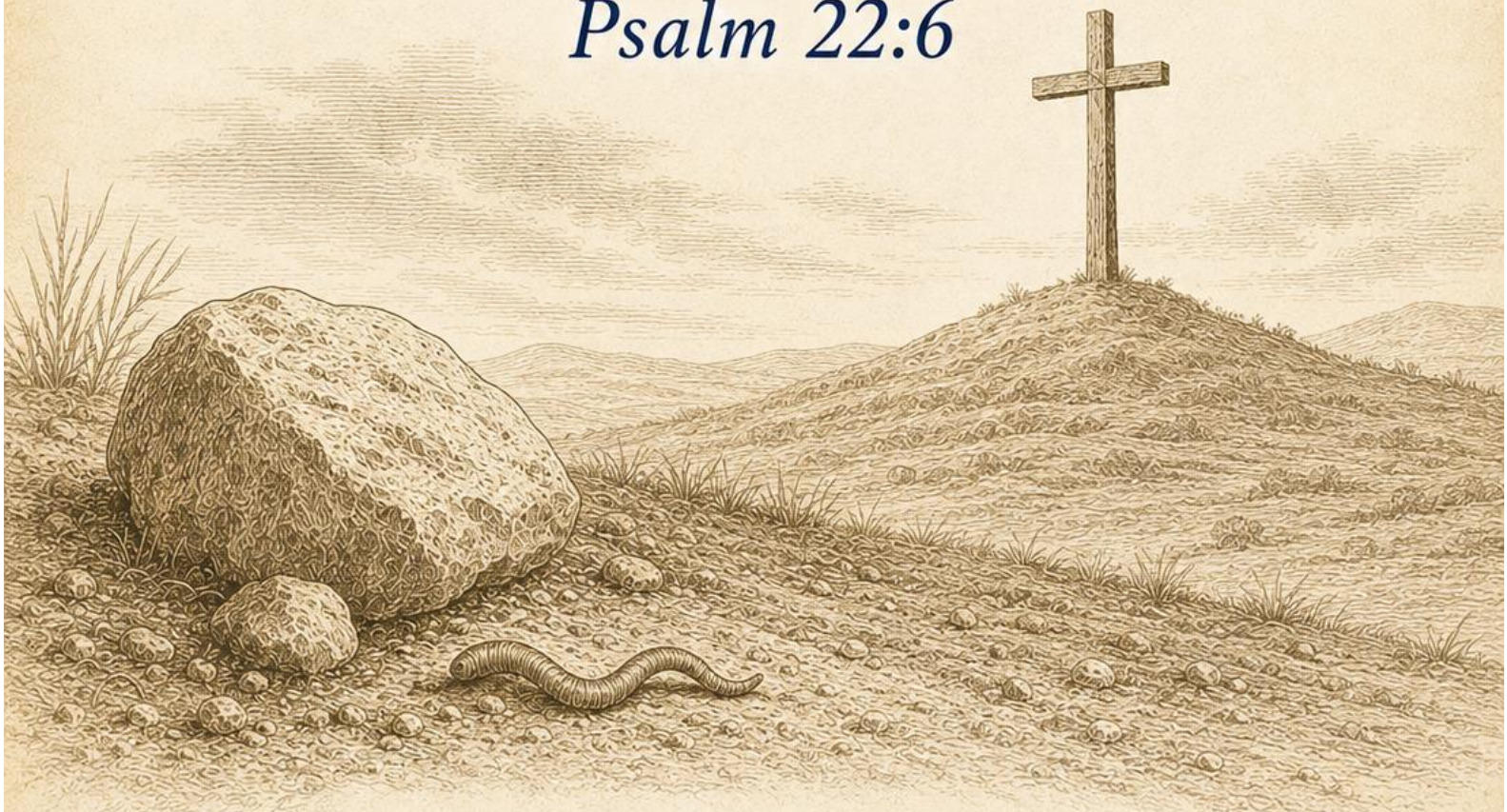


REASON TOGETHER STUDY

The Crimson Worm

Psalm 22:6



*But I am a worm, and no man;
a reproach of men, and despised of the people.*

by Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

www.ReasonTogether.Church

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THE CRIMSON WORM

RTS-030 Sermon Transcript

TODAY'S QUESTION

Why does Psalm 22 describe the Messiah as a worm?

Primary Scripture

Psalm 22:1–8 KJV

by Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

www.ReasonTogether.Church

*Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*

Aloha, church family.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you are sitting with us here today, joining us online or reading this study later, we are grateful that you have chosen to spend this time with us in the Word of God.

Today we are going to look at one small word.

It is not a grand word.

It is not a word we normally associate with royalty, victory or glory.

It is the word “worm.”

Psalm 22 contains one of the clearest Old Testament portraits of the suffering of Jesus Christ.

It begins with words Jesus spoke from the cross.

It describes the mockery He endured.

It speaks of His hands and feet being pierced.

It describes men dividing His garments and casting lots for His vesture.

And in the middle of that remarkable Psalm, the suffering Messiah says:

“But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people.”

Why a worm?

Why would the Holy Spirit choose that description?

And is there something more hidden inside the Hebrew word that David used?

Some people have heard a beautiful story about an insect commonly called the crimson worm.

According to the popular version, the mother fastens herself permanently to a tree.

Her young live beneath her body.

She dies so that they may live.

Her crimson blood stains them forever.

Then, after three days, her body becomes white like snow.

The parallels to Jesus sound almost too perfect to miss.

But are all those details true?

Did David intend all of them when he wrote Psalm 22?

And if some details have been exaggerated, is there still a legitimate Biblical connection between the worm, crimson and the cross?

That is our question today.

Why does Psalm 22 describe the Messiah as a worm?

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let's Reason Together the Word of God.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank You for bringing us together today.

We thank You for Your Word.

We thank You that Your Word is true when it comforts us, true when it challenges us and true when it corrects an idea we wanted to believe.

Give us wisdom as we examine this unusual word in Psalm 22.

Help us appreciate every genuine connection You have placed in Scripture.

Protect us from adding attractive details that You have not given us.

Teach us to distinguish between what the Bible says, what history confirms, what may be a useful illustration and what remains only speculation.

Most of all, help us see Jesus.

Help us understand the humiliation He accepted, the suffering He endured and the cleansing He offers.

If anyone listening today feels despised, rejected or beneath the notice of others, let that person see how far Christ was willing to descend to reach us.

Open our minds, soften our hearts and help us reason together through Your Word.

In Jesus's name we pray.

Amen.

Before we read today's Scripture, I want to take a brief moment to explain giving at Reason Together Church.

We do not pass a plate and we do not place visitors under pressure to give.

If you have a home church, we encourage you to remain faithful in supporting your home church.

Our members quietly and faithfully provide what is needed to keep the lights on, continue the ministry and make these studies freely available.

Any donations or love gifts are greatly appreciated, but they are never required to attend this church or to download any of our free online studies.

Your presence is a gift to us.

If you are visiting and would like to stay connected, our guest card asks only for your first name and email address.

We will not single you out or embarrass you.

After the service, please join us at the Reason Together Café.

The coffee is locally grown and freely served.

The coffee is free, and so are the refills on conversation.

Our primary passage is Psalm 22.

Let us begin with the first eight verses.

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

O my God, I cry in the daytime, but thou hearest not; and in the night season, and am not silent.

But thou art holy, O thou that inhabitest the praises of Israel.

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.

But 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.”

Most Christians immediately recognize the first verse.

Matthew chapter 27, verse 46 records:

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?”

Jesus was not reaching for random words in a moment of confusion.

His anguish was real.

His suffering was real.

The darkness was real.

But the words He chose were Scripture.

They were the opening words of Psalm 22.

There were no chapter numbers and verse numbers printed in the scrolls when Jesus walked the earth.

One way to direct listeners to a Psalm was to speak its opening words.

When Jesus cried, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” He was living the suffering described in that Psalm and calling attention to it.

Look at what follows.

Psalm 22:7 says:

“All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head.”

Matthew 27:39 says:

“And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads.”

Psalm 22:8 says:

“He trusted on the LORD that he would deliver him: let him deliver him, seeing he delighted in him.”

Matthew 27:43 records the mockers saying:

“He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him.”

That is not merely a general resemblance.

The language of the mockers at the cross follows the language of the mockers in the Psalm.

Psalm 22:14 says:

“I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint: my heart is like wax.”

Verse 15 says:

“My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws.”

Verse 16 says:

“They pierced my hands and my feet.”

Verse 18 says:

“They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture.”

Matthew 27:35 tells us:

“And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots.”

Long before Roman soldiers stood beneath the cross, Psalm 22 described the scene.

It described the physical suffering.

It described the thirst.

It described the pierced hands and feet.

It described the ridicule.

It described the challenge for God to deliver Him.

It described the divided garments and the casting of lots.

And it described the suffering One with these words:

“But I am a worm, and no man.”

Before we search for a hidden meaning, we must honor the plain meaning.

The safest place to begin is always the context.

What does the next part of the verse say?

“A reproach of men, and despised of the people.”

The worm is first a picture of humiliation.

A worm is low.

A worm is weak.

A worm has no claws with which to defend itself.

It has no roar with which to frighten an enemy.

It is easily ignored and easily crushed.

Most of us would not choose a worm for a royal emblem.

We might choose a lion.

We might choose an eagle.

We might choose a crown.

We probably would not put a worm in the center of the church logo and print it on the coffee mugs.

Yet the King of kings entered the place of the worm.

He allowed men to treat Him as though He possessed no dignity.

They stripped Him.

They beat Him.

They spat upon Him.

They placed a crown of thorns upon His head.

They drove nails through His hands and feet.

They displayed Him publicly while people laughed.

Psalm 22 does not merely say, “I am a worm.”

It says, “I am a worm, and no man.”

That does not mean Jesus ceased to be a man.

It describes the way men treated Him.

They denied Him the ordinary dignity human beings should extend even to an enemy.

Isaiah 53:3 says:

“He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.”

Psalm 22 calls Him “despised of the people.”

Isaiah calls Him “despised and rejected of men.”

The Bible occasionally uses worm language in this way.

Job 25:6 asks:

“How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?”

Isaiah 41:14 says:

“Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel; I will help thee, saith the LORD.”

God was not identifying Jacob as a special dye-producing insect.

He was speaking to a people who felt small, helpless and vulnerable.

So when Psalm 22 says, “I am a worm,” the primary meaning is not hidden.

The Messiah would descend into the lowest place of humiliation.

Philippians chapter 2 tells us that He made Himself of no reputation.

He took upon Him the form of a servant.

He humbled Himself.

He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

That truth alone is enough to preach.

The One who deserved every crown accepted every insult.

The One before whom angels worship allowed soldiers to mock Him.

The One who formed man from the dust permitted men to treat Him as something beneath their feet.

But now we are ready to ask whether the Hebrew word contains an additional association.

The Hebrew word translated “worm” in Psalm 22:6 is commonly written in English as tola‘ath.

The pronunciation matters less today than the way the word is used in Scripture.

The word can refer to a worm, grub or small creeping creature.

But that word family is also connected with crimson and scarlet dye.

In many Old Testament passages it appears with another Hebrew word, shani, to describe scarlet material.

Why would a word for a small creature become a word connected with a color?

Because an important crimson dye in the ancient world was produced from scale insects.

These creatures were commonly found upon certain oak trees around the Mediterranean.

The reproductive female attached herself to a branch.

She became rounded and could look more like a small berry than what we picture when we hear the English word “worm.”

She produced eggs in a protected chamber beneath her body.

Her body contained the red pigment from which crimson dye could be produced.

The insect and the color therefore became connected in language.

That much is real.

The ancient crimson dye is real.

Its connection with a scale insect is real.

The eggs beneath the female’s body are real.

The female dies after reproduction.

The red pigment is real.

And the Hebrew vocabulary connecting the creature with crimson is real.

But we must make an important distinction.

Psalm 22:6 does not explicitly say, “I am the crimson worm.”

It says, “I am a worm.”

The KJV translators were not hiding something from us.

“Worm” is the proper translation in this context.

The crimson association is a legitimate secondary connection because of the word’s wider use.

It is not permission to place every detail of a modern insect story into David’s sentence.

This is where an exciting discovery can become dangerous if we stop asking questions.

The popular account says that the mother knowingly fastens herself to a tree in order to sacrifice her life.

But an insect acts according to the instinct God placed within it.

We should not describe that instinct as though the insect made a conscious moral decision to die for its children.

The popular account says that the young eat the mother’s living body or drink her blood.

Reliable biological descriptions tell us that the eggs and newly hatched insects remain beneath the body for protection.

They do not establish the dramatic claim that the offspring eat her living flesh in the way the popular sermon describes.

The popular account says that crimson blood runs down the tree and permanently stains every child.

The insect contains crimson pigment.

Pigment is not the same thing as blood.

And we should not call something blood merely because that makes the illustration sound more like Calvary.

The popular account says that after exactly three days the dead mother becomes white like snow.

Scientific descriptions do mention a pale or white waxy covering associated with these insects.

But they do not establish the precise resurrection-like timetable commonly repeated in the story.

We must therefore be honest.

Some portions of the crimson-worm story are based upon genuine history and biology.

Other portions appear to have grown as the story was repeated from sermon to sermon and from person to person.

Perhaps one preacher said the insect reminded him of the sacrifice of Christ.

Another preacher added that it was attached to wood.

Someone else emphasized three days.

Someone else called the pigment blood.

Eventually, an illustration began to sound like a complete scientific prophecy of the crucifixion.

That does not require us to throw away every connection.

It requires us to handle the connection responsibly.

At Reason Together Church, we do not believe that asking questions dishonors God.

Truth is not injured by investigation.

If a claim is true, careful examination will strengthen it.

If part of a claim is untrue, we should be grateful to learn that before repeating it as fact.

We can keep what is true.

We can identify what is possible.

We can label an illustration as an illustration.

And we can refuse to call speculation Scripture.

The Word of God does not need us to improve it.

Calvary is not less powerful because an insect does not follow an exact three-day timetable.

The blood of Jesus does not become less precious because crimson pigment is not literally insect blood.

The resurrection does not need help from an embellished story.

Jesus truly died.

Jesus was truly buried.

Jesus truly rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

That truth stands upon the testimony of God's Word.

Now that we have separated the verified facts from the additions, we can follow the genuine scarlet trail through Scripture.

And that trail is remarkable.

Scarlet appears in the tabernacle.

Exodus 26:1 says:

“Moreover thou shalt make the tabernacle with ten curtains of fine twined linen, and blue, and purple, and scarlet.”

The place where God dwelt among His people contained scarlet woven into its fabric.

Scarlet appeared again in the veil.

Exodus 26:31 says:

“And thou shalt make a veil of blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine twined linen.”

That veil stood between the holy place and the most holy place.

It marked a boundary.

It declared that sinful people did not casually walk into the unveiled presence of a holy God.

Scarlet was woven into the barrier.

But when Jesus died, Matthew 27:51 says:

“And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom.”

It was torn from the top.

God opened the way.

Hebrews 10 tells believers that we have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus.

It calls this “a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.”

The veil containing scarlet was torn when the flesh of Christ was given and His blood was shed.

The scarlet trail also appears in the garments of the high priest.

Blue, purple and scarlet were woven into garments used in priestly service.

The high priest represented the people before God.

Jesus is our great High Priest.

He did not enter with the blood of an animal.

He entered by His own blood, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

Scarlet appears in the cleansing of a leper.

Leviticus 14 tells the priest to take two birds, cedar wood, scarlet and hyssop.

One bird was killed in an earthen vessel over running water.

The living bird, the cedar wood, the scarlet and the hyssop were dipped in the blood.

The person who had been unclean was sprinkled and pronounced clean.

Some of you may remember that we recently followed hyssop through the Bible.

At Passover, hyssop carried blood to the door.

In the law, hyssop appeared in cleansing.

At Calvary, hyssop lifted vinegar to the lips of Jesus.

When we followed the hyssop, scarlet was standing beside it in the cleansing ceremony.

Now we have returned to examine the scarlet.

This is one of the joys of studying Scripture carefully.

One study opens the door to another.

One word leads us back to a passage we thought we had finished.

The Bible is not a pile of disconnected stories.

Its truths are woven together.

Scarlet and hyssop appear together again in Numbers 19.

The priest cast cedar wood, hyssop and scarlet into the burning of the red heifer.

The ashes were used with water in purification from ceremonial uncleanness.

Again, scarlet appears in a setting of cleansing.

Scarlet also appears in the story of Rahab.

Rahab lived in Jericho.

Judgment was coming upon the city.

She received the spies and confessed faith in the God of Israel.

The spies instructed her to bind a scarlet thread in the window.

The scarlet cord marked the house connected with the promise.

Everyone gathered inside would be spared when judgment came.

The cord itself possessed no magical power.

Safety rested upon the promise of God that was attached to the sign.

But once again, scarlet appears where judgment passes and life is preserved.

Scarlet appears in worship.

Scarlet appears in the veil.

Scarlet appears in priestly garments.

Scarlet appears in purification.

Scarlet appears in the cleansing of the unclean.

Scarlet appears in a sign of deliverance.

Then we arrive at the cross.

Matthew 27:27 says:

“Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers.”

Verse 28 says:

“And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe.”

Do not hurry past that color.

Psalm 22 describes the suffering Messiah with a word belonging to the vocabulary of crimson.

At the cross, soldiers clothe Jesus in scarlet.

They did not intend to honor Him.

They intended to humiliate Him.

They placed a crown of thorns upon His head.

They put a reed in His right hand.

They bowed before Him and said, “Hail, King of the Jews!”

They spat upon Him.

They took the reed and struck Him on the head.

The robe of royal color became part of their mockery.

They saw a helpless prisoner pretending to be a king.

He was the true King standing before them.

They bowed in mock worship before the One to whom every knee will one day bow.

They placed a crown upon the One who will reign forever.

They clothed Him in scarlet while He prepared to bear the scarlet stain of our sin.

The soldiers thought they were creating a cruel joke.

God was allowing a picture none of them understood.

The Messiah had taken the place of the worm.

He was being treated as less than a man.

He was clothed in scarlet.

He was led to the place of execution.

His hands and feet were pierced.

His garments were divided.

His blood was shed.

And He did it for people stained by sin.

This brings us to the verse at the heart of Reason Together Church.

Isaiah 1:18 says:

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.”

This is where the true crimson-to-white miracle is found.

We do not need an uncertain story about an insect changing color precisely three days after death.

God has already given us the promise.

Our sins are scarlet.

Our sins are red like crimson.

Yet God says they can become white as snow.

They can become as wool.

Notice that God does not pretend the stain is small.

He does not say, “Your sins are barely noticeable.”

He calls them scarlet.

Scarlet is not easy to hide.

Crimson is not a faint mark that disappears when the light changes.

It is deep.

It is visible.

It penetrates the material.

Some people spend their lives trying to hide scarlet beneath another layer of scarlet.

We cover guilt with activity.

We cover shame with humor.

We cover failure with religious language.

We compare our stain with someone whose stain appears darker.

We tell ourselves that everyone is doing it.

But God does not invite us to disguise the stain.

He invites us to reason with Him about it.

“Come now, and let us reason together.”

That invitation is not God asking us to convince Him that sin is acceptable.

It is God calling us to face the truth and receive the cleansing only He can provide.

First John 1:7 says:

“And the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.”

The crimson insect cannot cleanse us.

Scarlet thread cannot cleanse us.

The robe placed upon Jesus cannot cleanse us.

Religious ceremony cannot cleanse us.

Only the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from sin.

Why does Psalm 22 describe Him as a worm?

First, because He entered the depths of humiliation.

He accepted the place men considered worthless.

He allowed Himself to be despised, mocked and crushed.

Second, because the Hebrew word carries a genuine association with crimson.

That association does not prove every detail of the popular insect story.

But it joins a scarlet vocabulary already woven through worship, priesthood, cleansing, deliverance and sacrifice.

Third, because the One treated like a worm was bearing the shame of people stained by sin.

Second Corinthians 5:21 says:

“For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”

He took our place.

He bore our shame.

He carried our sins in His own body on the tree.

He descended so that we might be lifted.

He was rejected so that we might be received.

He was stripped so that we might be clothed in righteousness.

He was treated as though He were beneath notice so that people forgotten by the world might know they are seen by God.

But there is one more truth we must not miss.

Psalm 22 does not end with the worm.

It does not end with mockery.

It does not end with pierced hands and feet.

It does not end with divided garments.

It does not even end with the cry, “Why hast thou forsaken me?”

Psalm 22:24 says:

“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.”

The suffering One cried.

God heard Him.

Verse 27 says:

“All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the LORD: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.”

The Psalm moves from one despised sufferer to all the families of the nations worshipping God.

Verse 31 says:

“They shall come, and shall declare his righteousness unto a people that shall be born, that he hath done this.”

The suffering is followed by victory.

The humiliation is followed by praise.

The One treated as a worm is revealed as the King before whom the nations worship.

That is the direction of the gospel.

The cross is not the defeat of Jesus.

The cross is where He defeated sin.

The tomb is not where His story ended.

On the third day, He rose again.

The crown of thorns did not prevent the eternal crown.

The scarlet robe of mockery did not change His royal identity.
Men may have treated Him as a worm, but heaven never stopped knowing He was the Son of God.
There is an application here for anyone who has been humiliated by others.
Some people have been treated as though they did not matter.
Some were ridiculed at school.
Some were rejected by family.
Some have been reduced to the worst mistake they ever made.
Some have walked into a church and felt that every person in the room could see the scarlet stain.
Some have been made to feel too poor, too broken, too different or too complicated to be welcome.
Jesus understands humiliation.
He does not understand it only as an observer in heaven.
He entered it.
He felt the spit.
He heard the laughter.
He saw the heads shaking.
He endured public shame.
When people treat you as though you are beneath their notice, their treatment does not determine your worth.
The soldiers treated Jesus as a false king.
Their opinion did not remove His crown.
The crowd treated Him as rejected by God.
Their mockery did not cancel God's purpose.
You should not measure your worth by the cruelty of someone who failed to recognize what God created.
You should measure your worth by the price Christ willingly paid to redeem you.
There is also an application for how we treat other people.
We cannot worship the One who entered the place of the worm while treating another human being as though that person is beneath us.
Our congregation includes people of different races, backgrounds, ages and experiences.
That diversity is not an inconvenience to overcome.
It is a small reminder of what heaven will look like when people from every kindred, tongue, people and nation worship the Lamb together.
At the foot of the cross, there is no superior race.

There is no superior social class.

There are only sinners who need grace and a Savior who provides it.

If Jesus was willing to descend, we should be willing to bend down and help someone rise.

If Jesus welcomed the rejected, His church must not create a private list of people we consider unworthy.

If His blood can cleanse scarlet sin, we must not keep displaying a stain God has forgiven.

There is also an application for how we study the Bible.

Exciting claims will continue to come our way.

Someone will say, "You will not believe what this Hebrew word really means."

Someone will say, "The translators hid this from you."

Someone will say, "Scientists have just discovered something that proves the Bible."

Sometimes there will be a genuine discovery beneath the excitement.

Sometimes there will be a small truth surrounded by large exaggerations.

Sometimes the claim will be completely false.

Do not become so cynical that you refuse to investigate.

Do not become so eager for a hidden nugget that you stop testing the claim.

Open the Bible.

Read the surrounding verses.

Ask how the word is used elsewhere.

Check the historical or scientific claim.

Separate certainty from possibility.

And never be embarrassed to say, "That is a beautiful illustration, but the Bible does not actually say that."

That sentence is not an attack upon faith.

It is an act of respect for Scripture.

The most powerful part of this study is not an insect story.

It is that the Son of God willingly entered the lowest place.

It is that Psalm 22 described His suffering centuries before Calvary.

It is that the scarlet vocabulary of worship and cleansing leads us to the cross.

It is that scarlet sins can become white as snow.

It is that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.

And it is that the Psalm beginning with apparent abandonment ends with the nations worshipping the victorious Lord.

Perhaps you came today carrying a scarlet stain.

You know what you did.

You know what was done to you.

You know what you have tried unsuccessfully to hide.

God already knows.

And His invitation is not, "Clean yourself and then come."

His invitation is, "Come now."

"Come now, and let us reason together."

Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

He was buried.

He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

Salvation is not earned by giving money, joining a church or performing enough religious acts.

It is the gift of God received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

If you do not know Christ as Savior, you can call upon Him today.

Admit the truth about your sin.

Believe that Jesus died and rose again.

Place your trust in Him rather than in yourself.

If you have questions, speak with me after the service.

We will open the Bible together.

There will be no pressure and no embarrassment.

That is why we are here.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, thank You for the truth of Your Word.

Thank You for Psalm 22 and its extraordinary portrait of the suffering Messiah.

Thank You that Jesus willingly entered the depths of humiliation for us.

He was despised.

He was rejected.

He was mocked.

He was pierced.

He shed His blood so that sinners could be cleansed.

Forgive us for the times we have embellished Your Word because we thought it needed our help.

Give us the humility to correct an attractive story when the evidence does not support it.

Give us the wisdom to preserve every connection that is true.

Teach us to love truth more than novelty.

For anyone carrying guilt today, make the promise of Isaiah 1:18 personal and real.

Though our sins be as scarlet, make them white as snow.

Though they be red like crimson, make them as wool.

For anyone who has been despised or treated as though they do not matter, let that person feel the compassion of Christ.

Remind us that the treatment of others does not determine the value You have placed upon a life.

Make Reason Together Church a place where people from every race, background and circumstance are welcomed with dignity.

Help us see in our diversity a small foretaste of the nations worshipping together before Your throne.

Keep us faithful to Scripture.

Keep us compassionate toward people.

Keep our eyes upon Jesus.

Thank You that Psalm 22 does not end in humiliation.

Thank You that Christ rose from the grave.

Thank You that the message of His righteousness continues to be declared to generations yet to be born.

Use us to carry that message throughout our community and throughout the islands.

We ask these things in the name of Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Before we close today, do not allow this message to remain only an interesting discussion about a Hebrew word or an unusual insect.

Take it into your week in two practical ways.

First, read Psalm 22 again.

Read it slowly.

Read it once while thinking about David's suffering.

Then read it again while thinking about the cross.

Underline the words reflected in Matthew 27.

Notice the ridicule.

Notice the thirst.

Notice the pierced hands and feet.

Notice the garments and the casting of lots.

Then keep reading until the suffering gives way to praise.

Do not stop at verse 1.

Do not stop at verse 6.

Let the entire Psalm carry you from the cry of suffering to the worship of the nations.

Second, share Isaiah 1:18 with one person this week.

You do not have to explain the entire crimson-worm study.

You do not have to pronounce the Hebrew word.

You can simply say, “I was reminded this week that God can make scarlet sins white as snow.”

Someone near you may believe that a stain has become permanent.

Someone may believe that God would never receive a person with that history.

Someone may need to hear that the invitation begins with the words, “Come now.”

If another exciting Bible claim comes your way this week, investigate it.

Do not reject it simply because it is unfamiliar.

Do not repeat it simply because it is exciting.

Bring your question.

Open your Bible.

Check the evidence.

Keep what is true.

That is how we reason together through the Word of God.

If today’s study raised another question, write it down and send it to us.

Questions are never an interruption here.

They are part of why Reason Together Church exists.

You are also invited to continue the conversation at the Reason Together Café.

Sometimes the best part of a study begins after the final prayer, when someone opens a Bible across a table and says, “I noticed something else.”

That is exactly the kind of conversation we welcome.

Thank you for being with us today.

To our first-time guests, Aloha Nui Loa.

To our church family and everyone joining us online, thank you for reasoning together through the Word of God.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let’s Reason Together the Word of God.

Aloha.

PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

The Crimson Worm

RTS-030 | Psalm 22; Isaiah 1:18; Matthew 27 KJV

A reader's companion to the sermon

Reason Together Church

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About This Commentary

The Pastor's Commentary is a readable public companion to the sermon. It explains the principal Biblical reasoning, factual cautions and pastoral applications behind RTS-030. It is not a second sermon and it is not the internal Study Vault. Readers may use it for personal study, group discussion or careful follow-up after hearing the message.

This study began with a popular devotional account about an insect commonly called the crimson worm. The story presents several striking parallels to the death and resurrection of Jesus: attachment to wood, a mother giving her life, crimson blood staining her offspring and a body becoming white after three days. The parallels are memorable, but not every popular detail is supported by Scripture or reliable biological evidence.

The purpose of this Commentary is not to drain wonder from Psalm 22. It is to place wonder on a dependable foundation. Psalm 22 genuinely points us toward the suffering of Christ. The Hebrew word translated "worm" genuinely belongs to a word family associated with crimson dye. Ancient people genuinely obtained valuable red dye from scale insects. Those facts are meaningful without turning every repeated claim into revealed prophecy.

The governing principle is simple: keep what is true, identify what is possible and release what cannot be established. Scripture does not need an embellished illustration in order to reveal the glory of Jesus Christ.

Commentary in Brief

Psalm 22 begins with the cry Jesus spoke from the cross: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" It proceeds through mockery, bodily suffering, pierced hands and feet, divided garments and the casting of lots. The New Testament crucifixion accounts repeatedly reflect its language.

Verse 6 says, "But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." In its immediate context, the worm image communicates humiliation. The sufferer is treated as low, weak, contemptible and beneath ordinary human regard. This is the primary meaning and must control every secondary association.

The Hebrew term commonly transliterated *tola'ath* can refer to a worm or small creeping creature. The same word family is also used in expressions for crimson or scarlet material. Ancient crimson dye was produced from scale insects associated with particular trees. This lexical and historical connection is real, but Psalm 22:6 does not explicitly say, "I am the crimson worm."

Several elements of the popular insect account are uncertain, exaggerated or unsupported. The sermon therefore does not present the offspring as drinking the mother's blood, the pigment as literal blood or a precise three-day change from crimson to white as scientific fact.

The dependable Biblical trail is richer. Scarlet appears in the tabernacle, the veil, priestly garments, cleansing rites, Rahab's cord, the red-heifer ceremony and the robe placed upon Jesus in mockery. Isaiah 1:18 then gives the explicit promise: sins like scarlet and crimson can become white as snow and wool. The cleansing comes through the blood of Jesus Christ.

1. Begin With the Whole Psalm

A word study can become misleading when one unusual word is lifted out of its paragraph, chapter and book. Psalm 22:6 should therefore be read inside the whole Psalm before it is connected to an insect, a dye or a devotional illustration.

The Psalm moves through anguish, ridicule and physical suffering. The speaker is mocked for trusting God. His strength is poured out. His bones are out of joint. His tongue cleaves to his jaws. His hands and feet are pierced. His garments are divided and lots are cast for his vesture.

Those details make the Christian connection to Calvary unavoidable. Matthew 27 records mockers shaking their heads and challenging Jesus to trust God for deliverance. The soldiers divide His garments by lot. Jesus speaks the opening words of Psalm 22 from the cross.

Yet Psalm 22 does not end in abandonment. It turns toward answered prayer, praise in the congregation, worship among the nations and proclamation to a people yet to be born. The movement is from suffering to vindication. Any interpretation that stops with the worm and never reaches worship has not followed the Psalm to its conclusion.

2. What Did Jesus Mean by Quoting Psalm 22:1?

Matthew 27:46 records Jesus crying, “Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?” and explains the words as, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?” Jesus was speaking the opening line of Psalm 22.

Christians have long considered the depth of this cry. It expresses genuine suffering and the terrible weight of sin borne at the cross. It must not be reduced to the idea that Jesus merely recited a convenient proof text without experiencing its anguish.

At the same time, quoting the opening line identifies the Psalm. Ancient hearers familiar with Scripture could recognize more than one isolated sentence. The words direct attention toward a Psalm whose details are unfolding around Jesus and whose ending announces worldwide worship.

This Commentary does not attempt to settle every theological question about the cry of forsakenness. That question deserves a separate study. For RTS-030, the essential point is that Jesus deliberately places Psalm 22 before those who hear Him at Calvary.

3. “I Am a Worm, and No Man”

The first duty of interpretation is to let the verse explain itself. The worm is immediately paired with the words “and no man,” followed by “a reproach of men, and despised of the people.” The image describes social contempt and profound humiliation.

A worm is low to the ground, easily crushed and commonly regarded as insignificant. It has no impressive appearance, no roar and no visible means of defense. The royal sufferer of Psalm 22 is treated as though He possesses less dignity than an ordinary man.

The crucifixion displays that humiliation. Jesus is stripped, mocked, spat upon, beaten, crowned with thorns and exposed publicly. The soldiers kneel before Him only to ridicule His kingship. Religious leaders use His suffering as an opportunity to taunt His trust in God.

The verse does not teach that Jesus ceased to be human or divine. It describes how people regarded and treated Him. The Son of God entered the lowest place of human shame while remaining the holy Son of God.

4. Other Biblical Uses of Worm Language

The Bible sometimes uses worm language to emphasize human frailty or low estate. Job 25:6 asks, “How much less man, that is a worm? and the son of man, which is a worm?” Isaiah 41:14 addresses “thou worm Jacob” before immediately promising the LORD’s help.

These passages demonstrate that the image can function without requiring detailed zoology. The point is not the creature’s reproductive cycle. The point is littleness, weakness and dependence when measured against divine power.

Psalm 22 intensifies that familiar image by placing it in the mouth of the righteous sufferer. He is not confessing personal worthlessness before God. He is describing the contempt directed toward Him by people.

This protects pastoral application. A person who has been bullied, rejected or treated as less than human may recognize the pain in this verse. Christ entered the place of the despised. He does not teach victims that abuse defines their true value.

5. The Hebrew Word Tola’ath

The Hebrew word translated “worm” in Psalm 22:6 is commonly written in English as tola’ath. Transliteration varies because Hebrew letters do not map perfectly onto English spelling. Pronunciation is not the main issue. Meaning and context are.

The word can refer to a worm, grub or small creeping creature. It is also associated with the production of crimson dye. In many Old Testament passages it appears in a phrase often translated “scarlet” or “scarlet stuff.”

This means the connection between worm and crimson is not a modern invention. The English reader may see two unrelated ideas because translators appropriately render the same word family according to context. Hebrew readers could encounter a closer lexical relationship between the creature and the colorant derived from it.

Lexical range does not automatically establish authorial intent. A word may carry several related senses without activating every sense in every sentence. Psalm 22:6 uses the creature image in a context of humiliation. The crimson association may enrich the reading, but it should not displace the plain meaning.

6. Why Some Bibles Say “Worm” Instead of “Crimson Worm”

The King James Version translates Psalm 22:6 correctly and plainly: “But I am a worm, and no man.” The verse does not contain an additional Hebrew adjective that requires the English word crimson at that location.

Elsewhere, the same word family participates in phrases describing scarlet material. Translators then use scarlet or crimson because color and textile are the sense required by the passage. Translation must

represent the word as it functions in each context, not insert every possible association every time it appears.

It is therefore inaccurate to say that translators hid the phrase “crimson worm” or removed a secret prophecy. The lexical background can be explained openly while respecting the wording of the KJV.

A good word study does not begin by accusing the English Bible. It compares usage, consults responsible lexical resources and returns to the immediate context.

7. The Real Insect and the Real Dye

Ancient Mediterranean and Near Eastern peoples obtained crimson color from scale insects commonly associated with oak trees. Females become attached to their host plant while developing. Their bodies contain pigment compounds that can be processed into dye.

The creature may look less like an earthworm and more like a small rounded scale or berry attached to a branch. The English term “worm” reflects older and broader usage for small creeping creatures, grubs or insect forms.

Collecting and processing enough insect material for dye required labor and specialized knowledge. That helps explain the value of scarlet textiles. Archaeological and chemical research confirms that insect-derived red dyes were used in the ancient world.

These facts provide legitimate historical background. They do not prove that David intended readers to reconstruct the insect’s complete life cycle from Psalm 22:6. A real association can be taught without converting it into a hidden biological code.

8. Testing the Popular Crimson-Worm Story

The popular account contains a mixture of fact, interpretation and embellishment. The female scale insect does attach to plant material. Eggs may develop beneath or within a protective structure associated with her body. Crimson pigment is genuinely connected with such insects.

The account becomes unreliable when it describes the mother as consciously choosing permanent sacrificial attachment to a tree in order to die for her children. Biological behavior should not be assigned human intention merely because the resulting illustration sounds devotional.

The claim that the offspring eat the mother’s living body or drink her blood is not established by the scientific sources consulted for this study. Descriptions of eggs, crawlers, protective coverings and maternal remains should not be rewritten as communion language.

The crimson material should be called pigment or colorant, not blood. An insect contains biological fluids, but the substance historically extracted for dye is not equivalent to the blood of Christ. The word blood is often introduced because it strengthens the illustration, not because it accurately describes the evidence.

The precise claim that the dead insect remains crimson for three days and then becomes white like snow is especially doubtful. The documented life cycle does not provide the neat resurrection timetable often repeated in sermons. A perfect three-day parallel is rhetorically attractive, but attractiveness is not verification.

9. Fact, Inference and Illustration

This study offers a simple method for evaluating every exciting Biblical “gold nugget.” First ask what Scripture states. Second ask what the text reasonably permits. Third ask what comes from an external illustration. These categories should not be blended.

Scripture states that Psalm 22's sufferer says, “I am a worm, and no man.” It states that He is reproached and despised. It states that His hands and feet are pierced, His garments divided and His vesture assigned by lot.

Lexical and historical evidence permits a secondary crimson association because *tola'ath* belongs to the vocabulary of insect-derived scarlet dye. Verified attachment to wood may be used as a restrained illustration. Neither point authorizes the preacher to supply unsupported maternal sacrifice, blood-feeding or a three-day whitening miracle.

An illustration serves Scripture. Scripture must never be forced to serve the illustration. When an illustration proves inaccurate, the Gospel has lost nothing. We simply return to the stronger truth God actually revealed.

10. Scarlet in the Tabernacle

Scarlet appears repeatedly in the construction of the tabernacle. Exodus 26 describes fine linen joined with blue, purple and scarlet. These colors were woven into the place where God dwelt among His covenant people.

The veil separating the holy place from the most holy also contained blue, purple and scarlet. At the death of Jesus, the temple veil was torn from top to bottom. Hebrews 10 speaks of boldness to enter the holiest by the blood of Jesus through a new and living way, “through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.”

The scarlet thread should not be isolated and declared to mean one thing in every occurrence. The tabernacle textiles communicate beauty, holiness, royal dignity and sacred order. Christian readers may nevertheless observe that scarlet stands inside the worship system later fulfilled in Christ.

The dependable connection is not that an insect predicted every detail of Calvary. It is that the vocabulary of scarlet is already woven into the Biblical setting of God's dwelling, priestly approach and access to His presence.

11. Scarlet, Hyssop and Cleansing

Leviticus 14 joins scarlet with cedar wood, birds and hyssop in ceremonies of cleansing. Numbers 19 joins scarlet and hyssop in the preparation connected with the red heifer. Hebrews 9 looks back upon blood, water, scarlet wool and hyssop while explaining covenant purification.

The appearance of scarlet does not mean the color alone cleansed anyone. It belongs to a God-given ritual in which blood, water, priestly action and declared cleanness are held together.

This connects naturally with the earlier Reason Together study on hyssop. At Passover, hyssop carried blood to the door. In cleansing rituals, hyssop and scarlet appear together. At the cross, John records hyssop near the final moments of Jesus's suffering.

Hebrews gives the controlling conclusion: “without shedding of blood is no remission.” The insect may explain the historical source of color. Only Scripture explains the redemptive meaning fulfilled in Christ.

12. Rahab's Scarlet Cord

Joshua 2 records the spies instructing Rahab to bind a scarlet line in her window. The cord marked the house connected with their promise of protection when judgment came upon Jericho.

The passage does not explicitly identify the cord as a prophecy of Christ's blood. Its immediate meaning belongs to the oath, the marked household and the promised rescue.

Christian readers may still recognize a Biblical pattern in which a scarlet sign accompanies deliverance. The resemblance to Passover is especially striking: judgment approaches, a household acts upon a promise and those gathered inside are spared.

Responsible typology begins with what the passage meant and then follows connections established by the wider canon. It does not erase Rahab's courage or the spies' covenant simply to obtain a red-colored sermon illustration.

13. The Scarlet Robe at Calvary

Matthew 27:28 says that the soldiers stripped Jesus and placed a scarlet robe upon Him. Mark and John describe the robe as purple, a difference easily understood within the overlapping ancient vocabulary and appearance of red-purple royal cloth.

The soldiers intended mockery. They added a crown of thorns, placed a reed in His hand, bowed before Him and called Him King of the Jews. Every symbol of royalty was turned into an instrument of humiliation.

Here the themes of Psalm 22:6 meet visibly. The One treated as “a worm, and no man” is clothed in scarlet while people despise Him. The color of kingship becomes part of the abuse directed toward the true King.

The robe does not prove the full insect story. It gives us something better: an explicit Gospel scene in which scarlet, kingship, reproach and the suffering Messiah stand together at Calvary.

14. Scarlet Sins Made White

Isaiah 1:18 says, “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” This is the clear Biblical crimson-to-white promise.

The verse is not teaching that sin is merely an unfortunate stain on otherwise innocent people. Isaiah confronts rebellion, empty religious performance, injustice and hands full of blood. God names the seriousness of the stain before offering cleansing.

The invitation begins with “Come now.” God calls guilty people to reason with Him on the basis of His truth. He does not ask them to pretend the stain is pale. He promises a transformation they cannot accomplish for themselves.

We do not need an uncertain claim that an insect turns white after three days. Isaiah already gives the inspired contrast. Scarlet and crimson describe the depth of sin. Snow and wool describe the cleansing God provides.

15. Pigment Is Not the Blood of Christ

The popular story often calls the insect's crimson pigment blood and then connects it to Jesus's words, "Take, eat; this is my body." That move creates a powerful emotional parallel, but it confuses biological pigment with the sacrificial blood of Christ.

The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus and interpreted by His own words. Its meaning rests upon His body given and His blood shed in the new covenant. It does not require an insect life cycle to authenticate it.

First John 1:7 says, "the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin." The subject is not metaphorical insect color. It is the actual sacrificial death of the sinless Son of God.

Precision protects worship. When we reserve the word blood for what Scripture calls blood, the cross becomes more precious, not less. Christ did not merely provide a color. He gave Himself for sinners.

16. Psalm 22 Does Not End With the Worm

The emotional force of verse 6 can cause readers to remain in humiliation. The Psalm itself refuses to remain there. Verse 24 declares that God "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."

Praise follows suffering. The meek eat and are satisfied. All the ends of the world remember and turn unto the LORD. Every nation worships before Him. A future people hear what God has done.

The crucifixion is therefore not the defeat of Jesus. The One mocked as less than a man is revealed as the King before whom the nations worship. The scarlet robe of mockery does not alter His royal identity.

This ending also shapes Christian hope. A believer may pass through reproach without being abandoned by God. Human contempt does not possess the final word. In Christ, suffering moves toward resurrection, praise and the declared righteousness of God.

17. A Word About Wormwood

Wormwood is not related to the worm of Psalm 22:6. The similarity exists in the English spelling, not in the underlying Biblical words or the objects they describe.

Old Testament wormwood translates a Hebrew word referring to a bitter plant. Scripture uses it as an image of bitterness, poison, sorrow or judgment. Revelation 8:11 uses a Greek term from which the botanical name *Artemisia absinthium* is associated.

The crimson-producing creature belongs to a different Hebrew word family. One is a small creature linked with crimson dye. The other is a bitter plant used as a symbol of grievous judgment.

This is a useful reminder that English word resemblance is not enough to establish a Biblical connection. Word studies must examine the actual Hebrew or Greek terms, their contexts and their usage across Scripture.

18. What This Study Teaches About Bible Study

The crimson-worm account is a valuable case study because it is not a malicious teaching. Most people share it because they love Jesus, cherish the cross and enjoy discovering connections in Scripture.

Correction should therefore be gentle. The goal is not to embarrass the person who shared the story. The goal is to separate a beautiful intention from claims that cannot carry the weight placed upon them.

A mature Christian does not have to choose between wonder and verification. We can become excited about a real Hebrew association while acknowledging lexical limits. We can appreciate an illustration while labeling it as an illustration. We can change our wording when better evidence becomes available.

Truth does not fear examination. The strongest “gold nuggets” are not hidden facts available only to clever readers. They are the truths God has placed openly in His Word: Christ suffered, Christ shed His blood, Christ rose again, sinners can be cleansed and the nations will worship Him.

The Final Answer

Why does Psalm 22 describe the Messiah as a worm? Primarily, the image expresses humiliation. Jesus was reproached, despised and treated as though He were beneath human dignity. The words “and no man” explain the force of the metaphor.

The Hebrew word also has a genuine association with crimson or scarlet dye derived from scale insects. That background may enrich the Christian reading of the verse, especially when followed through the wider Biblical scarlet pattern.

The popular account should not be repeated as established science in its complete form. Attachment to plant material and insect-derived crimson pigment are supportable. Maternal blood feeding, permanent blood staining and a precise three-day transformation to white are not adequately established.

The strongest conclusion comes from Scripture itself. The One treated like a worm was clothed in scarlet mockery, shed His blood for sinners and fulfilled the suffering portrait of Psalm 22. Through Him, sins as scarlet can become white as snow.

Questions for Personal or Group Reflection

What does the immediate context of Psalm 22:6 tell us about the meaning of the word “worm”?

Which details in Psalm 22 are reflected in Matthew 27 and the other crucifixion accounts?

Why is it important to distinguish a word’s possible associations from its meaning in one particular verse?

Which parts of the popular crimson-worm account appear supportable and which parts require caution?

How can a preacher correct a beloved illustration without mocking the people who shared it?

What do the tabernacle veil, cleansing rites and Rahab’s cord contribute to the wider Biblical use of scarlet?

Why is the scarlet robe in Matthew 27 a stronger Calvary connection than the uncertain three-day insect claim?

What does Isaiah 1:18 reveal about the seriousness of sin and the possibility of cleansing?

How does Psalm 22’s ending change the way we read its opening cry and verse 6 humiliation?

What new Bible claim have you recently heard that should be sorted into fact, inference and illustration?

Who in your community has been treated as though that person were beneath ordinary dignity?

How can you share the promise of scarlet sins becoming white as snow with someone this week?

Interpretive Cautions

Do not say Psalm 22:6 literally reads, “I am the crimson worm.”

Do not accuse KJV translators or other translators of hiding the verse’s true meaning.

Do not assume that one modern species identification can be assigned to the ancient Hebrew word with complete certainty.

Do not describe instinctive insect behavior as a conscious choice to sacrifice for offspring.

Do not call pigment blood merely to intensify a Calvary parallel.

Do not teach that the offspring drink the mother’s blood or eat her living body without reliable evidence.

Do not present an exact three-day crimson-to-white change as verified biology.

Do not turn every Biblical reference to scarlet into a direct prediction of Christ’s blood.

Do not overlook the primary contextual meaning of humiliation and contempt.

Do not confuse wormwood, a bitter plant, with the worm or crimson vocabulary of Psalm 22.

Do not let the correction of an illustration obscure the genuine fulfillment of Psalm 22 in Jesus.

Do not use technical language to display superiority. Explain the evidence in a way that helps ordinary readers trust Scripture.

A Personal Invitation to Christ

The message of Psalm 22 is not that a clever reader has discovered a secret insect. It is that the Son of God entered suffering, bore shame and gave Himself for sinners.

The Bible says, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23 KJV) Our sins are not removed by religious effort, family heritage or good intentions.

Jesus Christ lived without sin, died upon the cross for our sins, was buried and rose again the third day.

“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”

(Romans 5:8 KJV)

“That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” (Romans 10:9 KJV)

Come to Christ honestly. Admit your sin, believe that He died and rose again and trust Him as your personal Savior. The stain you cannot remove is not beyond His cleansing. “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” (Romans 10:13 KJV)

If you have trusted Christ, tell a mature believer and begin following Him in the fellowship of a faithful church. Open Psalm 22 again and read it as the testimony of the Savior who suffered and now receives the praise of the nations.

Pastoral Note

Some readers will feel disappointed when a beloved devotional story is qualified. That response is understandable. The story may have encouraged sincere worship for years. Correction should never be delivered with ridicule or spiritual pride.

Pastors can model both conviction and humility by saying, “This part is clearly Biblical. This part is historically plausible. This part has been repeated, but I cannot verify it.” Congregations become safer and stronger when certainty is calibrated honestly.

The humiliation language of Psalm 22 also deserves pastoral care. People who have been shamed, bullied, abused or rejected may hear “I am a worm” as confirmation that they truly possess no value. The verse describes the contempt directed toward the sufferer. It does not authorize anyone to degrade another person or teach victims to accept abuse.

Jesus entered the place of reproach, but He did not remain there. Psalm 22 reaches hearing, praise and worldwide worship. The church should treat people with the dignity of those for whom Christ died and welcome the racial and cultural diversity that anticipates the nations worshipping before Him.

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Selected Scripture and Study Resources

All Scripture quotations are from the King James Version.

Psalm 22. The controlling text, moving from suffering and reproach to praise among the nations.

Matthew 27:27–51. The scarlet robe, mockery, crucifixion, Psalm 22 cry, divided garments and torn veil.

Isaiah 1:16–20. The call to repentance and the promise that scarlet and crimson sins can become white.

Exodus 26:1, 31–33; 28:5–8, 15. Scarlet in the tabernacle veil and priestly garments.

Leviticus 14:4–7, 49–52; Numbers 19:6. Scarlet and hyssop in cleansing ceremonies.

Joshua 2:18–21; 6:22–25. Rahab’s scarlet line and the promised deliverance of her household.

Hebrews 9:11–22; 10:19–22. Christ’s blood, covenant purification and access through the veil.

First John 1:7–9. Cleansing from all sin through the blood of Jesus Christ.

Brown, Driver and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Entries for *tola’ath*, *shani* and *la’anah*.

Koehler, Baumgartner and Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Relevant worm, scarlet and wormwood entries.

Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50*; Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1–72*; John Goldingay, *Psalms, Volume 1*.

Scientific descriptions of *Kermes vermilio* morphology, life stages and dye compounds, including peer-reviewed entomological and chemical studies cited in the RTS-030 Study Vault.

Archaeological research concerning scale-insect dye identified in ancient textiles from the Biblical region.

A Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for giving us a Word that can be examined and trusted. Thank You for Psalm 22 and its extraordinary portrait of the suffering Messiah. Forgive us when excitement causes us to repeat more than the evidence supports. Give us humility to correct our words without losing our wonder. Thank You that Jesus entered the place of reproach, bore our sin and shed His blood for us. For every person carrying shame, make the promise of Isaiah 1:18 living and personal. Teach us to treat no person as beneath dignity. Help us open our Bibles, test every claim and hold firmly to what is true. Thank You that the Psalm does not end with the worm, but with praise among the nations. In Jesus’s name, amen.

Carry This Study Into the Week

Reopen Psalm 22 during the coming week. Read it once while noticing David's suffering. Read it again while placing Matthew 27 beside it. Mark the ridicule, thirst, pierced hands and feet, divided garments and casting of lots. Then continue until suffering gives way to praise.

Use the three-part test on one Biblical claim you encounter: What does Scripture state? What does the evidence reasonably permit? What belongs only to the illustration? Do not reject a claim because it is unusual and do not repeat it because it is exciting. Check it carefully.

Share Isaiah 1:18 with one person. You do not need to explain Hebrew or insect biology. You can simply say, "God promises that sins as scarlet can become white as snow." Someone may believe a stain has become permanent and may need to hear God's invitation, "Come now."

Finally, notice someone who is being treated as insignificant. The Savior entered the place of the worm. His people must not treat another human being as though that person were beneath compassion, welcome or dignity.

Until We Reason Together Again

The lasting lesson is not that every part of a popular crimson-worm story has been proven. It is that the true Biblical story is stronger than the embellishment. Jesus Christ fulfilled the suffering portrait of Psalm 22, wore the scarlet robe of mockery, shed His blood for sinners and rose in victory.

"Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." (Isaiah 1:18 KJV)

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