.

4. Ho, “Shape of Davidic Psalms,” 518; Vetne, “El Mesías allana el camino,” 12-16.

5. Richard M. Davidson, *Typology in Scripture: A Study of Hermeneutical Τύπος Structures*, Andrews University Dissertation Series 2 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 1981); and Richard M. Davidson, “The Eschatological Hermeneutic of Biblical Typology,” *TheoRhēma* 6, no. 2 (2011): 5-48.

itations, such is not possible in this article, and the reader is referred to the numerous recent commentaries which provide this historical analysis. Our focus is on the possible messianic interpretation of these psalms. First, let's briefly discuss the shape of the Psalter as messianic.

The Shape of the Psalter as Messianic

Several major pieces of evidence have led me to accept the conclusion of recent studies that the shape of the Psalter is messianic. First, the Psalter begins with an introduction, Psalms 1-2. Many biblical scholars have recognized that Psalms 1-2 form the introduction to the canonical form of the Psalter. These are the "door-keepers" to the Psalms. That Psalms 1 and 2 are to be viewed together as a unit is demonstrated by the inclusion using the term אֲשֶׁרִי ("blessed, or oh the happiness of!") which begins Psalm 1 and concludes Psalm 2.

The fact that the Psalms in their canonical shape have an introduction is evidence that those who gave the Psalter its final shape intended us to understand the Psalms as a unit, as a book. The Psalms are divided into five sections (1-41, 42-72, 73-89, 90-106, and 107-150), each one of them concluding with a doxology. This provides additional evidence that the final shaper(s) of the Psalter intended it to be seen as a unified whole, probably matching the five books of the Law of Moses. Furthermore, several scholars have studied the introductory Psalms 1-2 and have shown that they provide evidence within themselves that they are to be interpreted messianically.⁶ Though these are the only two psalms in Book I of the Psalms (1-41) without a superscription, Psalms 1-2 are clearly Davidic (cf. Acts 4:25); and together their messianic message provides a doorway into a messianic interpretation of the entire Psalter, and in particular the Davidic Psalms. Christine M. Vetne summarizes this understanding: "Psalms 1-2 thereby introduce the Psalter with a unique and life-saving invitation for all people to seek refuge in the Messiah and to follow in His footsteps. The rest of the Psalter develops these concepts, explaining *how* the Messiah is able to save humanity and give them access to the kingdom of God."⁷

6. David C. Mitchell, *The Message of the Psalter: An Eschatological Programme in the Book of Psalms*, JSOTSup 252 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 87; Robert Cole, *Psalms 1-2: Gateway to the Psalter* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 43; and Vetne, "El Mesías allana el camino," 4-7.

7. Vetne, "El Mesías allana el camino," 6-7.

In a separate study, I have shown how Psalm 2 provides striking evidence that the anointed Davidic king is to be regarded as a type of the future Messiah.⁸ Psalm 2 moves from what at first glance appears to be the local level of the earthly installation of the Davidic king as the “son” of Yahweh (vv. 6-9), to the level of the divine Son, the Messiah, in v. 12.⁹ This final verse of the psalm clinches the reference to the future divine Messiah: “Kiss the Son,¹⁰ / Lest He [the Son¹¹] be angry, / And you perish in the way / When His [the Son’s] wrath is kindled but a little. / Blessed are all those who put their trust in [בָּ + הַסֹּהֵן, ‘take refuge in’] Him [the Son].” The phrase הַסֹּהֵן followed by the preposition בָּ (“take refuge in”) is always elsewhere in the Psalms (twenty-four times) reserved for the deity, and therefore the Son of v. 12 is none other than the divine Son of God.¹²

Once one recognizes this clear indicator of the messianic interpretation of Psalm 2 at its conclusion, then one is led to go back through the psalm, and indicators of the cosmic/messianic character of this psalm now begin to appear throughout. The cosmic aspect may be detected from the very beginning of Psalm 2. It opens with a cosmic battle, between nations and two individuals, God and the Messiah. It does not mention specific kingdoms around Israel, but uses general

8. Richard M. Davidson, “New Testament Use of the Old Testament,” *JATS* 5, no. 1 (1994): 23-26.

9. The English numbering of verses is used in this study for convenience. In case the Hebrew numbering differs from the English, when it is necessary, it will be given between brackets []. Notice that while here in Psalm 2, as well as Psalms 23 and 24, the English and Hebrew numbering are identical, in Psalm 22 the Hebrew verse numbers are one higher than the English equivalent, beyond the superscription.

10. There is no need to emend the text to “kiss his feet” (as in RSV) or some other reading (as NEB). The word for “son” is in the Aramaic. The Aramaic word for “son”, בָּר, elsewhere in the HB is almost always used for the son of a king or nobility; here, considering vv. 2, 6, 7; it is clearly the son of a king. Without the article, the noun takes on universal connotations, and is best translated as a title “the Son,” paralleling the use of מָשִׁיחַ without the article in Daniel 9:25, best translated as “the Messiah.” These are examples of what Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O’Connor call “*unique appellatives*, terms that refer to unique individuals or things and are used more or less as names.” Bruce K. Waltke and Michael P. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 240. These kinds of nouns are determined (definite) even if they do not have the article.

11. The most natural antecedent to the pronoun is the nearest noun, the Son, rather than Yahweh in the previous verse.

12. For a rich discussion of the NT messianic fulfillment of Psalm 22, see especially Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms: Messages of Hope for Today* (Berrien Springs, MI: First Impressions, 1983), 53-60.

terms, thus implying that the reference is all-inclusive—all nations. God and Messiah have a specific claim over the nations, which seems to indicate more than political power, and relates to their ownership over the nations as Creator king.

The initial question “why” suggests that this is an odd behavior for the nations to seek to be free from God and Messiah. Why is it odd? Would not any nation want to be independent, unless it is talking about something more, speaking about actual ownership over the entire world—like God and the Messiah has and will again have at the end of the psalm?

The NT also connects the rebellion in the beginning of Psalm 2 with the death of Jesus Christ—i.e. perhaps the claim they seek to be free from, relates to this aspect, of God and Jesus—as Creator, Ruler, and Savior. Although all nations were not physically present at the cross of Jesus, the cosmic idea is nevertheless preserved.¹³

These internal indicators in Psalm 2 set the tone for the remainder of the Davidic psalter: the Davidic מָשִׁיחַ or “anointed one” is a type of the eschatological divine Messiah, or as other scholars argue, Psalm 2 as well as Psalm 1, are directly and not only typologically predictive of the Messiah. It may be a matter of both-and and not either-or.

A second major evidence for messianism in the Psalms, especially the Davidic collections, builds upon the first evidence, the messianic precedent set in Psalms 1-2, but expands it throughout the Davidic collections of the Psalter. Ho, in his recent detailed analysis of the major Davidic collections found in the Psalter, demonstrates how these collections are all concentric in shape showing their unity, but at the same time these collections move in linear sequence through the historical life of David.¹⁴ Ho concludes “that the trajectory traced here does not simply address the few often-quoted psalms in the NT but coheres strikingly with the broad Christological interpretation of the Psalms. . . . In other words, the NT’s understanding of the life and ministry of Jesus as the fulfillment of the messianic hopes in Davidic psalms is a formidable and reasonable

13. I am indebted to Christine M. Vetne (via personal communication) for these additional insights regarding the cosmic nature of the Psalm. Vetne also points out that the comparison between Psalm 22 (cosmic setting) and Psalm 3 (seemingly historical setting) may indicate a typological relationship between the historical events of David’s life and the experience of the coming Messiah.

14. See the summary of this trajectory of movement through the Psalms and David’s life, in Ho, “The Shape of Davidic Psalms,” 510.

interpretation and need not be an anachronistic reading.”¹⁵

A third evidence for messianism in the (Davidic) psalms becomes explicit in the prophets. Numerous OT prophets, under inspiration, predicted that the Messiah would come as the new antitypical David, recapitulating in His life the experience of the first David. Note especially the following passages: Isaiah 9:5, 6; 11:1-5; Jeremiah 23:5; Ezekiel 34:23; 37:24; Hosea 3:4-5; Amos 9:11; and Zechariah 8:3. Thus, the Davidic psalms relating to the experience of David as the anointed one—especially his suffering and his royal reign—are indicated to be types of the coming Davidic Messiah. Alternatively, as suggested by others, David is directly predicting the experience of the Messiah in these psalms. In either case, the NT writers and Jesus, by citing from Davidic psalms denoting the suffering and royalty of the anointed one, are simply announcing the fulfillment of what was already indicated in the OT.¹⁶

Psalm 22: The Psalm of the Cross?

Numerous verses of Psalm 22 are cited by Jesus and/or NT writers as being fulfilled in the various events surrounding the death and resurrection of the Messiah: v. 1 in Matthew 27:45 and Mark 15:34; v. 7 in Matthew 27:39 and Mark 15:29; v. 8 in Matthew 27:43; v. 18 in Matthew 27:35 and its parallels (Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24); and v. 22 in Hebrews 2:12.

The problem arises in the minds of many because the Psalm itself does not explicitly indicate that it is referring to the Messiah. Psalm 22 is written by David¹⁷ in the first person, and therefore

15. *Ibid.*, 530-531. Ho lists fourteen parallels between the Psalms and Christological re-readings in the NT. *Ibid.*, 531, n. 62.

16. Fifteen psalms are cited as messianic in the NT: Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 35, 40, 41, 45, 68, 69, 97, 102, 109, 110, and 118. Here are details: Psalm 2:1-2 (Acts 4:25-26; Rev 6:15; 11:15), 2:1-5 (Rev 11:18), 2:7 (Acts 13:33; Heb 1:5; 5:5), 2:8-9 (Rev 2:26-27; 19:15), 2:9 (Rev 12:5), 8:4-6 (Heb 2:6-9), 16:8-11 (Acts 2:25-28, 31; 13:35), 22:1 (Matt 27:46, Mark 15:34), 22:7 (Matt 27:39; Mark 15: 29), 22:8 (Matt 27:43; Luke 23:35), 22:18 (Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24), 22:22 (Heb 2:12; Matt 28:10), 35:19 (John 15:25), 40:6-8 (Heb 10:5-9), 41:9 (John 13:18), 45:6-7 (Heb 1:8-9), 68:6-7 (Eph 4:8), 69:4 (John 15:25), 69:9 (John 2:17; Rom 15:3), 69:21 (Matt 27:34, 48; Mark 15:36; John 19:28), 97:7 (Heb 1:6), 102:25-27 (Heb 1:10-12), 109:8 (Acts 1:20), 110:1 (Matt 22:44; 26:64; Mark 12:36; 14:62; 16:19; Luke 20:42-43; 22:69; Acts 2:34-35; 1 Cor 15:25; Heb 1:13; 10:13), 118:22 (Matt 21:42; Mark 12:10; Luke 20:17; Acts 4:11; 1 Pet 2:7), and 118:26 (Matt 21:9; 23:39; Mark 11:9; Luke 13:35; John 12:13).

17. The superscription of Psalm 22 reads, מְזֻמֹּר לְדָוִד, “A Psalm of David.”

apparently describes David's personal experience. It is often asked, how then can the NT writers and Jesus Himself see this psalm as pointing to the Messiah? Many scholars simply assume that the NT is engaging in reinterpretation, reading back into the OT with *Christ-colored glasses*. In our introduction, we have looked at crucial keys overlooked in much study of the messianic psalms: the OT itself provides verbal indicators that identify the typological and/or prophetic nature of these psalms. I add here that such specific indicators are found regarding Psalm 22 itself, beyond the general messianic keys we have examined in the introduction.¹⁸

In Psalm 22, despite the superscription denoting Davidic authorship and use of first person description, various commentators have recognized that "the features of this psalm far transcend the actual experiences of David."¹⁹ Derek Kidner also says that "David's language overflows all its natural banks."²⁰ Aage Bentzen accurately notes that Psalm 22 presents "not a description of illness, but of an *execution*."²¹ The executed one is actually brought "to the dust of death" in v. 15; and yet in v. 22 he is again alive and well, declaring Yahweh's name to His brethren! As Carl F. Keil y Franz Delitzsch have observed, "In Psalm 22, however, David descends, with his complaint, into a depth that lies beyond the depth of his affliction, and rises, with his hopes, to a height that lies far beyond the height of the reward of his affliction."²²

Many critical scholars refuse to accept at face value the information conveyed in the superscriptions to the Psalms. For evidence supporting the authenticity of the superscriptions in the Psalms and Davidic authorship of psalms with this superscription, see Jerome L. Skinner, "The Historical Superscriptions of Davidic Psalms: An Exegetical, Intertextual, and Methodological Analysis" (PhD diss., Andrews University, 2016); cf. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*, TOTC (London: Tyndale Press, 1973), 32-35; H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1959), 5-8.

18. For analysis of the messianic nature of Psalm 22, see especially John E. McKinley, "Psalms 16, 22, and 110: Historically Interpreted as Referring to Jesus," *Perichoresis* 10, no. 2 (2012): 207-221. See also Mark H. Heinemann, "An Exposition of Psalm 22," *BibSac* 147 (1990): 286-308; Richard D. Patterson, "Psalm 22: From Trial to Triumph," *JETS* 47, no. 2 (2004): 213-233.

19. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 21.

20. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 109.

21. Aage Bentzen, *King and Messiah* (London: Lutterworth, 1955), 94. *Italics* are from the original.

22. Carl F. Keil y Franz Delitzsch, *The Psalms*, vol. 5 de *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996), 306.

How the language of Psalm 22 can be written by David in the first person and yet move beyond his personal experience, is clarified in connection with the messianic Psalm 2, as pointed out in the introduction. The reference to the cosmic Messiah in Psalm 2 (either typologically or by direct prediction) provides a paradigm for the other Davidic psalms in the canonical shaping of the Psalter. I have argued that this is a typological movement, but I am open to the alternative interpretation that David is giving a direct prediction of the Messiah, or that the canonical shaping of the Psalter points in this direction as others have argued.

Regarding Psalm 22, prophet Daniel gives specific additional (inter-textual) evidence of its messianic import. In Daniel 9:26, referring to the death of the Messiah, the angel Gabriel alludes to this psalm. Jacques Doukhan points out how the expression אֵין לוֹ, “he has no”, is a contracted form of אֵין עֲזֹרָה לוֹ, “he has no help”, of Daniel 11:45 and alludes to the abbreviated form of this phrase in Psalm 22:11[12]: אֵין עֲזֹרָה, “no help.”²³ Verse 11[12] comes at a crucial juncture in the structure of the psalm.²⁴ Doukhan shows how Daniel 9:26 thus indicates that the Messiah would fulfill the experience described in Psalm 22. This prophetic indicator points to Psalm 22 as the special psalm of the Messiah at His death.

I suggest that Jesus, as a careful exegete of the messianic prophecy of Daniel 9, apparently understood that His death would be linked in fulfillment with Psalm 22. In fact, it is very possible that Jesus faced the experience of Calvary fortified by the words of Psalm 22, perhaps even mentally moving through the Psalm as the events of His crucifixion unfolded before His eyes.²⁵

23. Jacques Doukhan, “The Seventy Weeks of Daniel 9: An Exegetical Study,” *AUSS* 17 (1979): 18-19.

24. See Ernst R. Wendland, *Studies in the Psalms: Literary-Structural Analysis with Application to Translation* (Dallas, TX: SIL International, 2017), 125-176. Wendland’s meticulous analysis of Psalm 22 reveals how this psalm is divided into two main parts (vv. 1-21 and vv. 22-31), and part I is further divided into cycles (vv. 1-11 and 12-21), with v. 11 as the “hinge” verse connecting the two cycles, “in Janus, hinge-like fashion [which] had links in both directions.” *Ibid.*, 142; cf. 167.

25. Heinemann moves toward this conclusion, at least for part of the psalm as he declares, “He [Jesus] must have read this psalm many times, already having at age 12 extensive knowledge of the Scriptures (Luke 2:46-47). It seems logical to deduce that on the cross Jesus repeated the words of Psalm 22:1 to express His agony and to emphasize the prophetic connection between Himself and the psalm.” Heinemann, “Exposition of Psalm 22,” 288-289.

In other words, I suggest that Psalm 22 not only provides evidence for the messiahship of Jesus, as indicated by its being cited by the Gospel writers in describing the scenes of the crucifixion. It also answers another question: What gave the Messiah the inner passion to face His passion? Where did He derive His holy vision to sustain Him on the Via Dolorosa, the Way of Sorrows, and especially on the Cross?

I have become convinced that Christ overcame at Calvary, at least in part, because He had seen the battle plan in advance based on the OT Scriptures, and in particular Psalm 22, as it links with the prediction of His death in Daniel 9. He recognized that what David described under inspiration in Psalm 22, was to happen to the New David, the Messiah, in His death.

It seems no coincidence that as His unity with the Father is breaking up, separated by the sins of the world which He bore, Jesus cries out using the opening words of Psalm 22: “My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt 27:46; Mark 15:34). As He hangs on the cross, He cannot see through the portals of the tomb, but I suggest that by naked faith He sees the events described in Psalm 22 transpiring before Him and holds on to the assurances of this Psalm. In the midst of his groaning on the cross, with the Father apparently silent (vv. 1-2), He recalls His holy Father enthroned on the praises of His people (v. 3), and His faith is strengthened by remembering God’s mighty acts in the past: How Israel’s ancestors trusted in Yahweh, and He delivered them (vv. 4-5).

Despair again presses in upon Him, and He feels worthless, like a worm and not a man, being the reproach of men and despised by the people (v. 6). All around Him are those mocking (v. 7; Matt 27:39; Mark 15:19) in the very words of v. 8: “He trusted in the Lord, let Him rescue Him; let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him!” (NKJV; see Matt 27:43; Luke 23:35).

Once again Jesus holds on in naked faith, this time remembering what God did for Him in His individual history, how the Father taught Him to trust and was there for Him since birth: “You are He who took me out of the womb: You made me trust while on My mother’s breasts. I was cast upon You from birth. From My mother’s womb You have been my God” (vv. 9-10). Note that there is no mention of an earthly father in these verses, which fits Jesus’ circumstances of the virgin birth.²⁶

26. Heinemann, “Exposition of Psalm 22,” 293.

Again, His sense of being forsaken by His heavenly Father, as well as His disciples having forsaken Him, elicits the cry of v. 11 which depicts: “there is none to help.” As pointed out above, this verse is the climactic midpoint of the first half of the psalm, and this verse also clinches its messianic character because of its being alluded to by the angel Gabriel when predicting the Messiah’s death in Daniel 9:22.

Verses 12-13 vividly describe the Messiah’s enemies who surround Him, seeking to devour Him. Verse 14 aptly depicts His inner anguish of a broken heart: “My heart is like wax; it has melted within me.” In his thirst, He experiences v. 15: “My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue clings to My jaws.” He realizes that the time of death in his execution is near: “You have brought me to the dust of death” (v. 15). In the excruciating pain coming from the nail-pierced hands and feet, v. 16 is fulfilled in His experience: “they have pierced My hands and feet.” Notwithstanding He senses the shame of hanging naked on the Cross, there is a startling shift away from the anguishing petitions in v. 21b [22b] to a victory expression. In that verse, He does not continue to pray for deliverance, using imperatives as in vv. 19-21a [20-22a]. Such versions as NJPS miss the implications of the grammatical shift when they translate as a continuation of the imperative: “From the horns of the wild oxen rescue me” in v. 21b [22b]. The verb הַגִּבַּר, “answer”, here in the grammatical form of *qal* perfect 2ms, plus the 1cs pronominal suffix, should be translated “You have answered me!” This single word in Hebrew is reserved by the psalmist for the last word of the sentence. Though metrically this expression “You have answered me” could go with the prepositional phrase “from the horns of the wild oxen” (as in ESV), the dramatic change in mood and tense with this final word (in Hebrew) pivots the whole psalm from negative to positive. Beth L. Tanner insightfully notes, “The whole psalm pivots on this one word (at least in Hebrew)... ‘you answered me’”²⁷ on the cross, with the crowd staring at his naked and emaciated body (v. 17). As the soldiers cast lots for His garment, v. 18 comes true before His eyes: “They divide My garments among them, and for My clothing they cast lots” (Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:24).

27. Nancy DeClaisé-Walford, Rolf A. Jacobson, and Beth L. Tanner, *The Book of Psalms*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 236. For an intertextual analysis of Psalm 22, 23, and 24, see Nancy DeClaisé-Walford, “An Intertextual Reading of Psalms 22, 23, and 24,” in *The Book of Psalms: Composition and Reception*, ed. Peter W. Flint and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 139-152.

In vv. 19-21a we find a prayer for strength to hold on and to be delivered, which Jesus may well have prayed silently on the cross. There was no apparent answer to this prayer in Jesus' historical surroundings, but Jesus' faith may well have pierced the gloom on the cross as He came to the highpoint of the psalm, with the abrupt change of mood in the words of affirmation that follow abruptly in v. 21b [22b]: "You have answered me!" I follow those scholars taking this word/ clause as a stand-alone colon (poetic line) at the thematic center of the psalm, such as the one we find in Psalm 92:8 [9].²⁸ The flow of this verse is well captured by the NET translation: "Rescue me from the mouth of the lion, and from the horns of the wild oxen! You have answered me!"²⁹ I suggest the Messiah dares to believe—based upon the Word of God declared in this verse of the psalm—that God has already answered Him, although He sees no outward evidence of this.

The next verse, v. 22 [23], provides further hope for the Messiah on the Cross: "I will tell Your name to My brethren." Here is implied a resurrection from the "dust of death" described in v. 15. It describes a time when He is no longer being executed, but alive again. Even though there was no apparent change in his surroundings, the Messiah exercises implicit faith in the Word of God, which promises that God had already answered and that He would live again. It can hardly be only a coincidence that Jesus' first instructions to the women at the tomb after His resurrection echo the words of Psalm 22:22, "Go and tell my brethren" (Matt 28:10)!

Perhaps Jesus' faith was fortified in those last minutes on the cross by the encouragement of the final verses of Psalm 22, describing the praise of Yahweh by the descendant of Israel (v. 25), His own praise to His Father for answering His prayer (v. 26), and the future spread and acceptance of His testimony in "all the ends of the world" including the succeeding generations (vv. 27-31). In the words of Isaiah 53:11, "He shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

The final clause of Psalm 22 may be translated either as "He has done [it]" or "It is done/finished!" With the absence of an object to the

28. I concur with Wendland who says, "The most prominent structural marker of the major division [in the psalm] is the emphatic monocolon of closure in 21.3: 'You have answered me!' This is a cry of faith which so strongly anticipates a positive response from the LORD to the preceding pleas (especially those expressed in vv. 19-21) that one can assume that the deed is already done!" Wendland, *Studies in the Psalms*, 148-149.

29. For support for this interpretation, see Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 108.

verb, “it”, in the sentence, it is preferable to accept the passive sense represented by the latter translation. Jesus dies in triumph with the closing message of the Psalm on his lips—“It is finished!” (John 19:30).

Whether or not Jesus consciously worked His way through Psalm 22 in His crucifixion, it is clear that the fulfillment of this Psalm in His death and resurrection is not simply a reapplication of a Psalm in the light of the Christ-event. The OT has already indicated that the ultimate meaning of the Psalm moves beyond David to the antitypical David, the Messiah, in His suffering and death.

What are the implications of this Psalm of the Cross for us, as we have the privilege of sharing in the Messiah’s sufferings (Rom 8:17; Phil 1:29; 1 Pet 2:21)? This portrait of the Messiah in the “Psalm of the Cross” provides instruction on how we, like Jesus, may face our times of suffering for Him. We, like Jesus, may exercise faith and courage to sustain us in our darkest hours. Our faith may be sustained as we remember the mighty acts of God for His people in the past (vv. 3-5) and the acts of God on our behalf in our individual experience (vv. 9-10). Besides, and even when there is no physical evidence before our eyes, we may, with naked faith hold on to the promises of God’s Word (vv. 19-21).³⁰ Finally we may, like Christ on the Cross, look to the future and the ultimate triumph of God’s cause (vv. 22-30). Therefore, by faith, we can exclaim “It is done”—in Christ (v. 31) and look forward to the final “It is done” at the end of the cosmic conflict (Rev 16:17; 21:6)!

Considering the evidence presented above, I conclude that Psalm 22 may appropriately be entitled “the Psalm of the Cross.”

Psalm 24: The Psalm of the Crown?

Psalm 24 constitutes an entrance liturgy, forming an *inclusio* with the entrance liturgy of Psalm 15 in this group of Davidic Psalms.³¹ Al-

30. Wendland recognizes the same rhythm in the psalm that I have described, with a “twofold pattern that relates to the author’s primary communicative intentions and associated personal feelings. Thus, there is an initial complaint describing his desperate situation followed by either an implicit or explicit appeal (based upon trust) to Yahweh for deliverance.” This rhythm involves three stages: (1) a complaint (vv. 1-2) followed by an appeal based upon trust (vv. 3-5); (2) a complaint (vv. 6-8) followed by an appeal based upon trust (vv. 9-10); (3) and a complaint (vv. 11-18) followed by an appeal based upon trust (vv. 19-21). Wendland, *Studies in the Psalms*, 156.

31. For an introduction to the discourse analysis of Hebrew poetry, illustrated by Psalm 24, see *ibid.*, 1-27. Wendland divides this psalm into three parts revealing

though many suggestions regarding the historical background for this psalm have been proposed,³² if one accepts the Davidic authorship of the psalm, then the most likely background is the bringing up of the ark of Yahweh to Mount Zion, as described in 2 Samuel 6.³³ With the conquest of the city of the Jebusites (Jerusalem) by David, “all enemies were subdued and Israel could take full possession of the promised land.... With this crowning act David firmly established his throne in the land of Israel. In the ceremonial transfer of the Ark of God’s presence to Zion, God’s promises were essentially fulfilled to the nation of Israel.”³⁴ The Psalm was probably composed “especially for the inauguration of Zion as the dwelling place of God on earth.”³⁵ The psalm also may have been used “in later celebrations of this event.”³⁶

The first two verses of the psalm describe the mighty acts of Yahweh, who is the Creator and Owner of the universe and its inhabitants. Verses 3-6 summarize the ethical conditions and qualifications of those who wish to enter the sanctuary to worship Yahweh. The qualifications are basically the same as in Psalm 15. We will not focus upon these parts of the psalm in this study, although we may say in summary that these characteristics epitomize the character of King Messiah himself.

one expository theme: Yahweh rules as King, which is shown by (A) His mighty acts (vv. 1-2), (B) His worshipful community (vv. 3-6); and (C) His glorious character. Stated in terms of the hortatory theme of “Praise Yahweh the king of glory”, He is praised for (A) His wonderful creation (vv. 1-2), (B) His holy people (vv. 3-6), and (C) His victorious power (vv. 7-10). *Ibid.*, 23.

32. For example, Sigmund Mowinckel, followed by Artur Weiser and others, predictably sees the psalm associated with a Fall Festival. Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel’s Worship* (New York: Abingdon, 1967), 5, 6, 145. Alan P. Ross suggests that the song “was written to for the procession into the sanctuary to commemorate a great victory in battle.... The Israelites had just returned from a victorious battle with the Canaanites. They were proceeding to the sanctuary to give praise to the Lord for the great and mighty victory in battle, carrying with them the glorious ark of the covenant.” Alan P. Ross, *A Commentary on the Psalms: Volume 1 (1-41)*, Kregel Exegetical Library (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2011), 575.

33. For support of this conclusion, see Geoffrey F. Grogan, *Psalms*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 74-75; LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms*, 106-107; Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, 113; Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms*, 221.

34. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms*, 107.

35. *Ibid.*

36. Grogan, *Psalms*, 74-75. See the parallel Psalm 132, a “Psalm of Ascent” (to be sung when the Israelite worshipers “went up” three times a year to Zion for the annual feasts), where the worshipers sing (v. 8): “Arise, O Lord, to Your resting place, / You and the ark of Your strength.”

Verses 7-10 depict the entrance liturgy itself, “the official coronation of Yahweh on Mount Zion.”³⁷ According to 2 Samuel 6:15, “David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouting and with the sound of the horn [שׁוֹפָר].” The verses that follow describe how the “ark of the Lord came into the city” (v. 16), and how “they brought in the ark of the Lord and set it in its place, inside the tent that David had pitched for it” (v. 17).

Scriptures often mention God enthroned (יָשַׁב, active participle of יָשַׁב, lit. “sitting, dwelling”) above the ark between the cherubim.³⁸ There is disagreement among scholars as to whether the ark symbolizes God’s throne or the footstool of His (invisible) throne. The evidence seems to favor the latter. See especially 1 Chronicles 28:2, where the reference to the “Ark of the Covenant” is placed in apposition to “the footstool of our God”. The text says, “King David rose to his feet and said, ‘Hear me, my brothers, my people! I wanted to build a resting place for the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD, for the footstool of our God, and I laid aside material for building’” (NJPS).³⁹ This is parallel to the footstool mentioned in 2 Chronicles 9:18 below the throne of Solomon. Elsewhere in the ANE, footstools served a prominent place in throne design, especially in a cultic setting. Randall C. Bailey points out, “the ancient Near Eastern practice of placing treaty documents at the feet of the god in the temple indicates that the ark was thought of as Yahweh’s footstool (Pss 99:5; 132:7; Lam 2:1) implying that Yahweh resided above it.”⁴⁰ In any case the ark of the covenant symbolized the presence of God.

The psalm perhaps fills in details not mentioned in the historical record regarding the coronation of Yahweh on Mount Zion. When the joyous procession arrives at the site of the ancient gates of the

37. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms*, 107.

38. Numbers 7:89; 1 Samuel 4:4; 2 Kings 19:15; 1 Chronicles 13:6; Psalms 80:1; 99:1; Isaiah 37:16; etc.

39. The NJPS correctly understands the phrase “ark of the Covenant of the Lord” to be in apposition with what follows and explaining the ark’s function as “the footstool of our God,” and not referring to another subject, as some other modern versions translate it. See also Psalms 99:5; 132:7; Lamentations 2:1.

40. Randall C. Bailey, *Exodus*, The College Press NIV Commentary (Joplin, MO: College Press, 2007), 287. ANE examples of this practice include, e.g., the treaties between Shattiwaza of Mitanni and the Hittite king Shuppiluliuma, and the treaty between Ulmi-Teshup and Hattushili. Simon Sherwin, “1 Chronicles,” in *The Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, ed. John Walton (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2009), 3:276, 284.

fortress of Zion, the Israelite (Levitical?) leaders cry out to the gates (perhaps implying the presence of Levitical gatekeepers appointed by David, 1 Chr 9:17-27):

Lift up your heads [top doorposts], O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in” (v. 8, ESV)

With jubilation, the (Levitical?) escorts of Yahweh (represented by the ark) “personify the gates as if they were guardians, to bring out the exceeding greatness of Israel’s God. For Him each ‘gate’ is too small.”⁴¹ The gates (i.e., gatekeepers or sentinels of the entrance to the city) respond (v. 8a): “Who is this King of glory?” They do not ask this out of ignorance, but because they delight in hearing the answer of praise to their Lord (v. 8b):

The Lord, strong and mighty,
the Lord, mighty in battle.

This is an allusion to the Song of Moses, where Yahweh is called a “man of war” (Exod 15:15). The escorts of Yahweh again call out the challenge, never tiring of hearing Yahweh’s name exalted:

Lift up your heads, O gates!
And be lifted up, O ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in! (v. 9).

“They request again that the top doorposts—the ‘heads’ of the gates—rise higher because the gates are too small for this great God to pass through.”⁴² And the sentinels respond with joy using an abbreviation of the same refrain but including the full name of Yahweh, יהוה צבאות, “Lord of hosts:”

The Lord of hosts,
He is the King of glory! (v. 10).

41. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms*, 108.

42. Ibid.

At the mention of Yahweh's full name, the gates swing open, and the Ark of God with the accompanying host, enter the city praising God. The city of Jerusalem has become the center of the worship of Yahweh for both Israel and the Gentiles (1 Chr 16:7-36; Ps 18:49; cf. Isa 2:1-4; 56:6-7).

This psalm seems to imply a historical background in the time of David (although I do not rule out a direct prophetic interpretation), but also it seems to point toward an eschatological fulfillment. The psalm must be viewed in light of the parallel with Psalm 68, where a similar march and entry (from Mount Sinai to Mount Zion) takes place. God leads out prisoners and receives gifts from men (v. 18). Besides, there is a reference to salvation and escape from death (vv. 19-20)—which in this context seems to be more than mere protection in Israel's history as it is acknowledged by NT writers (Eph 4:7-12). The parallels between these two psalms strengthen the case affirmed by NT writers who describe Psalm 24 as ultimately describing Christ's ascension.⁴³ Furthermore, in light of the messianic shape of the Davidic psalms, focusing upon the installment of the messianic King already in Psalm 2, as discussed in the introduction of this article, what happened in the earthly city of Zion (Jerusalem) in the coronation of its rightful King, may be properly recognized as a type (and/or prediction) of the coronation of the Messiah at His ascension and entrance into the heavenly Zion (Jerusalem). "The solemn transfer of the Ark of the Lord in Psalm 24 may be seen fulfilled in Christ's ascension to the heavenly Zion in the New Jerusalem and in His coronation as King of the world (Acts 2:26; Eph 4:7-10)."⁴⁴ The escorts and sentinels at the gates at Jesus' ascension were angels (Acts 1:9-11; cf. Matt 24:30-31; 25:31). Hans K. LaRondelle cites a vivid description of this scene:

All heaven was waiting to welcome the Saviour to the celestial courts. As He ascended, He led the way, and the multitude of captives set free at His

43. See also the parallels with the prophets regarding the nations coming up to Mount Zion where God reigns (Isa 2:2-4; Zech 14:16-21).

44. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms*, 108. James D. Smart interprets this psalm as eschatological, with the Messiah coming "to his own city." For him, this city is the eschatological Jerusalem on earth. James D. Smart, "The Eschatological Interpretation of Psalm 24," *JBL* 52, no. 2-3 (1933): 175-180. However, I suggest that it could also refer to the heavenly Jerusalem (as described in Heb 12:22-24), which Jesus entered at His coronation.

resurrection followed. The heavenly host, with shouts and acclamations of praise and celestial song, attended the joyous train. As they drew near to the city of God, the challenge is given by the escorting angels,—

“Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
And be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors;
And the King of glory shall come in.”
Joyfully the waiting sentinels respond,—

“Who is this King of glory?”

This they say, not because they know not who He is, but because they would hear the answer of exalted praise,—

“The Lord strong and mighty,
The Lord mighty in battle!
Lift up your heads, O ye gates;
Even lift them up, ye everlasting doors;
And the King of glory shall come in.”

Again is heard the challenge, “Who is this King of glory?” for the angels never weary of hearing His name exalted. The escorting angels make reply,—

“The Lord of hosts;
He is the King of glory.” Psalm 24:7-10.

Then the portals of the city of God are opened wide, and the angelic throng sweep through the gates amid a burst of rapturous music.⁴⁵

This psalm, ultimately describing the coronation of the Messiah at His ascension to heavenly Mount Zion, may aptly be entitled “the Psalm of the Crown.”

Psalm 23: The Psalm of the Paschal Lamb?

Psalm 23 has often been applied homiletically to our lives as the sheep under the protective care of Yahweh, the divine Shepherd. But I suggest there is a deeper import to this psalm that has often been overlooked. This psalm is not just a nice *comforter* for God’s people. We have already mentioned earlier that in the inspired compositional strategy of the arrangement of the psalms in the Psalter, psalms with similar import were often placed together in thematic clusters. This study argues that Psalm 23, sandwiched between two messianic psalms, the Psalm of the Cross (Ps 22) and the Psalm of the Crown (Ps 24), should also be interpreted messianically.

45. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms*, 113-114; citing the nineteenth-century commentator, Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), 833.

A few scholars do point to a messianic reference in this psalm by suggesting that the shepherd is ultimately to be seen as Christ.⁴⁶ But I suggest that the psalm points toward a different direction. Despite its common designation as “The Shepherd’s Psalm,” we must recognize what should have been obvious all along: the statement “the Lord is my shepherd” at the start of the song implies that *the psalm was sung by a sheep (or lamb)!* It describes the experience of the sheep or lamb, from its point of view.⁴⁷ In continuity with the themes of Christ’s death-resurrection-ascension that comprise the adjacent psalms, I propose that the sheep/lamb in Psalm 23 prefigures (and/or predicts) none other than the Messiah, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world (cf. John 1:29).

David had personal experience as a shepherd, both as a keeper of literal sheep (1 Sam 16:19; 17:15, 20, 28, 34) and as the king who shepherded the people of Israel (2 Sam 5:2; 7:7), and thus he knew the ways of both shepherd and sheep. On a historical level, many of the details in the psalm reveal a pastoral background. I have dealt with these in another publication.⁴⁸ Key terms may refer to geographical locales frequented by David when shepherding his flocks. For example, the Hebrew word *צֶלְמָוֶת* (v. 4) is sometimes translated as “deep darkness” but I prefer the more literal meaning “shadow of death.” Archaeologists and biblical geographers have suggested that this phrase refers to a specific place in Palestine called “the Valley of Death.” It has been identified with the Wadi Qelt which runs through the wilderness of Judea from Jerusalem to Jericho. The gorge is some fifteen miles long total, and I have hiked (and camped) with my son through the entire wadi. The narrowest part is about five miles long, with cliffs reaching some 1500 feet on each side, and space to walk at the bottom of only 10-12 feet in many places. It was truly a valley of death, there are many caves, where in David’s day

46. Ross, *Commentary on the Psalms*, 571-572.

47. One of the few commentators who emphasize this point is Peter C. Craigie, who declares: “The psalm is written consistently from the perspective of the sheep;” but then he continues to discuss the application of the psalm to Christ as the “Good Shepherd,” without mention of the possibility of the typology pointing to Christ as the paschal lamb. Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50*, WBC 19 (Waco, TX: Word, 1983), 209.

48. Richard M. Davidson, “The Shepherd and the Exegetes: Hermeneutics through the Lens of Psalm 23,” *Current* 4 (2016): 18-21. See also James K. Wallace, *The Basque Shepherd and the Shepherd Psalm* (Vancouver: Graphos, 1977); W. Phillip Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

the wolves and other predators could hide.⁴⁹ At the end of the wadi, as it opens out near the plains of Jericho, my son and I came upon a whole flock of sheep, lying down in the pleasant grass shaded under the tall cliffs. The meaning of this psalm came together in a powerful way! We could unpack the rest of the Psalm on this historical level, perhaps based on David's own autobiographical experience as a shepherd.

But this psalm, sandwiched between two messianic psalms, on the deepest level, I suggest, is also messianic. Typologically (or prophetically) it is not primarily portraying the Messiah as the shepherd (there are other psalms and other biblical passages expressing this truth), but the Messiah as the sheep, the paschal lamb.⁵⁰ The sheep or lamb of the psalm points to the messianic Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The messianic Lamb trusts His Father, the Shepherd, and the Father provides for all His needs. The messianic import of this psalm is indicated not only by its compositional placement in the book of Psalms between two other messianic psalms, but also by its literary structure highlighting key messianic terminology. This psalm has an intricate chiasmic structure:

49. It is still a "valley of death", there was a murder in this torrent valley the week before I was walking over that place.

50. Hugh S. Pypers argues for the link between the sheep/lamb in the Psalm and Jesus as the paschal lamb, as well as recognizing the link between shepherd and Jesus, as highlighted by most commentators, and proceeds to emphasize the sheep/lamb linkage with the NT: "Finally, the shepherd and the virtual sheep are the hook by which the psalm reinserts itself into other communities. The New Testament gives us a whole range of references to Jesus as the shepherd with the result that this psalm can swiftly be reinterpreted as Christological by the young Church. It can also resonate with the New Testament's metaphor of Jesus as the lamb which draws in all the resonances of the paschal sacrifice. This culminates in Revelation 22 where the lamb, triumphant in its wars, is enthroned as Lord and light of the New Jerusalem, the city without a temple because the Lord is its light. In this reading, the lamb decidedly has the last laugh on the temple and its pretensions of security, itself representing the house of the Lord. Here, too, the lamb turns writer and determiner of the reader's survival, as the inhabitants of the city are only those who are 'written in the book of the Lamb'." Hugh S. Pypers, "The Triumph of the Lamb: Psalm 23 and Textual Fitness," *BibInt* 9, no. 4 (2001): 389. For a devotional treatment of Psalm 23, which does describe David from the perspective of a sheep, and does occasionally apply these insights to Jesus, but there is no sustained treatment of the psalm as messianic through the eyes of the sheep (Jesus as the paschal lamb), see Hosia L. Henley, Sr., and Garnet L. Henley, "The 23rd Psalm: An Exposition on Its Meaning and Prophecies," *JRT* 59-60 (2006-2007): 181-189.

- A Presence: With God (v. 1)
- B Provisions: Needs supplied (eat and drink) (vv. 2-3a)
- C Paths: *Righteousness* (v. 3b)
- C' Paths: *Shadow of death* (v. 4)
- B' Provisions: Needs supplied (eat and drink) (v. 5)
- A' Presence: With God (v. 6).⁵¹

The heart of the psalm, the climactic central verses of its carefully crafted chiasmic structure, describes the two major experiences of the lamb: (1) “He leads me in the paths of righteousness” and (2) “though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” Ultimately only the Lamb of God was both the Righteous One (fully innocent/blameless, cf. Isa 53:11) and the One who tasted death as the sacrificial paschal lamb (John 1:29; 1 Cor 5:7).

When the messianic Paschal Lamb passed through His valley of the shadow of death, He knew the Father was with Him (John 19:11), although as indicated by His citation of Psalm 22:1 the Father may have seemed to have forsaken Him. This psalm may be placed beside another messianic passage comparing the Messiah to a lamb or sheep. In the Servant Song of Isaiah 53 the Messiah was “like a lamb that is led to the slaughter; and like a sheep that before its shearers is dumb” (v. 7). In light of Isaiah 53, it might even be said that the Lamb of God found comfort in God’s rod by knowing that “God was pleased to crush Him making Him the guilt offering” (v. 10), bearing our sins and sorrows (vv. 4-6).

Even the picture of the shepherd preparing a table before the sheep “in the presence of His enemies” (Ps 23:5), following upon the heels of the description of the valley of the shadow of death (v. 4),⁵² may find an antitypical counterpart in Jesus, on several levels. As He sat at the paschal table the night before His crucifixion, his enemies among the Jewish leaders were surrounding Him, making plans at that very time

51. For this basic structure, and crucial insights into the messianic character of the psalm, I am indebted to Kevin Neidhardt, who wrote a paper on this psalm for one of my seminary classes many years ago.

52. I follow those commentators who see the entire psalm continuing the metaphor of the sheep-shepherd relationship, and not pivoting in vv. 5-6 to the metaphor of Lord as host. See the arguments in favor of this view in L. Koehler, “Psalm 23,” *ZAW* 68 (1956): 227-234. However, I do not totally rule out the possibility the metaphor changes to point toward Jesus’ post-resurrection experience with a heavenly meal, heavenly anointing, and heavenly habitation for all eternity.

to put Him to death. Even at the paschal table, there was an enemy, Judas, in the process of betraying His Lord for 30 pieces of silver. But on another level, eating in the presence of one's enemies in the ANE context (as still today in the Middle East) often symbolized reconciliation. This aspect of the psalm is alluded to by Paul: "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Rom 5:10).

Other motifs of the 23rd psalm find a counterpart in the life of Jesus the Lamb of God. The sheep is led beside still waters and on straight paths by the shepherd (vv. 2-3), and Jesus speaks of how He did nothing except by the leading and direction of the Father (John 5:19, 30; 8:28). The sheep was led in the paths of righteousness for the sake of the shepherd's name, and Christ's life of righteousness was to bring glory to the Father (John 1:14; 17:5, 24; Matt 16:27; Phil 2:11). The sheep was kept safe by the shepherd's rod and staff, and the Lamb of God was often preserved from harm by divine intervention (Luke 4:29-30; John 8:59; 10:39).

The sheep had its head anointed with oil, and the motif of anointing with oil finds a counterpart in the multi-faceted anointing of Jesus: at His baptism the Holy Spirit, often symbolized by oil in the Scripture, alighted upon the Lamb of God, anointing Him as the Messiah, "the anointed One" (John 1:29-34; Acts 10:38); at Simon's house Mary anointed His head and feet with the costly oil of spikenard for His burial (Mark 4:3-9; Luke 7:36-50; John 12:3-7); and at His ascension, He was "anointed with the oil of gladness" at His heavenly inauguration ceremony as King-Priest (Heb 1:9; Acts 2:32-33; cf. Pss 45:7; 133:2; Lev 8:12).

The sheep in the 23rd Psalm also exclaimed, "My cup runs over." The cup motif figures largely in the final scenes of the messianic Paschal Lamb's earthly life as it draws to a close. Jesus describes the ordeal of suffering that He is about to experience, as a "cup." He asked the disciples, "are you able to drink the cup which I am about to drink?" (Matt 20:22). At the paschal meal, "He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you.'" (Matt 26:27). In His agonizing prayer at Gethsemane, He prayed to the Father: "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You *will*" (Matt 26:39). "Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, 'O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done'" (Matt 26:42). After He was arrested, when Peter tried to defend Him,

He said, “put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?” (John 18:11).

The “goodness and mercy” (טוֹב and רַחֲמִים) that pursues the lamb in the 23rd Psalm are a summary of the character traits of the pre-existent Christ as proclaimed in Exod 34:6-7, when He makes His “goodness” pass before Moses (Exod 33:19; 34:6), with the terms for “goodness” and “mercy” each appearing twice in this passage describing the divine attributes. These are also a fitting summary of the character traits revealed by Jesus in His earthly life and ministry and atoning death.

According to the final verse of the psalm, the lamb will ultimately “live forever” in the heavenly “house of the Lord” (the heavenly temple/sanctuary). What an irony: A “sacrificial lamb”—who in the OT sanctuary services was destined to die—is living forever in the house of the Lord, the heavenly sanctuary! This finds echo in the language of Rev 5:11-14, where a “Lamb who was slain” (v. 12) receives blessing “forever and ever” along with “Him who sits on the throne” (v. 13) and “Who lives forever and ever” (v. 14)!

In these few verses of the Psalm we have a compacted “biography” of the messianic Lamb, including at least fourteen parallels:⁵³ (1) a sheep or lamb is referred to (John 1:29, 46 and twenty-six times in Revelation); (2) He implicitly trusts His shepherd (John 8:28-29); (3) all His needs are provided by the Shepherd (John 5:19); (4) He follows wherever the Shepherd [His Father] leads (John 5:30); (5) He lives a righteous life (Isa 53:11); (6) His being led in righteousness is for the sake of the Shepherd’s name, to glorify the Shepherd (John 17:1); (7) He walks through the valley of the shadow of death (the Passion narratives in the Gospels); (8) He experiences the rod and staff—divine judgment on behalf of sinners (Rom 3:25) and protection from danger (Luke 4:30; John 8:59; 10:39); (9) His life and death occur in the midst of enemies (Acts 4:26-27), and also lead to a reconciliation with His enemies (Rom 5:10); (10) His head is anointed with oil before His death (Mark 4:3-9) and at His ascension (Heb 1:9); (11) His cup runs over, as He drinks the cup of His passion (Matt 26:39, 42), and offers the cup to His disciples (Mark 10:38-39); (12) goodness and mercy follow Him all the days of His life, demonstrated in His character (see

53. This is not to say that the Psalm follows Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension in strict chronological order. Some of the parallels apply to His entire life and ministry, but there is basic movement from righteous life to the experience of death.

Exod 33:19; 34:6), both in His earthly ministry and heavenly mediatorial work after His ascension; (13) He paradoxically is a sacrificial lamb who is alive (Rev 5:6, 8, 12); and (14) He lives forever in the house of the Shepherd, the heavenly sanctuary (Rev 5:11-14).

Only in the light of this messianic interpretation of the psalm, focusing upon the Lamb of God, can we in the deepest way “follow His steps” as God’s sheep (1 Pet 2:21, 25). The messianic dimension gives greater importance to its practical (ecclesiological) application to our lives. If Psalm 23 is ultimately about the Lamb of God trusting in His Shepherd, then it has even more precious relevance for us who are to follow in His steps. We can walk in the steps of the Lamb of God, and like Him, trust in the Shepherd, in the paths of righteousness, and even in the valley of the shadow of death. Psalm 23 may aptly be entitled “The Psalm of the Paschal Lamb.”

Conclusion

Psalms 22-24 illustrate the outworking of reading the Psalms through the trajectory of the messianic shaping of the Psalter. Others have provided solid arguments that Psalms 1-2, messianic psalms which form the doorway into the entire Psalter, invite us to read the rest of the Psalms as messianic, and in particular the Davidic psalms. Beyond this general orientation to a messianic reading of the Psalms found in its introduction, Psalm 22, like Psalm 2, provides specific internal clues and indicators that the psalm is pointing beyond itself to the coming Messiah. Further indications come from its being alluded to by the angel Gabriel in Daniel 9:26, as well as by Jesus and the NT writers in connection with Christ’s crucifixion. *Psalm 22 is the Psalm of the Cross.*

Psalm 24, an entrance liturgy celebrating the inauguration of Zion as the dwelling place of God on earth, beckons the reader to read it typologically, to see it ultimately fulfilled in Christ’s ascension to heavenly Zion (the New Jerusalem, Heb 12:22-24) to be inaugurated and coronated as King of the universe (Acts 2:36; Eph 4:7-10; Heb 1:3-13), celebrating His great victory over cosmic enemies at the Cross. *Psalm 24 is the Psalm of the Crown.*

Psalm 23, sandwiched in between the Cross and the Crown, shows the relationship of the Messiah to God in Psalm 22, and gives the reason He receives the praise in Psalm 24. The entire life of the sheep in the Psalm, under the Shepherd’s care, may be seen to point

forward to the whole life and ministry of the Messiah, with special emphasis upon His passion as the Lamb of God. *Psalm 23 is the Psalm of the Paschal Lamb.*

These three psalms form a unity, complementing each other, and focusing upon the Messiah, particularly in His experience of death, resurrection, ascension, and coronation. Psalms 22, 23, and 24—a messianic trilogy? My answer is a resounding “Yes!” and “Amen!”⁵⁴

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54. This study was completed on Palm Sunday, April 5, 2020, in the midst of the horrendous Corona virus (COVID-19) pandemic, and is dedicated to all the victims slain in this terrible “war against an unseen enemy,” in the hope of a future resurrection and eternal life, based upon the death, resurrection, ascension, and coronation of the Lamb/King Messiah, who will ultimately bring victory over death itself and eternal life to all who take refuge in Him! May that day be soon! Many more issues remain to be discussed in another venue, such how these three psalms in particular as a “messianic trilogy”—focusing upon the Christ’s death, resurrection, ascension, and coronation— relate to other psalms in the Psalter that have been interpreted as messianic and dealing with these same events. Thus, for example, if Ps 24 is ultimately referring to the coronation of the ascended Christ, can the parallel “entrance Psalm”, Psalm 15, be read in the same way, and if so, does Psalm 15 somehow function differently than Psalm 24.