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UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF IMPRECATIONS WITHIN THE PSALTER

BY

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DECLARATION

CANDIDATE'S DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own original work
and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or
elsewhere
Candidate's Signature: Date:
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We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this thesis
were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid
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ABSTRACT

Studies in the psalter have generally been done using form-critical and historical-critical methodologies. In studying imprecations within the psalms, most scholars have focused on addressing the issues from Christian ethical perspectives. With the recent surge of newer and more reader-centred methodologies, this thesis deviates from the usual form-critical and Christian ethical approaches to the study of the imprecations in the psalms and rather uses a literary-critical method. With this method of exegesis, which relates with the interaction of the reader with the literary elements in the selected psalms, the thesis focused on revealing how literary elements of parallelism, intensification, and imagery are used to communicate imprecations and how they help the reader identify the nature and characteristics of the imprecations within the psalms. To achieve this, five representative psalms that contain imprecations were purposively selected for this study, namely, Psalms 35, 58, 69, 109, and 137. The study concludes that the psalmists makes adequate use of parallelism, intensification, and imagery to present the imprecations. These are used to achieve various purposes including emphasis, adding to a request, contrast actions, offer further explanation, etc. In addition, the imprecations are normally uttered as an address to God instead of just being wishes. Also, they normally take a "type/deeds of the enemy-imprecation" structure, where imprecations are uttered vis a vis the type/deeds of the enemy. In addition, the imprecations are usually uttered together with a declaration of innocence on the part of the lamenter or allusions of innocence. Finally, it was revealed in the study that imprecations generally have an annihilation motif in them, both These conclusions are deemed relevant for the directly and indirectly.

Ghanaian Christian community who make use of the psalms as well as the imprecations in their prayers. There are lots of implications that the conclusions have on Christian view of prayers and imprecations. These implications have a major impact on the way Ghanaian Christians need to view their enemies and the prayers they offer against them.

KEY WORDS

Old Testament

Lex Talionis

Literary-criticism

Psalms

Imprecations

Ghanaian Christianity

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DEDICATION

To my beloved wife, Rhoda Anima Boateng Andor and our daughter, Osapu-Egyeboare Akua Andor.

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CHAPTER ONE

THE PSALTER AND THE LEX TALIONIS

Introduction

Many people, especially Christians, make use of the content of the book of Psalms extensively (Adeogun, 2005). In fact, "few books of the Old Testament have been read more than the book of Psalms. This is because, whether it is through Jewish and Christian liturgy or through personal piety, they seem to come closest to the heart of believers" (Soggin, 1982, p. 363). This popular usage could be because the lyrics of the Hebrew Scriptures have stretched an influence that goes far beyond the confines of organized religion throughout the course of cultural history (Gerstenberger, 1985).

The psalms can be described as both the centre of the life and worship of Christian congregations and in the personal life of each individual (Miller, 1986). Quoting from Weiser, Sabourin (1970) states that the psalter is the book that the Christian community find easiest to approach in a direct and personal way. This same view is asserted by Adamo David Tuesday (2007) who states that it is the easiest to approach directly and personally in situations such as joy, sorrow, pain, and confusion. The lyrics influence many people, Christians and non-Christians alike.

While the use of psalms for various reasons can be established, one will realize that the psalms can be described as belonging to "individual poets who sought to give expression to their inward feelings and emotional experiences so others might learn from and share them" (Hayes, 1979, p. 288).

Unfortunately, some of the emotions may not be considered virtuous in today's world. One such emotion is the idea of imprecation. That is, the "invoking of judgment, calamity or curse" (Vos, 1949, p. 123). The psalms that have these imprecations contain "so much hatred, austerity and vengeance" (Davies, 1892, p. 154). This phenomenon is seen in a number of psalms within the psalter.

These emotions, though may not be considered virtuous and appropriate for today's Christian, are seen among most Christians in Africa, and Ghana in particular. Many Christians in Ghana pray against their enemies and wish evil for all those who hate them. The "back to sender" phenomenon that is prevalent in the prayers of most churches as well as individual prayers is an indication that the use of imprecations in our part of the world is rampant. This stems, perhaps, from the African understanding that one's enemy must be ostracized in order for one to progress in life.

Within the psalter also, sin is generally considered as having a sequel. This is the proposition of the *lex talionis* which seems to stress that the sinner's conduct falls back on his head (Sabourin, 1970). This stems from the law of retaliation in the Torah, "an eye for an eye" which was intended to prevent excessive revenge by giving a punishment that is equal to the damage caused (Sabourin, 1970). The concept of *lex talionis* is scattered throughout the psalter and it appears that the imprecations are linked to it. This seems to be the thinking of many Ghanaian Christians – whoever tries to destroy God's children should be destroyed by God. This thinking has characterised both individual and communal prayers in African Christianity. Such a mind-set among Christians makes a study of this nature relevant.

Statement of the Problem

Sabourin (1970) indicates that the lex talionis and the concept of retribution make it apposite to discuss "a problem that has long been a worry to many, mostly Christian, interpreters of the psalms: the imprecations of the psalmists, these passionate appeals to divine vengeance against God's enemies or against the persecutors of the just" (Sabourin, 1970, p. 15). The psalms with imprecations pose a problem for interpreters who live in a society where forgiveness is encouraged. As a result, many commentators on the psalms have attempted to reconcile the issues in these psalms with today's society. In attempting to do this, most of them simply glean from the background of the particular Psalm and explain why the author wrote with such imprecation. In addition, many scholars who have worked on the imprecatory psalms have done so from a Christian ethical point of view. Because of the extent of research that has been done on the form, nature, and structure of the imprecations in the psalter, scholars seem divided on which psalms can be described as imprecatory and which cannot. These problems leave a gap that needs to be filled. There are a number of questions that need answers. Literarily, do the imprecations in the psalms have a peculiar form or structure? Do they have some general characteristics? Do their form and structure provide clues to their meaning and understanding?

Objectives of the Study

This study focuses on a literary study of imprecations that are found in the psalter. The study seeks to meet the following objectives:

- To offer a study of selected psalms that contain imprecations from a literary-critical dimension, instead of the Christian ethical approach with which most scholars have studied them.
- To illustrate how literary elements of parallelism, intensification, and imagery are used in expressing imprecations in the psalter.
- To identify the nature and characteristics that imprecations often take in the psalter.
- To identify how the concept of imprecations is presented in the book of Psalms.

Delimitations of the study

This study is delimited to only a few portions of selected psalms that contain imprecations. The selected psalms for the study are 35, 58, 69, 109, and 137. This selection is purposively made to reflect psalms with imprecations under various categories. A review of the various identifications of imprecatory psalms reveals that Psalms 69, 109, and 137 are common to all the different views. Whereas most of the imprecations are found within different categories of psalms such as psalms of individual and communal lament (Kelley, 1984), these three Psalms are described by most scholars as imprecatory. In addition to these three, Psalms 35 and 58 are selected to include the representative nature of the selection.

The selection is purposively done to include psalms that contain imprecations in several verses (e.g., 35, 69, 109) and the ones that contain imprecations in few verses (e.g., 58, 137), psalms which contain imprecations against individual enemies (e.g. 35, 69, 109), and communal enemies - i.e.,

societal (e.g., 58) and national (e.g. 137), and psalms that are long (e.g., 35, 69, 109), and psalms that are short (e.g. 58, 137).

Also, the study is purely exegetical and the exegetical approach that has been chosen for the research is literary-criticism. The findings are therefore limited to meaning that is derived from the use of this a literary reading of selected Psalms. This method focuses on identifying the literary form, structure and pattern of the imprecations and how they relate with the meaning of the entire lament. This involves the analysis of the use of imagery, parallelism, and intensification in imprecations.

Methodology

As has been stated, the approach adopted for the exegetical study is a literary-critical reading of the selected psalms. The literary method used is the "new" literary criticism and not the "old" literary criticism which "dealt with units of the Bible, and with the historical settings in which the writing occurred" (Habel, 1971, p. vi). This is what has popularly been referred to as *Literarkritik*. It asks how the text came to be in the first place and whether it is made up from a diversity of underlying sources (Barton, 2009). The most common term for *Literarkritik* in English is now no longer "literary criticism" but "source criticism." (Barton, 2009).

The "new" literary criticism involves a sketch of the literary context and a lexical analysis of the passages that are selected for this study (Psalms 35, 58, 69, 109, 137). This study aims at revealing the nature and characteristics of imprecations within the psalter. This aim will be met by use of this "new" literary criticism.

A look at the interpretive approaches to the psalter reveals that "the interpretation of the book of Psalms in the twentieth century has been dominated by the form-critical and cult-functional methods" (McCann, 1992, p. 117). As is expected, these methods are aimed at determining the category of each psalm as it relates with the literary type or genre. It also seeks to determine the setting in which the psalms functioned in the cultic or communal life of ancient Israel and Judah. While these are important, some portions of psalms may not be fully understood if the reader approaches them from these form-critical and cult-functional methodologies.

Adamo (2007) mentions that older approaches to the study of the psalter have always included the determination of the author, the date, literary types and forms, the basic theological thoughts amongst many others. He adds that, these approaches to the psalter are considered universal and imposed on other scholars as the main, if not the only, criteria by which the study of the psalter can be judged authentic and scholarly. This, however, should not be the case.

Commenting on issues in the interpretation of psalms, Patrick D. Miller (1986) states that "form-critical study of the psalms has dominated, if not controlled, the way in which this part of Scripture has been handled during this century" (Miller, 1986, p. 3). Though they have produced exciting results and are still being used productively, "it has become clear in recent years, however, that form criticism and the cult-functional method are not sufficient" (McCann, 1992, p. 117).

Adamo (2007) comments on the history of the use of various approaches to the study of the psalms and explains the shift to a new direction as follows:

Other scholars, having recognized the limitation of the approach of form-critical and functional approaches to the study of the book of Psalms, have called for a totally new direction in which scholarship should travel. James Muileberg, one of the dominant scholars, called for the need to supplement form-critical approaches with what he called rhetorical criticism. According to him, scholars should take very seriously the rhetorical and literary features of each Psalm in order to recognize "the actuality of the particular text." Today, rhetorical criticism has joined the form-critical approach to become one of the major forces in biblical interpretation (Adamo, 2007, p. 27).

Charles R. Gianotti (2001) explains the approach that a study of the psalms should take in the following lines:

As C. S. Lewis points out, "The psalms must be read as poems, as lyrics, with all the license and all the formalities, the hyperbola, the emotion rather than logical connections, which are proper to lyric poetry." If this is not recognized, then our interpretations will be hopelessly inadequate. Studying poetry includes identifying figures of speech, literary structures and

the prevalent use in Hebrew of what is called "parallelism." (Gianotti, 2001, p. 3)

The elements that Gianotti mentions are very vital to the study of psalms in the twenty-first century. This means that the interpretation of poetic materials must involve identification of figures of speech, literary structures, and parallelism. These elements are found in the new literary critical approach to exegesis. Describing the "new" literary criticism, D.J.A. Clines and J. C. Exum (1993) include any work that focuses on the text as a unitary object, considering its style, rhetoric or structure as new tendencies (Clines & Exum, 1993). However, they exclude some literary criticisms that have these "new" tendencies such as feminist, Marxist, reader-response, and deconstructionists. According to them, the new literary criticism "signifies all the criticisms that are post-structuralist" (Clines & Exum, 1993, p. 12). Spencer describes this approach as the "postmodern view" (Spencer, 2012, p. 48; cf. Keener, 2016; Green, 2017). He explains that interpreters are "generally frustrated with elusive excavations for authorial identity and intention" hence they "prefer the more palpable company of texts and readers" (Spencer, 2012, p. 48).

Barton opines that:

"... in the last few decades there has been a radical shift in biblical studies, particularly outside the German world, toward a new sense of 'literary criticism,' the sense it has in general literary studies: a form of aesthetic appreciation of texts. In its current North American and British form, this seems as far removed as it could be from the 'reconstructive' tendency of *Literarkritik*. It works with the text as it now lies before us and

self-consciously rejects as irrelevant (or even historically inaccurate) hypotheses of earlier stages underlying the present text." (Barton, 2009, p. 525).

In a series of works, Alter has outlined a literary approach to the Hebrew Bible that takes its norms from the "close reading" of texts usual in the world of English and comparative literary Studies. Alter contrasts his work with *Literarkritik* by describing the latter as "excavative," a kind of literary archaeology. His description is a useful way of pointing to the tendency to look at earlier strata in the text rather than at the text that has come down to us.

Daniel J. Harrington (1990) explains literary criticism to mean the posing of questions about the ability of the language to express thought, significance of literary structure for meaning, and the relationship of content to literary form (Harrington, 1990). These are the questions that scholars in the field of literature often ask. Because words are considered the raw materials of any form of literature, the literary critic is "first of all interested in the words of the text and the images and symbols that they evoke" (Harrington, 1990, p. 3). Because of this, the intelligent reader is supposed to have confidence about the accuracy of the text and the meaning that the various parts of the text convey.

This "new" literary criticism, as described by Clines and Exum (1993), is said to be eclectic. This involves free movement "from one critical approach to another, combining materialist with reader-response criticism, psychoanalytic with ideological criticism, and so on" (Clines & Exum, 1993, pp. 12-13). In addition, there is a spirit of goodwill and even corporation within the interweaving of methods. This stands in contrast to the

disagreements and misunderstandings that characterize literary criticisms in general.

Clines and Exum (1993) mention that rhetorical criticism – which concerns itself with the way the language of texts is deployed to convey meaning; and structuralism – which concerns itself with patterns of human organizations and thought are no longer considered "new" (Clines & Exum, 1993). The ones that they consider "new" are Feminist Criticism, Materialist or political criticism, psychoanalytical criticism, reader-response criticism, and deconstruction (Clines & Exum, 1993).

Describing the elements in literary criticism, Daniel J. Harrington (1990) mentions five major concerns; namely, "the words, the characters, the story or thought line, the literary form, the relation between form and content" (Harrington, 1990, p. 5). The elements mentioned are described as aspects of the method that "can help the reader to enter the world of a written text and understand it more thoroughly than ever before" (Harrington, 1990, p. 5).

Harrington (1979) also gives a step by step outline of how one can go by literary criticism. In this outline, he mentions that the first question that the reader needs to ask is what words, images and symbols appear. He explains that the reader may sometimes consult a dictionary, commentary, or any other work to answer this important question correctly. The second question, according to Harrington (1979), should concern the overall movement of the text. The question should be about what characters appear and what their relationships are. The third question would also relate with the overall movement of the text, but it will really ask about the progress of thought. This

question demands that the reader gets to know how the text flows in order to increase the awareness of the artistic devices used. The fourth and fifth questions help make the notion of the artistic communication clearer. This is because, they ask about what literary form the text has, and how the form contributes in expressing the content. These steps, according Harrington, are applicable to both the New and the Old Testaments (Harrington, 1979; Harrington, 1981).

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent, the use of "new" literary methods will be more appropriate in the interpretation of the psalter. Since the psalms are made up of various literary elements, it will be important to survey the literary elements using literary criticism. This will help address the main objectives of this research; namely, to understand the concept of imprecations in the book of Psalms, to unearth any peculiar structure, nature or characteristics that imprecations have, and to ascertain what meaning they reveal using literary elements of parallelism, imagery and intensification.

These elements are described extensively by Alter (1985) in his book, *The Art of Biblical Poetry*. Alter begins by discussing the dynamics of parallelism. Here, he reviews the various views on the formal elements that constitute a poem in the Hebrew Bible. While some scholars see parallelism, others have raised questions about such prevalence. He also posits the existence of ambiguities about boundaries between prose and poetic passages in the Old Testament. He, however, cites Genesis 4:23, 24 (Lamech's chant) as a poetic piece and indicates that the text is set apart from the surrounding passages by the principle of parallelism on which it is organized. In this text, he demonstrates the existence of a parallelism of meaning. Parallelism of

meaning is observed where the poet precisely echoes in the second half of a line every component of the first half (Alter, 1985).

Alter goes on to suggest that literature, no matter how simple or sophisticated, thrives on parallelism, stylistically and structurally. He, however, goes on to mention that literary expression abhors complete parallelism. Explaining how poets handle numbers in a semantic parallelism, he indicates that one would find pairings if the system was based on synonymity. He also talks about the rule that scholars have generally observed which indicates that "if you introduce a number in the first verset, you have to go up in the second verset, either by adding one to the number or a decimal multiple plus the number itself" (Alter, 1985, p. 11). For example, the use of seven in one verset will mean that the second verset should contain eight or seventy-seven. Parallelism is identified and expressed in several other ways: emphasis (where the second line sets out to emphasise the message of the first), the use of synonyms (where synonyms of words in the first line are used in the second line), explanation (where the second line seems to explain an element in the first), "focusing" (this is what Alter (1985) describes as a situation where there is a movement from a general category to specific instance. For example, in spatial or geographical references, the second line is usually a smaller spatial entity within the first), the use of "elliptical parallelism" (where some elision calls for double- duty functions of a verb in the first line to correspond with the second). These elements of parallelism will be used in the analysis of imprecations in the selected psalms.

Apart from parallelism, this analysis will also involve the use of structures of intensification in biblical poetry. Alter concludes that the impulse

of semantic intensification leads to expectations of a continuous linear development either to a climax or to a climax and reversal. He also observes the way structures of intensification are used in the prophetic books. He observes that "prophetic poems are often built on a single rising line of intensity or a zooming-in focus from the process of retribution to its human objects" (Alter, 1985, p. 73). According to him, poetry, in general, involves a linear development of meaning. Thus, this analysis will consider how the psalmists in the selected psalms make use of intensification to zoom-in focus or develop meaning.

The psalms, like other poetic aspects of scripture, mostly make use of imagery. Alter (1985) talks about agricultural, anatomical, cosmic, cosmogonic, mythological, orifical, and birth imageries in the Bible. These are normally expressed in the form of metaphors or similes. Though it is believed that imagery in biblical poetry often serves a secondary purpose (Alter, 1985), they are very important and they help to make the meaning of the text clearer. Alter (1985) proposes that imagery in biblical poems can be generally observed in three categories: namely; conventional images, intensive images, and innovative images. Conventional images constitute the majority of cases and they are mostly found in the psalms. Intensive images mostly build on conventional metaphors and similes with a particular figure being pursued and elaborated through several lines or even the whole poem. Innovative images involve the use of imagination. Though the rarest of the three forms, innovative imagery invites the readers to imagine the world through inventive similitude and they often arrest the attention of readers through an original or startling image (Alter, 1985). The use of imagery will be examined in the

exegetical exercise to make the meaning of the imprecations and the entire psalm clearer.

These elements (parallelism, intensification, and imagery), which shall characterize the exegesis, will help us understand how the words, images and symbols are used and how the characters involved relate with each other. Once these elements are analysed, the text will be clearer and all the literary elements and characteristics of the imprecations will stand out. It must be noted that the translation from the Hebrew to English will be done by this researcher. This is to offer a literal translation and ensure that the literary elements are not missing in the English text. The analysis will also involve a study of how the imprecations are fused into the various laments. This will help us relate the imprecations with the overall meaning and message of the psalm. These analyses will not include meter and rhythm since they are not likely to contribute much to the establishment of the relation of the imprecation to the meaning of the psalm.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section shall discuss various pieces of literature on the major ideas in this thesis. The literature review includes literature on the psalms and the concept of *lex talionis*. The literature on the psalms will focus on the titles, classifications, and groupings and the review on the *lex talionis* will focus on meanings, historical developments, and relationship with the biblical "eye-for-an-eye" principle in imprecations. Whereas a review of literature and studies on the subject of imprecations and imprecatory Psalms are important, they

have been reserved for further review and discussion in the next chapter. This is because this chapter focuses mainly on the psalter and the *lex talionis* and seeks to introduce the entire thesis.

The Psalms

The book of Psalms is described as "a collection of Hebrew poetry and it stands unique in the world of literature. Its beauty has won an elite status, far surpassing all other poetic literature" (Gianotti, 2001, p. 2). It is a book that is mostly placed "at the head of the Kethubim (the third, final section of the Hebrew Bible) and thus follow the tradition of the Jews of Central Europe" (Kraus, 1988, p. 12). This means according to canonical arrangement in the Hebrew Bible, the book appears first in the third section, the *Kethubim*. This section of the review includes views of scholars on the title of the psalter, as well as classifications and groupings.

The Title of the Psalter

The titles of the psalms are mostly descriptive of the character of the poem, connected with the musical setting or performance, referring to liturgical use of psalms to be sung at certain times, relating to authorship, and describing the occasion of the psalm (Francisco, 1950).

The psalms have different titles describing them and Sabourin (1970) goes further to state the number of times that each term appears in the psalter. According to his reckoning, *shir* (song)appears thirty times; *mizmor* (psalm), fifty-seven times; *maskil* (a didactic psalm or an artistic psalm), thirteen times; *miktam* (may allude to a hidden or mysterious meaning or may suggest a golden poem), in Psalms 16 and 56-60; *siggayon* (a complaint or penitential

psalm), in Psalm 7 only; and *tehillah* (a song of praise), only in Psalm 145, though its masculine plural form is used to describe the whole collection of psalms (Sabourin, 1970).

Apart from its preferred title, *tehillim*, the book of Psalms has other titles. Some of these titles are *sipper tehillim*, *tellin*, or *sipper tellin*. The term *Tehillim* is a special formation from *tehillah*, the technical term for psalms of the hymn type (Kraus, 1988). In addition, the psalms are often designated by terms such as *shir* (song), *mizmor* (Psalm), *maskil* (a contemplative poem), *Miktam* (inscription poem or poem containing pithy meaning), *tephillah* (Prayers), or *shiggayon* (with obscure meaning) (Gianotti, 2001).

Its English title "psalms" is derived from the Greek word "psalmos" which means "song of praise." Soggin (1982) explains that the Greek psalterion is a stringed instrument and "psalmos" is a song accompanied by it. This ("Psalmos") was the title used by the Greek translators of the Old Testament (Gianotti, 2001). This is probably because its Hebrew title tehillim actually means "songs of praise." Though the title "songs of praise" is not an accurate description of all the 150 psalms, "the title probably originated in a time when the psalter was used and understood primarily as the 'hymnal of the Jewish community" (Kraus, 1988, p. 11).

Clyde Francisco (1950) asserts that the titles are not part of the original text. According to him, they were probably the work of ancient editors of the collections (Francisco, 1950). However, Andrew Hill and John Walton (2000) explain that

even the oldest manuscripts of the old Testament contain the titles, though they are not part of the composition proper. If

they are later additions by an editor, they are still very ancient and therefore have a claim to authenticity (Hill & Walton, 2000, p. 342).

In either case, the titles and superscriptions of the psalms are not the focus of this study. While we can side with Hill and Walton about the canonical authenticity of these titles, the fact still remains that they are later additions by editors.

Classifications and Groupings

There is a generally accepted division of the psalter into five books:

	D 1 1	D 1 1	4.1
•	Book 1	Psalms 1	-41

• Book 2 Psalms 42 – 72

• Book 3 Psalms 73 – 89

• Book 4 Psalms 90 – 106

• Book 5 Psalms 107 – 150

Apart from these the psalms are mostly divided into smaller or larger collections on the basis of superscriptions and shared key words (Schmidt, 1984). Thus, there are categories such as Enthronement psalms, Hallelujah psalms, etc. The categorizations variedly differ from one author to another. Francisco (1950) calls his classification "natural groups" implying that they fall in such groupings naturally. In his classification, there are:

- 1. Fifteen psalms of ascents (120-134)
- Seven alphabetical psalms (25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, and 145). With
 Psalm 119 being the most complete and elaborate example and Psalms
 9 and 10 giving some evidence of conformity to the order of letters.

3. Forty-two Elohist psalms (42 - 83), with all the rest regarded as Yahwistic.

4. Eleven Hallelujah psalms (111-113; 115 – 117; 146 – 150).

In this classification, though Francisco calls them "natural" groups, it is obvious that such cogent and clear grouping is not observed in the psalms. Even in his classification, they overlap. For example, some alphabetical psalms are also listed in another group. This makes it difficult to state in clear terms that the groupings fall in place naturally.

Hill and Walton (2000) identify the collections differently. According to them, apart from the generally accepted five-book structure, "smaller collections exist within the larger whole" (Hill & Walton, 2000, p. 342) as follows:

• Davidic group I: 3-41

• Sons of Korah Group I: 42-49

• Davidic Group II: 51-65

• Asaph Group: 73-83

• Sons of Korah Group II: 84-88 (except 86)

• Congregational Praise Group I: 95-100

• Hallelujah Group: 111-117

• Songs of Ascent to Jerusalem: 120-134

• Davidic Group III: 138-145

• Congregational Praise Group II: 146-150

This classification is done on the basis of authorship and key words. It also follows the canonical arrangement of the psalms. Soggin (1982) isolates the collections differently. In his classification, he has the Davidic psalter (3-

41); the Elohistic psalter (42-89) which is made up of the psalms of the Korahites (42-49; 84; 85; 87; 88), the psalms of Asaph (50; 73-83), a second Davidic psalter (51-65; 68-70); Psalms 90 – 150 which do not present any elements that allow for any historical and traditional identity; and Psalms 1 and 2 which seem to have different and special settings since "there is no connection between the content of the two psalms" (Soggin, 1982, p. 368). His claim to the lack of connection between Psalms 1 and 2 may not necessarily be true as the two psalms are mostly considered an introduction to the whole book presenting evidence of the editor's work and purpose (Hill & Walton, 2000). Though they may have different and special settings, the two psalms still have at least an editorial connection.

Sabourin (1974) accepts the classification of the psalter by Kissane into three main collections. He also draws out partial collections within the three main collections:

- A. Yahwistic series of the "prayers of David" (3-41)
- B. The Elohistic psalter (42 89): a unified collection
 - a. The psalter of the psalms of Core (42-49)
 - b. Elohistic series of the "prayers of David" (51-72)
 - c. psalms of Asaph (50:73-83)
 - d. Yahwistic supplement to the Elohistic psalter (84-89)
- C. Later Yahwistic collection (90 150: without real unity)
 - a. Psalms of Praise of Yahweh's kingship (93-99)
 - b. The alleluia- psalms (104 106; 111- 117; 135; 146 150) with Pss. 113- 118 forming the *hallel* of the ancient synagogue
 - c. The "Pilgrim psalms" (120 134)

- d. Other "Davidic psalms" (101, 103, 108 110, 138 145)
- e. Ten other isolated psalms

The problem with this classification is that Psalms 1 and 2 are left out unclassified. He does not also explain why they have been left out nor does he account for them. In addition, the classification of the psalms based on their use of divine names cannot be completely relied on. This is because *Elohim* is not completely absent in the Yahwistic collection, neither is *Yahweh* completely absent in the Elohistic collection. Moreover, the use of the divine name is not necessarily a definite reference that warrants attention as it could be arbitrarily used by the composers of the psalms.

Claus Westermann (1981) notes that Herman Gunkel's epoch making work on the categorization of the psalms reveals that the psalms are made of the following major categories:

- Hymns
- Laments of the people
- Laments of the individual
- Songs of thanksgiving of the individual
- "Spiritual Poems" ("the real treasure of the psalter")

This classification by Herman Gunkel has for a long time been recognized as the trailblazer in categorizing the psalms. Despite its admiration and general recognition, a careful study will pose a number of questions; namely, why does he call the "spiritual poems" the real treasure of the psalter? Does that mean the other groups are not as precious as the so-called "spiritual songs"? What about communal praise? He doesn't seem to provide satisfactory answers to these questions. Westermann, however, concludes after

analysing Gunkel's categories, that "in the psalter there are two dominant categories, the Hymn (including the Psalm of thanks) and the lament" (Westermann, 1981, p. 18). Thus, he talks about the polarity of petition and praise. He then divides the psalms of praise into two groups on the bases of mode of praise: declarative and descriptive praise, with the declarative praise subdivided into the declarative psalm of praise of the people and the declarative psalm of praise of the individual. He also divides that psalms of petition, according to subject, into Lament or petition of the people and Lament or petition of the individual. He concludes that:

All the "smaller categories" are not to be placed alongside these two great categories, but are to be included in them or can be derived from them. That is to say, in them a motif from one of the two major categories has become independent" (Westermann, 1981, p. 35).

This implies that, apart from the two major categories, all others are "small." Though Hill and Walton (2000) also emphasize these two categories, they also add a third category: wisdom. They explain that each psalm, for the most part, falls into only one of the classifications. From previous classifications, it is quite unclear whether this is a plausible assertion. They even point out an exception in Psalm 22, where verses 1-21 are a lament and verses 22-31 comprise a praise psalm. They however go ahead to explain that "both the praise and lament psalms have typical characteristic that make them easily identifiable" (Hill & Walton, 2000, p. 344).

For the sake of this study, such an assertion implies that psalms that are considered "imprecatory" are not, strictly speaking, a major category of the

psalter. Rather, they can be classified as part of one of the "major" categories

– Praise or lament. This seems to be what A. A. Anderson (1980) follows, but
with an addition of royal psalms and other types he refers to as "minor types".

In his outline of the psalms, he has the following elements:

1. The praises of God

- a. Hymns or Descriptive Praises
 - i. Praises of God in general
 - ii. Psalms celebrating Yahweh's Kingship
 - iii. Songs of Zion (indirect Praises of God)
- b. Declarative praises of the individual or individual Songs of Thanksgiving
- c. Declarative Praises of the People, or National Songs of
 Thanksgiving

2. Laments

- a. Laments of the Individual
 - i. Prayers of the unjustly accused man
 - ii. Psalms of penitence
- b. Laments of the Nation
- c. Psalms of Confidence
- 3. Royal psalms
- 4. Minor types

From his outline, Anderson seems to place the Praises of God and the Laments as the major categories. With the exception of the Royal psalms and a few other types, none of the psalms can be placed independently of the two major categories. Even with the royal psalms, he states that "in actual fact,

they do not form an independent literary type; rather they comprise psalms of *various* categories. Their distinguishing feature is the subject matter which concerns the relationship between God and the King" (Anderson, 1980, p. 39). One will agree with him in that while some of the psalms can have a distinguishing feature (for example, kingship, etc.), they may also be classified into either praise or lament.

From the forgoing, it is clear that the psalter has received wide scholarly discussion. It is also clear that much of the discussion has been on the title and the classifications. In addition, the review reveals that scholars are generally divided regarding the categories and classifications of the Psalms. While some categories are regarded as important, others are simply seen as belonging to a major category and a sub-category. Some categories are even dismissed as being non-existent. There is therefore lack of consensus among scholars on these classifications. The focus of this research, however, is on the theme of imprecations that are scattered throughout the psalter. It is observed that laments contain several elements including wishes and curses (Anderson, 1980). These wishes and curses are the elements often described as "imprecations".

This researcher agrees that the psalms can be placed into two major categories; praise and lament, but other categories are also observed. Because of this, one must be cautious of over-generalizing the identification of only two major categories to the extent of neglecting and rejecting other groups and categories. This caution is important because some categories are sometimes dismissed as being non-existent. One such classification is the group that may be described as Imprecatory psalms. Though imprecations are not yet

regarded, strictly speaking, a category of the psalms, it is undeniable that they are found in the psalms, especially in most of the Psalms of Lament. The focus of this research, however, is on the imprecations that are scattered throughout the psalter. It is observed that laments contain several elements including wishes and curses (Anderson, 1980). These wishes and curses are the elements often described as "imprecations". There are several arguments on whether there can be a recognized group of psalms designated "Imprecatory Psalms" or not. If this is possible, which psalms will and will not belong to this category? This subject will be discussed in detail in the next chapter of this work.

Presently, attention will be turned to a discussion of the concept of *lex talionis*- the law of retaliation, which stands as the basis for imprecations.

The lex talionis

The *lex talionis* (or "an eye for an eye" as it is commonly known) is probably the most widely quoted phrase from biblical law. Scholars generally see the formula in three passages of the Old Testament: Exodus 21:22-25 (the case of third party injury), Leviticus 24:10-23 (the half-breed blasphemer narrative), and Deuteronomy 19:15-21 (the case of false accusation). Although the phrase, "an eye for an eye", likely finds its roots in earlier sources, it is most often associated with the Old Testament (Vroom, 2009; Hekmat, 2010).

The Latin phrase "lex talionis" (translated "law of retaliation") is derived from Roman law. This Latin origin notwithstanding, the roots of the biblical formulation (eye for eye) is probably from other Mesopotamian legal bodies. For this reason, the lex talionis is simply linked with the biblical

formulation of retaliation (ie, the rule of "an eye for an eye"), linking the two concepts. *Lex talionis* is a commonly used term among scholars in various disciplines, especially in legal studies. It can also be properly used in the study of imprecations and prayers against enemies since such prayers appear to operate on the same principle. The proposition of the *lex talionis* seems to stress that the sinner's conduct falls back on his head (Sabourin, 1970). It is clear that both the *lex talionis* and the imprecations require the infliction upon a wrongdoer of the same injury which he has caused another (Harney, 1993).

Some assert that the *lex talionis* stems from the law of retaliation in the Torah, "an eye for an eye" whose intent was to prevent excessive revenge by giving a punishment that is considered equal to the damage caused (Sabourin, 1970). The passage in Leviticus reads: "And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he has done, so it shall be done to him; breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he has caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him". (Leviticus 24: 19-20). In Exodus 21, a section dealing with the situation which arises when mischief has been caused, the law reads: "you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe" (Exodus 21:23-25).

Another version is found in Deuteronomy 19:15-21 which begins by delineating the proper procedure that should be followed when one person testifies against another. The priests and the judges, as the representatives of the community, are advised not to accept the charge unless there are two or three witnesses who will support it. After clarifying this general principle, the text focuses on the specific case when one person accuses another of a wrongdoing of some kind which turns out to be false. The false witness should

be punished in the same manner and degree as he intended to do to another. Within this context, the *lex talionis* is invoked. According to Novakovic (2006), its purpose, as a fear factor, is to discourage any similar deeds in the future.

This law in the Torah is often considered the basis of the *lex talionis*. This is so because; it is considered a law of retaliation. While this is true, the Mosaic talion may not be the basis of the *lex talionis*. This is because the term is in Latin, a language which came several years later, though it was applied to a concept in the law of ancient people. According to Myers, the concept of "eye for eye" in the law, for centuries, was believed to have originated with Moses and the Jewish law. He however adds that after the discovery of the Code of Hammurabi, scholars realised it (the Hammurabi Code) not only included *lex talionis*, but it literally dictated laws for eyes and teeth similar to the ones found in the Bible (Myers, 2009, p. 1).

While several scholars seem to allude to the fact that the law was not original to ancient Israel, Kim (2006) argues that an attempt to find the origin of the *lex talionis* is not an easy task. According to him, there are no direct records other than biblical laws though South-western Asian Laws have good parallels. Scholars such as Myers use these parallels to conclude that ancient Israel might have borrowed from their neighbours and predecessors. Though this is possible, Kim stresses that the existence of these parallels does not automatically point to the origin of the *lex talionis*. To him, the origin should be traced back to agricultural village life of ancient Israel. From an anthropological perspective, he noted that the development (and application) of the *lex talionis* should be understood as a complex process, depending on a

period and its social structure/power. Thus, its origin should not be taken as a one-time and simple phenomenon but from a process that reveals that various social contexts (small villages, towns, clans, state, and monarchy) can change the focus of the *lex talionis* (Kim, 2006, pp. 2-3).

The talionic law prescribes that an injury must be requited by a reciprocal injury, no less and no more. It flows from the understanding that crime demands punishment and that unpunished crime pollutes the entire land. Perhaps it can be viewed under the principle asserted by Robert G. Moons in his work of fiction. He asserts that "Sometimes, to destroy evil it takes something equally dark" (Moons, 2012, p. 1). Thus, offenses need to be punished.

Punishment serves many purposes. Kinsella (1996) asserts that punishment can deter others from crime and prevent the offender from committing further crimes. It may even:

rehabilitate some criminals, if it is not capital. It can satisfy a victim's longing for revenge, or his relatives' desire to avenge. Punishment can also be used as a lever to gain restitution, recompense for some of the damage caused by the crime. For these reasons, the issue of punishment is, and always has been, of vital concern to civilized people (Kinsella, 1996, p. 51).

While Kinsella is right regarding the importance of punishment to the criminal and potential criminals, it is not always true. Punishments may have those benefits, but there are examples of people who return to their old ways after suffering punishment. Despite this, the issue of punishment has been a

concern among civilised people. This concern also includes the desire to know whether the kind of punishment meted out can be justified or not (Banks, 2004; Kinsella, 1996).

To achieve this, scholars generally advocate a retributive/retaliatory theory of punishment (Kinsella, 1996; Posner, 1980). This retributive concept is found in the *lex talionis* of early Roman law, the Old Testament "eye for an eye" precept, and other early codes and it has a long history in law and Philosophy (Parisi, 2001; Posner, 1980). Though different in origin and sometimes content, they all reflect the same concept. Hence it will be proper to refer to the Old Testament "eye for an eye" precept as a form of the *lex talionis* since it also reflects the concept of retribution. By this concept, punishment is treated as a form of recompense paid by the criminal. However, punishment seems to generally serve the purposes of retribution, deterrence, and retaliation. If punishment is viewed only as a form of recompense, the focus will eventually be lost and other purposes may not be met. The *lex talionis* in Deuteronomy, for instance, functions both as a punitive and as a preventive measure (Novakovic, 2006).

It is evident today that "the desire to punish a wrongdoer and obtain restitution from him appears deeply rooted in human nature" (Parisi, 2001, p. 3). According to Fridja, the desire for vengeance is one of the most potent of human sufferings. He lists a number of literary examples to prove that vengeance has been one of the major pre-occupations in the world of literature (Fridja, 1994). It is also a major theme in history and current affairs, it is not only restricted to religious or political action.

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It is important to point out here that the focus of ancient legal systems was not on compensating the victim, but punishing the offender. Punishment is used in the sense of a sanction imposed for a criminal offence. Punishment is normally *for*, or *in response to*, some action, inaction, feature, or status of the person punished. When a person is punished, it is because he is considered a wrongdoer and we typically want to teach him or others a lesson, or exact vengeance or restitution, for what he has done (Kinsella, 1980). According to the definition of Flew (1954 in Banks, 2004, pp. 103-104), punishment must include five elements, namely;

- 1. It must involve an unpleasantness to the victim.
- 2. It must be for an offense, actual or supposed.
- 3. It must be of an offender, actual or supposed.
- 4. It must be the work of personal agencies; in other words, it must not be the natural consequence of an action.
- 5. It must be imposed by an authority or an institution against whose rules the offense has been committed. If this is not the case, then the act is not one of punishment but is simply a hostile act. Similarly, direct action by a person who has no special authority is not properly called punishment, and is more likely to be revenge or an act of hostility (Banks, 2004, pp. 103-104)

With these elements, it is quite clear that the focus of punishment was not on the victim, but the offender. However, Parisi (2001) asserts that the focus has shifted with the passage of time. He identifies four phases in the

historical evolution from a system of retaliation to one based on victim's compensation. These four phases, which are most commonly identified with reference to their most salient feature, are

(1) the original absence of generally agreed-upon rules regarding the punishment of wrongs ("discretionary retaliation"); (2) the gradual emergence and articulation of a rule of proportional retaliation ("lex talionis" or "regulated retaliation"); (3) the commodification of the punitive entitlement, enabling the wrongdoer to buy out the victim's retaliatory right with pecuniary compensation ("bloodmoney"); and (4) the gradual replacement of lex talionis and blood money with a system of fixed pecuniary penalties ("fixed penalties") (Parisi, 2001, p. 4).

Though he does not provide any historical proof, he asserts that transition from one phase to another involved intriguing and puzzling developments. He argues that before the *lex talionis*, there were retaliatory sanctions in place. Blau's assertion that the interactions among the early groups were mostly governed by elementary natural laws (Blau, 1916) seems to support this idea.

According to Parisi's historical development, the introduction of the *lex talionis* is characterised by sanctions based on 1:1 retaliation. Here, there is a well-defined punitive rule indicating the measure of talionic acts that can be effected (Example, Exodus 21:23-25). He explains that the rules of this period serve two main purposes. First, they create an upper limit to retaliatory justice: that is, only one life for a life can be vindicated, nothing more. Second,

they serve as minimum punishment for the criminal: nothing less than the law requires (Parisi, 2001).

The next stage, according to Parisi, is that stage in which the practice of literal retaliation for physical injuries was no longer useful. With the exception of intentional killing, retaliation was gradually replaced by a system of compensation. This is also seen in some interpretations of the biblical passages. For example, Daube (1947) examines the possibility that "eye for an eye," actually stood for the "value of an eye for an eye."

Blau observes that practices of money compensation started emerging at the beginning of the first century. Gradually, Pharisaic interpretations moved away from the strict interpretation of the *lex talionis*. They believed that the literal interpretation of the law was untenable and contrary to the very purpose of the law (Blau, 1916). Thus, the payment of blood – money became part of talionic compensation. The right to impose the talionic sanction was waived once the victim gets sufficient satisfaction from the wrongdoer (Parisi, 2001). However, when there is no judicial authority to determine the amount of compensation, the victim who was not satisfied with the blood-money offered by the wrongdoer always demanded for the imposition of talionic penalties (Cherry, 1915).

Finally, the focus of retaliation seems to have shifted from punishment to compensation. Gradually, institutional devices were established to pave the way for compulsory compensation. As a result, original rules that imposed an "identity" between harm and punishment gradually gave way to norms requiring mere "equivalence" between harm and compensation (Parisi, 2001).

Finally, the acceptance of alternative compensation was made imperative (Blau, 1916). In sum, the evolution brought about change in the application of the *lex talionis* (Parisi, 2001).

This historical development presented by Parisi seems clear and progressively possible, but his presentation lacks dating and historical evidence. He does not cite the period that each phase of the development takes place. In addition, he does not provide the details of the historical periods in which these elements surfaced. It is only Blau (1916) who points to a period in the first Century when Pharisaic interpretations reflect characteristics of the payment of blood-money.

Though this has no historical merit, it can be understood, as Blau explains, that the early groups and tribes were mostly governed by elementary natural laws (Blau, 1916). If group A performs an action against group B, then group B would do the same against group A. This was, however, subject to their relative strength. If the victim's clan is relatively stronger than the offender's clan, the measure of retaliation would be very severe and greater than the harm suffered. Thus, the measure of retaliation was in the hand of the victim because there were no legal controls. Even in the absence of legal controls, legal historians generally agree that "all human societies followed practices of retaliation at one stage or another" (Parisi, 2001, p. 6).

In the absence of legal controls, the retaliatory act was bound to be more than the offence committed. Parisi (2001) identifies a number of biblical examples where the retaliatory act is presented as being higher than the offense: the symbolic "seven-fold" retaliation or multiples of seven (Genesis

4:15; 4:23-24; Proverbs 6:13); and moderate cases of four-fold (2 Samuel 12:13-18) and two-fold (Genesis 9:5) revenge in the historical narratives. According to Sulzberger (1915) the rule in Genesis 9:5 contains the doctrine of double blood-guilt. In this case, the first vindication is against the perpetrator and the second is against his entire community. The community suffers this because it was their responsibility to prevent the crime or, at least, punish it internally.

Interpretations of the biblical examples reveal several views regarding the *lex talionis*. Many scholars have attempted to discuss the execution of the law, the context, meaning, and application. For example, there are various views concerning the one who is to carry out the retaliation. Parisi (2001) cites Genesis 4:15 as describing the administration of justice in the pre-*lex talionis* period and Deuteronomy 13:9 as describing the reformed rule of the *lex talionis* period. Since the avenger of blood in Genesis is not a definite person, the act of retaliation could be carried out by any member of the tribe (Sulzberger, 1915). In Deuteronomy, however, the right and duty of retaliation belonged to the closest family of the victim. It was considered a disgrace for one to fail to carry out such a gloomy task (Blau, 1916).

Occasionally also, the laws did not formally indicate the person who would enforce the prescribed punishment. In such cases, it is deduced with certainty that the use of the passive verb (e.g., "he shall be put to death") implies that a public officer would carry out the execution. Contrariwise, the active form (e.g., "they shall kill him") implied that the injured party, or his clan, would carry out the retaliatory act. Driver and Miles (1952) observe that the official executioner was appointed by the king or governor.

Discussing the context of the *lex talionis* in ancient Israel, Kim (2006) observes that most of the people lived in villages. As a result, their primary life context was in agricultural, family-oriented, cultural religious life, having strong emotional attachments (Kim, 2006). However, the change of social structure from a family or clan-based society to a larger social unit like state could change how the *lex talionis* works. He argues that in the state structure, the danger of unregulated revenge or retaliation will be much higher than it is in the village context as it is expectedly difficult to reach a consensus between the parties in the larger context (Kim, 2006). However, others think that a larger society may be controlled efficiently (Buss, 1977).

The question posed by Myers (2009) is also very important in discussion of the concept of *lex talionis*. He discusses a hypothetical case in which a man with one eye causes a man with two eyes to lose one of his. The question is, how would the one eyed man's life be affected if his remaining eye was taken? Since it is taught that when one loses his vision his soul also departs, the loss of the remaining eye would place the man in a very different position from a man with one eye. The same would apply to a person with one arm or leg if *lex talionis* was blindly applied. The explanation Myers offers is that the "the rabbis instituted monetary compensation as an alternative" (Myers, 2009, p. 1). This explains the introduction of blood-money in the historical development as presented by Parisi.

In addition to all the elements discussed under the concept of *lex talionis*, some scholars have also attempted to consider whether the stipulations are to be taken literally or figuratively. This question is discussed in detail by Yung Suk Kim (2006). From an anthropological analysis of the

origins and context of the *lex talionis* in Exodus 21:22-25, he concludes that the law should be figuratively interpreted. The focus of his study was on the economic and social life of the people. He used this view of society to see how a customary law of the *lex talionis* works in everyday lives. He also examines the biblical lex talionis of Exod 21:22-25 (miscarriage and bodily injury) in the literary context: how the lex talionis functions in biblical law and/or how South-western Asia Laws are related to the biblical lex talionis. After this interesting analysis, he concludes that the *lex talionis* in biblical law should be interpreted figuratively in view of theological emphasis on the value of life. To Kim, the emphasis of life did not come one day suddenly. Rather, the law should be traced back to the ancient villages where a customary law should be present through history even before formal writings of biblical law. The emphasis on the value of life, however, cannot rule out a literal application of the law. Rather, the value of life may require strict laws that will deter people from taking the lives of others. Such strict laws are reflected in the *lex talionis* in biblical law.

Jacob Chinitz (1995) also stresses that in all the many narratives in the Bible, there is no reference to a literal eye-for-eye punishment. He adds that cases of such penalties are not found in post-biblical literature and historical references, Talmudic and post-Talmudic laws. He concludes that "the use of eye-for-eye as an easy device to conjure up the vision of cruel punishment and vindictiveness, even if not directed in each case against Jews and Judaism, perpetuates a prejudice, a misreading of scripture." (Chinitz, 1995, p. 84). According to him, interpretations should be done within the proper contexts and not to take the principle literally. Chinitz' arguments about the absence of

examples cannot stand if one attempts to consider the fact that the laws cannot exist in the vacuum. The existence of the laws implies that they were meant to be kept by the people in their communities. In addition, there is no example of the figurative application of the law in biblical literature and history.

Discussions on the *Lex talionis* in connection to the biblical "eye-for-eye" principles have taken several levels. Some scholars have even discussed it in the areas of capital punishment and abortion. These, however, are not related to the present study. What this review sought to do was to bring out issues regarding the origins, development, meaning, and interpretations of the law of retaliation and punishment. Understanding these background issues will help in a better understanding of the concept of imprecations as presented in the psalms.

Summary

This review was focused on two major areas: the book of Psalms and the *lex talionis*. The study looks at imprecations within the psalter hence a review of literature on the psalter, its composition, and arrangement is necessary for the researcher. It is revealed from the review that the psalter is a part of the Old Testament that has received wide scholarly discussion. It is clear that much of the discussion has been on the title and the classifications. It is observed that scholars are generally divided on the classifications of the psalms. One such classification is the group that may be described as Imprecatory psalms. Though imprecations are not yet regarded, strictly speaking, as a category of the psalms, it is undeniable that they are found in the psalms, especially in most of the psalms of lament. A detailed discussion

on imprecations within the psalter is reserved to be discussed in the next chapter. In addition, a review of ideas on the *lex talionis*, a concept related to imprecations, helps keep the research within the proper framework.

Organization of the study

The research is organized in a six-chapter outline. This first chapter is the introductory chapter to the whole research where the researcher introduces the problem, outlines the objectives of the research, its delimitations, as well as the methodology that the study employs. It also includes a review of various literature concerning the psalms and imprecations within the psalter. The second chapter consists of a detailed discussion of the concept of imprecations within the psalter. It unearths the meaning of the concept of imprecations, their use in the psalms, and identification. Chapter three presents a literary reading of selected communal laments, namely Psalms 58 and 137. The focus of the literary reading is the imprecations that are found in the selected psalms. Chapter four focuses on a literary reading of selected individual laments. The literary analysis of these selected individual laments (Psalms 35, 69, and 109) focuses on the imprecations found in them. The ideas gleaned from the exegeses in chapters three and four are synthesized and further discussed in chapter five focusing specifically on the use of parallelism, intensification, and imagery in the imprecations. The final chapter is a general conclusion to the research consisting of a summary of the entire research, conclusions and recommendations. Dubbed "the way forward", it teases out the implications of the findings of the study on Ghanaian Christianity and offers recommendations.

CHAPTER TWO

IMPRECATIONS WITHIN THE PSALTER

Introduction

This chapter discusses the imprecations in the psalter. This was not part of the literature review in the previous chapter because the discussion here includes further elements that relate with the core of the study (i.e., imprecations within the psalter) while the previous chapter sought to discuss the psalter and the *lex talionis*. The literature suggests that the psalter is a part of the Old Testament that has received wide scholarly discussion. It shows that scholars are generally divided regarding the categories and classifications of the psalms. It was also stated that there are several arguments on whether there can be a recognized group of psalms designated "imprecatory psalms" or not. If it is possible to give such a classification, the question bothers on which psalms will be part of that category? The issue of imprecations, their identification, and use is the focus of the present chapter. The chapter consists of a description of imprecations and imprecatory psalms and how such imprecations have been discussed. This is done by looking at what imprecations are, and how they appear in the psalms, especially the psalms of lament. Also, issues surrounding the identification of imprecatory psalms, the Christian ethical approach to imprecations, and Christian usage of the imprecations are discussed.

Imprecations and Imprecatory Psalms

An imprecation is defined, according to J. Carl Laney (1981) as "an invocation of judgment, calamity, or curse uttered against one's enemies, or the enemies of God" (Laney, 1981, p. 35). There are portions in the psalms that contain appeals to God to pour out His wrath on the enemies of the lamenter. According to Laney (1981), "these psalms are commonly classified 'imprecatory psalms' for the imprecation forms a chief element in the psalm" (Laney, 1981, p. 35). Thus, he is trying to say that once such invocation stands as a chief element in any psalm, it can be regarded as an imprecatory psalm. He, however, does not explain what he means by such invocation being a "chief element." Determining the chief element of a particular psalm may depend on the individual reader. While one will determine the chief element by looking at the dominant idea, another will determine it by considering the amount of space that the said element occupies in the psalm. For example, will a psalm be considered imprecatory if its dominant idea is an invocation of judgment and curses even if such invocation is in only a few verses? Or will it be considered imprecatory if it addresses kingship but has invocations of judgment in several verses? This makes it difficult to determine the chief element in a psalm, hence the determination of its status as an imprecatory psalm. This will be further discussed in connection with imprecatory psalms and their identification.

Apart from the psalter, this invocation of judgment, calamity and curse is found in various portions of scripture. Laney (1981) gives several examples of imprecations within the Old Testament. Some of his examples include the morning prayer of Moses which was an imprecation that the enemies of

Yahweh, who were Moses' enemies as well, would be scattered and flee from His presence (Num. 10:35); The Song of Deborah and Barak which concludes with an imprecation that Yahweh's enemies should perish (Judg. 5:31); and Jeremiah's repeated use of imprecations against his enemies (Jer. 11:20; 15:15; 17:18; 18:21-23; 20:12). He adds that,

such imprecations are not limited to the Old Testament, but are found in the New Testament as well (Rev. 6:9-10). Other portions of the New Testament are considered by some to contain imprecations (Acts 13:10-11; 23:3; 1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 1:8-9; 5:12; 2 Tim. 4:14), but while these verses contain a curse element, they do not have a specific prayer to the Lord that the judgment would be carried out (Laney, 1981, p. 36).

John N. Day (2002) defines imprecatory psalms as the ones that "express the desire for God's vengeance to fall on His (and His people's) enemies and include the use of actual curses, or imprecations" (Day, 2002, p. 166). According to Laney (1981), the definition of an imprecation must include at least two elements. He states that it must be an invocation – a prayer or address to God; and must contain a request that one's enemies or the enemies of Yahweh be judged and justly punished. From these two definitions we gather that imprecations in the Bible are not just the literal way of calling curses on people. Rather, they are prayers to God for vengeance on the enemies of the lamenter, who are also the enemies of Yahweh.

From the examples given by Laney and the explanation rendered by Day, an imprecation must contain a curse element and it must have a specific prayer to the Lord for judgment. If any is lacking, it cannot be regarded an

imprecation. Thus, imprecations are not necessarily curses uttered out of anger. Rather, they are prayers offered to God to pour out desired curses and punishments on the enemy. Such prayers are found in other parts of scripture, but their presence in the psalter is worthy of attention. Day (2002) states that "one eminently troublesome portion of the Scriptures is the so-called 'imprecatory psalms'" (Day, 2002, p. 166). They are described as troublesome because of the questions that they have persistently raised among scholars and interpreters. The problems have normally bordered on their identification, interpretation, and validity.

It is important to note here that scholars have disagreements as to whether there should be a category within the psalter that will be referred to as "imprecatory psalms" or not. The disagreement ranges from acceptance of a category of psalms called "imprecatory psalms" to a total rejection of any such category. There are others who seem to stay in the middle - agreeing to the existence of imprecations, but rejecting any such designation. An example of such disagreement is a situation where Angel M. Rodriguez states that "since no literary type of psalm appears in the psalter that could be called 'imprecatory,' it is better to say that there are imprecatory passages in some of the psalms" (Rodriguez, 1994, p. 40) and C. Hassell Bullock is much more accurate in identifying the imprecatory psalms to be an actual category with content (as opposed to form) as its primary distinguishing feature.

The burden of proof lies with scholars who believe that there is a category of imprecatory psalms. In Bullock's (2001) assertion, he does not recognize a peculiar form that imprecatory psalms take. Rather, his classification is based on the content of these psalms. He specifically identifies

Psalms 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109, and 137 as falling into the category of imprecatory psalms (Bullock, 2001). Raymond F. Surburg (1975) acknowledges "the presence of at least twenty-eight psalms containing imprecations, curses and condemnations of enemies" (Surburg, 1975, p. 88). He however quotes Charmers Martin as stating that only eighteen psalms truly contain imprecations. These eighteen psalms contain one hundred and sixty-eight verses with only sixty-five containing an imprecation. Surburg concludes: "Martin, therefore, contends that it would be more true to the facts to speak of 'imprecations within the psalms' rather than to claim there are imprecatory psalms" (Surburg, 1975, p. 93). This conclusion is accurate since we cannot conclusively describe a particular psalm as imprecatory or a psalm that has imprecation as its central idea. Rather, we can identify psalms that contain imprecations.

This conclusion raises again the question posed on Laney's description of an imprecatory psalm as one which has imprecation as its "chief element." He explains that:

In the imprecatory psalms the imprecation, instead of being a minor element, is greatly multiplied until it becomes a major element or leading feature. An imprecatory psalm, then, is one in which the imprecation is a major element or leading feature of the psalm (Laney, 1981, p. 36).

The question asked here is the same as the set of questions asked earlier in this chapter: how can the major element of a psalm be identified? Will a psalm be considered imprecatory based on its overriding theme or based on the predominance of verses that contain imprecations? While some

will use the predominance of verses that express an imprecation, others will normally use the dominant theme of the psalm. If we identify the chief element by using the predominance of verses alone, some psalms might be wrongly classified. It is possible to have a psalm whose major theme is seen when the entire psalm is considered as a whole. This major theme may not be expressed by several verses. Using the predominant theme alone may not also help in identifying the chief element in a psalm because the composers are more likely to express the chief element by constant repetition. Since these instances are possible, using only the amount of space dedicated to imprecations or only the dominant theme of a psalm will not be helpful in determining the chief element of a psalm. I will therefore, propose that the chief element should be identified by a consideration of both the dominant theme and the amount of space dedicated to imprecations. Hence for a psalm to be classified an imprecatory psalm, it must dedicate an appreciable amount of space to imprecations and it must express the theme of imprecations predominantly.

If this stance is considered in connection with the analysis of Surburg, several psalms which are considered imprecatory psalms should rather be described as psalms containing imprecations. The fact that a psalm contains imprecations does not necessarily make it an imprecatory psalm. Thus, it is possible to have a psalm whose dominant theme is Kingship but it may contain several imprecations. Such a psalm may either be classified as a royal psalm or an imprecatory psalm. It would therefore be better if the psalms are categorized according to their dominant themes and the amount of space dedicated to such themes. Since there does not seem to be a psalm whose

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dominant theme is an imprecation, we can agree with Surburg (1975) and Rodriguez (1994) that there are imprecations within the psalms. Hence imprecations will not feature as a major category of the psalms. Since imprecations cannot feature as a major category and their presence cannot be dismissed, they must be part of another category. To understand where they belong, it is important to delve into the classification of the psalms. This leads us to the study of Claus Westermann's work on the classifications of the psalms.

According to Westermann (1981), the psalms are predominantly psalms of praise and psalms of lament. Hence, all other categories fall within these two. As the names imply, the psalms of praise render thanks and praises to God. The psalms of lament bemoan the distress of the lamenter and calls upon God to come to his aid. They petition God to save or deliver them from their trouble and sometimes to punish their enemies. The nature of imprecations is such that they fall under psalms that are classified as laments. Westermann (1986) lists the psalms of lament as having a peculiar structure.

The structure proposed is as follows:

- 1. Address, with an introductory cry for help
- 2. Lament, which often involves three subjects; God, the sufferer, and the enemies of the sufferer
- 3. Confession of trust, introduced by the *waw* adversative ("but"). Here, the lamenter expresses confidence in God.
- 4. Petition to God for the needed action (Double wish)
- 5. Declaration of assurance of being heard
- 6. Vow of praise

Whereas this structure is not stereotyped for all psalms of individual lament, "the most constant of all parts is the petition. It is never missing" (Westermann, 1981, p. 55). In this part of the lament (the petition or double wish), the lamenter often asks God to "hear", "save", or "punish". The request to punish falls under the description of an imprecation. We can see imprecations within the psalms of lament when they are asking God to punish the enemy.

These psalms of lament are widely discussed. Kelley (1984) states that the individual laments are "the largest single group in the psalter and includes the following psalms: 3, 5, 6, 7, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 27 (w. 7-14), 28, 31, 35, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 63, 64, 69, 70, 71, 86, 88, 102, 109, 120, 130, 140, 141, 142, and 143" (Kelley, 1984, p. 377). He further states that the lamenter's distress is described in general terms and in highly figurative language which obscures the exact nature of the suffering. Anderson (1980) also sees them to be "the most common category in the psalter, and nearly a third of the psalms belong to this *Gattung*" (Anderson, 1980, p. 36). He subdivides them, like Westermann (1981), into Laments of the Individual and Communal Laments. In addition, he identifies that Laments usually consist of two parts; namely, introduction and main section. While the introduction often includes the invocation of Yahweh and a call for help, the main section consists of a number of elements, varying both in order and appearance. He explains that:

Most Lamentations would have a description of the distress or misfortune, which may be of a very varied nature (cf. 22:1-18 (MT 7-19), 38:2-12 (MT 3-13), etc.). Normally this would be

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followed by a prayer and a cry for help and deliverance (cf. 38:15f. (MT 16f), 39:7-10 (MT 8-11), 41:4, 10 (MT 5)), the nature of God (86:2, 15), the honour of God (42:10 (MT 11)), etc. In some Lamentations we find either a confession of sin (cf. 51: 3f. (MT. 5f)), or a protestation of innocence (59:3f. (MT. 4f.)), also wishes and curses (55:15 (MT. 16), 61: 4 (MT. 5),109:6-20), as well as a vow to praise God (cf. 61:8 (MT. 9), 109: 30f.) (Anderson, 1980, pp. 37-38).

In all of these descriptions of the psalms of lament, there is an element within the petitioner's prayer where help is sought from God. The kind of help sought is expressed in the form of wishes. The petitioner either wishes that God saves him from his calamity or he wishes and prays for God to punish his enemy. The prayers that ask God to punish the enemy are normally filled with imprecations. Thus, as stated earlier, imprecations are mostly found in the psalms of lament. In these psalms, the lamenter is actually crying for deliverance from the enemy. In addition, he wishes that the enemy should suffer a number of curses from God. In sum, imprecations are found in the psalms of lament.

These psalms of lament which contain the imprecations are sometimes described by some scholars as imprecatory psalms. The question is; can all such psalms be properly classified as imprecatory psalms because they contain imprecations? Though Westermann does not recognise imprecatory psalms as a category in the psalter, Kelley (1984) observes that the most frequent complaint in these laments is the "plotting of enemies (Pss. 3; 7; 13; 27:7-14; 31; 54; 70; 86; 120; 142; 143) and the machinations of the ungodly (Pss. 17,

22, 28, 35, 42-43, 52, 55, 56, 57, 59, 64, 69, 71, 109, 140, 141)" (Kelley, 1984, p. 378). It is within these cries that imprecations are found. The questions that have been answered so far are; does the prevalent nature of imprecations within a particular psalm qualify it to be referred to as an imprecatory psalm? Can any lament that contains an imprecation of some sort be regarded as an imprecatory psalm? Is there a criterion for identifying imprecatory psalms? We concluded that a psalm can be regarded imprecatory if its dominant theme is imprecation and it dedicates a good amount of space to imprecations. Using these criteria, it becomes difficult to tell which psalms belong to the category of "imprecatory psalms." There have, however, been lots of attempts to identify some psalms as imprecatory. Attention is now turned to discussions on these issues.

Identification of Imprecatory Psalms

The problem with imprecatory psalms is observed in the varied views regarding their identification. Identifying which psalms belong to the category will depend on the definition one gives to the category. After describing what he considers to be an imprecatory psalm, Laney proceeds to list some of the psalms as imprecatory. Even though most of the scholars who give a list are sure their list is conclusive, it is clear from the following review that scholars are highly divided:

Johannes G Vos (1949) identifies six psalms as imprecatory: Pss. 55,
 59, 69, 79, 109, and 137 (Vos, 1949).

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- Raymond F. Surburg (1975) asserts that though many passages and verses in the psalter have imprecations, the psalms listed as imprecatory are Psalms 55, 69, 109, and 137.
- J. Carl Laney (1981) would classify Psalms 7, 35, 58, 59, 69, 83, 109,
 137 and 139 as imprecatory (Laney, 1981).
- Shane Scott (1997) says the general consensus is that Psalms 55, 59,
 69, 79, 109 and 137 are imprecatory psalms (Scott, 1997),
- Alex Luc (1999) classifies Psalms 35, 58, 69, 83, 109, and 137 as imprecatory, but he notes that imprecations occur much more frequently in the psalter than this list would indicate. He further lists 28 psalms that contain imprecations. (Luc, 1999).
- C. Hassell Bullock (2001) classifies Psalms 35, 55, 59, 69, 79, 109 and
 137 as imprecatory (Bullock, 2001).
- John Day (2002) lists ninety-eight verses in thirty-two psalms that contain imprecations but classifies only Psalms 7, 35, 52, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 83, 94, 109, 129, 137, and 140 as imprecatory

From these lists, it is observed that the psalms that are common with all the scholars are three; 69, 109 and 137. A cursory reading of these three psalms reveals some issues worth noting. Psalms 69 and 109 have several verses that contain imprecations against the enemy. Psalm 137, on the other hand, has imprecations in only the last two verses. It seems therefore that its place among the lists provided is because of the strong language employed and the harshness of its content. Such harshness is also observed in Psalm 109 which also contains brutalities against the children of the enemy (Luc, 1999).

Also, taking together all the psalms that are listed, one arrives at fifteen psalms: 7, 35, 52, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 83, 94, 109, 129,137, 139 and 140. This reveals a great deal of disagreement on the psalms that can rightly belong to the category of imprecatory psalms. This is further explained in an article by Reed Lessing in the October 2006 edition of the *Concordia Journal*.

The sentiments of broken teeth, bloody baths, and baby bashing are not confined to a few psalms, in fact thirty-two of them fall under the ominous title, "imprecatory." They are often categorized into these three groups: imprecations against societal enemies (58, 94), imprecations against national enemies (68, 74, 79, 83,129,137), and imprecations against personal enemies (5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 17, 28, 31, 35, 40, 52, 54, 55, 56, 59, 69, 70, 71, 104, 109, 139, 140, 141, 143) (Reed, 2006, p. 368).

In this explanation, Reed (2006) is categorizing the imprecatory psalms into three, based on the enemy that is being prayed against: societal enemies, national enemies, and personal enemies. This idea is also held by Day (2002) since he discusses "three representative psalms; Psalm 58, an imprecation against a societal enemy; Psalm 137, an imprecation against a national or community enemy; and Psalm 109, an imprecation against a personal enemy" (Day, 2002, p. 169).

It is clear, from the foregoing, that the various classifications are done simply because scholars see strands of imprecations and imprecatory elements in the psalms. It will therefore be better, in the strictest sense of imprecations, to see the psalms as containing imprecations rather than being wholly imprecatory. This conclusion agrees with the earlier conclusions of Surburg (1975) and Rodriguez (1994). Apart from the issues of classification and identifications, scholars have also generally approached the imprecations from a Christian ethical point of view. A discussion of this will be helpful here for this study.

Christian Ethical Approaches to the Imprecatory Psalms

Scholars have discussed the imprecatory psalms in various ways using various approaches. The most prevalent approach is the Christian ethical approach. The question that most scholars have asked is the same as the one that John N. Day (2002) asks:

are not Christians to love their enemies (Matt. 5:44), to "bless and not curse" (Rom. 12:14)? How then does one justify calls for the barbaric dashing of infants against a rock (Ps. 137:9) or the washing of one's "feet in the blood of the wicked" (58:10)? Are the imprecatory psalms merely a way of venting rage without really meaning it? Or is cursing enemies the Old Testament way and loving enemies the New Testament way? Has the morality of Scripture evolved? And is it in any way legitimate to use these psalms in Christian life and worship? (Day, 2002, p. 170).

This question echoes through most of the thoughts of scholars who want to reconcile the ethics of scripture with the ethics of our day. Many attempts have been made to answer these questions.

Some have attempted to answer the questions by explaining that the Old Testament represents a lower morality than the New Testament. According to this category of scholars, "the psalter belongs to the dispensation of law, not the dispensation of grace" (Vos, 1949, p. 124). By this reckoning, the imprecations were right for the Old Testament saints, but wrong for today's Christians because the Old Testament saints lived in the dispensation of law while Christians of today live in a dispensation of grace. This view suggests that "since David lived prior to the full light of the truth about spirituality, as developed in the New Testament, broad ethical teaching and practice should not be expected from him" (Laney, 1981, pp. 38-39). Advancing this view, many critical scholars propose that the psalms were composed over the period between 400 to 100 BC, when the revelation of God was "in one of the low stages of development, and therefore the cursings reflect a sub-Christian morality which was to be rectified in the New Testament" (Surburg, 1975, p. 91).

Another group of scholars attempt to answer the ethical questions by asserting that the imprecations were prophetic. They explain that "these psalms do not express a desire for the doom of the wicked, but merely predict that doom" (Vos, 1949, p. 125). This view, which is one of the solutions offered by Barnes, Augustine, Calvin, and Spurgeon, shifts the responsibility of the imprecation to God. However, the biblical texts do not seem to support this idea. It can be observed that the imprecations are actual wishes or prayers that the pray-er wishes may happen (Laney, 1981).

There is another group of scholars like C. S. Lewis (1958) who are of the view that the imprecations in the psalms simply represent the personal animosities of the psalmists and not those of the Holy Spirit. These scholars tell us that we must not go by the idea that because it comes in the Bible, all this vindictive hatred must be good. There are a number of scholars who seem to go by this condemnation of the imprecations in the psalter. "This view is taken by Kittel who considers the imprecatory psalms to have originated from mean-spirited individuals who thought only of conquest and revenge" (Laney, 1981, p. 38). Despite that, there are a number of arguments against utter condemnation. The reader must understand that it is clear that imprecatory statements are not limited to the psalms, neither are they limited to only the Old Testament. Therefore, such condemnation is contrary to the doctrine of scriptural inspiration.

Another solution that some propose to the ethical problem of the imprecatory psalms is the assertion that "the imprecations contained in them are to be understood only in a spiritual or figurative sense" (Vos, 1949, p. 126). This view holds that the enemies that the psalmist is praying against are not real human beings but rather his spiritual enemies. Against this view, Vos categorically states:

It is perfectly obvious that the wicked persons whose doom is prayed for in the imprecatory psalms are not temptations, sinful tendencies in human nature, nor even demonic powers. They are human beings, who may, indeed, have been under the influence of demonic powers, but who were none the less human (Vos, 1949, pp. 126-127).

Vos' conclusion is simply that the enemies in these psalms were human, hence the mention of their families in some of them as in Psalm 109. This discussion has received much attention in the study of imprecations in the psalms.

In Day's (2002) discussion of Psalm 58, he attempts to identify the people being cursed. He posits that these are rulers or judges within the community but they were described as unjust, dishonest, ferociously violent, and stubbornly wicked and deadly. Day described them as people who "held positions of governing, legislative, or judicial authority, and they exploited their power for evil and their own ends" (Day, 2002, p. 170).

Thomas W. Overholdt (1970) suggests that the psalmist's enemies are those who bore false witness against him in a legal setting because the Hebrew term for falsehood and deceit occurs often in the laments. Sigmund Mowinckel (1962) identifies the enemies as sorcerers and people who practice black magic with curse that are powerful enough to do great harm to those against whom they are directed. These people are described as the wicked. They are "those who do not concern themselves with God but consider themselves to be too strong enough in their own power. In other words, they place themselves outside God's domain, disregarding the work of his hands (Ps. 28:5)" (Kelley, 1984, p. 378). Helmer Ringgren (1963) concludes that the enemies are more than humans. According to him, they are representatives of all evil forces that threaten life and order. He draws this conclusion by pointing to some of the laments (especially Pss. 22:12, 13, 16, and 73:6-9) in which the enemies are described as "wild beasts, demons, or mythological monsters" (Ringgren, 1963, p. 44).

Another suggested solution to the ethical questions posed on the imprecatory psalms is to regard them as outbursts of the moral feeling of

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humanity. In other words, readers should recognize the humanity of the psalmist. This view is further elaborated by Vos as follows:

when some extraordinarily brutal or atrocious crime has been committed, there is a universal demand that the guilty persons be punished, and this demand is not a demand for personal vengeance but a kind of indignation springing from the outraged moral sense of humanity (Vos, 1949, 129).

This view, according to Laney (1981), denies the divine authorship of the imprecatory psalms in an arbitrary attempt to distinguish between human expressions and inspiration.

According to Johannes G. Vos (1949), the solution to the problem posed by the imprecatory psalms can be solved by "a criticism of the presuppositions on which the usual objections to the imprecatory psalms are based" (Vos, 1949, p. 130). The objections to the imprecations are normally the usual ethical question of whether it is right to wish or pray for the doom or destruction of another and whether a Christian can use these psalms for worship. Vos (1949) declares that the objection is based on two presuppositions, namely; that the welfare of man is the chief end of man, and that man has rights which even God is bound to respect. He goes on to annul the validity of the two presuppositions leading him to conclude that:

Instead of being ashamed of the imprecatory psalms, and attempting to apologize for them and explain them away, Christian people should glory in them and not hesitate to use them in public and private exercise of the worship of God (Vos, 1949, p. 138).

In the reckoning of J. Carl Laney (1981), an awareness of the ethical and revelatory purposes of the imprecatory judgments will help the individual to understand the imprecatory psalms better. According to him, these purposes "give a divine perspective to the seemingly human cries for judgment" (Laney, 1981, p. 41). His proposed solution to the problem is the understanding of the covenantal basis of the curses. That is, according to the Abrahamic covenant, God promised to curse all those who cursed Abraham's descendants. For this reason, the psalmist was only asking for what God has already promised his people.

W. W. Davies (1892) attempts to solve the ethical problems posed by the imprecatory psalms by explaining why they appear in such terrific harshness. He explains that the language is poetic, hence

the fiery Eastern mind indulged in exaggerated expressions which, divested of their rhetorical extravagance and Oriental colouring, contain no more malice and real venom than may be found in the more elegant and refined speech of Englishmen. (Davies, 1892, p. 156).

He also explains that most of the imprecatory psalms, being Davidic, may be the result of David speaking not out of personal indignation, but rather expressing the feeling of a king towards the enemies of the state. Another possibility he talks about is the probability that the psalms were uttered in times of war. In summary Davies (1892) tries to explain away the imprecatory psalms and justify their occurrence in the Bible.

It is obvious from the various attempts to solve the ethical questions posed on the imprecatory psalms that almost all the attempts made appear to

explain away the Imprecations as defensible "because they were supposedly the product of an ethically inferior age" (Surburg, 1975, p. 97). However, the question still remains as to whether it is still right for people in today's society to wish that evil befalls their enemies. The problem remains once the imprecations are approached vis a vis Christian ethics. This raises the question of whether Christians should use them or not and how they should be used.

Christian Usage of Imprecatory Psalms

The final focus of the discussion on the imprecations within the psalter is whether it is proper or not for Christians to use the imprecatory psalms. While some scholars see nothing wrong with their usage, others see them to be sub-Christian and out-of-use for today's Christians. Surburg (1975) states that "there have been periods in the history of Christianity when it was proper to employ them" (Surburg, 1975, p. 100). He cited periods in the history of the Christian church when the Christians were persecuted. Some periods in the history he cites are the period of the persecuted Waldenses, the hunted Camisards, and the oppressed Covenanters. He then adds that "when all is quiet and peaceful, many may not feel very keenly the need for the use of the imprecatory psalms" (Surburg, 1975, p. 100).

Reed Lessing (2006), after discussing the brutality found in the imprecatory psalms, concludes that "Pastors who minister to those facing sustained injustice, hardened enmity, and gross oppression must teach the baptized to pray imprecatory psalms" (Reed, 2006, p. 369). John Day (2002) concludes that "at times it is legitimate to utter prayers of imprecations or

pleas for divine vengeance- like those in the psalms – against the recalcitrant enemies of God and his people" (Day, 2002, p. 185).

Another scholar who contributes in this discussion is Johannes G. Vos (1949), who thinks that Christians can pray for temporal judgments upon God's enemies. Vos (1949), however, argues that Christians, after praying for temporal judgements, must leave the application of such petitions to God since it is only God who knows the wicked persons that deserve such punishment. He concludes:

It may be concluded, then, that the Christian can use the imprecatory psalms in the worship of God, and can offer them as prayers to God, for temporal judgments short of death upon those enemies of God who in the divine secret counsel are elect persons, and for judgments including physical death and issuing in eternal death upon those enemies of God who in his secret and unrevealed counsel are reprobates (Vos, 1949, p. 138).

On the other hand, W. W. Davies (1892) reminds us that "the mere fact that a prayer contrary to the spirit of the Gospel is found in the psalms is no proof that it is pleasing to Jehovah, any more than the wicked acts of David, Solomon, Peter or Judas, which are recorded in the scriptures" (Davies, 1892, p. 159). By this, Davies thinks that imprecatory psalms are not in conformity with the spirit of true Christianity and hence cannot be used in today's world of Christianity. Carl Laney (1981) thinks that one can appreciate the imprecatory psalms and teach and preach from them. He, however, adds that they "should not be applied to church-age saints" (Laney, 1981, p. 44).

The concept of imprecations, their identification, and the classification of the psalms have received much discussion in the study of the psalter. It is clear that apart from the classification of psalms and identification of psalms as imprecatory, scholars have also approached the psalms from the Christian ethical perspective. The discussion, however, does not seem to reach a consensus. This lack of consensus calls for further study in the imprecations and their use. There is the need to also study the imprecations from a literary perspective. This is therefore the task of the rest of this thesis.

The way forward in the Study of Imprecations

It is clear here that scholars who have attempted to identify which psalms belong to a category that can be classified as imprecatory are strikingly divided. This division makes it difficult to agree that such a category exists in the psalter. It is either they use different criteria to arrive at their classifications or there is simply no clear cut category. Rather, there are imprecations within the psalms.

Since the striking disparity among scholars makes it difficult to agree on which psalms belong to the category and which do not, it would still be better to just talk of imprecations within the psalter as was earlier suggested. The problem that this might cause is that, it will create a wide range of options from psalms that contain the smallest form of imprecations to psalms that have several imprecatory elements. That is, we may be forced to study several psalms even if they contain only one verse of imprecation. To avoid this, the study focuses on representative psalms. The literary structures of selected psalms are studied and this will help in better appropriating the overall

meaning of the psalm. The psalms are chosen from diverse backgrounds. To ensure that the selected psalms are representative enough, they are purposively selected to reflect various aspects that are needed for the study. The selection contains psalms that have several imprecations and psalms that have only a few. The selection also includes psalms that contain imprecations against a personal enemy, a societal enemy, and a national enemy. Finally, the selection takes into consideration the overall length of the selected psalm.

As a result of this selection, the research will, in subsequent chapters, discuss Psalms 35, 58, 69, 109, and 137 as representative imprecatory psalms to reveal common literary features. These psalms have been selected because they are varied in several dimensions. The selection includes psalms that contain imprecations in several verses (e.g., 35, 69, 109) and the ones that contain imprecations in a few verses (e.g., 58, 137). Also, there are some which contain imprecations against individual enemies (e.g. 35, 69, 109), and communal enemies - i.e., societal (e.g., 58) and national (e.g. 137). They also vary in size; while some are relatively long (e.g., 35, 69, 109), others are relatively short (e.g. 58, 137). The study of these selected psalms shall focus on identifying the literary form, structure and pattern of the imprecations and how they relate with the meaning of the entire lament. This will involve the analysis of the use of imagery, parallelism, and intensification, in imprecations.

Summary

This chapter has been discussing the imprecations that are found within the psalter. The discussion focused on the meaning of imprecations, their

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identification, and use, especially by today's Christians. In all these areas, scholars are variously divided. There is no consensus on the identity of psalms that may be called imprecatory. In the midst of the disparity, however, psalms 69, 109, and 137 are commonly cited as belonging to the group of imprecatory psalms. This consensus however, seems to be as a result of the harsh tone of the imprecations within these three. In addition, three is need for a literary study of the imprecations within these psalms. This calls for a study that is focused on a literary analysis of the imprecations to reveal their structure, characteristics, and how they contribute to the meaning of the entire psalm. It is for this reason that this research delves into a literary analysis that will reveal the structure and characteristics of the imprecations within the psalms. To achieve this, a representative group of psalms will be studied. The psalms selected are Psalms 35, 58, 69, 109, and 137. A literary analysis of these psalms shall be the focus of the next two chapters: Psalms 58 and 137 in chapter three and Psalms 35, 69, and 109 in chapter four.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSES OF IMPRECATIONS IN COMMUNAL LAMENTS

Introduction

The previous chapter consisted of a detailed discussion of imprecations within the psalter. It was discovered that scholars are variously divided on their views on whether there could be a class of psalms designated imprecatory and which psalms could be classified as such. Hence it was concluded that rather than classifying the psalms as imprecatory, it is better to describe some of them (mostly the psalms of lament) as containing imprecations within them. It is also important that much attention be given to the literary elements in the imprecations. This makes it necessary for a study that is focused on a literary analysis of the psalms to reveal their structure and form and how they contribute to the meaning of the entire psalm. To achieve this, some representative psalms were selected. The selected psalms are Psalms 35, 58, 69, 109, and 137. Out of these, Psalms 35, 69, and 109 are individual laments that contain imprecations against the enemy/enemies of the individual lamenter while Psalms 58 and 137 are communal laments that contain imprecations against communal enemies. This chapter seeks to delve into a literary analysis of imprecations within psalms that deal with communal enemies; namely, Psalms 58, and 137.

As indicated earlier in the introductory chapter, the exegetical method adopted for the study is a literary-critical reading of the selected psalms within the psalter. It was indicated that the literary method to be used is the "new"

literary criticism which involves a sketch of the literary context and a lexical analysis of the passage. This will help achieve the aim of revealing the form and structure that imprecations within the psalter take and how these forms and structure can contribute to the meaning of the psalm.

It has already been noted in an earlier chapter that the study of poetry includes the identification of figures of speech, literary structures and parallelism (Gianotti, 2001). These elements are very vital to the study of psalms and they are found in the new literary-critical approach to exegesis. The "new" literary criticism includes any work that focuses on the text as a unitary object, considering its style, rhetoric or structure (Clines & Exum, 1993). In this chapter and the next, the imprecatory parts of each passage will be analysed by studying the literary elements within the text. Before these imprecatory parts are discussed the psalm will be translated and briefly reviewed. The core of the discussion will be on the outline and the meaning implied by the literary components in the passage. Though some would have preferred to do this alongside an analysis of the patterns of parallelism, structures of intensification or emphasis, and the use of imagery (metaphors and similes) in the text, such detailed analyses will be reserved to chapter five of this thesis. There, the ideas gleaned in this chapter and the next will be synthesized and further analysed. This is to ensure a detailed treatment of the literary elements and to properly place the issues under broad headings of parallelism, intensification, and imagery.

For each psalm, I will first present a brief review of how the psalm has generally been described and proceed to present the text. As stated earlier, all bible translations are the author's, unless otherwise stated. The text and its structure will reveal the sections that contain imprecations. Once these sections are identified, a detailed study of the imprecations will follow. The detailed study will focus on the literary elements that will be identified. Finally, their structure, their place in the lament, and their contribution to the meaning of the psalm will emerge.

Psalm 58

The first psalm to be studied in this section is Psalm 58. As indicated, the study of this psalm will consist of a determination of the structure of the entire psalm, a detailed analysis of the imprecatory sections, and a discussion of how the imprecations relate with and contribute to the meaning of the entire psalm.

Psalm 58 is named by Kraus (1988) and Anderson (1980) as "there is a God who judges on earth"; and by Weiser (1962) as "Unjust Judges". Kraus and Anderson seem to take this caption from the last line in the psalm: an emphatic "there is a God who judges on earth." Weiser looks at the point of contrast between the "God who Judges on earth" and the "unjust judges," who are addressed in the first part of the psalm. In these designations, the psalm is linked to a judicial context: either describing the justice in God's judgment or the injustice of the unjust judges. Anderson also sees it to be a national lamentation which, in some ways, is reminiscent of Psalm 14 (Anderson, 1980). Psalm 14 is understood to address the hardship of Israel in a godless and hostile world whereas this psalm touches on such hostility and injustice. Both Kraus (1988) and Weiser (1962) state that the psalm is in many respects

closely related to Psalm 82. This is quite true because Psalm 82 is a plea for justice and it describes God as one who judges among the gods. These "gods" judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked.

Though the title of the psalm implies a Davidic authorship, "many scholars assign it to the post-Exilic period and the general tenor of the psalm may point in the same direction" (Anderson, 1980, p. 429). Kraus argues that despite the use of לְדָוֹלָ, the psalm is written late. He however admits that it has some discernible archaic touches in vv 1ff. Day (2002) seems to subscribe to Davidic authorship but he does not give any justification for such a stance. This could simply be an assumption from the use of לְדָוֹלֶ in the title. However, it is clear from a general study of the psalms that the use of לְדָוֹלָ does not necessarily warrant Davidic authorship. Such a title could imply that the psalm is about him, for him, or by him (Kraus, 1988). Some have even suggested that the designation could refer to all kings in the Davidic lineage (Engnell 1943; Mowinckel 1951). Hence the assumption that יוֹדָוֹרָ implies Davidic authorship cannot be accepted, especially when the content seems to suggest a post-exilic period. It is therefore important to understand that Psalm 58, though with a subscription pointing to David, may not necessarily be Davidic. Issues of authorship are however not of interest to this study.

A glance at the psalm reveals that it addresses the subject of justice. According to Day (2002), the objects of the imprecations were the judges within the community. These Judges were responsible for seeing to it that justice is properly meted out. He also observes that the psalm is framed by an

ironic inclusion of judicial terms and ideas (Day, 2002). Within the psalm, the human "you judge" (v. 1) is contrasted with the divine "who judges" (v. 11); the human "gods" (v. 1) stand in contrast with the true "God" (v. 11); the lack of human justice "on earth" (v. 2) is also contrasted with the hope of divine justice "on earth" (v.11); and the human perversion of "righteousness" (v. 1) contrasts with the divine vindication of the "righteous" in v. 11 (Day, 2002). This juxtaposition makes the message of the psalm to stand out clearly: God is a righteous judge and he will judge the unjust judges.

Weiser (1962) also observes that the psalm is characterized by graphic, poetic quality manifested in the swift change of the numerous word-pictures and comparisons. One also observes that the message of the psalm is presented in drastic pictures (Kraus, 1988). Day indicates that the poet uses vivid imagery and simile to appeal to Yahweh to render these injurious "gods" powerless and even to destroy them if need be (vv. 6-8). According to him, once the righteous, who had suffered so grievously, realize this longed-for vengeance, they would be comforted and Yahweh will be established as the manifest and supreme Judge of the earth as indicated in the concluding part of the psalm (Day, 2002).

The objects of the imprecation here are described as unjust people. The psalm assumes that justice should pervade (vv. 1-2), but these men are chronically dishonest (v. 3), ferociously violent (vv. 2, 6), and stubbornly wicked and deadly (vv. 3-5). Day (2002) asserts that the psalm does not call down God's vengeance on occasional transgressors of God's laws, who harmed out of ignorance or whose abuses were casual. Rather, it is against people whose actions are premeditated and repetitive and people who chronically and

violently flaunted their position contrary to God's righteousness. He explains that "they held positions of governing, legislative, or judicial authority, and they exploited their power for evil and their own ends" (Day, 2002, p. 170).

In sum, the lament is a call upon God to judge corrupt judges so the righteous would continue to trust in the Lord. The structure proposed by Kraus is a). An address to אליים (vv. 1ff); b). A description of the distress that depicts the monstrous way of the אליים (vv. 3-5); c). A prayer addressed to God followed by a corresponding wish (vv. 6-9); and d). The joyous effects of divine justice for the righteous (vv. 10ff). The same outline is suggested by Weiser (1962) and Anderson (1980).

The Text

It is worth noting at this point that the outline is made using the English versions. The versification is different in the MT, which will be used in this analysis. This is because the MT versification begins from the title of the psalm. Hence the first verse in most translations is actually the second in the MT. The text appears as follows:

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    לַמנַצְחַ אַל-תַּשׁחֵׁת לַדָּוֹדְ מִכֹתְּם:
    הַאָּמִנָּם אֲלֶם צָבֶק תַּדַבֵּרִוּן מֵישָׁרִים תִּשׁפּטוּ בּנֵי אָדְם:
    הַאָּמִנָּם אֲלֶם צָבֶק תַּדַבֵּרִוּן מֵישָׁרִים תִּשׁפּטוּ בּנֵי אָדְם:
    הַמְּלֵּי בְּלֶב עוֹלֶת תִּפּעָלוּן בָּאָבֶץ חְמֵס יְדֵיכֶם תּפַּלֵּסְוּן:
    חַמַת-לָמוֹ בִּדְסִ מִּתְבָּרִ מַלְּוֹל מַלַחֲשִׁיִם חוֹבֵר חֲבָרִים מֹחֻכֶּם:
    אֲלֹהִים הַרָס־שָׁנִימוֹ בּפִימוֹ מַלֹּתְעוֹת כּפִירִים נְתְּץוֹ יְהְנָה:
    שְׁלָהִים הָבְרַס־שָׁנִימוֹ בּפִימוֹ מַלֹתְעוֹת כּפִירִים נְתְּץוֹ יְהֹנְה:
    בְּמֵוֹ יִתְנִלְּה בָּלֵב אָשֶׁר בֹמוֹ הַלְּה נָמָל אַשֶּׁת בַּל־חָזוּ שְׁמֶשׁ:
    בּמִוֹ הִלְנִה פִּירֹתִיכֵם אָטָר כּמוֹ-חַיִּ כּמוֹ־חָרוֹן יִשֹעָרֵנִּוּ:
    בּמֵיר הָבְינוֹ פִירֹתִיכֵם אָטָר כּמוֹ-חַיִּ כּמוֹ־חָרוֹן יִשֹעָרֵנִּוּ:
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ישֹׁמַח צַּדִּיק כִּי־חָזָה נָקָם פּעָמָיו יִּרְחַאַ בַּרַם הָרָשֵׁע: וֹ וִיאמַר אָדָם אַדְ־פּרָי לַצַּדִּיִק אַדְ וִשׁ־אֱלֹהִים שׁפִּטִים בָּאָרֵץ:

This is literally translated as follows:

¹To the director. "Do not spoil". A *Michtam* of David.

²Do you indeed, you gods, do righteousness

Do you with uprightness judge sons of man

³Even in heart, injustice you do

In the earth violence you weigh

⁴Estranged are the wicked, from the womb they wander

From birth they speak a lie

⁵Their poison is like the poison of a serpent

Like a deaf cobra that shuts its ear

⁶Which does not hear to the sound of enchanters

A united company of expertise

⁷Oh God, throw down their teeth in their mouth

Teeth fangs of young Lions, pull down, Oh Yahweh

⁸Let them flow like the waters walk to and fro for themselves.

Let him tread his arrows like they are withered

⁹Like a snail melting away as it walks.

Like the miscarriage of a woman, let them not see the sun

¹⁰Before your pots discern a bramble.

Like his living (and) like his burning anger, he sweeps away

¹¹The righteous will rejoice because he has seen vengeance.

His feet He will wash in the blood of the wicked

¹²And man shall say, surely there is a fruit for the righteous.

Surely there is a God who judges in the earth.

From this, it is observed that the first verse presents the title of the psalm, regarded in the MT as a verse of the lament. The address to the psalm, regarded in the MT as a verse of the lament. The address to the psalm, regarded in the MT as a verse of the lament. The address to the psalm, who are identified as unjust judges, begins in v. 2. This address ends in v. 3. In v. 4, the poet moves from the second person form of address to a third person where he seems to describe the wicked. This description runs through to v. 6. There is a shift to the second person again in v. 7. In this part, however, the address in to part of the imprecations against the enemies, it does not seem to be part of the address to Yahweh. That part

seems to be addressing the enemies. The psalm ends with a concluding declaration of joy and triumph for the righteous (vv. 11, 12). Thus, the psalm may be outlined as follows:

V. 1: Title

Vv. 2-3: Address to unjust judges

Vv. 4-6: Description of the wicked

Vv. 7-9: Petitions addressed to Yahweh

Vv 10: Curses uttered as an address to the wicked

Vv. 11-12: Vindication of the righteous

The point of deviation of this structure from the ones provided by Anderson (1980), Kraus (1988), and Weiser (1962) is in the separation of v. 10 from vv. 7-9 (In their reckoning, vv. 6-9). This is because the utterance in v. 10 does not form part of the lamenter's address to Yahweh. The address to Yahweh actually ends in v. 9. Hence, though v. 10 continues the wishes of the lamenter against the enemy, it begins a different section where the lamenter moves from petitioning Yahweh to the utterance of curses to the enemies.

In the title (v. 1), the attribution לְּמַבְּיֵלֵ ("to the director") is stated. The tune to which the psalm is set, אֵל־תַּבּעָּה (literally, "do not spoil") is also stated. This is followed by the assertion that it is בּוֹרָר מִכּתְּם ("A Michtam of David"). Though (לִּרָרָהְ) is separated from (מִּכֹתְּם) by some scholars (Kraus, 1988; Weiser, 1962), it is better combined to read "a Michtam

of David" as rendered by Anderson (1980). As stated earlier, this does not necessarily imply Davidic authorship. It could be dedicated to him or about him.

In the first section of the lament (vv. 2-3 – address to unjust judges), the judges are addressed as \square . Kraus links the identity of the \square with the use of the term in Psalm 82. He further identifies these "gods" as "divine beings that are subordinate to the Most High God, and accountable to Him" (Kraus, 1988, p. 535). Weiser (1962) seems to agree with the assertion of Kraus that the Document constitute the Celestial entourage of God. He also adds that the address here is made by God in a heavenly court scene. This is probably because of the assumption that the Disk are not humans and cannot be addressed by a human being. However, the overall context of the psalm does not seem to warrant such an assertion. It is possible that the Dissipation is a reference to human lords, rulers, judges, mighty ones, etc., (Anderson, 1980). The address is direct and they are asked questions on whether they do righteousness or whether they judge uprightly (v. 2). These questions are given immediate answers as the psalm further describes these judges in v. 3. He says there is injustice in their hearts and that they weigh violence in the earth. That is to say that instead of practicing justice, they planned injustice and violence.

In vv. 4-6, however, though the description continues, the address shifts from the D. The wicked are here described in the third person.

Anderson (1980) points out that the "wicked" who are described here are not

the same as the mighty ones addressed in vv. 2-3. With vivid imagery and symbolism, the wicked and their acts are described. They are estranged (v. 4a); they have been speaking lies from birth (v. 4c); their poison is like the poison of a serpent (v. 5a); they are like a deaf cobra that shuts its ear against the sound of enchanters who work with expertise (v. 5b-6). In this section, it appears that the wicked are described as people who are incorrigible and, like the deaf adder, cannot be charmed or influenced (Anderson 1980); have been speaking lies all their lives and threaten the life like dangerous serpents (Kraus, 1988).

After this description, the lamenter moves on to address God (vv. 7-9). This is where the imprecations are located. The next section (v. 10) continues with the imprecations though not addressed to Yahweh. Finally, in the section that describes the vindication of the righteous (vv. 11-12), there are some imprecations: the righteous will see vengeance and he will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked (v. 11). These imprecatory sections of the lament will be further analysed and their peculiar literary elements presented. Finally, the relationship of these imprecations with the entire lament and its meaning will be examined.

Imprecations in the Psalm

As already indicated, the imprecations in this psalm are located within the petitions addressed to Yahweh (vv. 7-9), the curses uttered to the wicked (v. 10), and the first part of the statement pronouncing vindication of the righteous (v. 11). These sections shall be the focus of this analysis.

Vv. 7-9: Imprecations within the Petitions addressed to Yahweh

This appears as follows:

⁷Oh God, throw down their teeth in their mouth

Teeth fangs of young Lions, pull down, Oh Yahweh

⁸Let them flow like the waters walk to and fro for themselves.

Let him tread his arrows like they are withered

⁹Like a snail melting away as it walks.

Like the miscarriage of a woman, let them not see the sun

In this section, the lamenter directly addresses God, immediately after describing the deeds of the wicked. At this point, there is a shift to God. Hence the poet begins with מֹלְהֹי and goes straight, without mincing words, to the wishes against the wicked. There is an indication that the lamenter wishes to leave everything to God from the use of the divine names in the first verse (v. 7). The verse begins with מֹלִהֹי and ends with מֹלִה These divine names guard the wishes which are expressed in chiastic (ABBA) succession. Since Hebrew poetry is replete with Chiasms, a lot of scholars have identified many chiastic structures in biblical studies. The pattern identified here by this researcher stands as follows:

- A Throw down
- B Their teeth in their mouth
- B¹ Teeth fangs of young lions
- A¹ Pull down

Since these are surrounded by the divine names at the beginning and at the end, the action is left in the hands of Yahweh. Anderson explains here that this section of the lament is patterned after the East Semitic type of curse where the performance of the curse is left to the deity (Anderson, 1980; see also Weiser, 1962).

In addition, the verbs used (the action to be taken by God) imply how this should be done. The teeth and teeth fangs are to be thrown down (סְבָּבִי) and pulled down (בְּבִיבִי). Since humans do not literally have teeth fangs, this reference points to their power to harm the lamenter. They signify that their ability to devour the people they oppressed should be painfully removed. The fact that there is the use of a lion metaphor implies that the lamenter sees the wicked to be extremely dangerous. Hence, they should be "rendered harmless" (Anderson, 1980, p. 432) by pulling down (בְּבִּבִי) their teeth fangs. This further confirms the earlier assertion that their deadliest weapons, to the lamenter, are their teeth.

The lamenter continues with the imprecation in v. 8 where there is a shift from the teeth to the use of similes that intensify the curses. In the first line, Yahweh is called upon to "let them flow like the waters walk to and fro for themselves." It is assumed by Anderson that "the writer may have had in mind the wadi that appears like a torrential stream during the rainy season but dries up in the summer" (Anderson, 1980, p. 432). This is true to some extent as the picture that the imagery used implies continuous flow into evaporation. The problem with Anderson's linkage is that the time frame in the psalm is short and abrupt. This short and abrupt nature cannot be directly linked to the time frame between the two seasons. The picture is that of a wade that appears during a rain and disappears almost immediately. In the words of Kraus, they should disappear "as water runs off and oozes away" (Kraus, 1988, p. 536). The lamenter is asking God to remove the wicked like water rushing away.

He then adds that he should tread his arrows "like they are withered" (line 2). It is worth noting here that this line is translated differently with different textual renditions. Kraus (1988) prefers to transpose the text to read, "Eric הציו בדרך, "wither like grass along the pathway" (see also Weiser, 1962). Literally from the MT, however, the text will read, "tread his arrows like withered." This can be properly rendered, "Let him tread his arrows like they are withered." Used in the hithpolel, "המלקלו has within it the idea of being cut off. The picture that this line seems to portray is the arrow of the wicked moving at an unfruitful pace. To be withered or cut off (יִתְבוֹלְלֵלוֹ) implies inability to penetrate or accomplish its intended purpose.

In v. 9, another set of parallel lines are set out. It is the wish of the lamenter that the wicked be made "like a snail melting away as it walks" (line 1) and "like the miscarriage of a woman" (line 2a). To complete the simile in the verse, he adds that "let them not see the sun" (line 2b). The problem with the translation of this verse is in the rendition of the hapax legomenon שׁבּלוּל. While it is usually translated as a "snail," some scholars follow the argument of G. R. Driver that it be rendered a "miscarriage" (Driver 1933). This seems to be from the fact that rendering it as a "miscarriage" will make it parallel with the element of untimely birth in the next line (Anderson, 1980). Kraus, however, argues that the first part of the verse "ought to expect a picture different" from the second part since "variation in the closest areas is a characteristic of the psalm (Kraus, 1988, p. 536). Hence, it doesn't necessarily have to be translated to express parallelism, especially when such a rendition is not clearly evident. In addition, the use of קבלים ("to walk") supports the argument that the hapax legomenon שַבלוּל be translated as "snail". The verse can therefore be literally translated to be a wish for the wicked to melt away (מְּנֶמֶשׁ) like the snail (שַׁבַּלּוֹלִי) and that they should not see the sun (שַׁבַּלִּילִי) בל־חַזוּ), like the miscarriage or untimely birth (בֶּבֶל) of a woman. This means that the lamenter wishes that the wicked will be completely annulled with their name and influence completely lost, as if they had never existed before (see Anderson, 1980; Kraus, 1988). He simply wanted them to melt away as snails do in the heat. His wish is that they die without any further influence, as a child who dies in its mother's womb. In the next section of the psalm (v. 10), the lamenter shifts the focus of the address from God to the wicked.

V. 10: Imprecations within the Curses uttered as an address to the wicked

In this section too, the images chosen communicate total disappearance of the wicked. Though there is some difficulty determining the addressee of this section, it seems plausible that the ones being addressed are the wicked. Anderson affirms that the verse "is in some textual difficulty" (Anderson, 1980, p. 433). He however concludes that the verse could be translated "before they perceive (their impending doom) he will tear them up, like weed(s) he will sweep them away in (his) burning anger." Except for his suggested emendation, this suggestion does not seem to fit into the grammar and construction of the verse. The same verse is translated by Weiser as "Sooner than your pots can feel the briar, whether green or ablaze, the high wind sweeps it away" (Weiser, 1962, p. 429). Though Weiser argues that the Revised Standard Version translation is doubtful, his translation seems very close to it: "Sooner than your pots can feel the heat of thorns, whether green or ablaze, may he sweep them away!" The message communicated here is simple: The wicked will be swept away before they know it. That is, before their pot (which is on fire) feels the heat that is produced by the fire (which is generated by the thorns), they will be swept away. The idea of thorns being green or ablaze stems from the phrase כמוֹ־חֵר כמוֹ־חַרוֹן (Literally, "Like his living (and) like his burning"). It appears the "pot on thorns" imagery used here reflects the sudden nature of their destruction. That is, whether the brambles (thorns) are green (alive) or burning (ablaze), the wicked will be swept away before their pots discern the heat coming from the fire generated by those thorns. This communicates sudden destruction.

From the fore-going, it is observed again that the plans of the wicked are alluded to in this imprecation. These plans are hidden in a pot and being heated on fire (whose heat is generated by thorns). The lamenter therefore wishes that these plans become null and void even before they are hatched: a wish for swift destruction and annulation. It is after this that he (the lamenter) shifts to vindicate the righteous. Within this last section (vv. 11-12) where he vindicates and pronounces blessings over the righteous, some imprecations are also uttered.

Vv. 11-12: Imprecations within the Vindication of the Righteous

In this final section, the psalmist turns to a tone of prediction and prophesying that the righteous will rejoice. In this section, he predicts that the righteous will rejoice because he has seen vengeance and that he (the righteous) will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. He adds that man shall proclaim that there is a fruit for the righteous and that there is a God who judges in the end.

Though this section stands as a conclusion to the psalm, it has within it an imprecation against the wicked. This is in the first part: "The righteous will rejoice because he has seen vengeance. His feet He will wash in the blood of the wicked". Both lines reflect the wish of the lamenter: for vengeance and destruction for the wicked. He wishes that he will rejoice. His joy depends on whether he will see vengeance or not.

Seeing vengeance $(\Box P)$ implies that the imprecations outlined earlier in the lament are ratified. That is the only time the law of retribution will be met. He will rejoice if the machinations of the enemies are annulled and/or

halted by Yahweh. It is seen that the joy of the lamenter will be complete only if the enemies meet destruction and their plans get aborted prematurely as petitioned in vv. 7-9. When God judges the wicked by cutting them off, the righteous will rejoice. Weiser describes it as the effects that the judgment will have on the righteous and that it shows an "undisguised gloating and the cruel vindictiveness of an intolerant religious fanaticism" (Weiser, 1962, p. 432). The context does not seem to suggest intolerant religious fanaticism as proposed by Weiser. Rather, the joy of the lamenter is probably because of the fact that justice is served. Anderson explains that the joy of the righteous is "primarily because God is justified, rather than because the wicked are punished" (Anderson, 1980, p. 433).

The second line paints a picture that contrasts the joy of the righteous and the demise of the wicked. He proclaims that the righteous will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. So the picture one sees is a gory scene in which the wicked are dead or wounded, their blood flowing and the righteous man is washing his feet in them. This gory scene is one of the reasons Psalm 58 is listed among psalms that contain imprecations.

Summary of Imprecations within Psalm 58

The imprecations within Psalm 58, as seen in the analyses, are placed within the lament and the cry for justice. The fact that it is a lament that cries for justice is illustrated in its introductory and final verses. After the title, the psalmist addresses the "gods" who are supposed to judge uprightly. He further describes the wicked and their actions which warrant the imprecations that follow in the next section. He describes their lies which they started since birth

and likens them to the poison of a serpent. The serpent is described so wildly that it seems even the expertise of enchanters cannot tame it. The psalm is arranged such that this description of the wicked will warrant the imprecations that follow in the petitions addressed to Yahweh.

The petitions begin from v. 7 where the lamenter calls upon Yahweh to throw down the teeth in the mouth of the wicked. He further wishes that the machinations and plans of the enemy, which he described as arrows, fail. The imagery used in this section is typical of the psalm. The imprecations are stated using the images that communicate the wish of the lamenter. He likens this wish to the flow of water that dries almost immediately, withered arrows, the trail of the snail that melts away or vanishes, and the miscarriage of a woman that does not see the sun. All these images are used to express the desire that the plans of the wicked be prematurely terminated.

Apart from the address to Yahweh which states these imprecations, the lamenter shifts attention to the enemy and tells them that their plans will not see the light of day. In this address too, imagery is employed. He tells them that their plans will be swept away before their "pots discern a bramble" (i.e., before the heat of fire lit by a bramble reaches the pot). This image also illustrates the wish of the lamenter against the enemies.

There are also imprecations in the concluding part that seeks to announce the vindication of the righteous. Apart from stating that the righteous will be vindicated, the psalmist contrasts the joy of the righteous with its accompanied misery that shall automatically engulf the wicked. This communicates the message that the psalm presents two sides: the lamenter and

his enemies. Only one side will see joy, there is no middle ground. Hence, the joy of the lamenter is misery for his enemies. Therefore, if the righteous will be victorious at the end, then "his feet he will wash in the blood of the wicked."

It is observed that the psalm is placed in a context that makes the imprecations inevitable. It begins by decrying the injustice wrought by the "gods" and ends with the emphatic declaration that "there is a God who judges in the earth." In between, there is a description of the wicked that presupposes injustice and the petition of the lamenter that calls for justice. The psalm, through its message, communicates that justice will prevail only if the wicked receive their punishment and the righteous are vindicated. As stated earlier, the vindication of the righteous is automatic misery for the wicked, hence the imprecations.

The imprecations are present in the psalm to contribute to its meaning and message. Once we attempt to take away the imprecations within this psalm, the message cannot be clearly communicated. This is so because, the plans of the wicked would have to be prematurely terminated before justice can prevail. Afterwards, the righteous would have to be vindicated, and this implies that the wicked will have to suffer ill fate.

A look at the imprecations in this psalm reveals that the psalmist uses a lot of imagery to communicate his wishes. Within this imagery, the enemies are subtly described (apart from the general description in vv. 4-6. After the general description, he begins his petition by addressing Yahweh and calling upon him to throw down their teeth, subtly indicating the *modus operandi* of

the wicked (the use of their teeth). He further calls for the withering of their arrows which, it is assumed, were meant to shoot at the lamenter. Also, he draws attention to the pot on fire and tells the wicked that their pot will not discern the heat before it is swept away. Thus, the imprecations are meant to thwart the efforts of the wicked to harm the lamenter. After that they will be vindicated and their victory implies the wicked will be destroyed (wounded or dead) and the righteous (the lamenter) will triumph over them. This will bring about the desired justice wrought by the "God who judges in the earth."

Psalm 137

Psalm 137 is the second communal lament that has been selected for this study. The psalm gives a picture of a group of 'Zion Lovers' sitting by the rivers of Babylon and weeping, refusing to sing the Lord's song in a strange land. It is full of heart-melting, tear-bringing pathos. The moaning of the captive, the wailing of the exile, and the sighing of the poets are heard in almost every line. Because of its tone and praise for the temple it is considered among the 'Zion hymns', namely the psalms that talk about Jerusalem (Bayerlin, 1975). Though rightly classified so, the lamenters also cursed their captors and prayed that the Lord repays them as they had served Israel. This cursing element gives the psalm a place in the classification of imprecatory psalms. The curses that are uttered against the enemies of Zion are so harsh that almost all scholars who list the imprecatory psalms add it (cf. Day, 2002; Reed, 2006; Bullock, 2001; Scott, 1997; Laney, 1981; Luc, 1999; Vos, 1949; and Surburg, 1975).

There may be disputes about many of the psalms and their dating but psalm 137 "needs no title to announce that its provenance was the Babylonian exile" (Kidner, 1975, p. 459). Though Sabourin indicates that Mowinckel considers Psalm 137 to be "considerably later than the return" (Sabourin, 1974, p. 320), a cursory reading will reveal that the main thrust of Psalm 137 is the captives' mournful sentiments of pensive melancholy and weary longing during its long and weary period of captivity. From this, it is suitable to be placed either during or immediately after the exile. The memories are so fresh and vividly described. Hence Sabourin further states that the psalm is more often than not dated during the exile (Sabourin, 1974). Schmidt is more emphatic about the claim. He states that Psalm 137 is the only psalm that points with certainty to the period of the exile, though the others cannot be classified as wholly pre-exilic or wholly post-exilic (Schmidt, 1984).

Claus Westermann suggests that Psalm 137 is not a psalm but a folksong, though he does not outline the reasons for his classification (Westermann, 1981). Hermann Gunkel puts it among a number of psalms that cannot belong in any of his categories because they borrow elements from two or more types; these are referred to as "mixed psalms" (Westermann, 1981). However, in his treatment of the various psalms, Leopold S. J. Sabourin places Psalm 137 in the laments of the community (Sabourin, 1974). A critical look at the psalm gives the reader an impression that it is a psalm of lament and more specifically, a community lament. Nothing can be sadder, or more despondent than the sorrow that this psalm of lament of the people expresses. It speaks of weeping in the remembrance of Zion; it speaks of lyres hung upon the poplar trees by exiles who have no heart to use them.

In addition to the despondency, weeping, etc., the Psalm also contains a thread of imprecations. These are seen in the last part of the psalm. The lamenter(s), at the end of the lament, utter curses and imprecations upon their enemies. These enemies are those who put them in the pains that are described in the psalm: The Babylonians and the Edomites. These imprecations, though not the main focus of the psalm, seem to form a major part of the lament and add meaning to the lament. This section seeks to analyse the entire psalm and to delve deeper into a study of the imprecatory sections and how they relate with the rest of the psalm. First there will be a literary analysis of the text and an attempt to further identify and analyse the imprecations found in the text. Finally, the relations of the imprecations with the rest of the psalm will be demonstrated.

Literary Analyses of the Text

The full text of the psalm in the BHS and a literal translation are as follows:

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    יַעַל נַהְרוֹתוּ בָּבֶּל שָׁם יָשַׁבנוּ נַּם־בָּכִינוּ

    בַּזְכֹרֵנוּ אֶת־צִּיּוֹן:

    יַעַל־עַרָבִים בּתוּכָה תְּלִינוּ כִּנְּרוֹתִינוּ:

    יַעַל־עַרָבִים בּתוּכָה תְּלִינוּ כִּנְרוֹתִינוּ:

    יַּעָל עָרָבִים בּתוּלְהִי שׁוֹבִינוּ הִבֹרִי־שִׁיר וְתוֹלְבֵינוּ שִׁמּחָתָה שִׁירוּ לְנִי מִשְׁלִּוּ תְּבִיר:

    זְּאִם־אָשׁבְּחְ יְנִינוּ הַבְּרִי שִׁרְּשִׁלְם תְּשִׁבְּח יְמִינִי:

    זְּאִם־בְּעִר אָשׁבְּחְ עַּלְבְּי אִם־לְּא אָזְכַּבְּרִי אִם־לְּא אַעְבֶּה פִּתְּרִי שָׁיִשְׁלָם תְּשִׁבְּח יְמִינִי:

    זְּלְרְנִי לְתִּבִּי שֲּהוֹם אֵת יִוֹם יְרִוּשְׁלָם הְאָמַרִים עָרוּוּ שִּׁבְּרִי הַיְּחִוֹּה וֹלְבֵנִי שֲּהוֹם אֵת יִוֹם יְרְוּשְׁלָם הְאָמִרִים עָרוּוּ שִּרְוּ עַּרְוּוֹ שִׁיִּבְּלָּת הַשְּׁבְּרָה אַשְׁרִי שִׁיְשַׁבְּם־לֵךְ אֶת־נְּמִוּלֵךְ שִׁנְּמַלִּת בָּבִּר הַשִּׁבְּרָה אַשְׁרִי שִׁיְשַׁבְּיִ אֵרְי שִׁיִּשְׁלָם הְבָּבְּל הַשְּׁבְּוֹלְ שָׁנְבִּין אֵח־עִלְלַלִיךְ אֵל־הַפָּלֵע:

    צִּינִי שִׁיּאחֹזּן וְנִבּּץן אֵת־עֹלְלַיִּךְ אֵל-הַפָּלֵע:

    צִּיִּמִין שִׁיּאחֹזוֹ וְנִבּּץן אֵת־עֹלְלַיִרְ אֵלֹבְּר הַשְּלִבִין שֵּיּאחֹזוֹ וְנִבּּץן אֵת־עֹלְלַיִרְ אֵלְּהַ הַשְּלֵבין.
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¹Upon Rivers of Babylon

There we sat, yea we wept In remembrance of Zion

²Upon poplar trees in its midst

We hanged our lyres

³For there they asked us our captors the words of a song

And our wasters, mirth. "Sing to us a song of Zion"

⁴How we sing the song of Yahweh

On a land of strangeness?

⁵If I forget you, Jerusalem,

Let my right hand forget (its skill)

⁶Let my tongue cling to my palate

If I do not remember you
If I do not bring up Jerusalem
Above my head joy

⁷Remember, Yahweh for the sons of Edom

On the day of Jerusalem.

Those saying "lay it bare, lay it bare"

To the foundation

⁸Daughter of Babylon, the one to be destroyed

Happy is he who deals with you as you have dealt with us

⁹Happy is he who grasps and dashes

Your children to the rock

In this psalm, we realize that the downhearted captives cannot enjoy themselves (vv. 1- 2), they cannot entertain their proud oppressors (vv. 3- 4), they cannot forget Jerusalem (vv. 5- 6), and they cannot forget Edom and Babylon (vv. 7-9). As already indicated, the psalm portrays the lamenters weeping and refusing to sing the Lord's song in a foreign land. Also, they

express their love for Jerusalem by vowing never to forget it. They end the psalm by praying against Edom and Babylon for being the cause of their present situation. Weiser (1962) observes that the psalm reveals the sufferings and sentiments of people who experienced the grievous days of the conquest and destruction of Jerusalem, shared the Babylonian captivity, and giving vent with passionate intensity to the feelings in their hearts, upon sighting the ruins that the happenings have wrought (Weiser 1962, 794). A further observation of the psalm reveals that the entire psalm can be looked at in a three - part structure when categorised thematically as follows:

- 1. The laments of Israel in Captivity (vv. 1-4)
- 2. Israel's remembrance of Jerusalem (vv. 5, 6)
- 3. Israel's prayer against Edom and Babylon (vv. 7-9)

The subject of vv. 14 is how the poets express their lament while in captivity. The section begins with עֵל בְּבֶּלוֹתוֹ בָּבֶּל "upon the rivers of Babylon" and ends with "עֵל אַרְבַּיִת בַּבֶּל "on a land of strangeness". The emphasis of this section is the land of strangeness, Babylon where they sat to lament. The second section (vv. 5, 6) begin with אַבּרְבָּיִלְּהְ עִּלְהֵרְדְּ יִרְרִשְּׁלָחֵ עֵׁל רָאשׁ שִׁנְּחְתִּר "if I forget Jerusalem" and ends with אַבּרְבִּי עַל רָאשׁ שִׁנְּחְתִר "if I do not bring up Jerusalem above my head joy". This makes Jerusalem the main object of the condition in both the opening and closing lines, hence the point of emphasis in the entire section. In vv. 7-9, Yahweh is directly addressed and the prayer and wish against Edom and Babylon are uttered. That section, though not directly delimited by a peculiar structure apart from

the change from the use of the first person, focuses on the subject of imprecation against the enemies of Israel.

The first section expresses their lament. Here, the poet begins with a description of what the captives were doing. They sat by the rivers of Babylon and wept when they remembered Zion. The reason that they give for their weeping is "when we remembered Zion". In Ezekiel 1:3 and 3:15, it is intimated that the captives were settled at Tel-Aviv along the river Chebar (Ntreh, 2006). Since in both the book of Ezekiel and in Psalm 137 the picture drawn of the exiles gives us the situation of a deplorable state, then we can conclude that the rivers referred to in the psalm will be what Ezekiel says. These captives sat here either by choice or compulsion. They might have chosen to spend time by the rivers so they could be alone, and mourn their fate, indulge their sorrows, and escape their grief. It is also possible that they were there by compulsion and employed to do some work for their captors either in taking goods from ships that were unloaded there, or to repair and maintain the banks of the rivers, or to do some servile work or another. Here, they would sometimes "sit down" pensive, as mourners used to do, and lament their case. Whatever the case may since, since the psalm doesn't really suggest the situation, what can be gleaned from the lament is that they were not happy where they were.

Nothing could present a more striking contrast to the Hebrews' native country than the region into which they were transplanted. Instead of their mountain city they entered the level city of Babylon. Unlike their national temple which was a small but highly furnished and richly adorned fabric, standing in the midst of its courts, all that they saw was the colossal temple of

the Chaldean Bel, rising from the plain. No wonder then that, the psalm is sung in pathetic words.

The posture identified by the poet is $\Box \underline{\underline{v}}$, (to sit). The idea of sitting down probably refers to those assembled for worship or those who happened to come together on some special occasion or perhaps a poetic representation of the general condition of the Hebrew captives, as sitting and meditating on the desolations of their native land. Among the poets, sitting on the ground is a mark of misery or captivity. The fact that they wept could mean that the word ישׁב is used to describe their miserable condition. Thus, as they sat there, they meditated and actually wept. Their emotions overpowered them, and they poured forth tears. The reason for this serious weeping was attributed to thoughts of their native land. They wept when they remembered (הבל) it. This line alludes to the remembrance of Jerusalem's former glory, the wrongs done to it, the desolations there, the temple in ruins, and their devastated homes. The remembrance could also be a reference to thoughts of the happy days which they had spent there. When these were contrasted with their present condition, they wept.

In addition, they hung their lyres (בּבּרוֹחֵינוּ) upon the willows. These were musical instruments, used in the temple service by the Levites. Their sorrow was so great that they hung them up as useless things. While the text could be talking about literally hanging their lyres upon the willows, it could also mean that they were as dumb as if they had hung up their lyres there.

They also added that, in the midst of their weeping they were interrupted:

³For there they asked us our captors the words of a song

And our wasters, mirth.

"Sing to us a song of Zion"

These people are here, after causing pain in the hearts of the people of Israel, requesting a song and mirth. They made this demand either out of curiosity, that they might know something of the temple songs and music they had heard of; or rather as jeering at and insulting the poor Jews in their miserable and melancholic circumstances. They seem to be saying: "now sing your songs if you can". However, it is important to note here that אַלְּלְנָלָּלְ does not express the idea of compulsion or force. Hence it was possibly a harmless request without the intention of taunting the captives. Despite their intentions, the general understanding of the captives was that the request of mirth and happiness was coming from those under whom they were then suffering. Hence, they felt tormented by the requests of their captors to sing the songs of Zion (Ntreh, 2006).

Their reaction to this request is a question which is rhetoric in nature:

⁴How we sing the song of Yahweh

On a land of strangeness?

This question tells us that the only reason assigned for not complying with the request for one of the songs of Zion was that they could not "sing the songs of Yahweh on a land of strangeness". The term "land of strangeness" (אַרְמַת בֶּבֶר) could be explained, as Ntreh puts it, as "a land of abominable deeds" (Ntreh, 2006, p. 99). This is clear in what Ezekiel says in Chapter 6:13.

The next part of the psalm seems to be telling how dear Jerusalem is to the lamenter. Though the entire psalm begins as a communal lament, the plural pronoun, "we" changes from this point to the singular, "I". This makes it sound like the lament of an individual:

⁵If I forget you, Jerusalem,

Let my right hand forget (its skill)

⁶Let my tongue cling to my palate

If I do not remember you
If I do not bring up Jerusalem
Above my head joy

The poet appears to be saying singing in such circumstances would seem to imply that they have forgotten Jerusalem. These captives are saying that it would be bad on their side if they should make merry while their temple was in ruins, their city desolate; and they being captives in a foreign land. He therefore vows that if he forgets Jerusalem, may his right hand forget its skill. This seems to refer to his skill in music, particularly in playing on the lyre. The Revised Standard Version translates the sentence as "let my right hand wither!" The sense could also be that: "let everything that is as dear as my right hand be taken from me."

The second aspect (v. 6) stands as a parallel repetition of the first aspect. Here the psalmist says that if he does not remember Jerusalem, then may his tongue cling to the roof of his mouth. "Let my tongue cling to my palate" serves here as a double-duty modifier because it modifies both "If I do not remember you" which precedes it and "If I do not bring up Jerusalem above my head joy" which immediately follows it. He seems to be saying here that "let me have no use of my tongue; let me be dumb and speechless; let me

never be able to sing a song or speak a word. Let these happen to me if I forget

about the deplorable state of Jerusalem and sing songs at such a season in an

enemy's country".

The "head joy" (רֹאשׁ שְׁמַחְתִּי) mentioned here is a reference to the

lamenter's chief or greatest joy. This joy seems to refer to the singing of the

Lord's song and the playing of the lyre because it is what is mentioned in the

immediate context: the lyres are hanged and the captives refuse to sing. The

psalmist ends this part of the lament by saying that he will prefer to forfeit his

greatest joy than to forget Jerusalem.

As indicated earlier, after lamenting their captivity and offering a

nostalgic remembrance of Jerusalem, the psalm ends with imprecations against

enemy nations (Babylon and Edom) in the final section (vv. 7-9). In this

section, the enemies are identified as Edom and Babylon, and Yahweh is

petitioned to "remember against" them. Their deeds, for which reason they are

being prayed against, are listed and the desired punishment is also indicated at

the end of the psalm. These imprecations shall be the focus of the next section.

Imprecations within Psalm 137 (vv. 7-9)

The imprecations in this psalm are in the final section (vv. 7–9) which

begins with an address to Yahweh and a request for vengeance on behalf of

Jerusalem. V. 7 reads,

⁷Remember, Yahweh for the sons of Edom

On the day of Jerusalem.

Those saying "lay it bare, lay it bare"

To the foundation

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Here, Yahweh is being asked to remember the sons of Edom on the day of Jerusalem. This day of Jerusalem (בְּוֹם בִּרְוֹשֵׁלְם is not known until it is linked with the first part of the psalm. In the first part of the psalm, there are nostalgic tones of the captives who sat by rivers of Babylon and wept. They found themselves in a strange land and could not sing the song of Zion. In the second section, the poet paints a picture that demonstrates that he will not forget Jerusalem. In fact, he decides to esteem Jerusalem above his greatest joy. Linking the nostalgia and the love for Jerusalem here, it can be concluded that בְּרֵרְנִיבֶּי נִיבְרִנְיִּבֶּי is a reference to the day that Jerusalem was destroyed. This simply implies that the imprecation is directly linked to the action of the enemy.

Yahweh is being called upon to remember "the sons of Edom" (בֹנֵי (בֹנֵי) on "the day of Jerusalem" (יוֹם יִרוּשֶׁלֶם). Sabourin says that the Edomites were "allied with the Babylonians to bring about the 'day of Jerusalem' (v. 7), the catastrophe of 587-6." (Sabourin 1974, p. 319). This assertion identifies יֵנֹם יִרְוּשֶׁלֶם to be the day of Jerusalem's destruction- the event that led to the situation described in v. 1. Because of the part the Edomites played in the destruction of Jerusalem, Yahweh is being petitioned to "remember" (דֹבֹנִי) them. This will be better understood from a study of the preposition used with it. The literal translation of that line will read: "Remember, Yahweh for/to the sons of Edom." The preposition "to" or "for" (לֹבוֹנִי אַרוֹם). It is important to note that when it is used with לֹבִנִי יִּרִּוֹם either

means to remember "for the sake of" or "against." That is, to remember their deeds either to their advantage or to their disadvantage (Holladay, 2000, cf. Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1906). In this context, Yahweh is being asked to remember the Edomites to their disadvantage. This makes the text an imprecation. The punishment wished for the Edomites is payment for what they have done. Though not directly stated, this line is a strong imprecatory statement. The use of הרבו is negative and vengeful; hence it can be viewed as a prayer against Edom.

The action of the Edomites that necessitated such vengeance as described in the next line within the same verse. The poet goes on to describe what the Edomites actually did and why Yahweh should "remember against" them. On the day of Jerusalem, they were saying "lay it bare, lay it bear to the foundation". The psalm paints the picture of Edomites standing aside and instigating or cheering up the Babylonians to completely destroy Jerusalem. They "seemed to have given moral support to the Babylonians when the destruction of Jerusalem was taking place" (Ntreh, 2006, p. 99). It seems they rejoiced at the ruin of Israel and helped forward their affliction, and were assistants to the Babylonians in the plunder and destruction of Jerusalem. The verb (ערד) means to "make naked" or "lay bare." The addition of "to the foundation" (עֵר הַוְּסִוֹר בָּה) expresses the idea of completely pulling down its walls and laying them level with the ground. They were so spiteful and malicious that they wanted Babylon to root up the very foundation of Jerusalem, and let nothing be left or seen but the bare naked ground. For such ruthlessness, the poet is asking God to remember the Edomites and repay them

accordingly. This imprecation is presented alongside the deeds of the enemy.

Thus, the Edomites called for the complete destruction of Jerusalem so the

Lord should remember and deal with them according to this deed.

The imprecation is presented in a different style in the next verse. Instead of addressing God, the poet addresses the enemy- Babylon. Expressing a spirit of vengeance and retaliation, vv. 8 and 9 address Babylon as follows:

⁸daughter of Babylon, the one to be destroyed

Happy/Blessed is he who deals with you as you have dealt with us ⁹Happy is he who grasps and dashes

Your children to the rock

Babylon is addressed and described as "the one to be destroyed" (הַשׁרֹּינָה) in line 1 of v. 8. In line 2, he continues to describe as "happy/blessed" (אַשׁרֵי) the one who will repay Babylon as they have served Israel. From line 1, we can infer that the psalmist is sure of this destruction that will come upon Babylon. In the second line, he is not just pronouncing blessings on the executer of such destruction, rather he calls the person blessed. The language used in these lines seems to imply the poet knows the outcome already. Since this follows immediately after the prayer for the Lord to remember Edom, the pronouncement here also implies that Yahweh, who is addressed in v. 7, will destroy Babylon. In addition, he will also bless anyone who treats Babylon with the kind of brutality that Israel suffered in their hands. The idea is that the one who shall repay Babylon for their treatment of Israel is blessed. So the wish of this lamenter is that Babylon should be treated as they have treated Israel.

This part of the psalm seems to portray that he will be esteemed a fortunate man who is made the instrument of inflicting punishment on a city so guilty and so cruel. He will acquire fame and honour by doing it; his name will be made known abroad and perpetuated among people. This could explain why Cyrus, who conquered Babylon, is called the anointed one by Isaiah (Isa 45:1). In order to emphasize Yahweh's choice of Cyrus, Isaiah reports that Cyrus was directly addressed by Yahweh (vv. 1-7). It is probable that Cyrus "gained this recognition from the biblical writers because his action and favour that he showed toward the Jews was unsurpassed" (Ntreh, 2006, p. 100).

Apart from the mention of total destruction "to the foundation" of Jerusalem as we see in v. 7, we are not given examples of what Babylon has done to Israel. However, the last verse, which contains imprecations, seems to supply this information. In this last verse, the lamenter pronounces happy the man who will grasp the enemies' children and dash them against the rock. Since the preceding lines are about repaying Babylon what they had done to Israel, this part, which appears as a logical continuation, supplies the fact that the people of Babylon dashed their (Israel's) little ones against the rock. This can be understood if the entire psalm is taken as a whole. It is portrayed to show that the Babylonians have really done much to hurt the captives. In v. 4, for example, they are described as "our wasters" and in v. 7, they are urged by the Edomites to lay bare Jerusalem to the foundation, which they probably did. In addition to these, v. 9 suggests also that they grasped and dashed the children of Israel to the rock. Hence, the lamenter's wish is that the same be done to Babylon.

In this passage, it is clear that the poet does not only approve of the action, or desired and prayed for it; he also looked forward to its fulfilment. It appears that he believes in the law of retaliation and hopes that a just and terrible judgment would certainly come upon the enemies of Israel. He therefore expressed this hope and states the manner in which it would occur. In addition, he described the feelings - the satisfaction - of those who would execute the divine purpose in the overthrow of Babylon. Also, he referred to the esteem in which the conqueror would be held by people, and the glory of the achievement as giving him fame among people.

It is clear here that though the psalm is described as a Zion psalm, the expression of its love for Zion stems from the wrongs done to Zion. Hence the spirit of vengeance is much more expressed. Thus, the psalm depicts the feelings of one who considers it proper that Babylon should be repaid as they have dealt with Zion. The lamenter also regards Babylon's destruction as a righteous judgment, and as a thing to be desired. Because of his desire for revenge, he approves of such a destruction, and sees it to be right. He describes the feelings of those by whom it would be done - their joy, their exultation, and even their barbarity. This implies that he approves of such barbarity and looks forward to it. This makes the imprecations to be more from the spirit of vengeance. He will be glad if the enemies should suffer exactly what they did to Israel. Because of this, it cannot in fairness be denied that these imprecations are apparently prompted more by the spirit of revenge than by a desire of just punishment. Because of the spirit revealed here and the harshness of the imprecations, the psalm is listed as an imprecatory psalm despite the fact that it contains only a small portion of prayers against enemies

(vv. 7- 9). This small portion, however, contributes to the overall meaning of the psalm. It makes the psalm to stand as a complete whole. It also adds some information for the reader. For example, it is within the imprecations that the reader gets to know some of the atrocities that were perpetrated against Israel. Within the imprecations also, we see the wish of the lamenter, and the actions of the enemy that warrant such imprecations.

Summary

This chapter has focused on a discussion of the imprecations within communal laments; Psalms 58 and 137. The psalms are introduced and discussed, their structures are outlines and the imprecations within them discussed. Finally, the relation of the imprecations to the entire psalm is established. It is clear that the enemies being prayed against are communal enemies and their actions have adversely affected the lamenters. Hence the prayer against them is that they get paid as they have treated the lamenters. This is clearly rooted in the spirit of vengeance and retaliation. The two psalms discussed present strong petitions against communal enemies and the imprecations are clearly based on the deeds of the enemies. In addition, the poets made use of parallelism, imagery, and intensification to present the The usage of these literary elements as well as the imprecations. characteristics that imprecations take will be further discussed in chapter five of this thesis. This is because this researcher intends to discuss the issues vis a vis similar issues in the individual laments which will be discussed in the next chapter (chapter four).

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSES OF IMPRECATIONS IN INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS

Introduction

In the previous chapter imprecations within communal laments were analysed. The selected psalms for this study are Psalms 35, 58, 69, 109, and 137. Out of these, Psalms 35, 69, and 109 are individual laments that contain imprecations against the enemy/enemies of the individual lamenter while Psalms 58 and 137 are communal laments that contain imprecations against communal enemies. While the previous chapter delved into a literary analysis of imprecations within Psalms 58 and 137 (i.e., psalms that contain imprecations against communal enemies), this chapter shall consist of a literary analysis of imprecations against individual enemies; namely, 35, 69, and 109. Just like the previous chapter, the exegetical method shall be the literary-critical reading of the selected psalms. Hence, poetic elements such as parallelism, intensification, imagery, etc., shall characterize the exegesis. For each psalm analysed in this chapter, there will be a brief review of the psalm, a presentation of the text, as translated by this researcher, and its structure which will reveal the sections that contain imprecations. Afterward, there will be a detailed study of the imprecations in the psalm to reveal the general characteristics and structure of the imprecations, as well as their place in the lament. The use of parallelism, intensification, and imagery in presenting these imprecations is reserved to be discussed in chapter five of this thesis. This will be done in synthesis with similar usages in communal laments that were discussed in chapter three. This will ensure a more detailed discussion as well as the presentation of a single conclusion on the nature and characteristics of imprecations within the psalter.

Psalm 35

Psalm 35 is the first to be studied in this section. This psalm can simply be described as a prayer for deliverance from false accusers. Kraus (1988) calls it a prayer song and a plea for Yahweh's assistance against false and hostile witnesses and Anderson (1980) calls it a prayer for deliverance. It is also described as a lament in which one of the "quiet in the land" is calling for deliverance (Weiser, 1962). According to Kraus, the psalm contains appeals addressed to Yahweh and an affirmation of innocence. He adds that the lamenter offers a description of the distress in addition to the appeal. It also includes a song of thanksgiving and a vow of praise. In addition, the psalm expresses confidence that the lamenter will be vindicated and there will be future praises. According to Anderson (1980) the lament is made up of petitions and expressions of certainty. Ugwueye and Uzuegbunam (2013) describe it as "a psalm of complaint of a burdened heart yearning desperately for vindication" (Ugwueye & Uzuegbunam, 2013, p. 31). They add that its imprecative outbursts are simply expressing the natural tendencies of the complainant's state of mind (Ugwueye & Uzuegbunam, 2013).

Though the psalm seems to have arisen from three different settings, Kraus talks of a single setting and asserts that the petitioner is persecuted by enemies. Particularly, the lamenter is falsely accused by false witnesses and people who are determined to persecute him. In this psalm "the righteousness and innocence of the oppressed psalmist lies in the balance" (Kraus, 1988, p.

392). Like Kraus, Anderson also sees a single setting for the psalm. He, however, suggests, "the psalm is a literary unity, describing the psalmist's experience from three different angles, with some overlapping" (Anderson, 1980, p. 275). In any case, we see the presence of enemies (or friends turned enemies) on each angle. He is therefore praying that Yahweh delivers him from these enemies. In the process, he invokes curses and imprecations on them.

It is clear from the review and the analysis of the psalm that it is a prayer for deliverance. The psalmist is praying to Yahweh to be delivered from his enemies. While it may appear as a military psalm with legal undertones, the psalm is better understood to be put in a legal setting with the petitioner using military terms to call for the action of Yahweh. This is demonstrated in the exegesis of the text.

The text (Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia - BHS)

The full passage as it appears in the Hebrew text - appears below:

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ַסְל עַ צִּמוֹתַיִּ וּתֹאמַרְנָהֹיְהנָהמִיכָּמִוֹך מַצִּיֵל עָנִימֵחְזָקְ 10 בָּל עַ צִמוֹתַיִּ וּתֹאמַרְנָהיְהנָהמִיכָּמִוֹך
                                                           מִמֶּנְרִוְעָנִי וְאֵביוֹן מִנֹזְלֹוּ:
                   יִבְּינִשׁאָלְוּנִי: חָמָס אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָבִעתִּיִשׁאָלְוּנִי: יַבְּעָה תַּחַתטוֹבָה שׁכִוֹל לנַפּשִׁי: <sup>12</sup> יְשֵׁלֹמֵוּנִי,רֶעָה תַּחַתטוֹבָה
יתפּלְתִׁי בַּאֲנִיוֹ בַּחֲלוֹתְּם לבושי שָׁק ענֵיִתִי בַצֵּוֹם נַפּשִׁי וֹתפּלְתִי 13
                                                                         עַל־חֵיקִי תָשְׁוּב:
           <sup>14</sup> כּרֵעַ־כּאָחֻלִיהִתהַלָּכִתִּי כַּאַבֶּל־אָם לְדֵר שַׁחְוֹתִי:
   יַרְעִתִי שָׁ מֹחֶוּ וְנֵצֵאַׁסָפּוּנֵאָספֿוּ עָלַיְנֵכִים וִלְא יָדַעִתִי 15
                                                                         בַרעוּ וַלֹא־דַמוּ:
                                  בֿחַנְבֶּי לַעֲנִי מָעִוֹג חָרִק עָלַיִשׁנִּימוֹ: בֿחַנְבָּי לַעֲנִי מָעִוֹג חָרִק
       17 אַדֹנָי בַּמָּהַתְּּרְאָה הָשִׁיבָה בַּמְימִשׁאֵיהַם מִכּפִירִים
               ברי מרמות בי לא שַלוֹם יְדַבֹּבְרוֹוְעֵל רְגְעִי־אָרָץ הִברִי מִרְמוֹת
   יַחֲשֹׁבְוּן:
בּוַיַּרִתִיבוּ עָלַיפִּּיהֶםְ אָמרוּ הָאָָחוֹ הֶאָח רְאֲתָה עֵינֵינוּ:
בּיבִּירִתִיבוּ עָלַיפִּיהֶם אָמרוּ הָאָחוֹ הֶאָח רְאֲתָה עֵינֵינוּ:
            בי באיתה יהוה אל-תחרש אדני אל-תרחקממניי
            <sup>23</sup> הָעִירָה וְהָקִיצָה לֹמִשְׁפָּמִי שֶׁלֹהֵי וַאִּרֹנָי לֹרִיבִי:
<sup>24</sup> שָׁפּמֵנִי,כִצִּרְקְדְּ יְהֹוָה שֱלֹהָיוְאַל־יִשֹׁמחוּ־לִי:
     יאמרוֹ בּלַבָּם הַאָח נַפּשׁנִוּ אַל־יֹאמרוֹ בּלַבָּם הַאָּח נַפּשׁנִוּ אַל־יֹאמרוֹ בּלַעְנְוּהוּ:
    בַּשׁוּוִיַחפּרוּ יַחִדְּוֹ שֹׁמֵחֵי רְּעָׁתִי יִלְבִשׁוּ־בְשֶׁתוּכלִּמָּוְהַ 26
                                                                         הַפַּגֹּרִילִים עַלֵי:
               בְּיַרְנָּוּוְיִשׁמחוּ חֲפֵצֵיצִּיְרְקִיוְיֹאמרְוּ תָּמִירִיִגְהַלֹּיְהוָה
הָחָפֵץ שׁלְּוֹם עַ בדּוֹ:
28 וּלשׁוֹנִי תָּהגָּה צִּרְקֵך כָּל־הַיּוֹם תּהַלָּתֶךְ:
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This passage can be literally translated as follows:

¹to David, *as author*Contend, O Yahweh, with my contenders;
Fight with my fighters.

² Take up a shield and a large shield
And stand up in my help.

³ And draw out a spear
And stop up my pursuers;
Say to my soul, "Your salvation am I."

⁴ Let them be ashamed and humiliated—those seeking my soul;
Let them move away behind and be abashed--those desiring my hurt.

⁵ Let them be like chaff before the wind,
And let the messenger of the Lord push (them)

⁶ Let their path be dark and slippery,

And the messenger of Yahweh pursuing them.

⁷ For without cause they hid their net for me (in) a pit;

Without cause they dug for my soul.

⁸ Let destruction come upon him unawares;

And his net which he hid, let it capture him:

In destruction let him fall.

⁹ And my soul will rejoice in Yahweh,

And it will exult in His salvation:

¹⁰ All my bones shall say, "Yahweh, who is like You,

Who delivers the afflicted from the one who is stronger than him,

And the poor and the needy from him who tears him away?"

¹¹ Malicious witnesses rise;

That which I do not know they ask me.

¹² They repay me evil after good;

Bereavement for my soul

¹³And I? In their sickness my clothing (was) sackcloth;

I humbled my soul with fasting

And my prayer returned unto my bosom.

¹⁴ like a friend, like a brother

I walked to and fro

Like a mourner for a mother

Blackened and bowed down.

¹⁵ and in my stumbling, they rejoiced and assembled together

Rose up against me as one man.

Assembled against me are smiters

And I do not know

They tore and were not silent

¹⁶With profane mockers (for) a feast;

They gnash at me with their teeth

¹⁷ Yahweh! How long will You look on?

Bring back my life from the ravages

From the young lions my only one

¹⁸ I will praise You in a large assembly;

Among many people I will praise you

¹⁹ Do not let my lying enemies rejoice over me;

Do not let those who hate me without cause wink the eye!

²⁰ For they do not speak peace

And against the quiet of a land

Lying words, they devise

²¹ And They enlarged their mouths against me

They said, "Aha! Aha!

Our eyes have seen!"

²² You have seen it, oh Yahweh; please do not be silent,

Lord, do not be far from me.

23 Arise, and awake for my judgement

My God and my lord, for my lawsuit!

²⁴ Judge me according to your righteousness, O Yahweh My God

Let them not rejoice over me!

²⁵ let them not say in their hearts

Aha! – Our soul

Let them not say, we have swallowed him up!

²⁶ Let them be put to shame and disgrace together,

The ones who rejoice over my misfortune!

Let them put on (be clothed in) shame and ignominy

The ones who make themselves great against me

²⁷ let them cry aloud and rejoice – Those who have a desire for my righteousness,

Let them say continually,

Great is Yahweh, who desires the peace of his servant!

²⁸ and my tongue shall proclaim your righteousness,

All the day it shall praise You.

It can be seen that the psalm is a lament in which the lamenter is mainly complaining about his enemies. Scholars have suggested various outlines for the psalm. According to Kraus (1988), the appeals addressed to Yahweh are expressed in vv. 1-8 and 22-26. In v. 7, there is an affirmation of innocence, and vv. 11ff offer a description of the distress in addition, there is a song of thanksgiving (vv. 9ff) and a vow of praise (v. 18). In addition, vv. 27ff express confidence that the lamenter will be vindicated and there will be future praises.

Kraus' (1988) outline reveals a three-part structure where the three major sections seem to each conclude with praise and thanksgiving (present or future). This is in line with Anderson's (1980) observation that the lament is made up of three petitions and each is followed by a promise to give thanks for the deliverance, or an expression of certainty. Anderson's versification, however, is different. In addition, Anderson gives the details of each section and accounts for each verse in the psalm. He states that vv. 1-10 are a prayer for divine help, with metaphors derived from warfare and hunting. Vv. 11- 18 present a further petition with a major theme being the ingratitude of the lamenter's former friends. These friends have become enemies at a time that he needed them most. The last section, according to Anderson, is vv. 19- 28,

which continue with the series of appeals. Here, the psalmist gives further description if his ominous need. Thus, like Kraus, Anderson also sees the psalm outlined in a three-part structure but the two slightly differ from each other on the point at which the sections begin and close. Though other scholars have attempted outlining the psalm (cf, Weiser, 1962; Putnam, 1980), the outlines presented by Kraus and Anderson stand out.

From vv. 1-8, the psalmist outlines a number of things he wants Yahweh to do against those who are against him. In this block, one sees an introductory address to Yahweh (vv. 1-3) which contain imprecations, an invocation of imprecations (vv 4-6), a declaration of innocence (vv. 7), and another invocation of imprecations (v. 8). In the next two verses (vv. 9-10), the psalmist describes how he/she will praise Yahweh for coming to his aid. It is also observed that from vv 11-17, the deeds of these "enemies" (vv. 11-12; 15-16) are described alongside the good deeds of the lamenter (v. 15-16) which seem to give an evidence of innocence. He ends in v. 17 by re-stating his plea for deliverance. This is also followed by a vow to give thanks in v. 18. Finally, there is a collection of wishes against the enemy in vv. 19-26. Within these wishes there are wishes that seek to prohibit the enemy from joy (v. 19), a description of their deeds (vv. 20-21), a series of addresses to Yahweh (vv. 22-24), a series of imprecations against the enemy (vv. 25-26), and an invocation of blessings for those who are on his (the psalmist) side (v. 27). This section is also concluded with a promise to praise Yahweh in v. 28.

This reveals three main sections as seen in the outline of Kraus and Anderson. These sections are further divided into subsections. Each of the

major sections is followed by a bridge of praise/vow of praise. This outline can be tabulated as follows:

Section 1:

Vv. 1-8	Expression of pleas to Yahweh
vv. 1-3	introductory address (with imprecations)
vv. 4-6	Invocation of imprecations
v. 7	Declaration of Innocence
v. 8	Invocation of Imprecations
Vv. 9-10	Vow of praise

Section 2:

Vv. 11-17	Description of the deeds of the enemy
vv. 11-12	Deeds of enemies
vv. 13- 14	Evidence of innocence
vv. 15-16	Deeds of the enemies
v. 17	Plea to Yahweh for deliverance
V. 18	Vow of praise

Section 3:

Vv. 19	0-27	Collection of wishes
	v. 19	prohibition wishes
	vv. 20- 21	deeds of the enemies
	vv. 22- 24	address to Yahweh
	vv. 25-26	Imprecations against enemies
	v. 27	blessings for friends
V. 28	Vow of praise	

This outline suggests three blocks (vv. 1-10, 11-18, 19 -28) in the psalm. Each block is made up of a lament and a vow of praise. The first block (v. 1-10) constitutes an expression of pleas to Yahweh; the second block (v. 11-18) consists of a description of the deeds of the enemies; and the third block (vv. 19-28) is made up of a collection of wishes. The vows of praise stand at the end of each block (vv. 9, 10; 18; 28). Hence the laments are found within vv. 1-8, 11-17, and 19-27. The imprecations are found mainly within the first and third blocks: vv. 1-8 and vv. 19-27. The second block (vv. 11-17) focuses on the deeds of the enemies and a proof of innocence. This seems to present justification for the imprecations in the first and third blocks.

The parts of this outline that contain imprecations shall constitute the focus of the rest of the discussion of the psalm. The sections within the first block that contain imprecations are the introductory addresses (vv. 1-3), and the two separate invocations (vv. 4-8 and v. 8). Within the last block, the imprecatory sections are in the prohibition wishes (v. 19) and in the last group of imprecations (vv. 25-26). These sections that contain imprecations are discussed below.

Imprecations within the First Block

Though the first block includes expression of pleas to Yahweh, the first three verses (vv. 1-3) are made up of requests for things that the lamenter wants Yahweh to do. Within this block, the imprecations can be found in the first section which contain the introductory address to Yahweh (vv. 1-3) and the section that follows with imprecations (vv. 4-6). V. 7 is a declaration of innocence and it is followed by another invocation of imprecations in v. 8.

Vv. 1-3: Introductory address

Though this is simply the introductory address, it contains imprecations worth considering. The section reads:

¹ Contend, O Yahweh, with my contenders;

Fight with my fighters.

² Take up a shield and a large shield

And stand up in my help.

³ And draw out a spear

And stop up my pursuers;

Say to my soul, "Your salvation am I."

In this introductory address, the psalmist begins the prayer by calling on Yahweh to contend with his (the psalmist's) contenders and fight with his (the psalmist's) fighters. He seems to be calling on Yahweh to do to the enemies what they do to him. If they contend with him, then Yahweh should contend with them. If they fight with him, then He (Yahweh) should fight with them. He continues by describing what Yahweh should do. He calls upon Yahweh to take up a shield and a large shield and stand up to help him. He (Yahweh) should draw out a spear and stop the pursuers and say to the lamenter's soul, "I am your salvation." It appears as if the first verse stands to introduce the theme. The lines are presented in a thematic parallelism where the lamenter is asking Yahweh to repay the enemies with exactly what they do: "Contend, with my contenders;" and "Fight with my fighters."

In the lines that follow he describes how this should be done. In vv. 2 and 3, he mentions the weapons that Yahweh should use and the action that is demanded against the enemies. First he is asked to take up a shield (בְּלֵבֶּל) and a large shield (בְּלֵבֶּל) which will be used to stand up to help the lamenter against the enemy. This should better be translated, "a shield, indeed a large shield."

Kraus translates און בּבְּבָּהְ as "shield and buckler". He explains that the psalmist is asking Yahweh to arm himself, take up a protective large yield to cover the persecuted and use the buckler as a weapon to fight the enemy (Kraus, 1988). He also explains that they are weapons of the foot soldier that Yahweh is to use as protection for the persecuted psalmist (Kraus, 1988).

Though two implements are mentioned, it is better translated as an emphasis, hence, "a shield, indeed a large shield" instead of Kraus' "shield and buckler". As indicated earlier, the psalm has military undertones, though it is presented in a legal background. The military undertones in the legal setting here seem to portray that the lamenter is at war (legal war) with his enemies and he is calling upon Yahweh to fight on his behalf. The next line (v. 3) adds up to this idea. The lamenter asks Yahweh to draw out a spear and stop the pursuers. The picture presented here is a situation where the enemies are pursuing the lamenter. The lamenter is helpless, calls upon Yahweh to draw a spear and stop them. This stoppage will involve fighting them on behalf of the lamenter. This fight is the wish of the lamenter against the enemies. The lamenter also seems to be in need of reassurance from Yahweh, hence the request, "Say to my soul, 'Your salvation am I.""

Vv. 4-6: Invocation of Imprecations

As already indicated, the verses that follow (vv. 4-6), are made of imprecations. The lamenter invokes upon the enemy his wishes which are imprecations and curses. He says:

⁴ Let them be ashamed and humiliated those seeking my soul; Let them move away behind and be abashed—

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those desiring my hurt.

⁵ Let them be like chaff before the wind,

And let the messenger of the Lord push (them)

⁶ Let their path be dark and slippery,

And the angel of the Lord pursuing them.

Each of these three verses is composed of two parallel lines. In the first verse, his wish is presented in two lines: the first line wishes that that those seeking his soul should be ashamed and humiliated and the second adds that those desiring his hurt should be moved away behind and be abashed. These two lines in v. 4, though choosing different words, are parallel in thought.

First, the people being prayed against are described as follows:

Line 1: "those seeking my soul"

Line 2: "those desiring my hurt".

These two lines are describing the same category of persons. To seek one's soul implies that the enemies also desire to hurt the lamenter. These people are really enemies because they are actively looking for the lamenter to hurt him. Hence he also wishes that Yahweh will do his bidding and punish them. In each line, he expresses two wishes. In line one, he wishes that they be ashamed and humiliated and in line two, he wishes that they be moved away behind and be abashed.

The wishes expressed in the two lines focus on the shame of the enemy. In the first line he prays that they be ashamed ($\Delta 12$) and humiliated ($\Delta 12$). Although $\Delta 12$ and $\Delta 22$ are qal imperfect in form, they function as jussive. This implies that the lamenter is expressing a desire to have his wish ratified. In addition, the two words share a similar meaning, which generally is

an expression of shame and disgrace. The recipients of this curse are described as "those seeking my soul" (מב. קשׁיבַּ. פֿשִׁי).)

In the second line, the petitioner wishes that they be moved behind מור) and be abashed (כלוד אחור). The idea of turning the enemies back seems to present a picture of pursuit. This links the second line with the first in which the enemies are described as those seeking the lamenter's soul. They are seeking his soul in pursuit and he wishes that they be turned back from their pursuit. He does not only wish that they be turned back; he also wishes that they be abashed. The word translated abashed (השבת) has roots that mean to dig or search for something. It can, however, be translated to mean ashamed or confounded (Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1906). In this context, it is clear that the psalmist wishes confusion and shame for his enemies. In this second line of the verse, the enemies are described as people who are "desiring my hurt" רעתי). Putting the two lines together, we can say that they are seeking for his soul to hurt him. The meaning of מֹלֵיניׁ actually goes beyond desire to esteeming and consciously devising. Thus, the enemies are making a conscious effort to make sure evil befall the psalmist. Hence, he wishes that their intentions are stopped and they be confounded and ashamed.

The wishes of the lamenter continue in v. 5:

5 Let them be like chaff before the wind, And let the messenger of the Lord push (them)

The two lines present an imagery of how the lamenter wishes that his enemies be completely extinguished. He first used a simile to present how In v. 6, he continues with further wishes against the enemy:

6 Let their path be dark and slippery, And the angel of the Lord pursuing them.

 way of behaviour, or an activity, custom, conduct, etc. if this is the case, then the psalmist it asking Yahweh to make the activities of the enemies difficult to be accomplished. For it to be dark and slippery, it means they will not be able to accomplish their wicked plans and activities. In addition to a dark and slippery path, the lamenter calls for pursuit by an angel of Yahweh. The image presented is one that certainly will make the enemies uncomfortable. The lamenter wishes that they have a dark and slippery path, and that they be being pursued by the messenger of Yahweh.

Unlike the previous verse where the messenger of Yahweh is to push (तिति) them, here he is to pursue (तिति) them. In v. 5, they are described as chaff blown by the wind and in v. 6, they have a dark and slippery path. The role of the messenger of Yahweh in either instance is one of intensification. In v. 5, they would be blown away by the wind anyway, but the psalmist further wishes that the messenger of Yahweh should push them. The fact that they are both blown by the wind and pushed by the messenger of Yahweh intensifies their fall. In the same vein, the dark and slippery road will result in sure disaster for the enemy. The psalmist, however, wishes in addition that the messenger of Yahweh should pursue them on this dark and slippery road. Pushing and pursuing are used here to present two different images of a similar action against the enemies. In essence, the messenger of Yahweh is introduced in the two verses in two separate lines of intensification. They are to reinforce the curse in their respective preceding lines and to increase the plight of the lamenter's enemies.

V. 8: Invocation of Imprecations

As mentioned earlier, the first clock closes with the imprecations in v.

8. The Lamenter concludes the section by returning to the pleas to Yahweh against the enemy. He prays:

8 Let destruction come upon him unawares; And his net which he hid, let it capture him: In destruction let him fall.

Unlike vv. 4-6, where each verse is presented in two lines, v. 8 contains three lines. Here too, the number of enemies changes. From vv. 1-7, the enemies are presented in plural terms. In v. 8, however, there is a shift from the plural to the use of the singular. Though the psalm does not suggest anything, the possible reason for this shift is that he is presenting a petition against his enemies generally, but at the present moment, he is targeting a particular enemy. This particular person might have masterminded the false allegations against him or he might have been the one who set the net. The lamenter's wish is that destruction comes upon the enemy unawares, that the net which he (the enemy) hid should capture him (the enemy himself), and that he should fall in destruction.

These three lines present the same idea in a developing sequence. First, the lamenter prays for unexpected and surprise destruction for him. That is, destruction should come upon him without his knowledge (בְּלֵבְיִלֵבֶׁ). This is explained in the next line where the prayer goes that he should be captured in the net that he had hid himself. What makes it a surprise is the fact that the net that captures him was hidden by him. This can only happen unexpectedly. Finally, the grand wish for the enemy's destruction is made: "In destruction let

him fall." The idea that the verse presents is destruction for the enemy. This is seen in the arrangement of the lines within the verse. The theme of "destruction" (אַבּוֹאָהוֹ (שׁוֹאָה) stands at the beginning (אַבּוֹאָהוֹ שׁוֹאָה), "let destruction come upon him") and at the end (אַבּיבָּה), "In destruction let him fall") of the verse. In between, there is a plea to let his own net capture him – a plight that will lead to destruction. Thus, this section ends with the idea of destruction for the enemy.

In this first block of the lament (vv. 1-8), the psalmist presents pleas to Yahweh against the enemies. The enemies are described by their acts and intentions: contenders, fighters, pursuers, those seeking my soul, those desiring my hurt, people who hid a net in a pit, and dug for the soul of the lamenter. Because of these acts, the lamenter calls upon Yahweh to come to his aid against the enemies. Yahweh is called upon to contend with them, fight them, take up a shield, draw out a spear, and save the lamenter. He is also called upon to ratify the wishes of the lamenter against the enemy: let them be ashamed and humiliated, let them be blown away like chaff, let their path be dark and slippery, and let them meet unexpected destruction. It is clear in this first section that the imprecations are mostly based on the actions of the enemies. The imprecations are made an integral part of the lament in that they are sandwiched between a description of the actions of the enemy and a declaration of innocence on the part of the lamenter. Along with the imprecations, the lamenter emphasises his innocence and highlights the brutality of the enemies. All these are followed by a vow of praise in vv. 9-10, a description of the deeds of the enemy in vv. 11-17, and another vow of praise in v. 18. Thus, there are no imprecations in the second block. Rather, the lamenter tries to prove that his enemy/enemies is/are guilty and that he (the lamenter) is innocent. It appears this block is deliberately placed between the first and third to give justification for the imprecations and curses that envelope it. The next group of imprecations are in the third block (vv. 19-28). These shall constitute the focus of the rest of this discussion.

Imprecations within the Third Block

V. 19: Prohibition Wishes

This section is a collection of wishes from the lamenter. Most of these wishes are against the Enemy. In the midst of these wishes, he also describes their acts and thus justifying his wishes. As already indicated, this final section begins with a wish that Yahweh should "not let my lying enemies rejoice over me." The verse stands as follows:

¹⁹ Do not let my lying enemies rejoice over me; Do not let those who hate me without cause wink the eye! Within the first line, the enemies are described as "lying enemies" (אֹיבִי שֶׁקָּר). This could either imply they are enemies who bear false witness against the lamenter or they are falsely his enemies. Since the psalm seems to assume a court context, the term אִיבִי שֶׁקָּר could be a reference to the fact that the enemies are bearing false witness against the lamenter. His plea here is that these enemies should be prevented from rejoicing over him. He adds, in the second line, that Yahweh should "not let those who hate me without cause wink the eye." Linking this with the first line, we can conclude here that the "winking of the eye" (קרצו־עֵין).) suggests a form of rejoicing that will arise after the fall of the lamenter. His request is that those who lie against him and those who hate him without cause should not be given any cause to rejoice.

Such prohibition may not directly appear as an imprecation, but a deeper analysis of the wishes and the context of the psalm makes it an invocation of a curse on the enemy, hence an imprecation. The first line is a request to prevent his enemies from rejoicing over him. Rejoicing over him implies that their (the enemies) testimony is believed and the lamenter is convicted. In the second line, he prays that they should not have any cause to wink the eye. That is, they should not have any cause to be happy. These prohibitions wishes are made because the enemies are "lying" and they hate him "without cause". After these prohibition wishes, the lamenter goes on to describe their deeds (vv. 20-21) and to call upon Yahweh to come to his aid (vv. 22-24). This is followed by another series of imprecations in vv. 25-26.

These seem like imprecations that will prevent the enemies from rejoicing over the lamenter.

Vv. 25-26: Imprecations against enemies

This is the last series of imprecations within the psalm. The text is as follows:

25 let them not say in their hearts
Aha! – Our soul
Let them not say, we have swallowed him up!
26 Let them be put to shame and disgrace together,
The ones who rejoice over my misfortune!
Let them put on (be clothe in) shame and ignominy
The ones who make themselves great against me

This section presents wishes (v. 25) and imprecations (v. 26) that are meant to keep the enemies from rejoicing over the lamenter. In v. 25, he prays that the enemies should not be granted the desire to say "Aha! Our soul." If they are able to make this expression, it will mean that their souls have gotten what they really wanted and that they have received their innermost desires. The next line adds more detail: "Let them not say, we have swallowed him up!" Linked with the previous line, we can conclude that the expression "We have swallowed him up!" is actually the desire of the enemies. They desire to completely undo and destroy him. Hence, the prayer of the lamenter is that the enemies should not be granted this desire. Rather, the desires of the lamenter should be ratified.

These desires are the imprecations found in v. 26. In this verse, the lamenter prays that the enemies be put to shame and disgrace together and that they be clothed in shame and ignominy. These are presented in two pairs of lines in an "Imprecation-type of enemy" structure. That is, the first line is the

curse and the next line is a description of the enemy. The two pairs may be tabulated as follows:

Imprecation 1: "Let them be put to shame and disgrace together,"

Type of enemy 1: "The ones who rejoice over my misfortune"

Imprecation 2: "Let them put on (be clothed in) shame and ignominy

Type of enemy 2: "The ones who make themselves great against me"

Within these imprecations, the enemies are described. They are people who rejoice at the misfortune of the lamenter and who also make themselves great against him. Rejoicing over his misfortune also includes the fact that they contributed to the misfortune. In the previous section of the lament, he described them as false witnesses whose desire is his doom and destruction. They will therefore rejoice at his misfortune. Hence, his wish against them is that they be put to shame and disgrace. He adds that this disgrace should happen to them together. The second pair of lines in the verse (v. 26) describes the enemies as people who magnify themselves against the lamenter. This refers either to those who become great at the expense of the enemy or to those who consider themselves to be great and look down at the lamenter. Either way, his wish for them is that they be clothed in shame and embarrassment. The picture given here is one in which these people who consider themselves above the lamenter are wearing clothes of shame and disgrace to the full glare of everyone. This way, their secrets will all be in the public domain and they will lose their respect and popularity.

Summary of Imprecations within Psalm 35

An analysis of the entire psalm with the imprecations in mind reveals that the imprecations play a major role in the overall meaning and presentation of the lament. The descriptions of the acts of the enemy are intertwined with the wishes of the lamenter against them. It is observed that the lamenter is praying for Yahweh to do unto the enemies what they have done to him (the lamenter). For example, Yahweh is called upon to contend with those who contend with the lamenter and fight with his (the lamenter's) fighters, etc. Here, we see a clear invocation of the law of retaliation (lex talionis). In addition, the descriptions of the acts of the enemy are meant to present a justification for the imprecations. Yahweh is called upon to punish them because they devised evil against the lamenter without cause. This is seen in his declarations of innocence that are seen in the psalm. Finally, the calls for deliverance are presented such that they may not be complete until the imprecatory aspects of the prayer are also answered. In short, Yahweh is called upon to deliver the lamenter from the oppression and false accusation of the enemy. This deliverance implies that the lamenter will be declared innocent and that places the enemies in guilt. Hence they will suffer the punishment and disgrace that goes with their guilt. Hence, it is clear that the imprecations that are presented within the psalm do a lot to make the message of the entire psalm stand out clearly.

The lament does not appear complete without the imprecations. This is because the psalm is a prayer for deliverance from false accusers. The deliverance cannot be completed if the curses and imprecations against them are not granted. The imprecations are meant to stop them while they are on the act of trying to destroy the lamenter. Hence Yahweh is called upon to do to them what they intend to do to the lamenter. This is the reason why their deeds are described together with the imprecations.

In each of the imprecations within this psalm, there is the use of imagery, parallelism, and intensification of ideas. These will be further discussed in chapter five. But the dominant structure is the juxtaposition of imprecations with the deeds of the enemy. This is seen in the structure of the entire psalm as well as the blocks of laments. The simple Message that this communicates is that, the lamenter gives justification for the curses and imprecations uttered against the enemy. This makes the psalm stand out as a prayer to Yahweh for deliverance from these enemies and such deliverance will be wrought by doing to the enemies what they intended to do to the Lamenter.

Psalm 69

Psalm 69 is another individual lament that contains imprecations. It is listed by Johannes G Vos (1949), Raymond F. Surburg (1975), J. Carl Laney (1981), Shane Scott (1997), Alex Luc (1999), C. Hassell Bullock (2001), and John Day (2002) as an imprecatory psalm. It stands alongside Psalms 109 and 137 as psalms that were listed by almost all scholars as imprecatory. Goldingay (2007) describes it as "a psalm of protest and plea" (Goldingay, 2007, p. 338). A cursory reading reveals that, like Psalm 109, it contains several verses that have imprecations in them.

Psalm 69 is generally described as an individual lament (Weiser, 1962; Sabourin, 1974; Westermann, 1981, Anderson, 1980). According to Anderson (1980), it is a "lament of the individual who has been afflicted by some illness, and by the unsympathetic attitude of his family and unjust accusations of his

enemies" (Anderson, 1980, p. 499). In fact, it is the most frequently quoted psalm in the New Testament after Psalm 22 (Weiser, 1962).

The text reveals that Psalm 69 is a lament of an individual who is praying for deliverance from personal enemies. His description of his sufferings implies that he is at the point of death. In addition, he has attracted further insults, accusation, and rejection from the entire community because of his faithfulness to Yahweh and his pious practices. Because he serves God faithfully, this lamenter believes that God will come and deliver him from misery and bring retribution upon his enemies. This retribution on the enemies is presented in the form of imprecations, hence its classification as an imprecatory psalm. This study does not seek to contend whether Psalm 69 belongs or doesn't belong to the imprecatory psalms. Rather, it seeks to interact with the imprecations that can be found in the text and study how they are presented in the text to contribute to the meaning of the entire psalm. Though the text presented below is the entire psalm, attention will be drawn to the aspects that contain imprecations. The rest of this section will focus on a presentation of the text and a literary analysis of the imprecations that are found therein.

The Text of Psalm 69

The text as it appears in the BHS is presented followed by its translation:

ַ לַמנַצֵּחַ עַל־שׁוֹשַנִּים לדָוִד בּהוֹשִׁיעֵנִי אֱלֹהִים כִּי בָאוּ מֵיִם עַד־נָפֶּשׁ מַבַעתִּי בִּיוֵן מצוּלָה וְאֵין מָעֲמָד בָּאתִי במַעֲמַקֵּי־מַיִם וִשִׁבֹּלֵת שׁטָפָּתנִי

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ַנְעַתִּי בקָרָאִי נְחַר נְּרוֹנִי כָּלוּ עֵינֵי מיַחֵל לֵאלֹהָי 4
בַּבּוּ מִשַּׂעֲרוֹת רֹאשִׁי שֹנְאַי חִנָּם עָ צמוּ מַצמִיתֵי אֹיְבַי שֶׁקֶר בַּּבּ
                                                אֲשֶׁרָ לֹא־נְזַלֹתִי אָז אָשִׁיב
    יַבעתָ לאָנַלתִי וְאַשׁמוֹתֵי מִמְּדְ לֹאָ־נְכחָדוּ 6 אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה יָדַעתָּ לאָנַלתִי וְאַשׁמוֹתֵי מִמְּדְ
       זאַל־יִבשׁוּ בִּי קוָיךּ אֲדְנָי יְהוִה צבָאוֹת אַל־יִכָּלמוּ בִי־
                                                  מבַקשֶׁיךָ אֱלֹהֵי ישׂרָאֵל
                       $פִי־עָלֶיךּ נָשָׂאֹתִי חֶרְפָּה כִּסִּתָה כֹלִמָּה פָּנָי $
                                מוּזָר הָיִיתִי לאֶחָי וְנָכרִי לִבנִי אִמִּי 9
       יַלָּעָת בֵּיתף אֲכָלָתנִי וְחֶרְפּוֹת חוֹרְפֶּיף נָפּלוּ עָלָי 10 בּי־קְנָאַת
                           יוֹנָאֶבכֶּה בְצוֹם נַפֹּשִׁי וַתִּהִי לַחֲרָפּוֹת לִי יוֹ
                            יוֹאָתנָה לבושי שָק וָאֱהִי לָהֶם למָשָׁל 12
                        ישָׁבִר וֹנְגִינוֹת שׁוֹחֵי שֶׁבָר וֹנְגִינוֹת שׁוֹחֵי שֵׁכָר יִשְׁבִי וֹשְׁבֵי שִׁבָר
ַנְנִי תּפִּלָּתִי־לֹךְ יְהֹנָה עֵת רָצוֹן אֱלֹהִים בּרָב־חַסהֶדְ עֲנִנִי 14
                                                                  בַּאֵמֵת ישעד
בּיבִים וְאַל־אֶטבָּעָה אָנָצלָה מִשֹּנְאַי וְמִפּוֹעֲמַקּי־כְּיִם אַנָּצלָה מִשֹּנְאַי וְמִפּוֹעֲמַקּי־כָּיִם
                 16 אַל־תִשטפֵנִי שִבּלֶת מַיִם וְאַל־תִבלְעֵנִי מצוּלְה
                                              וְאַל־תָאטַר־עָלַי בּאֵר פִּידָ
            יַלָּנְנִי יְהוָה כִּי־טוֹב חַסהֶךְ כּרֹב רַחֲמֶיךְ פּנֵה אֵלָי 17
             ּוְאַל־תַסתֵר פָּנֶיך מֵעַ בדֶּך כִּי־צַר־לִי מַתֵּר עֲנֵנִי 18
                       ייבי פּדִנִי אֶלְהַ למַעַן אִיְבֵי פּדִנִי 19
       אַתָּה יָדַעתָּ הֶרְפָּתִי וּבָשׁתִי וּכלְפָּתִי נֶגְּדְּדְ כָּל־צוֹרְרָי 20
 בים שָברָה לִבִּי נָאָנוּשָׁה נָאֲקַנֶּה לָנוּד נָאַין וְלַמנַחֲמִים 21
                                                                  וָלֹא מַצַאתִי
                      יַפּרוּתִי ראש וְלְצמָאִי יַשׁקוּנִי חֹמֶץ 22 בַּרוּתִי ראש
                 23 יְהִי־שֻׁלחָנָם לִפּנִיהֶם לפָח וְלִשׁלוֹמִים למוֹקֵשׁ
             רמעד הַמִּעִר הַמִּיבָה מָרָאוֹת וּמָתנֵיהֶם הָמִיד הַמוּעַר 24
                          עמֶּך וַחֲרוֹן אַפּּך יַשִּׂיגִם עַ עמֶּך וַחֲרוֹן אַפּּך יַשִּׂיגִם 25 עמֶּד בּיַשִּׁיגִם
                    26 תהי־טִירָתָם נְשַׁמָּה בּאָהֶלֵיהֶם אַל־יְהִי ישֵׁב^
    יַסְפֶּרוּ מְשֶׁר־הִכִּיתָ רְדָפוּ וְאֶל־מַכאוֹב חֲלָלֶיךְ יְסַפֵּרוּ מִילְ יָסַבּּרוּ מְלֶלֶיךְ יְסַפֵּרוּ
                          אַרְ־עָוֹן עַל־עֲוֹנָם וְאַל־יָבֹאוּ בּצִּדְקְתֶּךְ 28
                     יפָּתבוּ מִּפֶּפֶר חַיִּים וְעִם צַּדִּיקִים אַל־יִכְּחֵבוּ 29
                     יוֹאָנִי עָנִי וְכוֹאֵב יְשׁוּעָ תּךּ אֱלֹהִים תּשַּׂנְבֵנִי 30
                   מַבּלֶלָה שַׁם־אֱלֹהִים בּשִּׁיר וַאֲנַדְּלֶנוּ בתוֹדָה 31
                          מפרים מַקרן מַפרים משור פָּר מַקרן מַפרים 32
                מַנְוִים יִשׁמָחוּ דּרְשֵׁי אֱלֹהִים וִיחִי לבַבּבֶם 33
            יהנָה וְאֶת־אֱסִירָיו לֹא בָזָה מְאֶב־יוֹנִים יְהנָה וְאֶת־אֱסִירָיו לֹא בָזָה 34
                     יַבְללוּהוּ שָׁמַיִם נָאָרֶץ יַפִּים וְכָל־רֹמֵשׁ בָּם 35
       יושבו שָׁם אַלהִים יושיע ציון וְיִבנֶה עָרִי יְהוּדְה וְיָשבוּ שָׁם 36
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וִירֵשׁוּהָ זֹרֵע עֵבָדִיו יִנְחָלוּהָ וִאֹהֵבֵי שׁמוֹ יִשׁכּנוּ־בָה ³⁷

This is translated as follows:

¹To the Choirmaster. On Shoshannim. Of David ²Save me oh God; the waters have come to my neck ³I have sunk in deep mire and there is no foothold I have come into depths of water and a flood has overflowed me ⁴I have become weary of crying out My throat has become parched My eyes have failed waiting for my God

⁵They are many more than the hairs of my head who hate me without cause
They are numerous who destroy me
My lying enemies
What I stole not
I will return
⁶Oh God you know my folly
and my guilts are not hidden from you

⁷Let them not be ashamed who wait for you for my sake Oh Yahweh Lord of hosts
Let them not be humiliated who seek you for my sake Oh God of Israel

⁸I have borne reproach for your sake
My face is covered in ignominy

⁹I have become estranged to my brothers and a foreigner to the children of my mother

¹⁰The zeal of your house has consumed me and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me
¹¹And I wept with fasting and it became reproaches to me
¹²And I made my clothing sackcloth
And I became a byword for them
¹³Those who sit in the gate speak about me and the songs of drunkards

And I, my prayer is to you Oh Yahweh
 At a time of favour, Oh God
 Answer me in the greatness of your loving kindness
 In the faithfulness of your salvation
 Deliver me from the mud

and let me not sink
may I be delivered from those who hate me
And from the depths of water

16Let not the flood of water overflow me
And let not the deep swallow me up
And let not the pit close over me

¹⁷Oh Yahweh, answer me, for your loving kindness is good Turn to me according to the greatness of your compassion
¹⁸And do not hide your face from your servant
For I am in distress, answer me speedily
¹⁹Draw near to me, redeem
On account of my enemies, ransom me

²⁰You know my reproach
and my shame and my disgrace are before you
All my foes
²¹Reproach has broken my heart
And I have become sick
And I longed to sympathize
And I found no comforters
²²And they put poison in my food
And they gave me vinegar to drink for my taste

²³May their table become before them a trap and for their allies a snare ²⁴May their eyes grow dim from seeing and may their loins be made to shake continually ²⁵Pour out on them your indignation and may the burning of your anger overtake them ²⁶May their encampment be made desolate In their tents may no one dwell ²⁷For those whom you have struck down they have harassed and concerning the pain of the wounded ones, they have recounted ²⁸Put iniquity to their iniquity And don't let them come in your righteousness ²⁹May they be blotted out from the scroll of life And may they not be written down with the righteous ³⁰And I am in pain and afflicted Your Salvation, Oh God, may it set me on high

³¹I will praise the name of God with a song
And I will magnify Him with thanksgiving
³²And it will be good to Yahweh
more than an ox or a young bull having hooves and horns
³³The humble will see and rejoice
Oh you who seek God, may your heart live
³⁴For Yahweh is listening to the needy
and he despises not his prisoners

³⁵Let heaven and earth praise Him the seas and everything which moves in them ³⁶For God will save Zion And He will rebuild the Cities of Judah and they will dwell there and they will take possession of it ³⁷ and the offspring of His servants will inherit it and those who love His name will dwell in it

The text reveals that the poet describes his situation amidst various pleas and moves on to utter the imprecations against the enemies. The passage ends with a vow of praise at the end. Many scholars have studied this psalm from different perspectives and suggested various outlines for it. Kraus (1978) analyses Psalm 69 from a form-critical perspective, suggesting the following outline:

- V. 2a: a call of petition;
- Vv. 2b-5: a description of plight introduced by *ki*;
- V. 6: a confession of sin;
- V. 7: a prayer of petition;
- Vv. 8-13: continued lament, again introduced by ki;
- Vv. 14-19: petitions and wishes;
- vv 20-22: a lamenting description of humiliation at the hands of enemies:
- vv 23-29: petitions for God's judgment of wrath upon the enemies;
- v 30: a self-portrayal as *ani* and a final petition;
- vv 31-37: vows of thanksgiving.

A similar analysis is presented by Weiser (1962), Anderson (1980) and Mays (1994). Mays, for example, observes that vv. 1-29 of the psalm are

composed of alternating petitions (vv. 2a, 7, 14-19, 22-28) and complaints (vv. 2b-6, 8-13, 20-22, 27) (Mays, 1994, 229). According to Leslie C. Allen (1986), Gunkel proposes three parts as follows:

- vv. 2-19, divided into vv. 2-13 (dominated by lament) and vv. 14-19 (dominated by petitions and wishes);
- 2. vv. 20-29, divided into vv. 20-22 and 23-29; and
- 3. vv. 30-37

Allen explains that Gunkel went beyond the question of form to further explore how the poet used form for his individual ends. A careful reading reveals that the detailed structure proposed by Kraus can be found in Gunkel's three-part structure. It is seen that Gunkel puts into one part (vv. 2-19) what Kraus outlines to include a call of petition (v. 2a), a description of plight introduced (vv 2b-5), a confession of sin (v 6), a prayer of petition (v 7), continued lament (vv 8-13), and the petitions and wishes (vv 14-19). He divides them into two parts with the first part (2-13) dominated by lament and the second part (14-19) dominated by petitions and wishes.

The second part, according to Gunkel's structure covers vv. 20-29 which Kraus classifies into two parts: a lamenting description of humiliation at the hands of enemies (vv. 20-22) and petitions for God's judgment of wrath upon the enemies (vv. 23-29). The same subdivisions are found in Gunkel's structure. The last part according to Gunkel is vv. 30-37 which Kraus divides into two: a self-portrayal and a final petition (v. 30) and vows of thanksgiving (vv. 31-37). Some scholars (Allen, 1986; Groenewald, 2003, and Simango, 2003) also subscribe to a five-stanza structure of the psalm: vv. 2-5, vv. 6-14b, vv. 14c-19, vv. 20-30 and vv. 31-37. This five-stanza outline appears to be more accurate

when the text is thematically analysed. Vv. 2-5 introduces the lament by calling upon Yahweh to save the lamenter. The section further describes his plight and what he has been going through. In the next section (vv. 6-14), he describes his deeds actions that make him innocent. This is followed by a cry for deliverance in the third section (vv. 14c-19) and a set of petitions including imprecations in vv. 20-30. The psalm closes with vows of praise in the last section (vv. 31-37).

From these structures, it is clear that the lamenter follows a systematic procedure to present his petition to Yahweh. He calls upon Yahweh and goes on to describe his plight. In order to present his case, he confesses his own sin and offers his petition by lamenting his situation. He further describes the deeds of the enemies and how they contributed to his plight. It is only after their deeds are described that he continues to utter imprecations against them. Finally, he ends with a vow of thanksgiving, believing that his petition will be granted. From this outline, the imprecations are found in the fourth sections (specifically, vv. 23-29). The rest of this section shall focus on a literary analysis of the imprecations within the psalm.

Imprecations within Psalm 69

As already indicated, the imprecations within Psalm 69 are found in vv. 23-29. The text is as follows:

²³May their table become before them a trap and for their allies a snare ²⁴May their eyes grow dim from seeing

and may their loins be made to shake continually

²⁵Pour out on them your indignation and may the burning of your anger overtake them

²⁶May their encampment be made desolate

In their tents may no one dwell

²⁷For those whom you have struck down they have harassed

and concerning the pain of the wounded ones, they have recounted

²⁸Put iniquity to their iniquity

And don't let them come in your righteousness

²⁹May they be blotted out from the scroll of life

And may they not be written down with the righteous

This comes immediately after describing the deeds of the enemies. He

them begins by praying that their tables become a trap before them. By tables

(שֶׁלֹחֶן), the poet was referring to the image of setting a table before them in the

form of a feast or a meal. In secular use, the term refers to animal skin laid on

the ground for a meal (Holladay, 2000). Anderson (1980) asserts that this is

"probably not to ordinary fare or feasting, but to the sacrificial meals in the

Temple, which were supposedly in honour of Yahweh" (Anderson, 1980, p.

506). This, he prays should become a trap (\$\Pi\$) to the enemy. The next line

stands as a parallel line and it uses the same image of the table (מַלְּבוֹן). Here he

says it should be a snare (מוֹלְשׁבׁ). Both the trap (אוֹלְשׁב) and the snare (מוֹלְשׁב) are

elements used metaphorically to connote entrapment. Since he referred to

"their" own tables, the sense portrayed is one of self-entrapment or that their

wish be returned to them.

The next verse (v. 24) talks about their body: theirs eyes and their loins:

²⁴May their eyes grow dim from seeing

and may their loins be made to shake continually

The shift to their body here is quite interesting as the attention is on the

eyes and the loins. His prayer is that their eyes grow dim, and that they see not.

Simply put, may they be blind. He adds to their blindness the expression that

their loins should be made to shake continually. The loins (מתנים) are used to

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denote the source of a man's strength and vigour (Anderson, 1980). To pray for them to continually shake is probably connoting the idea of depriving them of their strength. These prayers in v. 24 are all related with the body of the enemy being prayed against – that they be plagued with an illness or a malfunction of some parts of the body; eyes and loins.

In v. 25, the lamenter turns to directly speak with God. While in the previous imprecations he wishes the curses on the enemies, here he calls upon God to act:

²⁵Pour out on them your indignation and may the burning of your anger overtake them

He is called upon to pour upon the enemies his indignation (קוֹלֶם) and that the burning of his anger (קוֹרוֹן) should overtake them. The two lines in this verse stand parallel to refer to the wrath of Yahweh. Though both מְלֵבוֹן and מְלְבוֹן are terms that are used to express wrath, וֹלֵבוֹן is used to express only the wrath of God (Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1906). Its usage here is an invocation of divine action upon the enemies of the lamenter. It gives the picture of his burning anger overtaking them in pursuit and punishing them for their wrongdoing.

The lament returns to the expression of wishes in v. 25:

²⁶May their encampment be made desolate In their tents may no one dwell

Another set of parallels are placed side by side: their encampment (מַירָה) and their tents (אוֹרָה). These two are both dwelling places for the enemies and

their families. The same sentence is repeated in the second line to pray for a desolate dwelling for the enemies. By implication, the lamenter is praying for complete annihilation of the enemy and his family. Once they are all dead, no one will dwell in their tents. The picture that this imprecation presents is a tent

that is left empty without anyone staying in it. Hence their tents will be rendered

useless. Tents are made to be inhabited and they become useless when no one is

occupying them.

imprecations.

The next imprecation comes in v. 28 after a break to explain the deeds of the enemies in v. 27. The lamenter explains in v. 27 that the enemies have harassed those Yahweh has struck down and have recounted the pain of the wounded ones. Though these people were struck down and wounded by Yahweh, the lamenter sees no good reason why such persons should be harassed, or why their pain will be compounded by recounting it. Hence his prayer against the perpetrators of such acts is based on their actions. The verse stands as a bridge in the midst of imprecations to explain the reason for such

In the imprecations before this explanation, he talked about "their" table, "their" allies, "their" eyes, and "their" loins. Then he addresses Yahweh and refers to "your" indignation and "your" anger. He returns to talk about "their" encampment and "their" tents before the break (v. 27). After the break, he returns to address Yahweh and in one verse (v. 28) he talks about "their" iniquity and "your" righteousness:

²⁸Put iniquity to their iniquity And don't let them come in your righteousness

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These two lines stand direct contrast to each other. While one is talking

about "their iniquity" (עֵוֹנֶם) the other is talking about "your righteousness"

(בְּרַכְּתְּבְּ). The call to put iniquity to their iniquity is perhaps a call to "punish"

their iniquity as some versions have chosen to translate the text. This calls for

justice being done. In support of this explanation, Anderson explains that the

second line ("don't let them come to your righteousness") can actually be

rendered "may they not experience your salvation" (Anderson, 1980, p. 508). In

short, they should be punished for their iniquity, and that they should not be

allowed to come to the Lord's righteousness to escape the punishment due them

for their iniquity.

The last imprecation in the psalm is in v. 29:

²⁹May they be blotted out from the scroll of life

And may they not be written down with the righteous

The lamenter is still addressing Yahweh here and he prays that the

enemies be blotted out from the scroll of life and that they not be written down

with the righteous. This is another parallelism of two lines expressing the same

message in contrasting expressions. While the first line talks about blotting them

out (מְּחָבֶּ), the second negates the word to write (בַּחַב). הֹקָה begins the verse

and Included closes it. The parallels appear as follows:

Line 1: May they be blotted (コロロ)

Line 2: May they not be written (ユロュ)

The juxtaposition of the two lines in relation to blotting out and writing

connote the idea of both sentences communicating the same idea. The enemies

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are supposed to be blotted out (בְּלֶּהְהָה) from the scroll of life. In other words, they should not be written (בְּלֵּהְהָ) at all among the righteous. By implication, the scroll of life (בְּלֵּהְהַ) contains the names of those regarded as righteous (בַּרִיקִים). Since the enemies are previously described as people with iniquity, there is no way they can be written with the righteous (בַּרִיקִים). And once they are not written with the בַּרִיקִים).

In all, the imprecations in Psalm 69 (found in vv. 23-29) are arranged in parallel pairs and touching on various aspects of the enemy: their table, allies, eyes, loins, encampment, tents, and their iniquity. God's indignation, anger, and his righteousness are also mentioned. Amidst the imprecations also, the lamenter attempts to explain why the enemies deserve such imprecations. A more detailed analysis of these imprecations in chapter five of this thesis shall focus on how parallelism, imagery, and intensification are used to communicate the message that the poet intends to carry across and how they contribute to the overall meaning of the psalm.

Psalm 109

The last psalm to be discussed in this study is Psalm 109. This is a psalm that is properly understood as an individual lament. David Wright calls it an "individual complaint" (Wright, 1994, p. 392). According to Weiser, it is "prayed by a man who, if we understand the psalm aright, is accused of being

guilty of the death of a poor man (v. 16), presumably by means of magically effective curses (vv. 17ff)" (Weiser, 1962, p. 690). Weiser further suggests that the accusation brought by the lamenter's adversaries was one of sorcery (Weiser, 1962). Brueggemann (1985) also thinks it might be from the presentation of false evidence in court leading to the miscarriage of justice. He however, suggests that "only a violation of property or honour could evoke such a harsh response" (Brueggemann, 1985, p. 146). As indicated earlier in this work, Psalm 109 is listed by almost all scholars who have discussed and attempted to list the psalms regarded as imprecatory.

Regarding authorship, it is clear from the superscription that it is attributed to David. Emphasizing Davidic authorship, Martin Ward calls it David's poem of vengeance. He states that it is the most emphatic of the imprecatory psalms (Ward, 1980). Wright says it "contains the most vivid imprecatory language of the biblical psalms" (Wright, 1994, p. 392). Brueggemann (1985) considers it an "extreme case" in discussing the imprecatory psalms. These descriptions are probably because of the intensity of the imprecatory sections or the volume dedicated to them. The volume dedicated to the imprecations in this psalm is observed when the text and its structure are presented. This section will focus on presenting the text as it appears in the BHS and a translation. This will be followed by a discussion of its structure and how the imprecations suffice. The imprecations will then be studied and discussed. The discussion will focus on the literary arrangement of the imprecations, as well as the use of imagery and parallelism in expressing them.

The Text

The text appears as follows:

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ַלַמנַצֵּחַ לדָוִד מִזְמוֹר אֱלֹהֵי תַהְלָּתִי אַל־הֶּחֶרֵשׁ בּיַ
בּי פִי רָשָׁע וּפִּי־מִּרְמָה עָלַי פָּתָחוּ דִּבּרוּ אָתִי לשׁוֹן שָׁקֶר 2
                           נְוְדַבֵּרִי שִּׂנְאָה סבָבוּנִי וַיִּּלְּחֲמוּנִי חִנָּם 3
                               ⁴ תַחַת־אַהַבָּתִי יִשׂטנוּנִי וַאֵנִי תפִּלָה
        ַנַיָּשִׂימוּ עָלַי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה וְשִׂנְאָה תַּחַת אַהֲבָתִי זַּיַ
                      ּהַפּקַד עָלָיו רָשָׁע וְשָּׂטָן יַעֲמוֹד עַל־יְמִינוֹ 6
                  רבהשָׁפטו וַצֵא רָשָע ותפִּלְתוֹ תִהוָה לַחֲטָאָה זַ
                            אַחֵר יַּקָיו מעַפִּים פּקְדָתוֹ יִקַּח אַחֵר 8
                                יהיו־בָנָיו יְתוֹמִים וְאִשׁתוֹ אַלמָנָה 9
                 יונוֹעַ יָנוּעוּ בָנָיו וְשָׁאֵלוּ וְדָרְשׁוּ מֵחָרְבוֹתֵיהֶם 10
                 ינִיעוֹ וֹשָׁה לֹכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְיָבֹזוּ זָרִים יְגִיעוֹ 11
              יַהִי-לוֹ מֹשֵׁךְ חָסֶר וְאַל-יְהִי חוֹגֵן לִיתוֹמָיו 12 אַל-יְהִי-לוֹ
               13 יהי־אַחַריתו להַכרית בדור אַחר יפַּח שׁטָם
         יוֹבֶר עֲוֹן אֲבֹתָיו אֶל־יְהוָה וְחַמַאת אִפוֹו אַל־תִּפָּח יִּוֹ
                   יהיוּ נֵגֶד־יְהוָה תָּמִיד וְיַכֵּרֵת מֵאֶבֶץ זִכּרָם 15
   וַיַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא זָכַר עֲשׁוֹת חָסֶד וַיִּרְדֹּף אִישׁ־עָנִי וְאֶביוֹן 16
                                                 וְנִכאֵה לֵבָב למותֵת
יַנֶּאֱהַב קלָלָה וַתּבוֹאֵהוּ וְלֹא־חָפֵץ בִּברָכָה וַתִּרְחַק מִּמֶּנוּ 17
          וֹיִּלבַשׁ קלָלָה כּמַדּוֹ וַתְּבֹא כַמַּיִם בּקּרְבּוֹ וְכַשֶּׁמֶן 18
                                                             בע צמותיו
                  יַחְגְּרֶהְ יַ עמֶה וּלמֵזַח הָמִיר יַחְגְּרֶהְ 19 הַתִּיר יַחְגְּרֶהְ
    ימאת פּעֻלַת שטני מָאָת יְהוָה וְהַדּברִים רָע עַל־נַפּשִׁי 20
 קקת יְהוָה אֲדֹנָי עֲשֵׂה־אִתִּי לֹמַעַן שׁמֶּךְ כִּי־טוֹב חַסְרְדְּ
                      22 כִּי־עָנִי וְאֶביוֹן אָנֹכִי וְלִבִּי חָלֵל בּקְרְבִּי
                       בּצֵל־כִּנְטוֹתוֹ נֶהֱלָכתִי נִנְעַרְתִּי כָּאַרְבֶּה 23
                       בּרְכַּי כָּשׁלוּ מִצוֹם ובשָרִי כָּחַשׁ מִשְּׁמֶון 24
              בּאַנִי הָיִיתִי חֶרְפָּה לָהֶם יִרְאוּנִי יְנִיעוּן רֹאשָׁם 25
                           קֹבנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהָי הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי כחַסֶּדְּ 26
                       יַּרְעוּ כִּי־נְדְר וֹאת אַתָּה יְהנָה עֲשִׂיתָה 27
    28 יְכַללוּ־הֵכָּוָה וְאַתָּה תבָרֵך קמוּ וַוִּבשׁוּ וְעַ בַּדְּדְ יִשׁמָח
                  29 ילבשו שוטני כלמָה וְיַעֲטוּ כַמֹעִיל בְּשׁתְּם
              30 אוֹבֶה יְהוָה מֹאֹד בּפִי וּבתוֹךְ רַבִּים אֲהַלֹלֶנֵּוּ
               ינפשר לימין אביון להושיע משפטי נפשו 31 בי־יַעמור לימין
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This is translated as follows:

¹To the Music Director. A psalm of David. Oh God of my praise, do not be silent

²For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of deceit have opened on me. They have spoken with me a tongue of falsehood

³And words of hatred they have surrounded me and they have fought against me without cause

⁴In place of my love, they accuse me but I make prayer

⁵And they have put on me evil in place of good and hatred in place of my love

⁶Appoint over him a wicked man and let an accuser stand on his right hand

⁷Let him come forth guilty when he is judged and let his prayer become sin

⁸May his days be few and let another take his office

⁹May his children be orphans and his wife a widow

¹⁰May his children really wander and beg and may they seek a place away from their ruins

¹¹May a creditor lay snares for all his belongings and may strangers plunder his property

¹²May no one show prolonged kindness to him and may no one show favour to his orphaned children

¹³May his posterity be cut off; May their name be blotted out in another generation

¹⁴May the iniquity of his ancestors be remembered by Yahweh and may the sin of his mother not be blotted out

¹⁵Let them be continually before Yahweh and may their memory be cut off from the earth

¹⁶Because he did not remember to show kindness and he harassed the poor and needy and the disheartened to death

¹⁷He loved a curse, let it come on him. And he delighted not in blessing, let it be far from him

¹⁸He is clothed with a curse as his garment, let it go into his inward parts like water, and like oil in his bones

- ¹⁹May it be for him like a garment with which he wraps himself and a waistband which he girds on continually
- ²⁰May this be the wages of my accusers from Yahweh and those who speak evil against me
- ²¹But you, Oh Yahweh, my Lord deal with me for the sake of your name; Because your kindness is good, deliver me
- ²²Because I am poor and needy; and my heart is pierced in my inner being
- ²³I have vanished like a shadow just as it stretches out; I have been shaken off like the locust
- ²⁴My knees have staggered from fasting; and my flesh has become lean without fatness
- ²⁵and I have become a reproach to them; they see me, they shake their heads
- ²⁶Help me, Oh Yahweh my God; Save me according to your kindness
- ²⁷So that they may know that this is your hand, oh Yahweh, you have done it
- ²⁸Let them curse and you will bless; Let them arise and be ashamed and your servant will rejoice
- ²⁹May my accusers be clothed in ignominy and may they be wrapped in their shame as the robe
- ³⁰I will give thanks to Yahweh exceedingly with my mouth and I will praise Him among many people.
- ³¹Because He stands to the right hand of the needy to save him from those who judge his soul.

According to Ward (1980), the psalm is structured into three main divisions with an A-B-A¹ pattern. His outline is as follows:

- A a plea for help because of the wrongs done to the lamenter (vv. 1-5)
- B imprecations against the lamenter's chief enemy in the form of prayers to God (vv. 6-20)
- A¹ further plea for help concluding with praise to God for his salvation (vv. 21-31)

The same three-part structure is proposed by Brueggemann who further divides the second section (vv. 6-20) into: An introductory appeal (vv.6-7), the hoped-for sentence (vv. 8-15, 19-20) and the reasons for such vociferous judgments (vv. 16-19). Putting these together, one realizes that the initial appeal (vv. 1-5) constitutes a general plea to God for help. Also, the long middle section (vv.6-20) constituting an introductory appeal (vv. 6-7), the "hoped-for sentence" (vv. 8-15, 19-20) and a presentation of reasons for such prayers (vv. 16-19) constitutes the major imprecations in the psalm. Finally, the prayer of trust and petition addressed to God (vv. 21-31) constitutes the further plea with a concluding praise to God.

On the part of Ward, the psalm can further be placed within six stanzas, each containing five verses, except the last stanza which has six verses. Ward presents these six stanzas as follows:

- Stanza 1 the psalmist's plea to God for help
- Stanza 2 beginning of the imprecations against the psalmist's enemy, with emphasis on his family;
- Stanza 3 continuation of the imprecations with emphasis on his enemy's possessions, ancestors, and posterity;
- Stanza 4 conclusion of the imprecations with emphasis on his enemy's character;
- Stanza 5 a reiteration of the psalmist's need;
- Stanza 6 another plea for help, ending with praise for the deliverance the psalmist knows is coming.

Ward's six-stanza structure, which this researcher adopts, seems to have been suggested on the basis of theme and it better represents the ideas captured in the psalm. Categorizing them further, it is observed that the stanza 1 is the only stanza in the first part of the psalm that comprises the initial appeal for help (vv. 1-5). The second part (vv. 6-20) has three stanzas which constitute the beginning (vv. 6-10), continuation (vv. 11-15), and conclusion (vv.16-20) of the imprecations with each stanza emphasizing specific aspects of the enemy's life. Finally, the last two stanzas are in the third section of the psalm where the plea is concluding with praise for deliverance.

From these, it can be seen that the imprecations in Psalm 109 appear in stanzas 2, 3, and 4 with one line of concluding imprecation in stanza 6 which stands as the conclusion. These imprecatory sections shall be the focus of the rest of this discussion.

Imprecations within Psalm 109

As indicated, the imprecations are found in three major stanzas (2, 3, 4) with one line of imprecation in the last stanza (6). Each set emphasizes specific aspects of the enemy's life. If the lamenter moves from the introductory stanza and begins directly with imprecations, continuing into the next two stanzas, and also repeating another imprecation in the final stanza, then it can be concluded that the imprecations will do a lot to contribute to the understanding of the psalm. This makes a study of the specific imprecations in each stanza necessary.

Imprecations in Stanza 2:

The entire stanza is made up of imprecations:

⁶Appoint over him a wicked man and let an accuser stand on his right hand

⁷Let him come forth guilty when he is judged and let his prayer become sin

⁸May his days be few and let another take his office

⁹May his children be orphans and his wife a widow

¹⁰May his children really wander and beg and may they seek a place away from their ruins

He begins by calling upon Yahweh to appoint a wicked man over the enemy and let an accuser stand on his right hand. The use of the descriptions, "wicked man" and "an accuser", points to a setting where a wicked judge or witness will be against him in court. The superiority of this "wicked man" over the lamenter's enemy points to a situation where the "wicked man" has the power to rule or dictate to the enemy. This is probably why the Jerusalem Bible translates that to be a reference to a Judge. The same argument can be used in support or a witness, especially if it is the principal witness whose accusation will lead to the final verdict in court. This imprecation paints the picture of a courtroom where the enemy is in the box and an accuser is standing on his right hand. The accuser will testify against him and he will finally be condemned. Either way, the lamenter wants the enemy to fall into the hands of a wicked man. Once this is accomplished, the enemy will be harassed by the wickedness of this accuser.

He doesn't prescribe what specifically he wishes that the wicked man should do, but it is obvious that the enemy will not be comfortable under a wicked man. In addition, the wish for an accuser to stand on his right hand is probably linked with the actions of the enemy outlined in the first stanza. The enemy is said to have performed the role of a false accuser (vv. 2, 4). Since the enemy accuses him falsely, his prayer is that Yahweh will cause an accuser (a wicked man) to stand against him (the enemy) too.

This courtroom motif is directly continued in the next line (v. 7):

"Let him come forth guilty when he is judged and let his prayer become sin"

The prayer is simple; that the enemy of the lamenter should be found guilty in the court when he is judged. This wish is linked with what the enemy did to the lamenter: false accusation in the courtroom. Since he tormented the lamenter in the courtroom, he should also be found guilty in the courts. It is assumed that he will pray for deliverance, but the lamenter further wishes that such prayer be regarded as sin by Yahweh.

The next line (v. 8) is an imprecation that directly wishes the death of the enemy: "May his days be few and let another take his office." The wish, "may his days be few", is directly calling for the death of the enemy. It is clear that the lamenter wishes the immediate death of the enemy. In addition to his few days, the lamenter adds that his office should be taken by another. Though another person taking his office is a natural consequence of his death (i.e. few days), the lamenter adds for emphasis that another (אוון און will take his office. This simply implies that the enemy has an office, an indication of a position in the city gates. That is, he is probably a member of the local court. The use of אוון און denotes one who is far from him (most probably, not his offspring or kinsman). It is possible that after his death, his office or estate will be inherited by his descendants or kinsmen. But the lamenter emphasizes that the office be taken by אוון "another", other than his own descendant or kinsmen.

The fact that he didn't mean the offspring of the enemy is displayed in the lines that follow. The imprecations in vv. 9 and 10 seem to be directly against the children and wife of the enemy.

⁹ May his children be orphans and his wife a widow

¹⁰ May his children really wander and beg and may they seek a place away from their ruins

Though the death of the enemy will automatically render the children orphans and the wife a widow, the lamenter adds these elements for emphasis. This further proves that the use of "another" in v. 8 is a reference to another who was not an offspring of the enemy. He prays that his children be orphans and his wife a widow. He adds that they should wonder and beg and that they seek a place away from their ruins.

It appears that the psalmist is more interested in the children being orphaned and the wife being widowed than in the death of the enemy. The description of his wife and children as widow and orphans respectively implies a state of poverty, helplessness and misery. These two classes are considered extremely helpless and poor in society. The picture is portrayed more clearly in the next line: "May his children really wander and beg and may they seek a place away from their ruins." This adds that the children, who are orphaned, will wander and beg. In addition, they will seek a place away from their ruins.

The idea of wandering and begging explains the motif of the earlier line about the children being orphaned. With the death of the bread-winner, their father, they will have no choice than to wander about and beg in order to make a living. In addition, they will have to become homeless and "seek a place away from their ruins." This is a completely appalling situation for the family of the enemy being prayed against. The issue with this part of the imprecation is that the enemy is not around to suffer this or see his family suffering. Hence the logical intention of this imprecation is to hurt the family members of the enemy. This further confirms that the prayer that המול "another" will take his office is a reference to another person other than his offspring or kinsmen who are legally entitled to his inheritance. The picture painted here however, implies that his

inheritance will be taken over by another, and his family (wife and children) as well as kinsmen will remain desperate and miserable.

Imprecations in Stanza 3:

Stanza three seems to be a logical continuation of the imprecations in stanza 2. The stanza is as follows:

- May a creditor lay snares for all his belongings and may strangers plunder his property
- ¹² May no one show prolonged kindness to him and may no one show favour to his orphaned children
- ¹³ May his posterity be cut off; May their name be blotted out in another generation
- ¹⁴ May the iniquity of his ancestors be remembered by Yahweh and may the sin of his mother not be blotted out
- ¹⁵ Let them be continually before Yahweh and may their memory be cut off from the earth

The stanza begins with a further wish that the creditors of the enemy lay a snare for his belongings and that strangers will plunder his property. So that even if his family would have any right to his inheritance, the lamenter prays that such belongings and properties be taken over by creditors (מֹנְשֶׁה) and by strangers (בְּרִים). The use of בְּרִים connotes strangers who are unauthorized or forbidden beneficiaries of the properties of the deceased (Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1906). Its use further stresses that the enemies' kinsmen and offspring will not inherit his estate.

In addition, he prays that the enemy as well as his children not be shown any form of kindness (v. 12). Because of the strong wish for the death of the enemy, this part of the imprecation adds that no one should show favour to his orphaned children when he is dead. Since previous verses talked about the children wandering to beg and

being homeless, they will need to obtain favour from benefactors in society. The imprecation here however, is meant to pray against their obtaining favour from anyone. This might lead to eventual starvation and death. Homelessness and starvation without favour from anyone will lead to eventual extinction. Coupled with the fact that he wishes a stranger takes over his office and his belongings, the main aim of the psalmist is the extinction of the enemy. This is directly revealed in v. 13:

¹³ May his posterity be cut off; May their name be blotted out in another generation

This explains the real reason why there are imprecations against family members even after the death of the enemy. If his offspring inherits his possessions, his posterity will not be cut off nor will he be blotted out in the next generation. In essence, his desire in these set of imprecations is total extinction of the enemy or his name. This will be possible only if his entire family is wiped out.

To achieve this, the psalmist does not only attack the enemy's descendants, but also his ancestors. This is captured in v. 14. The prayer here is that the iniquity of his ancestors be remembered and that the sin of his mother not be blotted out. The same motif of Yahweh holding their sins against them is employed in the two lines. They stand parallel with the first line talking about remembering and the second line talking about the sins not being blotted out. What is unique about this aspect is the fact that the imprecation is about family members who are already dead – ancestors – and one who is older

than him – his mother. It appears the lamenter wishes the ancestors be reckoned as having committed acts that the enemy should suffer for. Talking about their iniquity and sin being remembered implies that Yahweh is to visit the punishment of these family members on the enemy and his descendants. Though the generational lines are not given, the context implies that the lamenter is simply against the enemy and his entire family.

He adds that the sins of his mother continually be before Yahweh, and that their memory be cut off from the earth. By their memory, the psalmist was not referring to the immediate antecedent, the sin of his mother (אַבּהָיוֹן); rather to his ancestors (אַבֹּהְיוֹן). This is because, the last part of the verse, "and may their memory be cut off from the earth", is plural and masculine just like אַבֹּהְיוֹן, "the sin of his mother" is singular and feminine. In essence, the psalmist's prayer is that the memory of the enemy's ancestors be cut off from the earth.

Imprecations in Stanza 4:

The verses that contain imprecations in Stanza 4 are 17, 18, and 19. The entire stanza is as follows:

¹⁶Because he did not remember to show kindness and he harassed the poor and needy and the disheartened to death

¹⁷He loved a curse, let it come on him. And he delighted not in blessing; let it be far from him

¹⁸He is clothed with a curse as his garment, let it go into his inward parts like water, and like oil in his bones

¹⁹May it be for him like a garment with which he wraps himself and a waistband which he girds on continually

 20 May this be the wages of my accusers from Yahweh and those who speak evil against me

The stanza begins with a description of what the enemy had done: "he did not remember to show kindness and he harassed the poor and needy and the disheartened to death" (v. 16). It is after this description that he further places various imprecations alongside the activities of the enemy. The section is arranged in a "enemy's action-imprecation" format. That is, the action of the enemy is mentioned vis-à-vis the imprecation wished against him. These three pairs are arranged in a simple A-B-A pattern. The first and last pairs are about a curse (קֹלֶלֶהְ) and they surround one that is about a blessing (בַּבּרֶכֶה). Whereas the blessings are wished to be far from him, the curses are wished to be as close to him as a garment. These wishes are paired with his actions because he loved a curse and clothe himself with curses but delighted not in blessings. In essence, his own actions are used against him in the imprecations. They are organized as follows:

Pattern	Enemy's	Imprecation
	Action	
A	He loved a	let it (a curse) come on
	curse	him
В	He delighted	let it (blessing) be far
	not in blessing	from him
A	He is clothed	let it (a curse) go into his
	with a curse as	inward parts like water,
	his garment	and like oil in his bones

To these "enemy's action-imprecation" pairs, he adds "May it be for him like a garment with which he wraps himself and a waistband which he girds on continually" in v. 19. Here he was referring to the curse. He presents the image of the enemy having a curse wrapped around him like a garment and as a waistband.

The fact that the garment and the waistband is wished to be girded on continually (קְּמָיִד) is worthy of comment. The term used (קְּמָיִד) connotes that it continues without interruption (Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1906). This corroborates the last pair which gives the picture of curses going into his (the enemy's) inward parts like water and like oil in his bones. The image of water and oil flowing into his body and bones suggest ample closeness to the curses. The lamenter concludes the imprecations in this stanza by reiterating the sprayer in v. 20: "May this be the wages of my accusers from Yahweh and those who speak evil against me". This conclusion implies that the lamenter sees all the imprecations uttered to be payment for those who accuse him and speak evil against him. Since this ends the imprecatory sections of the psalm, the last line does the duty of reiterating the reason why such imprecations are uttered. However, it is observed that toward the end of the psalm, in the midst of a final plea for help, ending with praise for the deliverance the psalmist knows is coming, he utters another imprecation. This is in stanza 6.

Imprecations in Stanza 6:

The entire stanza stands at the conclusion of the lament. It utters a final plea to Yahweh for help (vv. 26-28) and ends on a note of praise for deliverance (vv. 30-31). Between these two concluding

segments, is a line that contains an imprecation (v. 29): "May my accusers be clothed in ignominy and May they be wrapped in their shame as the robe"

Like previous imprecations in stanza 4, this last imprecation uses the image of clothing to express the ignominy and shame wished for the enemy. It is quite clear that this final imprecation seems to repeat the same imprecations in the previous stanzas. Except that whereas stanza talks about being wrapped in a curse, this line talks about being wrapped in shame and ignominy. Standing at the conclusion, this line simply asks for vindication. Once the lamenter is vindicated, all accusers will be clothed in shame.

In sum, Psalm 109, though a psalm of lament, devotes much attention uttering imprecations against the enemy who has accused the lamenter wrongly. The imprecations uttered are meant to destroy the enemy completely, his posterity, his family, his name, and everything about him. In addition, the imprecations are uttered based on the actions of the enemy. He is supposed to suffer the fate that he has subjected the lamenter into. At the end, the lamenter prays that he (the lamenter) be vindicated and the enemy be clothed with shame and ignominy.

Summary

The focus of this chapter was a literary reading of three individual laments (Psalms 35, 69, and 109). The texts and their outlines were discussed and the aspects containing imprecations

further analysed. The analysis included a study of how the imprecations are presented by lamenters to Yahweh. This presents an idea of how the imprecations contribute to the overall meaning of each psalm. Just like the communal laments, the lamenter in the individual laments also present their case logically, outlining the deeds of the enemy, and presented their wishes against the enemy. These are done by the use of literary elements such as parallelism, imagery, intensification, etc. Since the poets made use of literary elements to present the imprecations, the next chapter focuses on how parallelism, imagery, and intensification are used to express the imprecations. It also concentrates on synthesizing the ideas gleaned in the analyses of the individual laments and communal laments discussed in chapters three and four of this thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE

IMPRECATIONS WITHIN COMMUNAL AND INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS

Introduction

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of how the poet uses literary elements of parallelism, intensification, and imagery to present the imprecations discussed in chapters three and four of this thesis. In chapter three, imprecations within selected communal laments (Psalms 58 and 137) were analysed and in chapter four, imprecations within selected individual laments (Psalms 35, 69 and 109) were analysed. This chapter synthesizes the ideas gleaned from these imprecations and discusses the use of poetic elements in further detail. The synthesis shall consist of a summary of issues raised in the two previous chapters, a discussion of the poetic elements of parallelism, intensification, and imagery used in imprecations within the selected psalms as well as the general characteristics of the imprecations.

A summary of ideas in Selected Psalms

The selected Psalms (35, 58, 69, 109, and 137) are all laments from various contexts and backgrounds. Of these, Psalms 35, 69, and 109 are individual laments while Psalms 58 and 137 are communal laments. In the individual laments, the imprecations are uttered against the enemy/enemies of one person (the lamenter) who seeks to be delivered. In these psalms, it is mostly observed that the lamenter is seeking to be delivered from oppression and injustice.

Psalm 35, for example, is a prayer for deliverance in which the psalmist is praying to be delivered from his enemies by Yahweh. In addition, the lamenter describes his distress in addition to the appeal and ends with a song of thanksgiving and a vow of praise. Psalm 69 is generally described as an individual lament (Anderson, 1980; Weiser, 1962; Sabourin, 1974; Westermann, 1981). The imprecations in it are found in vv. 23-29. They are arranged in parallel pairs and they are uttered to include various aspects of the enemies: their table, allies, eyes, loins, encampment, tents, and their iniquity. Amidst the imprecations also, the lamenter attempts to explain why the enemies deserve such imprecations. He does this by highlighting the actions of the enemies.

Psalm 109 is an "individual complaint" (Wright, 1994, p. 392) which is a response to what appears to be some false evidence in court leading to the miscarriage of justice. It is observed that the lamenter devotes much attention uttering imprecations against the enemy who has accused him wrongly. The imprecations uttered are prayers for complete destruction. The enemy's life, his posterity, his family, his name, and everything about him were to be completely over. In addition, the imprecations are based on the actions of the enemy. He is supposed to suffer a fate similar to that which he has subjected the lamenter to. At the end, the lamenter prays that he (the lamenter) be vindicated and the enemy be clothed in shame.

In the communal laments, the imprecations are uttered against enemies of the entire community, such as judges who judge unjustly or enemies of the entire nation. Psalm 58 is presented in a judicial context in which it contrasts the justice in God's judgment with the injustice of the unjust judges. Hence,

the lamenter utters imprecations against these unjust judges who are chronically dishonest (v. 3), ferociously violent (vv. 2, 6), and stubbornly wicked and deadly (vv. 3-5). The psalm is a call upon God to judge corrupt judges so the righteous would continue to trust in the Lord. Psalm 137 presents a picture of a group of lamenters sitting by the rivers of Babylon and weeping, refusing to sing the Lord's song because they were in a strange land. Apart from bemoaning their plight, the lamenters also cursed their oppressors and prayed that Yahweh repays them just as they had treated Jerusalem. These curses are so harsh that almost all scholars who list the imprecatory psalms add Psalm 137 to the list (cf. Day, 2002; Reed, 2006; Bullock, 2001; Scott, 1997; Laney, 1981; Luc, 1999; Vos, 1949; and Surburg, 1975).

The nature of these psalms and the way imprecations are scattered among the laments warrant that instead of classifying them in a category called imprecatory psalms, they can be better described as laments that contain imprecations. Psalms 35, 69, and 109 are therefore individual psalms of lament in which the lamenter utters imprecatory prayers against his enemy/enemies. Psalms 58 and 137 are communal laments in which imprecations are uttered against the enemies of society/the nation. This corroborates the idea that imprecations are mostly found in the laments. Since laments are uttered from painful and unhappy circumstances, we can conclude that the imprecations that come out of these laments are uttered from deep emotional pathos and pain from the actions of the enemies being prayed against. No imprecation, therefore, is uttered without initial provocation from the enemy/enemies of the lamenter.

This is probably the reason why most of the imprecations are uttered in juxtaposition with the actions of the enemy. The lamenter wishes that the enemy will suffer the same kind of fate he subjects the lamenter into. In some of the parallels presented, the imprecations uttered stand in direct or contrasting parallel with the action of the enemy. For example, Yahweh is called upon, in the introductory address of Psalm 35, to contend with the contenders (of the lamenter) and fight with his (the lamenter's) fighters. He calls on Yahweh to do to the enemies what they do to him. If they contend with him, then Yahweh should contend with them. If they fight with him, then He (Yahweh) should fight with them.

Within the laments also, the descriptions of the acts of the enemy give a justification for the imprecations. Yahweh is called upon to punish them because they devised evil against the lamenter without cause. The idea of "without cause" is observed in the declarations of innocence that are seen in the psalms. All the psalms that contain imprecations also portray the idea that the lamenter is suffering "without cause". For example, each block in Psalm 35 contains verses that either declare the innocence of the lamenter (vv. 7; 13-14) or describe the deeds of the enemies (vv. 11-12; 15-16; 20-21). In places where there is an acknowledgement and confession of sin (like Psalm 69:6), it is made clear that the sin is not the cause of the enemies' plot against the lamenter. When the deeds of the enemies are described, they are expressed in such a way that the innocence of the lamenter is portrayed.

This section has noted that the imprecations are found in the laments and that the idea of having a group of psalms categorised as imprecatory psalms cannot be fully substantiated. Rather, we can talk of psalms of lament that contain imprecations. In presenting these imprecations, the lamenter juxtaposes the wishes with the deeds of the enemies that warrant such imprecation. There is also a constant emphasis on the innocence of the lamenter. This declaration of innocence is an attempt by the lamenter to justify the imprecations.

The rest of this chapter will focus on the way the psalms make use of figures of speech such as parallelism, intensification and imagery to communicate the message. To achieve this, elements of parallelism, intensification, and imagery that emerged in the analyses in chapters three and four of this thesis will be presented and discussed further. Other literary elements such as metre, pitch, alliteration, etc. will not be part of this discussion as they will not directly contribute to the main objective of this thesis.

Parallelism

It is clear from the study of the imprecations that the poet makes use of parallelism to communicate most of the imprecations. Normally the ideas stand in direct or indirect parallel to each other in terms of ideas and/or words. The parallels that emerged in the analysis of each psalm in chapters three and four of this thesis will be presented and discussed further.

Psalm 35

Psalm 35 is divided into three blocks (vv. 1-10, 11-18, and 19-28) and the imprecations are found within the first and third blocks: vv. 1-10 and vv. 19-28. These two blocks have between them a block that describes the deeds of the enemies and a proof of innocence. Within the first block, the

imprecations are found in the introductory addresses (vv. 1-3), and the two separate invocations (vv. 4-8 and v. 8). Within the last block, the imprecations are in the prohibition wishes (v. 19) and in the last group of imprecations (vv. 25-26). The lamenter makes use of parallelism in these imprecations. For example, vv. 4-6, presents parallels in each verse. V. 4 will therefore stand as follows:

Line 1: Let them be ashamed and humiliated /those seeking my soul

Line 2: Let them move away behind and be abashed / those desiring my hurt

These two lines in v. 4, though choosing different words, are parallel in thought with both lines employing an "imprecation-type of enemy" structure. The people being prayed against are "those seeking my soul" (מַבַּרִקְשֵׁינָב בַּשִׁי) and "those desiring my hurt" (מֵבִּרְשָׁינָב בַּשְׁי). The lamenter employs the use of two different terms to describe the same category of people. In each line, he expresses two wishes. In the first line he prays that they be ashamed (בוֹשׁ and humiliated (בֹלֹם). In the second line, the same pattern of two words is used- that they be moved behind (בֹלֹם) and be abashed (בֹלֹם). He does not only wish that they be turned back; he also wishes that they be abashed. Putting the two lines together, we can say that the enemies being described are seeking for his soul to hurt him. He therefore prays for their shame and complete humiliation.

Another example of parallelism found in Psalm 35 is in v. 26 (third block). Here the lamenter prays that the enemies be put to shame and disgrace together and that they be clothe in shame and ignominy. These imprecations

are presented in parallels that this researcher described in chapter four of this thesis as an "Imprecation-type of enemy" structure. This is tabulated as follows:

Imprecation 1: "Let them be put to shame and disgrace

together,"

Type of enemy 1: "The ones who rejoice over my misfortune"

Imprecation 2: "Let them put on (be clothe in) shame and

ignominy

Type of enemy 2: "The ones who make themselves great against

me"

In his prayer, he wishes that those who rejoice over his misfortune are put to shame and disgrace. He also wishes that those who magnify themselves against him be put to shame and ignominy. The imprecations stand parallel with the type of enemy (actions of the enemy). In these parallels, the wish is a direct negation of what the enemies have made of themselves. They rejoice, Yahweh should put them to shame (i.e., take away their rejoicing); they magnify themselves, Yahweh should clothe them in shame (i.e., bring them low). These parallels make the message clearer and seem to justify the imprecations within the verses.

Psalm 69

Psalm 69 also makes use of parallelism in presenting the imprecations. He describes his plight to Yahweh, confesses his sin, and offers his petition amidst the description of the deeds of the enemies. After these aspects, he utters the imprecations against them. From the analysis in Chapter four of this thesis, it was concluded that out of the 37 verses in the psalm, the imprecations are found in vv. 23-29. There is the use of parallelism in some of the lines within this block of imprecations.

The text containing the imprecations is translated as follows:

²³May their table become before them a trap and for their allies a snare

²⁴May their eyes grow dim from seeing and may their loins be made to shake continually

²⁵Pour out on them your indignation

and may the burning of your anger overtake them

²⁶May their encampment be made desolate

In their tents may no one dwell

²⁷For those whom you have struck down they have harassed and concerning the pain of the wounded ones, they have recounted

²⁸Put iniquity to their iniquity

And don't let them come in your righteousness

²⁹May they be blotted out from the scroll of life

And may they not be written down with the righteous

The verses that make use of a parallelism are vv. 25, 26, 28 and 29:

In the two lines used to describe what Yahweh should do to the enemies in v. 25, there is a parallel use of two different words - מוֹנ (indignation) and וֹנ (anger) - to describe the wrath of Yahweh. In this usage, וֹנְ is used to further explain מוֹנ and to directly relate it with the wrath of God.

In v. 26 too, the two lines seem to express the same idea. Line 1 wishes that their encampment be made desolate and line 2 wishes that no one dwells in their tents:

Line 1: their encampment may it be made desolate
Line 2: their tents may no one dwell in it

It is clear that both טִירָה and אֹהֶל are dwelling places for the enemies.

The desire that it be made desolate simply implies that no one dwells in them.

What the use of parallelism achieves is that the idea is repeated in the second

line in a clearer picture that explains line 1.

The two lines in v. 28 stand in direct contrast to each other expressing an idea of antithetic parallelism:

²⁸Put iniquity to their iniquity And don't let them come in your righteousness

While line 1 talks about "their iniquity" (עֵלְנָם), line 2 talks about "your righteousness" (בְּרֶקְתָּדְ). The two ideas (directly opposite) are placed in the two lines to paint the picture of "their iniquity" clearer. When placed side by side with the righteousness of Yahweh, their iniquity becomes clearer. In this context, Yahweh is petitioned to put iniquity to their iniquity and also stop them from coming to the righteousness of Yahweh.

In v. 29, the "scroll of life" in line 1 is further explained in parallel line 2 with the phrase "be written down with the righteous"

The lamenter's prayer is that Yahweh should blot out the names of the enemies from the scroll of life and that they should not be written down with the righteous. The same message is expressed here but with contrasting words: blotting out (תְּבָּיִם), and writing (בַּבַּיבַם). The entire verse is enveloped by the two words with בְּבָּיבַם beginning the verse and בַּבְּיבַ closing it. This juxtaposition seems to suggest a form of emphasis on the fact that the lamenter wants the enemies to be blotted out from the scroll of life or they should not be written at all among the righteous.

Psalm 109

Psalm 109 is structured into six stanzas and the imprecations are found in three stanzas (2, 3, 4) with only one line of imprecation in the last stanza (6).

The whole of stanza 2, and part of stanzas 3 and 4 are made up of imprecations. The imprecations in stanza 2 are placed in various parallel patterns to communicate different messages. Most of them are not directly parallel in thought or words, but in pattern. In v. 6, for instance, he calls upon Yahweh to appoint a wicked man over the enemy and let an accuser stand on his right hand. The two lines joined by the conjunction "and" both relate with how he wishes others to relate with the enemy. He states the calibre of person ("a wicked man" in line 1 and "an accuser in line 2) that should be appointed over him and what should be done to him (i.e., the enemy being prayed against). Though not directly parallel, they share a similar pattern (hence we can talk of a "parallel pattern"):

Line 1: a wicked man (relation with the enemy)

to be appointed over him (action)

Line 2: an accuser (relation with the enemy)

to stand on his right hand (action)

This verse is about the action that the lamenter intends persons (i.e., a wicked man and an accuser) to perform against the enemy. This can be extended to imply that the lamenter wishes that the enemy's "accuser" (line 2) should be "a wicked man" (line 1). In the rest of the section (vv. 7ff), the lamenter presents his intended imprecations on the enemy, and his immediate family members, and other elements about him. These are presented in parallel patterns. Each verse has two lines and each line mentions an aspect of the enemy (e.g., himself, his office, his family, etc.) in the first strophe and the intended outcome (i.e., the expected imprecation) in the second strophe of the line. They are tabulated as follows:

Verse	Line	Aspects of the	Intended outcome
		enemy	
v. 7	Line 1	Him	to come forth guilty
	Line 2	His prayer	to become sin
v. 8	Line 1	His days	to become few
	Line 2	His office	let another take
v. 9	Line 1	His children	to be orphans
	Line 2	His wife	to be a widow
v. 10	Line 1	His children	to wander and beg
	Line 2	His children (they)	to seek a place away from their ruins

Of all the patterns presented, only the lines in vv. 9 and 10 are parallel in both thought and pattern. In v. 9, the idea that his children be orphaned stands parallel with the idea that his wife be widowed. These two lines present a point of emphasis on the fact that the lamenter wishes the enemy dead. In v. 10 too, both lines 1 and 2 are about the state of the children after the death of their father. The intended outcome of "may they wander and beg" expresses an idea that "may they seek a place away from their ruins" emphasizes and intensifies. The patterns observed in the imprecations in stanza 2 are also observed in stanza 3. This is probably because it continues the imprecations in stanza 2. In stanza 3, however, the focus is on other details of the enemy like a creditor, his posterity, ancestors, etc. the patterned pairs are as follows:

Verse	Line	Aspects of the enemy	Intended outcome
v. 11	Line 1	A creditor	lay snares for all his belongings
	Line 2	Strangers	plunder his property
v. 12	Line 1	No one	show prolonged kindness to him
	Line 2	No one	show favour to his orphaned children
v. 13	Line 1	His posterity	Be cut off
	Line 2	Their name	be blotted out in another generation
v. 14	Line 1	Iniquity of his ancestors	be remembered by Yahweh
	Line 2	Sin of his mother	Not be blotted out
v. 15	Line 1	Sin of his mother ("them")	be continually before Yahweh
	Line 2	Their memory	be cut off from the earth

It is observed that from the pattern in each of the verses, line 2 in each of the verses is parallel in thought with line 1. For example, in v. 11, the lamenter prays that the belongings and properties of the enemy be taken over by a creditor (בּוֹשֶׁבֹי) and by strangers (בִּרִים). He also wishes in v. 13 that "his posterity" (line 1) be cut off and that "their name" be blotted out in another generation. In each verse, the second line seems to be repeating the same idea expressed in the first line but in different ways.

In stanza 4, the imprecations are found in vv. 17, 18, and 19.

¹⁷He loved a curse, let it come on him. And he delighted not in blessing; let it be far from him

¹⁸He is clothed with a curse as his garment; let it go into his inward parts like water, and like oil in his bones

¹⁹May it be for him like a garment with which he wraps himself and a waistband which he girds on continually

The imprecations in this stanza are placed alongside the activities of the enemy. They are arranged in an "enemy's action-imprecation" format. That is, the action of the enemy is mentioned alongside the imprecation wished against him. The three verses contain two major motifs, a curse and a blessing, standing parallel. The enemy's actions determine the imprecation wished against him: When the enemy's action involves loving a curse, the lamenter prays that a curse should come upon him. When his action involves shunning a blessing, then the lamenter prays that a blessing be far from him. This is tabulated as follows:

Verse	Enemy's	Imprecation
	Action	
v. 17a	He loved a	let it (a curse)
	curse	come on him
v. 17b	He delighted	let it (blessing) be
	not in blessing	far from him
v. 18a	He is clothed	let it (a curse) go
	with a curse as	into his inward
	his garment	parts like water,
v. 18b		and (let a curse go
		into his inward
		parts) like oil in his
		bones
v. 19		May it (a curse) be for
		him like a garment with
		which he wraps himself
		and (may the curse be) a
		waistband which he girds
		on continually

Each verse contains two lines of imprecations related to either a curse or a blessing. In each of these pairs, the second line continues from the first and adds to the sense portrayed, either in the opposite sense (e.g., v. 17), or in the sense of adding to the meaning implied (e.g., vv. 18, 19).

The only verse that contains an imprecation in stanza 6 is 29: "May my accusers be clothed in ignominy and May they be wrapped in their shame as the robe". The two lines here are parallel complements with line 2, "and May they be wrapped in their shame as the robe", expressing the same idea in line 1, "May my accusers be clothed in ignominy".

Psalm 58

The imprecations in Psalm 58 are found in vv. 7-11. These verses constitute the last three sections in a six-part structure of the psalm. These are petitions addressed to Yahweh (vv. 7-9), Curses uttered as an address to the

wicked (v. 10), and a final section pronouncing the vindication of the righteous (v. 11). Out of these, the parts that make use of parallelism are vv. 7 and 9. The first verse (v. 7) is as follows:

⁷Oh God, throw down their teeth in their mouth Teeth fangs of young Lions, pull down, Oh Yahweh

It is presented in a chiastic (ABBA) structure with the two lines AB and BA standing parallel to each other. Each of the two lines contains the idea expressed in the other. They are tabulated as follows:

Line	Column 1	Column 2
1	(A) Throw down	(B) Their teeth in their mouth
2	(B ¹) Teeth fangs of young lions	(A ¹) Pull down

It is clear that the idea expressed in the first line is repeated in the second: the lamenter wishes the teeth of his enemies down. The next set of parallel lines is found in v. 9. The verse is as follows:

⁹Like a snail melting away as it walks. Like the miscarriage of a woman, let them not see the sun

In this verse, the prayer is for the wicked to be "like a snail melting away as it walks" (Line 1) and "like the miscarriage of a woman" (line 2a). If the hapax legomenon שׁבּלוֹל is rendered as "miscarriage" as suggested by Driver (1933), then line 1 and line 2 will be parallel in terms of the idea expressed. The idea is that the lamenter wants the wicked to melt away (בּלְילֵּה) like the snail (בֹלְיהָה) and that they should not see the sun (בֹלֵיהָה) of a woman. In short, he wants them to be completely annihilated, their name and influence completely lost,

and their existence wiped off, as if they had never existed before (see Anderson, 1980; Kraus, 1988).

Psalm 137

Psalm 137 is made up of very strong imprecations, albeit short. The main thrust of the psalm is the lament over the destruction of Jerusalem. But in the midst of this lament, the lamenters also cursed their captors and prayed against them. These imprecations are found in the final section (vv. 7-9) of the psalm. The parallelism applied in these imprecations is seen in the arrangement of the prayer in vv. 8 and 9:

⁸Daughter of Babylon, the one to be destroyed
Happy is he who deals with you as you have dealt with us

⁹Happy is he who grasps and dashes
Your children to the rock

The prayer pronounces blessings on the one who will carry out the desired imprecations on the enemies. The lines in these two verses are arranged in an ABBA structure. These are tabulated as follows:

Pattern	Verse	Column 1	Column 2
A	8a	Daughter of Babylon	the one to be destroyed
В	8b	Happy is he	who deals with you as you have dealt with us
\mathbf{B}^1	9a	Happy is he	who grasps and dashes
A^1	9b	Your children	to the rock

This pattern makes it clear that the first colon in v. 8a parallels with the first colon in v. 9b. Whereas "daughter of Babylon" (v. 8a) is the same as "your children" (v. 9b), "the one to be destroyed" (v. 8a) is a reference to the prayer that they be dashed "to the rock" (v. 9b). In the same vein, the two lines in the middle (vv. 8b and 9a) seem to express the same idea. Both lines offer a blessing on the person who repays the daughter of Babylon. Though this

person is not named, it is clear from the arrangement that the one "who deals with you as you have dealt with us" (v. 8b) is the same as the one "who grasps and dashes" their children to the rock. All that the lamenters are interested in is that their plight be avenged. Hence, a blessing is pronounced on whoever is used as an instrument to perform the action. Attention is rather given to the details of the retaliation, which are poetically arranged in parallels. These parallels simply corroborate the conclusion that the imprecations are normally linked with the actions of the enemy. The prayer in Psalm 137 is simply saying the enemies should be dealt with in the same way that they have dealt with Israel: namely, that their children be grasped and dashed to the rock.

In all the psalms analysed in this section, the lamenter uses different forms of parallelism to communicate the imprecations. Some of the lines and columns are parallel in thought, words, and patterns. A major recognisable pattern is the juxtaposition of the imprecations with the actions of the enemy. It is also clear that the poets make use of parallelism to meet various objectives. Mostly, parallelism is meant to clarify the message, justify the imprecations, make emphasis, intensify the prayer (though there are instances where this need is met without the use of parallelism), relate the deeds of enemy with the prayer being offered, or juxtapose the deeds of the enemy with the imprecations being uttered. These uses have succeeded in getting the message clearer, and in some instances, understanding the intent of the poet as well as the meaning of the psalm.

Intensification

Another poetic device that is used in uttering the imprecations is intensification. While the need to intensify meaning is met using parallelism, there are instances where intensification is employed without necessarily using parallelism. This is observed where a "narrative progression in biblical verse often moves up a scale of increasing intensity" (Alter, 1985, p. 63). Alter also calls it "incremental repetition" (Alter, 1985, p. 64). Most of the imprecations make use of this device in explaining exactly what the lamenter wants to happen to the enemy. According to Alter (1985), "this kind of poetic structure lends itself beautifully to the writing of a psalmodic plea for help, a prophetic denunciation, or a Jobian complaint" (Alter, 1985, p. 63). The reader encounters a progression of events in increasing intensity and sometimes parallels that have an intensified meaning in the next colon or line. This section seeks to discuss the patterns of intensification observed in the psalms that were analysed in chapters three and four of this thesis: namely, Psalms 35, 58, 69, 109, and 137.

Psalm 35

The imprecations in Psalm 35 have a number of intensification patterns that demand attention. As already indicated, the parts that contain imprecations are vv. 1-3, 4-6, and 8 in the first block and vv. 19 and 25-26 in the last block. The imprecations in the first part (vv. 1-3) are as follows:

Fight with my fighters.

And stand up in my help.

And stop up my pursuers;

Say to my soul, "Your salvation am I."

¹ Contend, O Yahweh, with my contenders;

² Take up a shield and a large shield

³ And draw out a spear

The intensification used in this section is in v. 2 where the lamenter is asking Yahweh to take up a shield (בְּנָבֶּה) and a large shield (בְּנָבָּה) to stand up in his help. The translation should be rendered as "take up a shield, indeed a large shield" to clearly present the intensified meaning intended. The "waw" here does not play the role of a joining conjunction, but a form of intensification of the war implement mentioned. The invocations and imprecation in vv. 4-6 are as follows:

⁴ Let them be ashamed and humiliated—those seeking my soul; Let them move away behind and be abashed--those desiring my hurt.

And the messenger of the Lord pushing;

And the angel of the Lord pursuing them.

The verses in which there is use of intensification are vv. 5-6. In both verses, the second line makes the first line more serious for the enemies. Whereas the first line in each verse is an imprecation in itself, the addition of the second line, makes the situation of the enemy more desperate. In v. 5, for example, the prayer is that they be "like chaff before the wind" (line 1), but he adds in line 2 that the messenger of Yahweh should push them. This places them in a more desperate situation than just being chaff blown away by the wind. In v. 6, the lamenter wishes that the path of the enemies would be dark (אָרַלֶּלֶלֶלֶ) and slippery (אָרַלֶּלֶלֶלֶל). The image here is a dark road on which it is difficult or impossible for the enemies to see. As if the darkness is not enough, he adds that the road be slippery. This is further intensified in line 2 of the verse where the lamenter calls for pursuit by an angel of Yahweh on the dark

⁵ Let them be like chaff before the wind,

⁶ Let their path be dark and slippery,

and slippery path. The intent of this intensified wish is to totally defeat the enemies.

It becomes clear that the role that the messenger of Yahweh plays is one of intensification. In essence, the messenger of Yahweh is introduced in the two verses in two separate lines of intensification to reinforce the imprecation uttered in preceding lines. The main objective identified here is to increase the plight of the enemies. This incremental pattern of the imprecation is done using the literary patterns of intensification.

Another set of imprecations that contain patterns of intensification is in v. 26. The verse is expressed as follows:

²⁶ Let them be put to shame and disgrace together, The ones who rejoice over my misfortune! Let them put on (be clothe in) shame and ignominy The ones who make themselves great against me

The four lines are arranged to present the same kind of message. The lamenter is praying that the enemies be put to shame and disgrace together (line 1) and that they be clothed in shame and ignominy (line 3). The deeds of the enemy in each level of the imprecation are in lines 2 and 4. As previously discussed, they are presented in two pairs of lines in an "Imprecation-type of enemy" structure: a curse and a description of the enemy.

While in line 1, he wishes that they be put to shame and disgrace, line 3 adds that they should be clothed in shame and embarrassment. The point is, being clothed in shame and embarrassment is another way of portraying shame and disgrace as expressed in line 1. To be wearing clothes of shame and disgrace to the full glare of everyone implies that their secrets will all be in the

public domain and they will lose their respect and popularity. It is seen from these examples that the intensification in Psalm 35 has generally been used to add to the meaning expressed in the previous line or column.

Psalm 69

Psalm 69 also uses intensification to present the imprecations. The imprecations are found in vv. 23-29, hence they will be the focus of this section. Each of the verses in the imprecations contains two lines that seem to complement each other. The second line in each verse adds meaning to the first line. Though the meaning added may not necessarily intensify the imprecation, they are worth considering. Apart from v. 27 which mentions the deeds of the enemies, the other verses in the block contain an aspect of the enemy and the desired action by the lamenter. These can be tabulated as follows:

Verse	Line	Element	Desired Action
23	1	Their table	(may it) become before them a trap
	2		and (may their table become) for
			their allies a snare
24	1	Their eyes	(may they) grow dim from seeing
	2	(And) their loins	(may they) be made to shake
			continually
25	1	Your indignation	Pour out on them
	2	The burning of your anger	(may it) overtake them
26	1	Their encampment	(may it) be made desolate
	2	Their tents	may no one dwell
28	1	Iniquity	Put to their iniquity
	2	Your righteousness	don't let them come in
29	1	The scroll of life	May they be blotted out
	2	The righteous	may they not be written down

While some of the lines are just repetitions of the same idea, the ones in vv. 23, 25, and 29 contain some intensification. In v. 23, the prayer that their tables become "for their allies a snare" (line 2) intensifies the idea

expressed in line 1 that their tables "become before them a trap". In line 2, the entrapment extends to others (their allies) apart from only the enemy (line 1). Whereas a trap (אוֹבָי וֹבְּי וֹבְּי וֹבְי וֹבְי וֹבִי וֹבְי וֹבִי וֹבְי וֹבִי וֹבְּי וֹבְּיי וֹבְּיִי וֹבְיי וֹבִי וֹבִי וֹבְיי וֹבִי וֹבְיי וֹבִי וֹבִי וֹבְיי וְבִּי וֹבְיי וֹבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְּיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְּיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבִיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וֹבְיי וֹבְיי וֹבְיי וֹבְי וֹבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וֹבְיי וְבְיי וֹבְיי וֹבְיי וְבְיי וְבְּיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְּיי וְבְיי וְבְּיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְּיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְּיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי וְבְיי ו

In v. 25, the lamenter calls on Yahweh to pour out his indignation on the enemies (line 1) and let the burning of his anger overtake them (line 2). The term "the burning of your anger" (אַבְּיִרְיִּן) is an intensification of the "indignation" (אַבְיִרְיִּן) expressed in line 1. The indignation is a further picture of God's burning anger. The image portrayed by אַבּיִרן is anger so severe that it burns (אַבְּיִרוֹן) in the nostrils (אַבּירוֹן) of God. The severity is expressed in the form of imagery for the anger portrayed.

The next imprecation that makes use of intensification is in v. 29. Here, the poet employs two lines to express his wish:

²⁹May they be blotted out from the scroll of life And may they not be written down with the righteous

In line 1, he expresses the wish that Yahweh should blot the enemies out of the scroll of life. Line two expresses the same idea but makes it more intensive: that they should not be written down with the righteous. This is expressed using negative parallels: "blotted out" (המול) and "be written"

(בְּהַלָּהַ) prefixed with a negative particle. It would seem as though being in the scroll of life is different from being written down with the righteous. But it is clear from the context that the righteous are those written in the scroll of life. The intensification involved in this verse therefore includes the fact that the enemies should have their names erased from the scroll of life and that it should not be written there ever. Since being listed among the righteous can eventually grant them a chance of getting their names re-written in the scroll of life. To get them completely off, the lamenter asks for them to be blotted out from the scroll of life and not be written with the righteous.

Psalm 109

The imprecations in Psalm 109 also make use of some intensification. As already noted in chapter four of this thesis, the psalm is placed in a six-stanza structure (on the basis of theme) and the imprecations appear in stanzas 2, 3, and 4 with one line of concluding imprecation in stanza 6.

In stanza 2, it is observed that the imprecations are intensified in progression from verse to verse. The idea in v. 6 is intensified by the imprecation in v. 7 which is further intensified in v. 8 in that order till the stanza climaxes in v. 10.

The lamenter wishes that a wicked man be appointed over the enemy and that he be accused (v. 6). The accusation is intensified in v. 7 by a wish that he be found guilty when he is judged based on the accusation. The context portrays an accusation that should attract a death sentence. This is suggested in v. 8 where the lamenter prays that the enemy's day be few (probably truncated by the death sentence) and that another should take his office. Once this

happens, the logical consequence is his children becoming orphans and his wife a widow (v. 9). As if that is not enough, v. 10 intensifies the plight by wishing that his orphaned children will wander and beg, looking for a place of refuge away from their ruins.

Stanza 3 continues the imprecations in the same pattern of intensifying the plight of the enemy's descendants. In this stanza, however, attention is placed on the posterity of the enemy. Once he dies and his family remains in a deplorable state (as suggested in stanza 2) what follows should completely wipe his name out. The progression is as follows:

- v. 11: His belongings should be taken over by a creditor and his property should be plundered by strangers (so that his family will remain without any inheritance)
- v. 12: His orphaned children should not be shown any favour (so that they will remain in misery and in need)
- v. 13: His posterity should be cut off (so that his name will not continue to the next generation). This implies that his children should also die without any heirs.
- v. 14: Once he has no descendants to carry on his name and posterity,
 his ancestry should also be tainted and the sins of his ancestors who are
 already dead should not be forgotten of blotted out.
- v. 15: The ultimate wish comes at the end: that their (his ancestors) memory is cut off from the earth.

The imprecations in stanza 4 (found in vv. 17-19) employ some intensification. V. 19 seems to intensify the idea expressed in v. 18. While v. 18 talks about a curse going "into his inwards parts like water, and like oil in

his bones", v. 19 adds that it should also be to "him like a garment with which he wraps himself and a waistband which he girds on continually." The idea of intensification is observed in the perpetuity and addition. The wish is that the curse should not only be internal (i.e., "his inwards parts") but also external (i.e., "like a garment" and "a waistband"). This, according to the lamenter, should be on the enemy continually.

Psalm 58

The imprecations in Psalm 58 also make use of intensification to communicate the ideas. These imprecations, as already noted in chapter three of this thesis, are found in vv. 7-11. Of these, the poet employs intensification in vv. 8 and 9. The verses appear as follows:

⁸Let them flow like the waters walk to and fro for themselves. Let him tread his arrows like they are withered ⁹Like a snail melting away as it walks. Like the miscarriage of a woman, let them not see the sun

In v. 8b, the lamenter prays that the arrows of the enemy of the state (i.e., the corrupt judges) tread "like they are withered". The image presented is an arrow that is weak and is unable to meet its target appropriately. The description in v. 9 is a continuation of the movement of the arrow. It intensifies the idea expressed in v. 8b by adding that it should be "like a snail melting away as it walks" and "like the miscarriage of a woman". These images present a slower and ineffective arrow of the enemy. At the end of the day, he adds that it should not "see the sun" just like the miscarriage of a woman. In essence, the lamenter prays that the enemy should fail in his

endeavours and that all efforts sound be without result. This message is better communicated through the use of intensification.

Psalm 137

The last psalm in this study is Psalm 137. The imprecations in the last section of the psalm, where the poet requests for vengeance on behalf of Jerusalem, are very harsh and strikingly horrible. The lamenters call upon Yahweh to remember the sons of Edom (v. 7) and further pronounce imprecatory curses on Babylon:

8daughter of Babylon, the one to be destroyed
 Happy is he who deals with you as you have dealt with us
 9Happy is he who grasps and dashes
 Your children to the rock

After describing Babylon as "the one to be destroyed" (תַּשְׁדֹרְיָה) in line 1, he continues to pronounce a blessing on the one who will repay Babylon as they have treated Israel in line 2. This pronouncement is repeated in v. 9. The ABBA structure of this section reveals a pattern of intensification. The structure is such that v. 8a ("daughter of Babylon, the one to be destroyed") corresponds with v. 9b. ("your children to the rock") and v. 8b (happy is he who deals with you as you have dealt with us") corresponds with v. 9a ("happy is he who grasps and dashes"). The pronunciation of blessing on the one who will perform the act (v. 8b and v. 9a) is enveloped by a description of the enemy ("daughter of Babylon"/"your children") and their destruction ("the one to be destroyed"/"to the rock") at the beginning and end of the block. Hence, "to the rock" at the end (v. 9b) intensifies the idea of "the one to be destroyed" (v. 8a) by making the picture clearer. It tells the desired

form of destruction from the lamenter: that their children are dashed "to the rock."

Also, the pronouncement of blessing on the performer of the act provides an intensification that seeks to give further detail. The fact that he pronounces a blessing on the one "who deals with you as you have dealt with us" (v. 8b) is further explained when he pronounced the same kind of blessing on the one who "grasps and dashes" (v. 9a) their children to the rock. This implies that the grasping and dashing of children to the rocks is what the enemy (Babylon) did to the lamenters' people (Israel). This intensification therefore performs the role of adding further information and explaining the phrase it intensifies.

This section has focused on a discussion of how intensification is used in the utterance of imprecations within the psalms. It is clear that the poets usually use intensification by progression, repetition, or explanation. Either way, it seeks to clearly present the intended action and wish against the enemy. Intensification in the imprecations presents the wishes in a progressive manner adding more to the wishes in each line, till the ultimate reach is uttered. Also, they are used to sometimes repeat the idea expressed in one line for the sake of emphasis. They are also used to explain earlier lines that may not contain the entire message intended.

In addition, the portions where the poet seeks to intensify the message in the imprecations contain imagery. These make the intensification more vivid and recognisable. The rest of this chapter shall focus on the use of imagery in the utterance of the imprecations.

Imagery

The imprecations are also uttered in the form of imagery. That is the use of figurative language to portray an idea intended. Alter (1985) identifies three general categories of imageries in the biblical poems: conventional images, intensive images, and innovative images. He explains that the psalter is made of several strands of imagery and that many poets often want to arrest the attention of their audience "through an original and startling image" (Alter, 1985, p. 190). The images here are presented in the form of similes and metaphors to communicate the intended imprecation. In this section, the imagery used in the utterance of the imprecations in the selected psalms are analysed to further understand how they contribute to the overall message of the psalms.

Psalm 35

The imprecations in Psalm 35 are found within vv.1-8 (first block) and vv. 19-27 (third block). The imprecations in the first block are in vv. 1-6, 8 and within the third block, the imprecatory are in v. 19 and vv. 25-26.

In the introductory address of Yahweh (vv. 1-3), the lamenter is calling upon Yahweh to contend with his contenders and fight with his fighters. The image presented is a military contention with the enemies. He mentions the weapons that Yahweh should use to fight the enemies: a shield (בַּבָּבָּה), indeed a large shield (בַּבָּבָּה). The psalmist is asking Yahweh to arm himself, take up a protective large yield to cover the persecuted and use the buckler as a weapon to fight the enemy (Kraus, 1988). This picture is clearly drawn in the mind of

the reader as the poem portrays it. The idea presented here is that the lamenter is calling upon Yahweh to "fight" (not literally) the enemies, protect him from harm, and eventually give him salvation.

In the invocation of imprecations, the lamenter is seen uttering a number of imprecations on the enemies as follows:

⁴ Let them be ashamed and humiliated—those seeking my soul; Let them move away behind and be abashed--those desiring my hurt.

⁵ Let them be like chaff before the wind,

And the messenger of the Lord pushing;

⁶ Let their path be dark and slippery,

And the angel of the Lord pursuing them

In these wishes, one sees the use of imagery in vv. 5-6. The two lines in v. 5 present an imagery of the lamenter's wish. He begins by using a simile to show how they should be: "like chaff before the wind" (בְּבָּיִי לָפַנִי־רְנַהַ).

To be "like chaff before the wind" presents an image of lightness and of a useless value. It is used to express how useless the enemy should be rendered. It is clear that this imagery simply says that the enemies be blown away, be burnt in flames, or be extinguished as chaff. Linking the work of the messenger of Yahweh with the concept of chaff, it is clear that the lamenter wants his enemies to be completely annihilated: blown away like chaff.

Another image of the enemies escaping on a dark and slippery road is presented in v. 6. While moving on this dark and slippery path, line 2 adds that they should be pursued by an angel of Yahweh. In the first place, a dark and slippery path is not safe for them, but the image adds that they are pursued. The reader can imagine the enemies of the lamenter being pursued while they try to escape on a dark and slippery road. The plausible outcome is that they will be totally destroyed.

In v. 8, another image of a net which the enemy has set is presented. The net is normally set to capture a bird. Here the psalmist is not referring to a literal net, but the image is presented as a metaphor of the enemy's schemes against the lamenter. His prayer, therefore, is that, the same net should capture the enemy.

In the third block where the lamenter utters imprecations against the enemies again (vv. 25-26), he makes use of imagery in v. 26: "Let them put on (be clothe in) shame and ignominy". One pictures the enemies wearing a cloth of shame and disgrace. This image simply communicates that their shame should be visible to the public just like people's clothes are seen by everyone else.

Psalm 69

Just like Psalm 35, Psalm 69 also makes use of imagery in the utterance of imprecations. The entire block of imprecations (vv. 23-29) is made up of many metaphors and similes.

In v. 23, the lamenter begins the set of imprecations with the wish that the enemies' table become a trap. One may have the picture of tables turning into traps. However, the imagery here, as already established, is not about literal tables becoming literal traps but the setting of a table before them in the form of a feast or a meal, specifically, "the sacrificial meals in the Temple, which were supposedly in honour of Yahweh" (Anderson, 1980, 506). The poet's addition that it should be a snare (שֵׁלְבָּיִב), connotes the same idea of entrapment. In this sense, he talks about "their" own tables, implying that their wish should return to them.

He moves further to talk about their eyes growing dim and their loins shaking continually. The reader encounters the image in which he imagines the enemies' eyes growing dim and their loins shaking. The eyes are for seeing and the loins (בַּוֹתנֵיֵם) are used to denote the source of a man's strength and vigour (Anderson, 1980). Hence, the prayer is simply wishing that they may be blinded and that they should be deprived of their strength.

Another imagery is observed in v. 26 where the lamenter prays that the encampment of the enemies "be made desolate" and that no one should dwell in their tents. One sees a description of the dwelling places of the enemies and their families: their encampment (מֹבְירָה) and their tents (מֹבִירָה). Through the picture of a desolate and empty dwelling place, the lamenter is praying for complete annihilation of the enemy and his family. The picture here is tent that is rendered useless and left empty without anyone staying in it.

The imagery used here is to make the message stand out and to present them as an imprecation that the reader can imagine and understand the intended pain wished on the enemy; hence the mention of body parts, tables, dwelling places, etc.

Psalm 109

Within the three stanzas in Psalm 109 that contain imprecations, there is the use of imagery to communicate the imprecations. These imageries seek to present a clearer picture of what the lamenter intends to befall the enemy. In stanza 2 (vv. 6-10), where the entire stanza is made of imprecations, the following is observed.

Yahweh is called upon to appoint a wicked man over the enemy and to "let an accuser stand on his right hand." One imagines an accuser standing on the right hand of the enemy. The legal image drawn presents a case where the lamenter may be talking about a literal accuser or a figurative one. The possibility of a dual interpretation of this is seen in v. 7 where he adds that the enemy be found guilty.

After wishing for the death of the enemy in vv. 8-9, he continues to present a picture of how his orphaned children should "wander and beg" and also "seek a place away from their ruins." This presents a deplorable state for the orphaned children and a shame to the enemy.

Stanza 3 whose imprecations follow stanza 2 immediately also makes use of imagery to utter some of the imprecations. For example, in v. 11 the lamenter prays that a "creditor lay snares for all his belongings" and that strangers should "plunder his property". One sees a picture of a creditor setting a trap in order to take over all the belongings of the enemy. Since the one being prayed against owes the creditor already, this trap possibly implies a way of ensuring that the enemy is sold into slavery because of the debt and his properties be taken away. This picture is a logical continuation of the aspect of the stanza where he wishes death for the enemy. In essence, his children should not be allowed to possess any inheritance from their father.

In stanza 4, imagery is used in vv. 18-19. Here he prays that since the enemy is "clothed with a curse as his garment", that curse should "go into his inward parts like water and like oil in his bones" (v. 18). The reader naturally imagines the enemy wrapped with a curse as a garment and as a waist belt. This imagery actually connotes perpetuity and closeness as a garment is to the

wearer. The reader also pictures a curse going into the enemy's inward parts "like water, and like oil in his bones." This is an intensive imagery that further adds to the closeness of the curse to the enemy. The picture is vivid and the message is clear. The fact that the garment and the waistband are wished to be girded on continually (קְּמָיִר) connotes that it continues without interruption (Brown, Driver & Briggs, 1906). The image of water and oil flowing into his body and bones suggest ample closeness to the curses.

The same clothing motif is used in the last verse containing an imprecation in Psalm 109 (v. 29). He prays that they be "clothed in ignominy" and "wrapped in their shame as the robe". This seems to be a repetition of the imagery used in stanza 4. Standing at the conclusion, this line simply asks for vindication. Once the lamenter is vindicated, all accusers will be clothed in shame.

Psalm 58

The imprecations in Psalm 58 are also made of imagery. All the imprecations in vv. 7-11 make use of imagery of some sort. In vv. 7-9, the petition is directly addressed to God. V. 7 concentrates on the teeth (שׁבֵּי בְּיִנְיִי בִּין) and teeth fangs (בַּוֹלְתְּעִוֹת) of the enemies. God is called upon to "throw down their teeth in their mouth" (line 1) and to pull down the "teeth fangs of young lions" (line 2). It is observed that line 1 presents an image of the teeth of the enemies being thrown down. The reader can imagine the teeth of the enemies being thrown down. In line 2, the same teeth imagery is used but another metaphor is used where he described the enemies as "young lions".

The words for teeth is used figuratively to refer to the weapons that the enemies use against the lamenter. Hence, the plea to break their teeth (בְּבָּיִבְּיִים) is a plea to Yahweh to render them powerless. Also, the verbs to be thrown down (בְּבָּיִם) and pulled down (בְּבִּיִים) are probably used to signify that their ability to devour the people they oppressed (their teeth and teeth fangs) be painfully removed. Also, lion metaphor seems to imply that the wicked are extremely dangerous. As already indicated, the removal of these teeth and teeth fangs mean they should be "rendered harmless" (Anderson, 1980, p. 432) and powerless.

The imagery used in v. 8 intensifies the imprecation. Yahweh is called upon to "let them flow like the waters walk to and fro for themselves" (line 1). The picture that the imagery used gives is one of continuous flow of water into evaporation. Waters cannot walk as it is expressed so the image presented is that of a wade that appears during a rain and disappears almost immediately. The effect that the image presents is one in which they vanish almost immediately like water rushing away.

Though line 2 has textual complications and deliberation, it presents an image that seems to portray that the arrow of the wicked should move at an unfruitful pace. The verb used, "to be withered" or "cut off" (אַלְלֶלֶלֶל) implies inability to penetrate or accomplish its intended purpose. This motif continues in v. 9 with a different image: "Like a snail melting away as it walks" (line 1) and "Like the miscarriage of a woman" (line 2). In short, the lamenter prays that the enemies will tread their arrows "like they are withered", "Like a

snail's (trail) melts away as it walks", and "Like the miscarriage of a woman". Like these, "let them not see the sun" (line 2b). The similes and metaphors used present the message sought to be portrayed: that the machinations of the wicked should not accomplish its intended purpose. Another message portrayed in the fact that the lamenter wants the wicked to be completely annihilated "Like a snail melting away as it walks", and "Like the miscarriage of a woman" without seeing the sun, as if they have not even existed before (see Anderson, 1980; Kraus, 1988). This is an image of total annihilation of the wicked and their plans against the lamenter.

The message presented in the imagery used in v. 10 is total disappearance of the wicked. What he seems to be saying here is telling the wicked that they will be swept away before they even realize it. In the imagery, there is an idea of thorns being green or ablaze (from the phrase 'קרוֹן' במוֹרְחָר בּמוֹרְחָר בּמוֹרְחָר בּמוֹרְחָר בּמוֹרְחָר בּמוֹר חָר בּמוֹר חַר בּמוֹר חָר בּמוֹר חִיי בּמוֹר בּמוֹר חִיי בּמוֹר חִי בּמוֹר חִיי בְּיִי בְּמוֹר חִיי בְּיִי בְּמִי בְּיִי בְיִי בְּיִי ב

The pot imagery also illustrates that the wicked may be getting ready to heat something up in a pot. This, in the context of the psalm, could be a reference to their evil plans. The fact that it is in a pot implies that those plans are hidden from public view. Also, the fact that these contents in the pot (a metaphor for their evil plans) are going to require heat, illustrates that the evil plans of the enemies take some time to plan and implement. Hence, the poet addresses these wicked people and tells them directly that, their wicked plans and machinations will not be hatched before their plight of being swept away comes. He believes that their destruction would be swift The swiftness is expressed in the fact that the source of the fire is the bramble (thorns). Thorns burn faster than other sources of firewood, hence the swiftness of their destruction is illustrated.

Finally, v. 11 end the imprecations in Psalm 58. Here, another vivid image is used to describe the end of the wicked. The verse portrays the righteous as rejoicing over the vengeance which leads to the destruction of the wicked. This is presented in a gory image in line 2 where he says the righteous will wash his feet "in the blood of the wicked". In this image, the joy of the righteous is contrasted with the demise of the wicked. Once the righteous are washing their feet in the blood of the wicked, the implication is that the wicked are either dead or terribly wounded. The imagery is such that the blood is flowing in great volumes, volumes large enough to the extent that the vindicated righteous man is washing his feet in them. This image is hyperbolic and symbolizes joy in victory. The line affirms that "the righteous will see the total defeat of wrong and evil" (Anderson, 1980, p. 434). The implication of washing the feet is that he has his enemies under his feet (a posture that means they have been placed under him).

Psalm 137

The whole of Psalm 137 is an image of "Zion lovers" in exile sitting by the rivers of Babylon and weeping about the destruction of Jerusalem. As part of their lament, they uttered imprecations against the enemies who wrought the destruction. These imprecations are found in the last section of the psalm (vv. 7-9). The part of this imprecation where imagery is portrayed is the last two verses where the lamenters pronounce a blessing on the person who deals with the enemies as they have dealt with Jerusalem (v. 8) and the one who grasps and dashes the children of the enemies to the rock (v. 9). The image that the reader encounters here is one of heartlessly grasping children and dashing them to the rock. Whereas the context may suggest literal dashing of children to the rock, it may also be an image of ruthlessly dealing with the enemies for doing same to Jerusalem.

The foregoing discussion reveals that lamenters often make use of imagery in imprecations. These are done to intensify a wish, add more information, or make the wish clearer and more vivid. This is generally done with the use of similes and metaphors. The reader therefore pictures the kind of imprecation wished against the enemy and gets the meaning implied by the images used.

Characteristics of Imprecations

Having studied the imprecations within five selected psalms (35, 58, 69, 109, and 137), it is observed that they usually take a particular form, nature, and structure. The use of the terms "form" and "structure" here is not a reference to form and structure as understood in form criticism, used by

Gunkel, Noth, and von Rad as expounded by Wevers (1956) and Habel (1971). They are just reflective of the way the imprecations are usually presented within the psalter. These are referred to as characteristics in this thesis. These characteristics shall be the focus of this section. The following characteristics are therefore observed in the imprecations:

An address to God

There are presented as an address to Yahweh, with a few instances as an address to the enemy. In almost all the imprecations, one observes a prayer to God. To this end, Day (2002) defines imprecatory psalms as psalms that "express the desire for God's vengeance to fall on His (and His people's) enemies and include the use of actual curses, or imprecations" (Day, 2002, p. 166). So the imprecations go beyond just the wishes of the lamenter to a prayer to Yahweh to vindicate him. Hence the imprecations are replete with the divine name. The various psalms do not make use of one particular structure in addressing God, but it is clear that they all have the divine name in the imprecations. For example, the chiastic (ABBA) rendering of Psalm 58:7 is sandwiched by the reference to God as follows:

⁷Oh God, throw down their teeth in their mouth Teeth fangs of young Lions, pull down, Oh Yahweh

"Oh God" introduces the first line, "throw down their teeth in their mouth" and "Teeth fangs of young Lions, pull down" closes with 'Oh Yahweh". The two lines are parallel in thought and words with inverse arrangement, but they are introduced and concluded as an address to God. This is a key feature of imprecations. In imprecations where the name of God is not repeatedly mentioned, the initial address is to God before the pleas are uttered.

In a few examples, they are uttered like mere wishes, but a study of the entire

psalm will link them to a prayer to God. An example is Psalm 137 where in

vv. 8, 9 the psalmist diverts to address the enemies and rain curses on them. In

v. 7, there is a prayer to Yahweh: "Remember, Yahweh for the sons of Edom"

because the Edomites urged the Babylonian raiders on during the destruction

of Jerusalem. This is then followed by the imprecations that occupy the latter

part of the psalm.

"Type/Deeds of the Enemy-Imprecation" Structure

The study of selected psalms and imprecations also revealed that most

of the imprecations are placed in what is referred to by this author as

"type/deed of the enemy-imprecation" or "imprecation-type/deed of enemy"

structure. That is, the imprecations are tied to the type of enemy or the deeds

of the enemy. The imprecations are not just uttered in a vacuum; rather, the

desired imprecation depends on the type of enemy the lamenter is talking

about and/or his deeds. Yahweh is called upon to fight with an enemy who

fights with the lamenter, contend with his contenders, dash the children of the

enemy to the rock since the enemy did same to Israel, let the enemy have a

curse since he desired a curse, etc.

This structure is consistently used in the selected psalms and

imprecations. For example, In Psalm 35:26, two lines are placed in an

"Imprecation-type of enemy" structure where the first line is the imprecation

and the next line is a description of the enemy. These are tabulated as follows:

Imprecation 1:

"Let them be put to shame and disgrace

together,"

Type of enemy 1:

"The ones who rejoice over my misfortune"

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Imprecation 2: "Let them put on (be clothe in) shame and

ignominy

Type of enemy 2: "The ones who make themselves great against

me"

Imprecation 1 is meant for Type of enemy 1 and imprecation 2 is for Type of enemy 2. This goes directly with the fact that the type of enemy

determines the imprecation uttered against the person.

A similar structure is observed in the imprecations in stanza 4 of Psalm 109. The stanza begins with a description of what the enemy had done: "he did not remember to show kindness and he harassed the poor and needy and the disheartened to death" (v. 16). Then there is a series of imprecations that are linked with the deeds of actions of the enemy. The entire stanza is as follows:

¹⁶Because he did not remember to show kindness and he harassed the poor and needy and the disheartened to death

¹⁷He loved a curse, let it come on him. and he delighted not in blessing, let it be far from him

¹⁸He is clothed with a curse as his garment, let it go into his inward parts like water, and like oil in his bones

¹⁹May it be for him like a garment with which he wraps himself and a waistband which he girds on continually

²⁰May this be the wages of my accusers from Yahweh and those who speak evil against me

The three pairs of imprecations in vv. 17-18 are arranged in a simple A-B-A pattern with the "deeds of the enemy-imprecation" structure that places the action of the enemy vis-à-vis the imprecation wished against him. These wishes are paired with his actions because he loved a curse (קֹלֶלֶלֶ) and clothe himself with curses but delighted not in blessings (בַּבַּרֶבָּה). In essence, his

own actions are used against him in the imprecations. They are organized as follows:

Verse	Enemy's Action	Imprecation
17a	He loved a curse	let it (a curse) come on
		him
17b	He delighted not	let it (blessing) be far
	in blessing	from him
18	He is clothed	let it (a curse) go into
	with a curse as	his inward parts like
	his garment	water, and like oil in
		his bones

To these "enemy's action-imprecation" pairs, he adds "May it be for him like a garment with which he wraps himself and a waistband which he girds on continually" in v. 19. In v. 20, he mentions the deeds of the enemy alongside the imprecation: "May this (imprecation) be the wages of my accusers from Yahweh and those who speak evil against me (deed of the enemy).

Though not all the imprecations have the organised structure as seen in the examples presented here, the imprecations wished against the enemies in the imprecations are mostly a consequence of their (the enemies') actions and deeds.

Declaration of Innocence

Another major characteristic observed in the imprecations is the declaration of innocence and outlining the good deeds of the lamenter. Whereas the actions/deeds of the enemy are mentioned as a justification for the harshness of the imprecations, the lamenter often declares his own innocence and/or outlines his deeds to present his case. In most of the laments, the lamenter also mentions his deeds (good deeds), especially the ones that the

enemy was a beneficiary of, as part of the declaration of innocence. What this does is that it exalts the enormity of the actions of the enemy. That is, all the actions of the enemy against the lamenter were performed without cause. Therefore, they deserve the imprecations wished against them. Though there is no direct declaration of innocence for some of the imprecations in the psalms, the tone of these imprecations suggest that the lamenter sees himself/herself as innocent and that the enemies deserve the wishes uttered against them.

Also, the declaration of innocence calls for a vindication. The laments assume that if the enemy had perpetrated their actions against the lamenter for a reason, then their actions may be justified, hence they do not need vindication. However, since the lamenter presents himself as innocent, then the deeds of the enemy cannot be justified or excuse. Hence the need for vindication; and that is where the imprecations come in.

There are examples of this in almost all the selected psalms. For example, In Psalm 35, the psalmist places evidence of his innocence in vv. 13-14. Here he explains how he sympathised with the enemies in their misery and related to them "like a friend, like a brother" (v. 14). This portion is strategically placed between two parts (vv. 11-12 and 15-16) that specifically outlines the deeds of the enemies. The sandwiching of this by the deeds of the enemy is simply contrasting his deeds with that of the enemy and making it clear that the enemies are not justified. In Psalm 69, the lamenter states in v. 6 that God knows his folly and that his guilt is not hidden. This is to communicate that he may have some faults but those faults are not the reason for the enemy's persecution. He states in v. 5 that they hate him "without cause". The same "without cause" motif is used in Psalm 109:3. He continues

to state how "In place of my love, they accuse me but I make prayer" (v. 4) and how "they have put on me evil in place of good and hatred in place of my love" (v. 5). This background and juxtaposition of the lamenter's love and the hatred of the enemy makes room for the imprecations that follow. Psalm 58 ends on the note that the "righteous" will rejoice upon seeing vengeance (v. 11) and it will be said "there is a fruit for the righteous" (v. 12). The repetition of the term "righteous" seeks to communicate the deeds of the lamenter in contrast to the deeds of the enemies. The deed of the lamenter portrayed in Psalm 137 is the love of the lamenters for Jerusalem (vv. 5-6). This is placed in contrast with the actions of the enemies of Jerusalem who viciously destroyed it and its inhabitants.

Annihilation motif

Finally, it is observed that the imprecations are replete with the annihilation motif. A careful study of the laments will reveal that the lamenter is calling for complete annihilation of the enemies, their families, and their posterity. The language is one that suggests that the lamenter is wishing for total extinction and obliteration of the enemy. This motif is seen in almost all the imprecations studied. In some instances, the imprecations spread to affect the families. The prayers are offered and by the use of intensification, the calamity wished against the enemy is increased to the point of extinction. But in all, most imprecations have the annihilation motif in them. For example, In Psalm 35, the lamenter prays that Yahweh will "Let them be like chaff before the wind, And the messenger of Yahweh pushing;" (v. 5) and that he should "Let their path be dark and slippery, And the messenger of Yahweh pursuing them." (v. 6). These images definitely have destruction in mind. V. 8 makes it

very clear: "Let destruction come upon him unawares; And his net which he hid, let it capture him: In destruction let him fall." This call for complete destruction forms part of the annihilation motif in the imprecations.

Psalm 69 talks about being blotted from the scroll of life toward the end of the imprecations (v. 29). In Psalm 109, the imprecations increase in intensity to the point of total annihilation of the enemy, his descendants and even his ancestors. The summary of the imprecations is in v. 13 where he prays that the enemy's "posterity be cut off; May their name be blotted out in another generation". The climax of Psalm 58 also makes this point clear. The lamenter wishes that at the end, when all is said and done, the righteous will wash his feet "in the blood of the wicked" (v. 11). This most probably implies complete destruction and death of the enemy. A similar gruesome picture is seen at the end of Psalm 137 where the psalmist prays that the children of the enemy be dashed against the rocks (v. 9). Though not directly stated, the attack on the little ones here suggests that the lamenter wishes for complete extinction of the enemies in addition to their little ones.

These examples reveal the fact that the lamenters have in mind total destruction of the enemies they are praying against. In some of the laments, however, this motive is not directly stated, but annihilation is implied. The idea of annihilation forms part of the vengeance sought and that is the only moment the lamenter will feel vindicated. So the imprecations are not just desired punishments for the enemies of the lamenter; they are wishes that seek total annihilation of the enemies and (in some cases) their family members.

Summary

This chapter has focused on a synthesis of ideas gleaned from the analyses of imprecations within five selected psalms (35, 58, 69, 109, and 137). The chapter looked at these imprecations in detail focusing on the use of three literary devices: parallelism, intensification, and imagery. It is observed that the imprecations make use of parallelism to add meaning, make emphasis, and sometimes to add more information to an imprecation. Also, intensification is used to progressively make a case for the desired result; i.e., to ensure complete destruction of the enemy. Intensification is also used to emphasize a point in an imprecation. Finally, imprecations use imagery in the form of similes and metaphors to present a clearer picture of the desired imprecation. The chapter also points of the various characteristics of imprecations and psalms containing imprecations. It is observed that the imprecations are normally uttered as an address to God instead of just being wishes. Also, they have a "type/deeds of the enemy-imprecation" structure where imprecations are uttered vis a vis the type/deeds of the enemy. They also contain a declaration of innocence and/or a description of the good deeds of the lamenter that warrant that the imprecations are justifiable. Finally, there is an annihilation motif that is present in the imprecations. Most of the imprecations have a final result of total destruction for the enemy in mind. These conclusions have helped to meet the quest of this thesis; i.e., to do a literary analysis of the imprecations within the selected psalms. This analysis has revealed their use of literary devices and their characteristics in the psalms that contain them.

CHAPTER SIX

IMPRECATIONS IN THE PSALMS: THE WAY FORWARD

Introduction

This chapter summarises the entire thesis, draws conclusions from the study, presents the implication of the findings to Ghanaian Christianity, and offers recommendations on the way forward. The summary presents the main highlights of the thesis and how it is presented. The conclusion highlights the major findings of the research vis a vis the objectives of the study. The findings are further discussed alongside their implications for Ghanaian Christianity in terms of the use of imprecation in prayers. The recommendations are made on the basis of the findings as well as the suggestions for further research areas.

Summary

The research investigated the imprecations within the psalter. This investigation was to determine how the imprecations are uttered, their nature and characteristics, and how they contribute to the message of the psalms that contain them. To achieve this, the study focused on an analysis to determine the literary elements used by the lamenters to utter the imprecations. This thesis, organized in six chapters, presents the report of the study, its findings, conclusions and recommendations.

The first chapter introduces the problem of the thesis and sets the objectives as well as the method used in the study. The chapter also focused

on a review of related literature on psalms and the concept of *lex talionis*, the law of retaliation. The second chapter discussed imprecations within the psalter. The chapter looked at what imprecations are, and how they appear in the psalms, especially the psalms of lament. In addition, issues surrounding the identification of imprecatory psalms were also discussed. It was observed that there is no consensus on the identity of psalms that may be called imprecatory. In the midst of the disparity, however, psalms 69, 109, and 137 are commonly cited as belonging to the group of imprecatory psalms. The thesis proposed that there may not be a psalm that can be properly described as an imprecatory psalm. Rather, there are psalms that contain imprecations. A representative group of psalms were therefore selected for the study; namely, Psalms 35, 58, 69, 109, and 137. The communal laments in this selection (Psalms 58 and 137) were analysed in chapter three. The chapter delved into a literary analysis of imprecations within the selected communal laments (58 and 137). A literary analysis of the selected individual laments (Psalms 35, 69, and 109) was conducted in chapter four. The literary-critical exegetical method was used in analysing the selected psalms. Each psalm in these two chapters was briefly reviewed the text presented with its structure to bring out the sections that contain imprecations. The imprecations are then analysed and their place in the lament discussed.

The ideas in the analyses of the selected psalms are gleaned together and discussed in chapter five. The chapter assessed the imprecations in detail focusing on the use of three literary devices: parallelism, intensification, and imagery. The chapter also pointed to the various characteristics of imprecations and psalms containing imprecations. This final chapter (chapter

six) seeks to conclude the thesis by presenting a summary and the conclusions of the research. This also includes the recommendations and suggestion of areas for further study.

Conclusion

Being a literary study of imprecations within the psalter, this thesis had the following objectives:

- To offer a study of selected psalms that contain imprecations from a literary-critical dimension, instead of the Christian ethical approach with which most scholars have studied them.
- To illustrate how literary elements of parallelism, intensification, and imagery are used in expressing imprecations in the psalter.
- To identify the nature and characteristics that imprecations often take in the psalter.
- To identify how the concept of imprecations is presented in the book of Psalms.

Deviating from the Christian ethical approach of looking at the psalms with imprecations, this study used a literary-critical method to read imprecations in selected psalms. Noting that there are imprecations within the psalms, rather than imprecatory psalms, the study focused on the sections in the selected psalms (35, 58, 69, 109, and 137) that contain imprecations. The literary elements of parallelism, intensification, and imagery in the imprecations are studied and the message that they present teased out. Afterward, a number of conclusions can be reached in answer to the research questions raised in pursuit of the objectives of the study.

This study concludes that instead of labelling some selected psalms as imprecatory, it is proper, based on the way imprecations are used in the psalms, to rather see psalms as containing imprecations. The divergent views regarding the identity of imprecatory psalms makes it difficult to settle on any psalm or group of psalms as imprecatory. It is not also conducive to label any psalm which contains imprecations as an imprecatory psalm since it may be properly placed in a different classification. It is therefore more appropriate to discuss such psalms as psalms that contain imprecations. These imprecations, almost exclusively found in the Laments, are expressed in various forms and structures and using various literary and poetic elements, including, but not limited to, parallelism, intensification, and imagery.

The use of parallelism, intensification, and imagery has been to meet various motives of communicating the imprecations. In all the psalms, the lamenter uses lines that are parallel in thought, words, and patterns. The study observes that the imprecations make use of parallelism to clarify the message, justify the imprecations, make emphasis, intensify the prayer, relate the deeds of enemy with the prayer being offered, or juxtapose the deeds of the enemy with the imprecations being uttered. The major recognisable pattern is the juxtaposition of the imprecations with the actions of the enemy.

Intensification is used to progressively make a case for the desired result of the imprecation. In the imprecations studied, the poets use intensification by progression, repetition, or explanation. These are to clearly present the intended action and wish against the enemy. They are also used to repeat the idea expressed in one line for the sake of emphasis or to explain

earlier lines that may not contain the entire message intended. In addition, they are used to emphasize a point in an imprecation.

Imagery in the form of similes and metaphors are also used in the imprecations to present a clearer picture, intensify a wish, add more information, or make the wish more vivid. By using imagery, the poet helps the reader to pictures the kind of imprecation wished against the enemy. In the end, the meaning implied by the images used is revealed.

Other peculiar characteristics of imprecations are observed in the study. These reveal the "form" and "structure" that imprecations normally take. That is, the nature and general characteristics of the imprecations. While these characteristics are direct and clear in some of the imprecations, they are indirect in others, but the idea is still expressed.

The study reveals that the imprecations are normally uttered as an address to God instead of just being wishes. They go beyond just the wishes of the lamenter to a prayer to Yahweh to vindicate him. It becomes observable that the imprecations are replete with the divine name.

Another characteristic that this study identified is that the imprecations normally take a "type/deeds of the enemy-imprecation" structure. This is where imprecations are uttered vis a vis the type/deeds of the enemy. The imprecations are tied to the type of enemy or his/her deeds. They are not just uttered in a vacuum; rather, the desired imprecation depends on the type of enemy the lamenter is talking about and/or his deeds.

In addition, the imprecations are uttered together with a declaration of innocence on the part of the lamenter. Just like the deeds of the enemy are used as a justification for the harshness of the imprecations, the lamenter often declares his own innocence and/or outlines his deeds to present his case, probably as a reason why the imprecations are necessary. These declarations normally call for vindication.

Finally, the imprecations generally have an annihilation motif in them. The desired final result of the lamenter is total destruction for the enemy. One will observe that in each of the imprecations, the lamenter is calling for complete annihilation of the enemies, their families, and their posterity. This motif is normally presented by the use of intensification, where the punishment is increased until the motive of complete extinction is reached. In essence, the imprecations are not just desired punishments for the enemies of the lamenter; they are wishes that seek total annihilation of the enemies and (in some cases) their family members.

These conclusions and observations have helped to meet the objectives of this thesis. The literary study didn't give attention to the ethical considerations of the imprecations, literary elements of parallelism, intensification, and imagery have been analysed and the way they help present the imprecations expressed, and the characteristics of the imprecations within the psalter are appropriately teased out. This has helped present an understanding of the concept of imprecations in the psalter from a literary perspective, marking a key contribution to the subject of imprecations in the psalms.

Implications of Findings for Ghanaian Christianity

Since the psalms as well as the imprecations are mostly used by Christians in Ghana, it is appropriate that the findings in this study are linked with Ghanaian Christian use of imprecations. This linkage will make this study relevant to the Ghanaian Christian community and users of the Bible. This is so because in Africa, and Ghana in particular, there is a belief that most of our misfortunes are caused by our enemies (Quayesi-Amakye, 2015; Tetteh, 2016). The belief is that the problems we face are born from evil spirits, malicious persons, witches, sorcerers, etc and "to maintain and reactivate the protective presence of the benevolent divine force, the individual and his family must of necessity maintain the cosmological balance through protective and preventive rites" (Larbi, 2015, p. 9). Hence, to prosper in life, one needs the intervention of a supernatural being to deal with these enemies. This belief has led to the use of prayers labelled "back to sender" among Christians. The misfortunes and problems faced by some believers are believed to be sent by an enemy, hence they are prayed "back to sender". While Christians in the West will not consider cursing when directly offended, African Christians will have thoughts of cursing even when they are not directed affected (Broadhusrt, 2004).

This teaching has become so popular in the charismatic and Pentecostal settings to the extent that some prophets and "men of God" sell "back to sender" oils, etc. to their members and offer special prayers against "enemies" who are the cause of problems in the lives of Christians. Members use "back to sender" oils as a form of vengeance and spiritual warfare (Ansah, 2011). Since these thought patterns and activities characterise the lives of most

Ghanaian Christians today, the conclusions of this study, which looks at prayers offered against the enemies of the psalmists, will be relevant to Ghanaian Christianity.

The fact that the lamenter in the psalms makes use of parallelism, intensification, and imagery to express the imprecations reflects an important aspect of Ghanaian linguistics: the use of literary devices. The songs that are sung in various traditional set-ups are mostly poetic. These poetic utterances are even expressed in modern music and language. This makes it easier for Ghanaians to appreciate the use of parallels, intensifications, and images to express themselves. These are used for emphasis, explanation, additions, and sometimes, for beautification. With a background of poetic language and style of music, a typical Ghanaian will properly appreciate the poetic expression of imprecations.

Another aspect of the findings in this study that will be relevant to Ghanaian Christianity is the fact that imprecations are observed to be prayers offered to God. The role of the divine being plays a major role in Ghanaian Christianity. Prayers against enemies, though rooted in the desire to retaliate, must be based prayers offered to God, and not just wishes. However, some Christians directly command the devil and evil spirits in their prayers. What Christians have to note is that no matter what wishes they may have against their enemies, they still do not have the power to ratify those wishes. They still need a more powerful source to get their wishes granted. This is why such hatred, bitterness, or retaliatory desires need to be uttered as prayers to God.

The concept of "back-to-sender" prayers makes more meaning among Ghanaian Christians when the idea that the imprecations are uttered in a "type/deed of the enemy-imprecation" structure. In this sense, the calamity wished against the enemy is the same as their (the enemy's) wish against the lamenter. Hence, the prayer is simply a "back-to-sender" type of prayer: i.e., "May it happen to the enemy as he/she wished against me". This was the style of the lamenter as it is practiced among most Ghanaian Christians.

In the prayers, the lamenter always declares his/her innocence. This is very important for every Christian. You must be innocent in order to effectively pray against someone who is scheming evil against you. The fact that the lamenter juxtaposes his innocence with his wishes against the enemy implies that anyone praying the imprecations must be innocent (at least of the evil he/she is being accused of). Christians must take note and ensure that they are not guilty of the same sins they accuse others of.

Finally, the annihilation motif displayed in the imprecations should be of important note to Ghanaian Christianity. The prayers that are offered by most Christians are usually crafted to contain the motive of total destruction of the enemy. Prayers are offered to "bind", "blind", and "destroy" the enemy. There are also prayers invoking "Holy Ghost fire" on the enemies and their plans. This is probably because in a traditional Ghanaian society, the enemy could be blinded, made deaf, struck with madness or a strange disease. To the Christians, these are desired in order to disgrace the enemy. Whereas this is quite linked with the annihilation motif observed in the imprecations, Christians are to approach this style of prayer with caution. It is apparent that most Ghanaian Christians have patterned their prayers after the imprecations

in the psalms. It will however, be helpful if Christians will use the imprecations in context and not just as a yardstick for expressing wishes against their enemies.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions reached in this study, a number of recommendations can be reached. These recommendations include suggestions for further areas of research as well as practical recommendations for users of the psalms in scholarly and religious contexts. The following recommendations for further study suffice:

- This study focused on five selected psalms out of the many psalms that
 contain imprecations. It will be worthwhile to further study other
 psalms that contain imprecations vis a vis the conclusions of this study.
 This kind of study will confirm the universality of the conclusions
 reached in this study.
- 2. Whereas this study focused on only the literary elements of parallelism, intensification, and imagery, it may be helpful to look at the use of other literary and poetic devices such as metre, consonance, assonance, rhythm, etc. These elements are likely to reveal another dimension of the imprecations.
- 3. Other exegetical methods can be used to read the selected psalms as well as other psalms that contain imprecations. New reader-response methodologies such as Ntreh's African Biblical Hermeneutics (Ntreh, 1990; 2001; 2004; 2012; 2016) will reveal an understanding of the

imprecations from readers' points of view. These will further open new discussions in the area of imprecations and psalm studies.

The research also offers recommendations for other users of the Bibles and the psalms – church leaders, preachers, bible teachers, prophets, Christians in general, as well as the general populace. The following are the recommendations:

- 1. It is recommended that users of the psalms focus on the overall messages of each selected psalm instead of picking out sections and interpreting them in isolation. Since this study observes that the imprecations are better understood when studied alongside other aspects of the psalm, it is important to note that isolating the imprecations will raise many theological issues in the interpretation process. These could affect the prayer life of most Christians and other users of the psalms.
- 2. Since people pray with the psalms, this study recommends that the imprecations be used in circumspection. The literary contexts of each psalm will reveal the identity of the enemy and how the users can inculcate it in their contexts during prayer. Without this, users will pray with their pre-identified "enemies" in mind, but such enemies may not fit the contextual enemies in the psalms. Specifically, the annihilation motif observed in the imprecations makes it necessary for users to be circumspect in their use.
- 3. The use of a literary-critical method to study the selected psalms has revealed that when the psalms are studied as a final product, without giving attention to "excavative" tendencies in historical-critical

methodologies, a clearer message is received, and the poetic elements better understood and appreciated. This study therefore recommends that the psalms be approached from the perspective of new literarycritical and reader-response readings.

These recommendations, when followed will help in the proper understanding and use of the imprecations as well as the psalms that contain them.

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