

“I am a worm”

Psalm 22:6-8 – Its incredible word picture



By Philip Shields

Psalm 22:6 – “I am a worm” is one of the profound Messianic prophecies, fulfilled by Yeshua (Jesus) in so many details, especially while he was being crucified.

Embedded in this breath-taking psalm is verse 6, which is loaded with truth that most of us read right over. Or we misunderstand its true message. A dear friend in WA state – Dean – reminded me of this verse and its deeper meaning -- when he remarked on it in an email years ago. What I’m about to write is not unique to me or us, as it has been known for centuries, but I hope it will be so meaningful to you who come to Light on the Rock who may not have heard it before. Please pass this sermon on to others if you find it rich in meaning. And be sure to check our other sermons and blogs too.

Psalms 22:6-8 KJV

“But I am a worm, and no man; A reproach of men, and despised by the people. All those who see Me ridicule Me; They shoot out the lip, they shake the head, saying, "**He trusted in YHVH, let Him rescue Him**; Let Him deliver Him, since He delights in Him”

Psalm 22:8 describes almost exactly what Yeshua heard while he was nailed to the stake.

Matthew 27:38-44

Then two robbers were crucified with Him, one on the right and another on the left. 39 And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads 40 and saying, "You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself! If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross."

41 Likewise the chief priests also, mocking with the scribes and elders, said, 42 "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him now come down from the cross, and we will believe Him.

43 **He trusted in God; let Him deliver Him now if He will have Him; for He said, 'I am the Son of God.'**"

44 Even the robbers who were crucified with Him reviled Him with the same thing.

*The last part of that passage is clearly seen in the gospel accounts, but we don’t have a record of Yeshua saying he was but a worm. He must have **felt** that way and in any case, we are to learn something from that prophetic statement. But it’s far more than that. This “worm” -- based on the original language – was no ordinary worm.*

The usual word for “**worm**” in Hebrew was *rimmah*, meaning a maggot. But that’s not the worm mentioned here. This worm was *tola’at or tola* in Hebrew (to-law’, phonetically), **Strong’s# 8438**. It was translated 43 times usually as either “worm, scarlet, crimson”. Maybe you’re starting to think and realize this is no ordinary worm. It was clearly associated with a bright red color. In fact, the word is often translated simply as scarlet or crimson – yes, the same word that is translated “worm” in other verses. So be sure to learn why.

You are about to be amazed when the fuller picture of this worm is revealed. What was the “worm” Yeshua said HE was while being crucified on the tree or stake (1 Peter 2:24; Acts 5:30; Acts 10:39; 13:29)? He didn’t mean “earthworm”.

This worm **was *the Crimson Worm to which Psalm 22:6 refers*** – common to the area of old Israel. These worms are about the size of a pea, and looked more like a grub than a worm. They were often mistaken to be a part of the plant or stick to which they were attached.

This worm -- **Strong’s word #8438** – was the same one that destroyed stale manna in **Exodus 16:20**.

Exodus 16:20

“Notwithstanding they did not heed Moses. But some of them left part of it [manna] until morning, **and it bred worms (#8438)** and stank. And Moses was angry with them.”

The NIV says “It was full of maggots and began to smell.” But the Hebrew word is #8438. Young’s Literal Translation: “it bringeth up worms and stinketh”

This crimson worm gets around. It was the same grub that ate the vine or gourd under whose shade Jonah was enjoying outside Nineveh (**Jonah 4:7**).

Jonah 4:6-7

And the LORD God (Yehovah Elohim) prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day **God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered.**”

Same worm – Strong’s 8438 – the crimson worm.

It was known as the crimson grub or worm. Why?

When the female crimson worm was ready to lay its eggs – which she does *only once in her lifetime* (keep that in mind) – there are several things it does that pictured Messiah.

- **The mother crimson worm makes a hard crimson shell over her soft body *and attaches herself to a tree trunk*, large stick or fencepost.**

The Messiah was what the Crimson Worm *pictured*, attached firmly to a tree. We see that when Christ was crucified (1 Peter 2:23-24) on a tree. Nailed to it. Verse 22 says he was our example. Let's pick up now in 1 Peter 1:23-24....

1 Peter 2:23-24

“who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself **bore our sins in His own body on the TREE**, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness — by *whose stripes you were healed*.”

Christ was crucified – NAILED TO -- either on a stake or a tree.

- This crimson worm – when seen attached on a tree – **had thorn-like edges to it**. Think about that too. You cannot remove this worm or the shell it made without ripping her body apart and killing her. What did the soldiers jam tightly on to Christ's head? **A CROWN OF THORNS**. They crowned him, on Passover, a common time when kings of Judah were crowned; and put royal-colored robe on him as they mocked him – but they did crown him and they did put on the sign – “KING of the Jews.”

So the crimson worm had thorn-like edges to it. So did the Christ/Messiah.

- This crimson worm now lays its eggs under her body, and protects her future offspring by her firmly attached hard crimson shell. But that is just half the story. It gets better.

When the larvae hatch, they stay right there – under the mama's shell for protection and food! **The baby larvae feed on the living body of their mother!**

Just as the crimson worm gives its life for its offspring, Yeshua gave his life for us. He died, that we might live through Him (**1 John 4:9**). The larvae all fed on the mother before leaving its protective shell and covering. *We too, at least symbolically, eat of Him and if we don't, we have no life in us (John 6:53-57).* Let's read it.

John 6:53-57

“Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, **unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life**, and I will raise him up at the last day.

55 For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. 56 He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. 57 **As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.**”

Remember what Yeshua said at his Passover: “This is my body, which is given for you...” (**Luke 22:19**).

Luke 22:19

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, **“This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”**”

Mark 14:22

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them and said, **“Take, eat; this is My body.”**

So the crimson worm gave her flesh to her baby larvae to eat so they might live. Over the next few days the larvae grow to where they can independently fare for themselves. *The mother crimson worm dies, oozing a bright red or scarlet/crimson dye which permanently stains her baby worms and the tree spot to which she/her shell is attached. The larvae are colored a bright scarlet the rest of their lives.* But – they lived because their “mother” gave her life for them, covering them in her protective shell and letting them feed on her.

How did our Yeshua look while up there on the tree/stake? Bright red –badly bleeding all over from the severe scourging beating he had just endured. **The Crimson worm as it began to die, also oozed this bright red dye.** Though there are doctrinal errors in the very graphic movie “The Passion of the Christ”, they do show how he could have looked after his scourging with whips that had pieces of metal, bone and sharp objects attached to the whip to wound, hurt, and rip off chunks of flesh. The Romans were not limited to 39 lashes or just lashes to the back, but they attacked the legs, the head, the chest – everywhere!

Isaiah 52:13-14

“Behold, My Servant shall deal prudently;
He shall be exalted and extolled and be very high.
14 **Just as many were astonished at you,
So His visage was marred more than any man,
And His form more than the sons of men;”**

Psalms 22:14-18

“I am poured out like water,
And all My bones are out of joint;
My heart is like wax;
It has melted within Me.
15 My strength is dried up like a potsherd,
And My tongue clings to My jaws;
You have brought Me to the dust of death.

16 For dogs have surrounded Me;
The congregation of the wicked has enclosed Me.
They pierced My hands and My feet;

**17 I can count all My bones.
They look and stare at Me.
18 They divide My garments among them,
And for My clothing they cast lots.”**

He was one red, bleeding, oozing bloody mess writhing in pain from the beatings, infection, torn ligaments, the spikes in his wrists/hands and heels. Severe pain, a red bloody mess.

And like the mama crimson worm encasing her eggs, Christ is our protective shell, as it were. HE is our covering righteousness and sustaining life. HE is in fact, what each of the pieces of the “armor of God” ultimately picture – protecting and guarding the children of God.

Blood is a bright red color, or scarlet or crimson. This particular worm – and its shell – were often scraped off the wood and then **crushed into powder to make the bright red dyes for clothing – and for the scarlet materials found in the Tabernacle** and its furnishings (see Exodus 25:4; Numbers 4-8). The word translated “crimson” or sometimes even “scarlet” is often the very same word as the one used for the crimson *worm* itself. All of that came from *this* crimson worm, the specific worm Yeshua said HE was – as he was being crucified, firmly attached, on the tree.

Crimson or scarlet is seen everywhere God is cleansing. A scarlet string is seen in the ritual required for cleansing a leper (**Leviticus 14:4,6**), or a house (**Leviticus 14:49-52**) and also in the laws of the red heifer – whose ashes were used in the purification rituals as well (**Numbers 19:6**). The same Hebrew word being translated “scarlet” or “red” – is the same word translated “worm” in other verses, as warranted.

If the mother’s shell is left there, after three days the dead worm’s body loses its red color and now turns into a whitish color that falls to the ground like snow. Reminds you of Isaiah 1.

Isaiah 1:18

“Come now, let us reason together, says YHVH: though your **sins be as scarlet**, they shall be as white as snow; though they be **red like crimson**, they shall be as wool”

It’s the same Hebrew word there for crimson itself, as for the crimson *worm*.

The larvae are dyed a bright red the rest of their lives by the protecting scarlet worm soon after they hatch from their eggs. We too are washed – bathed – covered – in the blood of the Lamb, our Savior – washing away ALL our sins.

1 John 1:7

“But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and **the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin**”.

I delight in identifying with the sacrifice of my big brother, my friend, my Lord, my Savior and my GOD – Yeshua, Jesus the Son of God. We are most pleased to be seen as someone under the blood of Christ!

So our Savior was telling us, as he was firmly attached to the tree at his vicious crucifixion:

- “I’m doing this for you – once, for all time, for all people who accept it” (just as the crimson worm did it only once – **Hebrews 9:28; 10:10**).

Hebrews 9:25-28

“not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood of another — *26 He then would have had to suffer often* since the foundation of the world; **but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.** *27 And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,* **28 so Christ was offered ONCE to bear the sins of many.** To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation.”

- **“I’ve been nailed to a tree – firmly attached** – as I’m about to end my life, for you – just as the Crimson worm attached itself to a tree or wood at the end of its life. I have a crown of thorns around my head, just as this Crimson worm has a thorn-like perimeter around its shell.”
- **“I’m your covering and source of life”** – just as the Crimson worm gave its life and body to the larvae that it brought into the world. It protected them by her hard outer shell.
- “My red blood is what forgives you, washes away every single sin you’ve ever committed, redeems you and reconciles us in the family of God to the Father – just as we’re reminded of that color when any sacrificial animal’s blood was spilled, or when you saw so much RED in the tabernacle, where God and mankind were reconciled.” WE TOO are covered by the blood of Yeshua.

When you read **Psalm 22:6** – “I am a worm” -- The Word was pointing us to the scarlet worm, to the crucifixion, to the power of his crimson or scarlet blood. God’s word never ceases to amaze. And praise you Yeshua, our Redeemer. (Closing prayer)

