

WAS JESUS' CRUCIFIXION PREDICTED IN PSALM 22?

Psalm 22. Speaks of a man who is despised and mocked by the people, who suffers from thirst, who has been cut all over, who has pierced hands and feet and who is near death. He feels he can count all his bones. People are casting lots for his clothes.

Alleged Fulfilment. The crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

New Testament Interpretation. This may be accepted by John (19) for he said the bit about the casting lots was about Jesus but then John used a verse right after that (19:36) that was taken out of context so perhaps he believed that the psalms only contained bits about Jesus and that the context did not mean anything. Matthew weaves passages from this psalm into his narrative but this means nothing. Hebrews 2 cites a verse from the Psalm as if it were spoken by Jesus but it does not say that it was about the crucifixion of Jesus or that the whole psalm was about Jesus. It is possible that the same holds true for John. Never does the Bible use the entire psalm as a prophecy of Jesus.

The Truth. The main thing in the Psalm that gets people's attention is how it says they have pierced my hands and feet. But the text is problematic - we have no proof that pierced is the right translation. But you may say that the Hebrew word ka'aru cut and ka'ari like the lion are so close that its a copyist error. The oldest script, from Nahal Hever around the Dead Sea, says the word is pierced. There was a tradition in that region for taking liberties with texts so that is inconclusive. Just like the New Testament, those Jews or dissident Jews were revisionists. They abused the texts they had and altered them.

Others see that the Hebrew says "like a lion at my hands and feet" meaning mauled by dogs as in bad people. The Christians just assume the piercing and translate it as piercing to trick people into thinking the nailing of Jesus is meant (Challenging the Verdict, The Fabulous Prophecies of the Messiah by Jim Lippard).

My hands and feet like the lion would be poetry for using your hands and feet in self defence. That is why he goes on to say then he can count every one of his bones. Its about a fight.

Let us assume my hands and my feet are pierced and that is the right rendering.

Rather than a man being crucified, the Psalm could be describing a severe beating. The man can number his bones for he can feel in them in the pain. They have pierced his hands and his feet probably to prevent him from walking to get help and using his hands after the attack.

Jesus could easily have cut his own hands and feet if he had got a beating to fulfil this prophecy. Christians contend that something very bad happened then when they were singled out for a mention. But that may have just been because of their importance.

If Jesus wore good clothes on his final journey it would have ensured that the soldiers would try to win them in a game of casting lots. If the gospels did not mention the casting lots and it never happened Christians would be saying that it did happen.

Had it been a real prophecy, we would be reading in the gospels that Jesus went out in poor clothes and these were ripped off him and valuable ones put on and for those better clothes the soldiers cast lots. Then it would have been harder for Jesus to fulfil the prophecy.

Here is proof that the psalm is not about Jesus.

The man says he cries in the day and the night and is hated by all and they pierce his hands and feet and cast lots for his clothes. This shows the suffering is in the context of something that lasted longer than what Jesus went through, three hours on the cross. When a man says he cries day and night and God does not hear and he is in jail he means or most probably means that he was in jail all that time. It is the same with the Psalmist and especially the Psalmist because he uses the one tense until he turns to the future tense at v22.

Verse 8 says that the persecutors yelled that the Psalmist trusted in and delights in the Lord. This is supposed to predict the Jews sneering at Jesus and saying he could save others but not himself and that God would not help him. But the Jews never complemented Jesus on his trust and joy in the Lord. They always accused him of being thoroughly bad news and a practitioner of deceitful magic and satanic magic. They would not have praised him for they wanted to be seen as better than him.

Verse 11 asks God to be near for there is nobody to help. Jesus did not want any help and refused to try and hide when he was about to be arrested. During his trial he deliberately upset and provoked the High Priest and Pilate and would not defend himself.

Verse 12-4 says that the person is hedged in or imprisoned and that is why he is thirsty. Jesus was offered drink before he was crucified and he would not take it. A man deliberately making himself thirsty on the cross to emulate the Psalmist could be nothing else but a fake fulfiller. Prophecies are supposed to be beyond fabricating.

When the Psalmist puts the thirst before the wounding of the hands and the feet it strongly suggests that the wounding was not the reason for the thirst. But crucifixion causes thirst. It is suspicious that Jesus only asks for a drink just as he is about to die (John 19:28) which means either that he had already drunk enough or that the story was made up for he would have been desperate long before that.

The Psalm never mentions death and just says that the Psalmist nearly died (v 15). A prophecy about Jesus would not omit such an important detail. Verse 20 has the author asking for deliverance from the sword and the power of the dog which is the person who is trying to kill him. It is fantasy to say that this is deliverance from death by means of the resurrection for it most probably means rescue – remember, never interpret something as meaning supernatural when it could mean natural. And especially when there is no hint of resurrection anywhere in the Psalms. Jesus was not killed by the sword but by the cross.

Jesus, if good, would not think of his attackers as dogs like the Psalmist did. First of all, Luke says he forgave them for they did not know what they did. Secondly, the gospels say that Jesus was at his holiest during his passion. Thirdly, the gospels exculpate the Romans who crucified Jesus and say the Jews forced them.

The dogs reference proves that the passage about the pierced hands and feet is symbolic. The passage is actually saying that since the author is surrounded by dogs they are tearing holes in his hands and his feet – he is using the image of dogs biting him. He is trying to defend himself with his hands and feet and the dogs are making at them for they are his weapons. The passage is poetry. The present tense in the original Hebrew says they are at his hands and feet which is proof that is not referring to Jesus because the Hebrew actually does not mention piercing at all – that is something that the translators assume the Hebrew means. They imagine that it is implied. But it is not implied for dogs being at you does not necessarily mean you are being bitten by them.
(See www.fortunecity.com/greenfield/bp/890/interpretation.html.)

In our tradition, the Psalmist had no strength at all and compared it to a fragment of clay pottery and for emphasis and his tongue was stuck to his mouth with weakness and thirst (v15) BEFORE he said he was being pierced. But Jesus was able to yell just before he died AFTER he was pierced so he was not that weak. If the Psalmist was predicting Jesus' experience, he was disputing the authenticity of the gospels.

Christians make the prophecy seem more convincing when they say it is not chronological. For example, the pierced hands and feet should have been spoken of first and then the thirst if the prophecy was about crucifixion for after being nailed and hung up the person gets very thirsty. But a prophecy worth its salt would be chronological. For example, if I predict that President X of the USA will get married and have one child and visit Ireland and then suffer tragically and only one thing comes true, his marriage, then somebody could say that the visit to Ireland happened before he became President and the one child refers to the boy he had before he became President and the tragic suffering happened when his friend died when he was ten. The credibility of the prophecy is undermined. If I really know the future I will be able to get the order correct.

The Psalmist is putting himself in the place of somebody experiencing violence so if you have nails in your hands and feet on a cross and struggling to breathe are you then going to be thinking about your bones being painful? No.

The composer is on about his own experiences for and to say he was not is to abuse the scriptures for only express prophecies have the right to be considered.