

STUDIES IN PSALMS

PSALM 69

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Pictures of Distress and Outcries for Deliverance, followed by Imprecations on Cruel Enemies, and by Promises of Praise.

ANALYSIS

This psalm is almost certainly Composite, not easily lending itself to Stanzaic divisions. The following are its principal contents. Chiefly under the figure of a Man Drowning in a Swampy Stream, the psalmist describes his sufferings from Innumerable Foes—vers. 1-4. He confesses his Folly and Wrong-doing—ver. 5. Prays that others may Not be Injured through Him—ver. 6. Declares that he Suffers for Jehovah's sake—vers. 7-9. Is Exposed to Ridicule—vers. 10-12. Yet Hopes to be Heard—ver. 13. Frames his Petitions on his Original Description of Peril—vers. 14, 15. Becomes yet More Importunate—vers. 16-18. Is Broken-hearted by the Bitter Mockery of his Enemies—vers. 19-21. At length, in seven strong couplets, he prays for the Punishment of his Foes—vers. 22-28. Returning to his Own Case, he Confidently Counts on Salvation and Promises Praise—vers. 29-31. He anticipates that the Humbled will be Revived and Jehovah Exalted—vers. 32, 33. And finally invites Heaven and Earth to Give Praise for the Restoration of Zion—vers. 34-36.

(Lm.) By David.

- 1 Save me O God because waters have come in as far as the life:¹
- 2 I have sunk into a swamp that is deep where is no place to stand,
I have come unto depths of waters and a flowing stream hath swept me away;
- 3 I² am weary with mine outcry parched is my throat, bedimmed are mine eyes through waiting for my God.
- 4 More than the hairs of my head are they who hate me without cause,

1. U.: "soul."

2. These varying indentations indicate varying measures in the original

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more numerous than my bones¹ are they who are falsely my
foes:

When I had seized nothing then I² had to make good.

- 5 O God thou knowest my folly,³
and my wrong-doings from thee are not hid.
- 6 Let not those who have waited for thee be put to shame
through me O Jehovah of hosts!⁴
let not those who are seeking for thee be confounded through
me O God of Israel!
- 7 Because for thy sake have I borne reproach,⁵
confusion hath covered my face:
- 8 Estranged have I become from my brothers,
yea an alien to the sons of my mother:
- 9 Because zeal for thy house hath consumed me,⁶
and the reproaches meant for thee⁷ have fallen on me.
- 10 When I have humbled⁸ with fasting my soul
then hath it become a reproach to me:
- 11 When I have made my clothing sackcloth
then have I become to them a taunt-song:
- 12 They who sit in the gate compose songs⁹ about me,
yea, string-songs for the imbibers of strong-drink.
- 13 But as for me my prayer is to thee Jehovah in an acceptable
time,¹⁰
O God! in the abounding of thy kindness answer me in the
truth of thy salvation.
- 14 Rescue me from the mire and oh let me not sink,¹¹
oh let me rescued from my haters and from depths of waters:
- 15 Let not a flowing stream of waters sweep me away, nor a
deep swallow me up,
nor a well close over me her mouth.
- 16 Answer me Jehovah! for good is thy kindness,¹²

1. So it shd. be (w. Syr.) (or "locks")—Gn.

2. So *Gt*—Gn.

3. Cp. 39:5.

4. So Sep. M.T.: "O Adonai Jehovah of hosts."

5. Cp. 44:22; Rom. 8:36.

6. Cp. Jn. 2:17.

7. M.T. (ml.): "And the reproaches of those reproaching thee."

8. So it shd. be (w. Sep.): cp. 35:13—Gn.

9. So Br. (cp. 105:2; Judges 5:10).

10. Ml.: "in a time of favour."

11. Cp. v. 2 ff.

12. Cp. 109:21.

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according to the abounding of thy compassions turn thou
unto me;

- 17 And hide not thy face from thy servant,
because I am in distress haste thee answer me.
- 18 Oh draw near to my soul redeem it,
on account of mine enemies ransom thou me.
- 19 Thou knowest my reproach and my shame and my confusion,
before thee are all mine adversaries.
- 20 Reproach hath broken my heart and I am incurable,
And I waited for one to show sympathy and there was none,
and for comforters but I found none;
- 21 But they put in¹ my food poison,²
and for my thirst they gave as my drink, vinegar.³
- 22 Let their table before them become a trap,⁴
and unto their friends⁵ a lure.⁶
- 23 Let their eyes become too dim to see,
and their loins continually cause thou to shake.
- 24 Pour out over them thine indignation,
and let the glow of thine anger overtake them.
- 25 Let their encampment become desolate,⁷
in their tents be there none to dwell.
- 26 Because whom thou thyself hadst smitten they pursued,
and unto the pain of thy wounded ones they must needs add.⁸
- 27 Lay punishment on their iniquity⁹
and do not let them come into thy vindication.¹⁰
- 28 Let them be blotted out of the register of the living,¹¹
and with the righteous let them not be enrolled.
- 29 But I am humbled and in pain,
thy salvation O God shall set me on high!
- 30 I would fain praise the name of God in a song,
and would magnify him with thanksgiving;

1. Or: "as"—O.G.

2. Cp. Mt. 27:34.

3. Cp. Jn. 19:29.

4. Cp. Rom. 11:9, 10.

5. "And their peace-offerings"—Br.

6. Or: "bait." So Dr.

7. Cp. Acts 1:20.

8. So it shd. be (w. Sep., Syr., Vul.)—Gn.

9. "Impute guilt to their guiltiness"—Carter.

10. Or: "righteousness."

11. ="book of life"—Cp. Exo. 32:32, 33, Ps. 87:6, Isa. 4:3, Eze. 13:9,
Dan. 12:1.

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- 31 And it will be more pleasing to Jehovah than a bullock,—
a bull with horn and split hoof.
32 The humble have seen and rejoice:
ye seekers after God! let your hearts then revive,
33 Because a hearkener to the needy is Jehovah,
and his prisoners hath he not despised.
34 Let the heavens and the earth praise him,
the seas and everything gliding therein
35 Because God will save Zion,
and will build the cities of Judah,
and men shall dwell there and possess it;
36 And the seed of his servants shall inherit it,
and the lovers of his name shall abide therein.

(Lm.) To the Chief Musician.

PARAPHRASE

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Save me, O my God. The floods have risen. Deeper and deeper I sink in the mire; the waters rise around me.

3 I have wept until I am exhausted; my throat is dry and hoarse; my eyes are swollen with weeping, waiting for my God to act.

4 I cannot even count all those who hate me without cause. They are influential men, these who plot to kill me though I am innocent. They demand that I be punished for what I didn't do.

5 O God, You know so well how stupid I am, and You know all my sins.

6 O Lord God of the armies of heaven, don't let me be a stumbling block to those who trust in You. O God of Israel, don't let me cause them to be confused,

7 Though I am mocked and cursed and shamed for Your sake.

8 Even my own brothers pretend they don't know me!

9 My zeal for God and his work¹ burns hot within me. And because I advocate Your cause, Your enemies insult me even as they insult You.

10 How they scoff and mock me when I mourn and fast before the Lord!

1. Literally, "for Your house."

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11 How they talk about me when I wear sackcloth to show my humiliation and sorrow for my sins!

12 I am the talk of the town and the song of the drunkards.

13 But I keep right on praying to you, Lord. For now is the time—You are bending down to hear! You are ready with a plentiful supply of love and kindness! Now answer my prayer and rescue me as You promised.¹

14 Pull me out of this mire. Don't let me sink in. Rescue me from those who hate me, and from these deep waters I am in.

15 Don't let the floods overwhelm me, or the ocean swallow me; save me from the pit that threatens me.

16 O Jehovah, answer my prayers, for Your loving kindness is wonderful; Your mercy is so plentiful, so tender and so kind.

17 Don't hide from me;² for I am in deep trouble. Quick! Come and save me.

18 Come, Lord, and rescue me. Ransom me from all my enemies.

19 You know how they talk about me, and how they so shamefully dishonor me. You see them all and know what each has said.

20 Their contempt has broken my heart; my spirit is heavy within me. If even one would show some pity, if even one would comfort me!

21 For food they give me poison; for my awful thirst they offered me vinegar.

22 Let their joys³ turn to ashes and their peace disappear;

23 Let darkness, blindness and great feebleness be theirs.

24 Pour out Your fury upon them; consume them with the fierceness of Your anger.

25 Let their homes be desolate and abandoned.

26 For they persecute the one You have smitten; and scoff at the pain of the one You have pierced.

27 Pile their sins high and do not overlook them.

28 Let these men be blotted from the list⁴ of the living; do not give them the joys of life with the righteous.

29 But rescue me, O God, from my poverty and pain.

1. Literally, "in the truth of Your salvation."

2. Literally, "Your servant."

3. Literally, "their table."

4. Or, "Let them be blotted out of the book of life."

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30 Then I will praise God with my singing! My thanks will be His praise—

31 That will please Him more than sacrificing a bullock or an ox.

32 The humble shall see their God at work for them. No wonder they will be so glad! All who seek for God shall live in joy.

33 For Jehovah hears the cries of His needy ones, and does not look the other way.

34 Praise Him, all heaven and earth! Praise Him, all the seas and everything in them!

35 For God will save Jerusalem;¹ He rebuilds the cities of Judah. His people shall live in them and not be dispossessed.

36 Their children shall inherit the land; all who love His name shall live there safely.

EXPOSITION

This psalm is remarkable, on the one hand, for its terrible imprecations on enemies; and, on the other, for the frequency with which it is quoted in the New Testament: also, in a minor degree, for its manifestly composite structure, which sets stanzical arrangement at defiance—as may be seen by observing the varying indentations of the lines, which in the present rendering call attention to the numerous metrical changes evident in the Hebrew.

As to this past peculiarity, it may at once be remarked: That only by a drastic re-arrangement of its parts, can continuity of measure and symmetry of form be secured; and, even so, only at the risk of obliterating traces of living adaptation to his own circumstances effected by the final author: whose spontaneous comments on the two original psalms before him, we can here and there with probability distinguish. Readers caring to follow up this suggestion may find assistance by noting: That lines here set fully out in the margin are regarded as pentameters, those pushed in one degree at tetrameters, and those indented two degrees as trimeters, counting with Dr. Briggs by word-group beats. After making reasonable allowance for possible contractions and expansions of the lines without serious disturbance of the sense, there will still surely emerge to the critical eye clear indications that, in its present form, the psalm is decidedly composite.

1. Literally, "Zion."

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Neatly connected with these matters of form arises the always interesting question of authorship. The traditional headline traces the psalm ultimately to David; nor is this note of origin probably so easily discredited as some critics appear to suppose. The opening lines of this psalm remind us of the first stanza of Ps. 40, which we saw reason to conclude came from David's pen; and at the close of those lines (namely at ver. 4c) is a statement so peculiar that scholars have pronounced it a mere proverbial saying, the exact meaning of which is not to be pressed; *when I had seized nothing then had I to make good*. It seems not to have occurred to them to reflect how naturally this would become literally true of David, in those early days when he was accustomed to make raids in the name of King Saul into the territories of the Philistines and others, and when the hatred of the meaner spirits amongst Saul's courtiers had already begun to show itself. As, however, there is no temptation to attribute the entire psalms to David, it becomes easy to remark how well many parts of the psalm could have come from Hezekiah—especially its close. To what extent the early life of Hezekiah was conformed to that of David in respect of the stern discipline of suffering and waiting, perhaps we shall never know, but from slight indications, discovered in Psa. 35, 42 and 43, our minds are familiarised with the possibility that Hezekiah had a considerable share in sufferings such as are so emphatically memorialised in this psalm. Naturally, JEREMIAH stands pre-eminent as a prince of sufferers; and if in Ps. 31 we felt constrained to admit "the weeping prophet" into that gallery of portraits—even though placed there by the Sopherim (Intro., chap. I.)—it would be taking an extreme position to assume that we have none of Jeremiah's work in this psalm. Nevertheless the reasons for so late a date to the whole psalm are probably by no means so conclusive as, for instance, Kirkpatrick deems them to be. But, in truth, anything like adequacy in experience of suffering to prepare the psalmist for penning the more sorrowful of the strains before us, is the less anxiously to be sought, the more we perceive the spirit of the Messiah to have been at work in preparing these lines of lamentation. If even Briggs has to say: "This sufferer is doubtless the ideal community of Ps. 22, Is. 53; "how readily may we assure ourselves that "the ideal community" has to be summed up and made possible by the patiently borne sufferings of the IDEAL MAN who, to our eyes, is in those scriptures so plainly delineated.

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In point of fact, as in previous psalms, so in this, the reachings forth of the Divine Spirit towards something more than types could express, are plainly visible; so that, for instance, as in Ps. 45 no "king most beautiful" can be found in Israel fully answering to the description there given, so probably it would be vain to expect to find in Israel any typical sufferer—or circle of sufferers—exhausting the terms of this psalm. Suffice it to observe, at this point, that whether with types or without them, many and undeserved are the woes which lead up to the great imprecatory passage which fills vers. 22-28 of this psalm: which, indeed, for length and intensity, is really not exceeded by Psalm 109.

Now there are several considerations which may well be urged in mitigation of the difficulty widely felt respecting the OUTCRIES FOR VENGEANCE which are scattered throughout the Old Testament; and which, in the devotional atmosphere of the Psalms, are, to many sensitive minds, painfully unacceptable.

In the *first* place, it should be considered: That desire for the punishment of persistent evil-doers, is an ineradicable instinct of the human breast, rooted in the persuasion that the Judge of all the earth must needs do right, and in the apprehension that, were it otherwise, all faith in the government of God would necessarily come to an end.

In the *second* place it should be remarked: That vengeance is seldom if ever expressed, with any show of Divine approval, except as provoked by atrocious crimes of wilful cruelty and bloodshed. In this very psalm, an aggravation of offence is alleged against those against whom imprecations are uttered:

*Because whom thou thyself had smitted they pursued,
And unto the pain of thy wounded ones they must
needs add.*

With which may be compared Isaiah 47:6 and other passages.

In the *third* place, it should be remembered: That there was no clear revelation, in those older times when the Old Testament was being written, of the reservation of rewards and punishments to a future life. Under such conditions the feeling naturally sprang up: "Now or never must justice be done!" Hence it was inevitable that, in periods of strain due to the triumph of the wicked, good men should cry out for early Divine intervention; so that normal moral conditions of life might be restored, and men generally be reassured that "there is fruit

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to the righteous." Given, then, the instinctive impulse, the bitter occasion, and the time urgency—what wonder that grossly injured men should cry out to God for vengeance?

But in the *fourth* place, it should be called to mind: That to a large extent, times have been constitutionally changed since those Old Testament imprecations were uttered. For the Church of Christ, at least, a new Era has set in; seeing that the example, the commands, and especially the spirit of the Lord Jesus not only forbid outcries for vengeance, but render indulgence in them abhorrent to our better natures: so that what was excusable under the Law is unpardonable under the Gospel. We ourselves have been forgiven; and, at the risk of having our own pardon withdrawn (Mat. 18:21-35), we are solemnly bound by our Master to forgive even our enemies. Their repentance we must seek; and be ready to pardon. Hence we live in the atmosphere of forgiveness, human and divine. This is very much the reason why we are so shocked at the imprecations of the older time, and have to excuse ourselves from making them our own.

But this is not all. We have now, in the *fifth* place, to brace up our minds and to sharpen our vision to perceive and to realise: That the forgiveness of injuries is only a partial and after all temporary manifestation of the spirit of Christ. It is binding on individual Christians, and binding on the collective Church; but it is certainly not binding on the civil magistrate, or he would indeed "hold the sword in vain;" and even on individual Christians and the collective Church, it is, though binding, yet transitionally educative rather than of absolute and permanent obligation. For the present, retaliation is forbidden: for the present, forgiveness of injuries is enjoined: for the present, the forcible suppression of evil is to a real and serious degree postponed: for the present, prayers for the punishment of evil-doers naturally falter on our lips. Adequately to realise this is to reach a vantage ground which reveals on the one hand to what a spiritual elevation our Lord Christ has uplifted us, and on the other hand that the kingdom of God comprehensively viewed has in it lower levels which must be included. The most effective way to bring this home to us to study, not the earthly life only of our Master, but his entire commission as Redeemer and Monarch of mankind. On earth, he did not curse; he only blessed. But he warned, and uttered woes; he denounced, and he predicted; and the woes that trembled on his lips seemed to fore-

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cast the terrible "accursed" which he knew he should have to utter when he should sit as king on his throne of glory (Mat. 25:41). And, finally, "the wrath of the Lamb," in its partial unveiling, is seen in the Apocalypse to strike apprehensive consternation into the hearts of men who would if they could hide themselves from its terrors (Rev. 6:16, 17). So that, when we declare that the spirit of Christ is opposed to imprecations on the doers of wrong, this statement needs to be brought under the regulative restriction: That the Messiah in his humiliation, while as yet he was learning obedience by the things that he suffered (Heb. 2:10) might not curse, and did not; but that, when released by his Father from that severe course of discipline, his "love of righteousness and hatred of lawlessness," may and must so flame forth that "his own right hand shall teach him fearful things" (Ps. 45:4). Whether as it is now with him so it will hereafter be with us, when vested with immortal strength to bear so weighty a responsibility, may to some minds seem speculative and doubtful, and in any case probably remains to be seen. Ideally considered, it might seem fitting that, even to the Church, regarded as the Bride of the Lamb, should NOT be given the work of inflicting punishment on offenders, nor even be assigned the duty of offering prayers for its infliction; but, if not to Christians as such, yet almost certainly to Hebrews, there is in store a prerogative of vengeance of which the most formidable of Gentile nations might do well to stand in fear. Anything more solemnly admonitory in that direction than Ps. 149 cannot well be conceived; seeing that therein Jehovah's very "men of kindness" are taught that it will be nothing less than a splendid service which they shall render when they are commissioned to—

"Let extollings of God be in their throats,
And a two-edged sword be in their hand;
To execute an avenging on the nations,
(To inflict) chastisements on the peoples;
To bind their kings with chains,
And their honorables with fetters of iron,—
To execute upon them the sentence written."

Let Turkey beware! Let Russia beware! And let us British Christians learn to respect and not be wholly ashamed of the punitive element in our Holy Oracles.

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The QUOTATIONS made from this psalm in the N.T. are too instructive to be passed over in silence. From Mat. 27:34 and Jn. 19:28, 29; also from Jn. 2:17, 15:25, and Rom. 15:3, we see how clearly the Apostles discovered in their Lord the Sufferer of the psalm. From Acts 1:20, we gather how the imprecations of the psalm served the useful purpose of preparing the minds of his fellow-apostles for the falling of Judas out of their number. And, finally, from Rom. 11:9, 10, we perceive that this psalm assisted the Apostle Paul in accepting the unwelcome conviction that a temporary hardening of heart had been permitted by God to befall his own chosen people. In fine, while on the one hand there is in the N.T. no distinct echo of the maledictions of this psalm—no direct cursing therefrom repeated; yet, on the other hand, there is no shrinking from the practical use thereof in other ways—on the contrary, the evidence goes to shew how deeply its lessons had engraven themselves on the most godly minds in Israel. We ourselves also, in humble obedience to our Lord, must abstain from cursing—from making our own its prayers for the punishment for the wicked, even the maliciously injurious; but, if we enter intelligently into the reasons why this abstention becomes our duty, we can then study to profit this and the like examples of O.T. imprecations. The high standard of poetic beauty mostly attained by these stern lyrics may excite our reverent admiration; while the intense moral earnestness which they breathe may help to brace our minds to the strong and healthful conviction that in sacred things there should be no trifling, and that, after all, justice is the foundation of grace.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Rotherham feels this psalm practically defies outlining. Scroggie on the other hand offers this outline: "The Song is divided into two equal parts (1-18) and (19-36). Each of the two main parts have three minor parts—This is a personal psalm and the writer is always in view: (1) His Condition 1-6; (2) His Claim 7-12; (3) His Cry 13-18; (4) His Calamity 19-21; (5) His Curse 22-28; (6) His Confidence 29-36." Please read the psalm with this outline before you—see if it fits. Discuss.
2. The authorship of this psalm seems to be a real problem—are we to abandon the Davidic authorship? Discuss.

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3. Why do so many students suppose that Jeremiah was the author? Cf. Jer. 15:15-18; 11:18-23; Lam. 3:53-58. Discuss this possibility.
4. This psalm is quoted often in the New Testament—Cf. Matt. 27:34; Jh. 2:17; 15:25; 19:28, 29; Rom. 15:3; 11:9, 10. What do these New Testament references teach us about this psalm?
5. Rotherham gives five fine observations concerning the OUT-cries FOR VENGEANCE found in this psalm and others. Please list and discuss his observations.

PSALM 70, 71

DESCRIPTIVE TITLE

Prayer Not to be Forsaken in Old Age.

ANALYSIS

Stanza I., vers. 1-3 (70), Prayer against Enemies. Stanza II., vers. 4, 5 (70), Prayer in behalf of Friends. Stanza III., vers. 1-3 (71), Prayer for Rescue and Deliverance, with Appeals to Divine Righteousness and Protection. Stanza IV., vers. 4-6 (71), For Deliverance from One who is Lawless, Perverse and Ruthless, sought by Reference to Youthful Days. Stanza V., vers. 7-9 (71), The Wonders of a Lifetime are pleaded against Rejection in Old Age. Stanza VI., vers. 10-13 (71), Urgency against Appearance of being Forsaken. Stanza VII., vers. 14-16 (71), More Hopeful Strain. Stanza VIII., vers. 17-19 (71), Renewed references to Youth and Age, coupled with desire by this Aged Saint to do more for his Matchless God. Stanza IX., vers. 20-24 (71), In view of Resurrection, whose-souled Praise is Promised, aided by Lute, Lyre, Lips and Tongue.

(Lm.) By David—To bring to remembrance.

- 1 Be pleased¹ O God to rescue me,
Jehovah! to help me oh make haste!
- 2 Put to shame and abashed² be they who are seeking my life,³
Turned back and confounded be they who are taking
pleasure in my hurt,⁴

1. So *Gt.*: cp. 40:13—*Gn.* Cp. throughout w. 40:13-17.

2. Cp. 71:24.

3. *U.*: "soul."

4. Cp. 71:13, 24; also 35:4, 26, 40:14.