

PSALM 22 AND THE PASSION NARRATIVE

While several New Testament verses cite or allude to Psalm 22 verses, most of the references to Psalm 22 appear in the Passion narratives of the Gospels:

Psalm Reference	Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition (RSVCE) ¹ Text of the Psalm	Passion Narrative Reference
22:1	My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Why art thou so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning?	Mark 15:34, Matt 27:46
22:7-8	All who see me mock at me, they make mouths at me, they wag their heads; “He committed his cause to the LORD; let him deliver him, let him rescue him, for he delights in him!”	Matt 27:39 and 43, Mark 15:29, Luke 23:35
22:15	my strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue cleaves to my jaws; thou dost lay me in the dust of death.	John 19:28
22:16	Yea, dogs are round about me; a company of evildoers encircle me; they have pierced my hands and feet—	No specific reference, however crucifixion is known to entail nails through hands and feet.
22:18	they divide my garments among them, and for my raiment they cast lots.	Matt 27:35, Mark 15:24, Luke 23:34, John 19:24

The one questionable reference is Ps 22:16. The RSVCE and New American Bible, Revised Edition (NABRE) translate the Hebrew term אָרַי (lemma transliterated as ‘*ari*) as “pierced.” In the RSVCE, only once (Psalm 22:16) is the term translated as “pierced.” The remaining thirty-two times that this lemma appears the RSVCE translates it as “lion.”² Other versions of the Bible translate the term as “shriveled,” or “wasted.” Suffice it to say, the translation of this Hebrew

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical references are from the RSVCE.

² For example, Pr 22:13, 26:13 and 28:15.

word is unclear. Gregory Vall in an unrelated article³ argues that the term should be translated as “bound,” which would not significantly change the relationship with the Passion narrative. I will not spend time on this discussion as it is not germane to the issues of this essay. For the purposes of this essay, I will use the term “pierced.”

While other Psalms are cited in the various Passion narratives, none appear as many times as Ps 22. “Thirteen (perhaps seventeen) Old Testament texts appear in the passion narrative of the Gospels. Some are quotations, some allusions. Of the thirteen, eight come from the Psalms. Five come from Psalm 22, two from Psalm 69, and one from Psalm 31.”⁴

³ Gregory Vall, “Psalms 22:17B: ‘The Old Guess’,” *JBL* 116/1 (1997): 45-56. (ATLA)

⁴ James Luther Mays, *Psalms, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 105.