

Matthew 27:46

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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?

Analysis

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? This cry from the cross represents the deepest mystery of the atonement. 'The ninth hour' (ὥραν ἐνάτην/hōran enatēn) was approximately 3:00 PM, three hours after darkness fell upon the land (Matthew 27:45). Jesus had hung on the cross for six hours; His physical agony was reaching its climax, but infinitely worse was the spiritual anguish now breaking forth.

'Jesus cried with a loud voice' (ἐβόησεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς φωνῇ μεγάλῃ/eboēsen ho Iēsous phōnē megalē)—not a whisper of defeat but a shout of anguish. Despite extreme physical weakness from scourging, crucifixion, and blood loss, Jesus summoned strength to cry out. This was no theatrical performance but genuine torment of soul expressing itself audibly.

'Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani' (Ἠλί Ἠλί λεμὰ σαβαχθανί/Ēli Ēli lema sabachthani)—Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1 in Aramaic (though Mark records 'Eloi, Eloi' using Hebrew, both are attested forms). This psalm, written by David a millennium earlier, prophetically described crucifixion details with stunning precision. Jesus's use of it proclaims that His suffering fulfills Scripture's prophecies.

'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' (Θεέ μου θεέ μου ἵνατί με ἐγκατέλιπες/Thee mou thee mou hinati me enkatelipes)—this is not merely

emotional feeling but objective reality. The Father truly forsook the Son. Why? Because Jesus bore our sins (2 Corinthians 5:21), becoming 'a curse for us' (Galatians 3:13). The holy God cannot look upon sin (Habakkuk 1:13); when Jesus was 'made sin,' the Father turned away, breaking the eternal fellowship of the Trinity for those awful hours. This is penal substitutionary atonement: Jesus suffered the punishment (forsakenness, separation from God) that our sins deserved. He experienced hell—God-forsakenness—so we never would.

Historical Context

Darkness covered the land from the sixth to ninth hour (noon to 3 PM, Matthew 27:45), a supernatural sign of judgment. In Egyptian and Babylonian thought, darkness during daytime was an omen of divine displeasure. Nature itself responded to the Creator's suffering.

Crucifixion victims typically died from asphyxiation over many hours or even days. Jesus's relatively quick death (six hours) surprised Pilate (Mark 15:44). Yet the greater cause of death wasn't physical torture but bearing sin's weight and God's wrath. The spiritual agony exceeded the physical.

Some bystanders misunderstood His cry as calling for Elijah (Matthew 27:47), perhaps deliberately mocking or genuinely mishearing 'Eli' as 'Elijah.' Jewish tradition held that Elijah would rescue the righteous in distress. The confusion added to Jesus's humiliation—even His words were misinterpreted.

Church fathers (Athanasius, Gregory of Nazianzus, Calvin) have wrestled with how the Father could forsake the Son while maintaining Trinitarian unity. The mystery is that in Jesus's human nature, He experienced forsakenness while His divine nature remained united with the Father. The person of Christ experienced real separation and dereliction for our sake.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus's cry of forsakenness reveal both the horror of sin (which separates from God) and the depth of Christ's love (willing to bear that separation for us)?
2. What does it mean that Jesus quotes Psalm 22 rather than merely expressing emotion—how does this point to Scripture's fulfillment and God's sovereign plan in the crucifixion?
3. How should the reality of Christ's God-forsakenness on the cross assure believers that we will never be forsaken (Hebrews 13:5), since He bore that punishment in our place?

Interlinear Text

περὶ	δὲ	τὴν	ἐννάτην	ὥραν	ἀνεβόησεν	ὁ	Ἰησοῦς
about	And	G3588	the ninth	hour	cried	G3588	Jesus
G4012	G1161		G1766	G5610	G310		G2424
φωνῇ	μεγάλῃ	λέγων,	ἤλι	ἤλι	λαμὰ	σαβαχθανι	τοῦτ'
voice	with a loud	saying	Eli	Eli	lama	sabachthani	G5124
G5456	G3173	G3004	G2241	G2241	G2982	G4518	
ἔστιν	θεέ	μου	θεέ	μου	ἵνατί	με	ἐγκατέλιπες
G2076	God	is to say My	God	is to say My	why	me	hast thou forsaken
	G2316	G3450	G2316	G3450	G2444	G3165	G1459

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 22:1 (References God): My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?

Hebrews 5:7 (Parallel theme): Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

Mark 15:34 (References Jesus): And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?

Isaiah 53:10 (Parallel theme): Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Psalms 71:11 (References God): Saying, God hath forsaken him: persecute and take him; for there is none to deliver him.

Luke 23:46 (References Jesus): And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, he said, Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost.

Lamentations 1:12 (Parallel theme): Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me, wherewith the LORD hath afflicted me in the day of his fierce anger.