

***Psalm 22 and the Cross
Or, One Reason So Many of the First Christians were Jews***

By Anthony Horvath

Smashwords Edition

This ebook is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. This ebook may not be re-sold or given away to other people. If you would like to share this book with another person, please purchase an additional copy for each recipient. If you're reading this book and did not purchase it, or it was not purchased for your use only, then please return to Smashwords.com and purchase your own copy. Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

Copyright Anthony Horvath 2012. All Rights Reserved

Published by Athanatos Publishing Group

Cover by Julius Broqueza.

Psalm 22 and the Cross
Or, One Reason So Many of the First Christians were Jews

by *Anthony Horvath*

Anyone who has ever had the opportunity to study the Jewish people prior to 100 AD will instantly recognize what rascals they were to anyone who came in contact with them. This, indeed, is the story of the Jews right back to their exodus from Egypt. And why shouldn't they be precocious? Of all nations, God had chosen them to have a special relationship with. Unfortunately, they took God's grace and patience for granted, and even God allowed his people to become afflicted, culminating in the conquest and dispersion of the Jewish people; first by the Assyrians, then by the Babylonians, then the Persians, eventually the Greeks, and in Christ's time, by the Romans.

Every despot that put his hand to managing the conquered the Jews probably wished they had just left them alone. Palestine was a particularly pointed problem for the Romans, and Pontius Pilate the unhappy 'man on the ground' who had to deal with it. His interview with Jesus suggests Pilate was a passive, weak, man. This says much about Jesus' impact on men, because the Pilate of history was a cruel, vindictive man- a perfect match to the obnoxious Jews, who believed they had a divine claim to the land and fiercely guarded their heritage and strict monotheism. When Pilate tried to take money from the Temple, the Jews revolted. When Pilate tried to put up banners symbolizing Roman rule, the Jews were whipped into a froth at the presence of 'idolatry' in Jerusalem. Pilate nearly killed thousands of them, but relented in horror when the Jews stubbornly, in mass, exposed their necks to make it easier for the soldiers to behead them. Not long after Jesus' death and resurrection, Pilate would be deposed. He probably welcomed the vacation.

It was these same people that were somehow persuaded to become Christians. By the tens of thousands.

It becomes comprehensible when one remembers the history of the Jewish people and remembers that the Jewish people themselves remembered the Jewish history! They knew that God has punished them but they also knew that God had made particular promises, and unlike them, God was faithful. He had promised a messiah, and God would keep his promise.

What is a messiah?

The word comes from the Hebrew for 'anointing.' The word 'Christ' is actually the Greek word for the very same thing. Think: "he christened a boat." Among the Jews at the time, to say someone was the 'messiah' was the same as saying he was the king. It goes back to the very first Jewish king, Saul, and the unique implications that come from 'anointing' something. (eg, 1 Sam. 10)

Remember, this is a time when there are no radios, televisions, or newspapers. What is to stop someone from simply declaring, "I am the king!" or some similar wild claim that could not be disproven?

Perfumes and oils in those times were very expensive, much as they often are today. They do not get wasted on frivolous things. Moreover, there is an aroma associated with them that cannot be contained. You will smell a newly anointed person coming, from miles away, if the wind is

right! If a person shows up with \$10,000 worth of fragrant oils doused over them, you know that at the very least, someone has invested quite a bit of money on him. It would just be as if someone spent \$10,000 for a sheet of paper. Yes, it could be nothing but flattened wood, but the mere fact that someone paid such a high price for it would give a clue that it was in fact special; if they said it was an original letter from Thomas Jefferson, it would make sense, and you would be inclined to believe it was authentic. Likewise when someone shows up with thousands of dollars worth of oil over one's head claiming to be king.

Jewish kings were anointed in this way. They were each one of them 'messiahs.' The Jews of first century Israel were awaiting for God to finally send the messiah that would return Israel to its glory. From bits of prophecy in the books of Micah and Daniel, and others, the Jews were not merely waiting for the messiah, but actually were expecting him to arrive within the time when Jesus was walking the earth. This also is why the Jews were so unwilling to bow to the Roman occupation. The Return of the King was imminent.

Bear all this in mind, then, when one reads the accounts of Jesus' last days.

Just two days before the Passover feast which Christians would later call the "Last Supper," Jesus is resting at a home in Bethany, when a woman comes in with a jar of perfume (nard) and poured it over Jesus' head. (See Mark 14, Matthew 26, John 12) Judas is said to have been indignant, protesting that the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor, and that it was worth a year's wages. In our times, that surely means it was worth tens of thousands of dollars.

As an aside, the Gospel of John reports that Judas was not concerned about the poor, but was in charge of the disciple's money, and was a thief; Jesus rebukes Judas, and this seems to be the catalyst for Judas' betrayal.

So, Jesus has just had thousands of dollars worth of perfume poured over his head. The next day, Jesus enters Jerusalem, and enters it on a donkey. Not only did word of his approach precede him, but no doubt the overwhelming aroma of being newly anointed precede him, as well. Is it no wonder that the people cried out "Hosanna!" on his approach? (eg, John 12:12-17). Every indication was that the anointed one, the messiah, the Christ, had arrived at long last.

There surely is some significance to the fact that Jesus had been anointed by a forgiven woman rather than a prophet of God, but it is not our purpose here to delve into that.

Jesus surely would have continued to reek for days. At the Last Supper, he smelled of his anointing. When he washed the disciple's feet, it was the anointed one who did so. When he was arrested in Gethsemane, he smelled. Before Pilate and Herod, he smelled. When beaten by the Roman soldiers, he smelled. When he was finally hung on the cross, naked, he almost certainly still had the overpowering stench of his anointing.

One can imagine the deep confusion that Jesus' followers were thrown into. Every sign seemed to point to the fact that Jesus was the promised Messiah. He had come at just the right time in Jewish history. He was coming at just the right time into Jerusalem and was newly anointed, even. And now he is on the cross? Had they been fooled by someone claiming to be the messiah, just as so many others had been in the decades previously? And if you were the Pharisees and other leaders, would you not also have concluded that you had defeated yet another usurper? You'd be pretty happy with yourself, really.

When the Romans pierce Jesus' hands and feet, you delight in the fact that another pretender is being punished. When the guards divide the victim's last possessions between them, by throwing lots for his garments, you gloat (eg, Matthew 27:35). Jesus was surrounded by a band of tormentors who mocked him and issued cat calls to 'save himself.' Pilate had affixed a sign over his head "king of the Jews." Everyone was getting their last digs in. Jesus beheld them all, and there stretched out in front of them, beheld even his own naked self. And he thirsted; offered the 'gall,' or alcoholic drink the Roman guards themselves used to deaden their senses as they executed men, women, and children, day in and day out, Jesus refused... he would not numb himself from the pain and shame.

All was going swimmingly for Jesus' enemies, but the smelly naked man would occasionally speak, and then he said something very curious, something very unexpected, something more than a bit odd. He cried out:

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!" The Gospel writers tell us that this means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me." Even Matthew, writing for the Jews, has to explain what this bit of Aramaic means. Those standing at the cross are likewise befuddled, thinking he is calling out to Elijah. Notwithstanding the fact that this seems odd when we are told by all that Aramaic was the lingua franca of the region, and that Jesus and his disciples and the other Jews would have likewise conversed primarily in Aramaic, it is a curve ball in its own right, but not for the reason that modern readers initially guess.

Modern readers see this as Jesus indicating that in that moment, God had abandoned him. Much ink is spilled on Jesus being separated from God at this moment, and its alleged implications. And perhaps it is true, that in this moment the Father has turned his back on the Son. But that is not what the Jews standing at the foot of the cross would have fixed on.

You see, this is the era of scrolls. There are not books, with covers, and titles on those covers. Libraries did not have shelves of books stood up in vertical fashion, rather they were repositories of scrolls. There was no Dewey Decimal system for organizing them. Indeed, the great cost and expense in making scrolls meant that there were very few of them. They did not last long, and you need paid scribes to constantly make new copies of them. Not everyone could afford such a thing, and since the Jews believed it was the very Word of God, they found it imperative that as much of the Scriptures (what we know as the Old Testament) would be memorized.

Indeed, even today it is common for Jewish boys and girls preparing for adulthood to memorize the Torah- that is, the first five books of the Old Testament- and have to recite it. Go look at the first five books of the Old Testament, and let that sink in. Now imagine an oral society such as first century Judaism, believing they have in their possession the very Word of God in the Scriptures, who cannot immediately pull up a bible passage in single book, let alone a search engine, but has memorized by necessity much of their sacred writings.

When they hear, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" they immediately hear something quite a bit different.

You might get the sense of it if you hear someone say... "In the beginning, God created..." or, "For God so loved the world..." You will be able to finish the passage. The Jew at that time would be able to finish the whole chapter! And it just so happens that "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" is the first lines of Psalm 22.

When Jesus says these words, all the good Jewish boys and girls around him, after getting past the strange change of subject, would have recognized that Jesus had just asked them to look up a Bible passage in their mental reference set.

Now, they already know that Psalm 22 is a prayer of David, like so many of the psalms are. They were deeply familiar with the life of David as their first 'good king.' In fact, they knew the Messiah would be of the line of David, and previously Jesus flummoxed the Pharisees by asking who David was referring to in Psalm 110 where it is written, "The Lord says to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.'" Jesus says to the Pharisees (Matt 22:45): "If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"

It is reported that no one dared to ask him any more questions. That is because there is nothing in the life of David to help answer this question.

Likewise, there is nothing in the life of David that corresponds to the details listed in Psalm 22. One looks in vain for some kind of inspiration for the 'lyrics' of Psalm 22 in David's life.

At Jesus' citation, they begin going through the psalm in their minds...

They read of the psalmist being a 'worm and not a man'; 'all who see him mock him.' 'insults are hurled,' they say; "He trusts in the Lord; let the Lord rescue him." (Psalm 22:8)

Do they recall that they themselves just mocked him, saying, "He trusts in God. Let God rescue him..."? (Matt 27:43)

Do they continue reading through the Psalm in their minds and get to the part that reads:

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth? (vs 15)"

And Jesus had just said, "I thirst."

Verse sixteen continues: "Dogs have surrounded me, they have pierced my hands and my feet."

At no time in David's life was his hands and feet pierced; here are 'dogs' (the Jews regarded the gentiles, ie, folks like the Roman soldiers, as 'dogs') surrounding Jesus and driving nails through his hands and feet. This is uncanny.

The psalm carries on, 'I can count all my bones; people stare and gloat over me.'

Yes, Jesus can count his own bones as he is stretched out on the cross, pierced hand and foot, and exposed to the world in indignity and shame.

"They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing." (vs. 18)

At this point, anyone at the cross that was taking the time to recite Psalm 22 in their minds would have been comparing the events in that psalm with the events unfolding in front of them. They will no doubt recognize that right before their eyes a prophecy had unfolded. Things had been done completely outside of Jesus' control; he could not make the people mock him, he could not manipulate the guards into casting lots for his clothes; he could not arrange to be crucified rather than, say, flogged to death. Psalm 22 does not correspond to any events in the life of David... with terror and even horror (especially if you helped put Jesus on the cross), you realize that they correspond to events in the life of the Son of David!

And if you are that Jew, and you are not already struck dumb by the unfolding of events in front of your very eyes, the Roman guards, working to ensure that Jesus was really dead, thrust a spear

into Jesus' side. The Gospel of John reports: "...one of the soldiers pierced Jesus' side with a spear, bringing a sudden flow of blood and water."

The Psalmist says: "I am poured out like water... my bones are out of joint... my heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me."

At this point, only the blackest-hearted Jew fails to recognize that this stinky, smell, naked man on the cross was in fact the Messiah, the promised King; and they had killed him.

No other group of people in any time or place would have been so prepared to hear Jesus' words, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" and been equipped to recount the rest of the passage and match it up with the events unfolding in front of them.

But, isn't it established here that the King had been killed? Despite the horror of being complicit in his killing and the certain expectation that God was going to unleash holy hell on you for assisting in the slaughter of His Holy One, should that not have been the end of the story?

No, because the psalm goes on. Yes, midway through the psalm, there is a humiliating death, but suddenly there is a turn in the psalm, a paradigm shift, a new fresh wind; it does not seem to belong. How could it fit? It would seem better as an entirely different psalm. Suddenly, the psalmist is crying out... "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the congregation I will praise you."

The psalmist... the lyricist... King David, if you believe that! Someone else, more likely, has passed from death to the congregation. The good news is that the earlier prayer in the psalm has been answered:

"For God has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help." vs 24.

The poor will eat and be satisfied... their hearts will live forever! vs 26

"Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn- for he has done it." vs 31

The Author of Psalm 22 proclaims that the events described within it were done, complete, and finished, centuries before the events themselves played out in human time.

"It is finished," said Jesus.

"He has done it," says the Psalmist.

Now, you are the Jew that has just witnessed the humiliating death of the anointed king, per the description of Psalm 22, but knowing the rest of the story, you know that the rest of the story is yet to be told!

When word arrives in the streets and alleys of Jerusalem and the wilds of Israel's roads that the one that had been anointed and believed to be King had been killed, yes, but has now been sighted very much alive, you will believe it. You, of all people, as a Jew, as one whom God had made a promise to a thousand years earlier, which you have memorized, and recited over and over again, will believe it.

God has used the intransigence of the Jews as a way to authenticate the deeds and claims of his son Jesus, for there has never been a people as fiercely monotheistic as the Jews that generated, in the span of 5-10 years, so many people claiming that God had become man.

The best approximation would be the Muslims and their fervor for the monotheism of Allah. If one claimed that Allah had become a man in many Muslim countries, that person would be killed on sight. Pity the man who actually claimed to be Allah! But now if out of the Muslim countries their spread with frightening speed that a man claiming to be Allah existed, and proved it, and Muslims were believing that claim by the hundreds of thousands... that would be the sort of thing you'd sit up and take notice of, and it is precisely the sort of thing that happened with the Jews and Christianity.

And Jesus' fulfillment of Psalm 22 before their very eyes was one reason that the Jews themselves believed the claim.

It is worth sitting up and taking notice of.