

## 32. Defining Messianic Psalms (Psalms 1–2, 8, 19–23, 40, 46)

David’s psalms—which are hymns of praise or simply “praises” (*tehilim*)—generally spring from spontaneous exultation after David has passed through an ordeal or descent phase. His messianic psalms also fall in that category, though in a number of instances they prefigure the life of Jesus Christ. As a whole, however, messianic psalms are grounded in the life of David himself, not in that of Jesus. This is important to keep in mind, as for the most part messianic psalms prefigure the role of God’s end-time servant, who is Israel’s king or prince in the pattern of King David. Messianic prophecies similarly distinguish between God’s end-time servant, who brings to pass Israel’s *temporal* salvation, and Israel’s God Jehovah, who brings to pass Israel’s *spiritual* salvation. As an integral part of the “restitution of all things which God has spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began” (Acts 3:21), the new David is literally an earthly ruler like King David of old. Jesus’ coming to reign on the earth, on the other hand, fulfills prophecies of the coming of Israel’s heavenly King.

A messianic psalm pertaining mostly to ancient David but additionally prefiguring the end-time David deals with the Lord’s establishing his king on his holy hill of Zion, a reference to Mount Zion that adjoins the ancient city of Jerusalem. The kings of David’s empire conspire to free themselves from his rule but the Lord chose him as his “son” or vassal and empowers him over them. (Note: Because Hebrew has no capital letters, instances of these originate with translators of a text, not with its authors.) Word links and prophetic connections in messianic psalms—such as both ancient and end-time David’s being the Lord’s “anointed” or “messiah” (*mashiach*), and each one’s respective conquest of the nations of the world in his day—identify such connections with the mission and attributes of God’s end-time servant:

“Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee. Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter’s vessel. Be wise now therefore, O ye kings: be instructed, ye judges of the earth” (Psalms 2:1–10).

A messianic psalm pertaining mostly to the earthly mission of Jesus Christ—Israel’s God Jehovah—starts with Jesus’ last words on the cross: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” (Psalms 22:1; cf. Matthew 27:46) as he suffered being cut from God’s presence on behalf of those who would similarly have been cut off had he not atoned for their transgressions. Just as Jews pray only the first line of synagogue prayers when they run out of time, so Jesus had strength to utter only the first part that signified the whole.

The whole of Psalm 22 thus goes on to portray Jesus’ suffering and humiliations, to which he responds with an assurance that his God will yet deliver him: “Our fathers trusted in thee: they

trusted, and thou didst deliver them. They cried unto thee and were delivered; they trusted in thee and were not confounded” (Psalms 22:4–5).

Parts of Psalm 22 prefigure the actual nature of Jesus suffering on the cross: “I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people. All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, He trusted on the Lord that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him” (Psalms 22:6–8; cf. Matthew 27:43); “My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and thou hast brought me into the dust of death. For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked has enclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture” (Psalms 22:15–18; Matthew 27:35; John 20:25).

The end of the psalm depicts Jesus’ victory over evil as his decent phase into trials gives way to his ascent phase to glory: “For he hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; neither hath he hid his face from him; but when he cried unto him, he heard. My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him. The meek shall eat and be satisfied: they shall praise the Lord that seek him: your heart shall live forever. All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee” (Psalms 22:24–27).