

Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary

But You are a Man Like My Equal: An Exploration of the
Suffering of the Righteous at the Hands of Fellow Community Members

A Thesis Submitted to
Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary
In Partial Fulfilment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Masters of Divinity
Academic/Pre-Ph.D.

By

Dan Cooper

30/04/14

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| I. INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| a) Statement of the Problem | 1 |
| b) Statement of the Purpose | 3 |
| c) Statement of the Importance of the Problem | 3 |
| d) Statement of the Position on the Problem | 5 |
| e) Statement of the Limitations | 6 |
| f) Statement of the Method | 7 |
| II. THE SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT | 12 |
| a) Suffering In the Torah | 12 |
| b) Suffering In the Prophets | 15 |
| c) Suffering In the Writings | 18 |
| III. THE IDENTITY OF THE ENEMIES | 23 |
| a) The Enemy in Historical Scholarship | 23 |
| b) The Enemy as an Individual | 28 |
| c) The Enemy as a Mob | 31 |
| IV. THE TACTICS OF THE ENEMIES | 37 |
| a) Fear and Violence | 37 |
| b) Deceit and Slander | 41 |
| c) Corruption and Subversion | 45 |
| V. THE MOTIVATIONS OF THE ENEMIES | 51 |
| a) “I am Responsible to No One” | 52 |
| b) “You are Responsible to Me” | 56 |
| VI. IMPLICATIONS FOR WORSHIP AND THEOLOGY | 63 |
| a) Validity for Modern Believers | 63 |
| b) Importance for Modern Believers | 66 |
| c) Applicability for Modern Believers | 68 |
| d) Universality of Suffering for Believers | 73 |
| e) A Biblical Response for Believers | 76 |
| VIII. APPENDIX I | 82 |
| a) Translations of Selected Psalms | 82 |
| IX. BIBLIOGRAPHY | 94 |

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Suffering is one of the topics most dealt with in the Psalms. Although the study of the enemies of the psalmist would naturally focus heavily on those Psalms often designated as laments, enemies appear even in Psalms of thanksgiving and wisdom.¹ Although the popularity of the laments have waned in the Western world, these psalms have traditionally been one of the most important resources on suffering within the Bible. To some, it may seem strange that a book on worship would contain so much material on suffering, but the psalms of lament outnumber all other sub-genres in the Psalms. The authors of these psalms experienced sufferings of every variety—both individual and corporate. It is then clear that the Psalm writers were well-acquainted with suffering.

One of the most bitter and often confusing forms of suffering dealt with in the Psalms is the suffering of the righteous. The psalmist suffers intensely and often, even as the paradigmatic worshiper of God. The reader can see that this shows that not all is well for those who serve God. The psalmist, despite his close-knit relationship with God, often finds himself besieged by enemy nations, hunted down by murderers, or slandered by two-faced friends. Sometimes these ruthless attacks seem causeless, while other times it would seem that the only “crime” that the psalmist is guilty of is righteousness.

The Psalms are not alone in their treatment of the theme of people suffering despite their righteousness. From Abel in Genesis to the two witnesses in Revelation, there is clearly a recurring theme in the Bible of the righteous suffering. Although the created universe was originally seen as “good,” few sober-minded individuals could say the same about the world

¹ Hans Kraus, *Psalms: A Commentary*, Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House (1988): 125.

today. In fact, the Bible makes it quite clear that the world is a blurry reflection of the original creation; one where sin, death, and pain are the new norms. In Matthew 5:45, Jesus tells His listeners that good and evil befall both the righteous and the unrighteous. Although the former is not without comment on the Bible, discussions on the latter theme take up large portions of Scripture. Men in Scripture, specifically Joseph, Job, and Jeremiah, suffered greatly despite their righteousness. They suffered poverty, loss, natural disaster, war, and imprisonment to name just a few. As if their sufferings were not great enough, their pains were often added upon or sometimes even caused by men who were at the very least aware of God and His expectations of conduct. God's prophets were relentlessly hounded—even to the point of martyrdom—by their own neighbors. Some of the most noteworthy biblical characters experienced severe sufferings despite their upright behavior.

When these situations arose—as they do throughout the Bible—the biblical writers would often express their frustration. Some poured their hearts out in prayer to God as did Elijah in 1 Kings 19. Job reacted differently by discussing the injustice of the universe with his friends while calling for a mediator between him and God. Those who were seemingly more poetically-minded, such as David and Jeremiah, chose instead to express their pain through song and verse. These songs and poems are emotionally, philosophically, and theologically charged. The Psalms take the time to explore the problem of the suffering of the righteous in detail that narratives cannot afford.

Statement of the Purpose

It is on the songs of disorientation and polemic that this paper will focus, specifically those bitter laments that make up the bulk of book two of the Psalms. This thesis will examine the raw treatment of the righteous suffering because of the wicked found within the Psalms of lament. More specifically, this thesis will examine how book two of the Psalms (42-72) shows that the righteous are often in the cruel hands of the unrighteous who are from within the so-called believing community. Book two has been selected partially because higher volume of psalms that deal with this topic but also as a way of narrowing down a very large theme.

This thesis aims to examine carefully book two of the Psalms to uncover the identity of the psalmist's attackers but in a different sense of identity than what is often explored. This thesis will aim to discover the motivations, religious beliefs, and tactics of the psalmist's attackers. This discussion will give important information on the nature of the psalmist's suffering and ultimately point to the identity of the enemy as fellow Israelites who attack the psalmist for no reason other than his righteousness.

Statement of the Importance of the Problem

Suffering and persecution as part of any Christian's life are undeniable facts in the New Testament. Christians today are not only suffering in countries like North Korea, China and Egypt where they are beaten, jailed and even killed, but Christians everywhere suffer on a daily basis.¹ Peter, James, and Revelation show that the reality of suffering as a Christian is an undeniable fact. The apostles and early Christians were hunted down, tortured, and killed for their faith; practices that continue even today in many countries.

In Western countries where Christianity is still prevalent, at least nominally, persecution

takes on a different form. Although this trend is changing as immigration rates increase in the West, many Christians today are rarely in contact with anyone other than Christians, agnostics, and those who have no religious beliefs at all. As such, Christians are far more likely to face social forms of persecution such as gossip, slander, and social derision from Atheists and Christians than they are persecution and violence from other religious groups or by governmental authority. This could happen from nominal Christians, Christians of different persuasions, or even Christians who are normally amicable. The inevitability of such suffering is also portrayed in the New Testament epistles. The early Church was quickly faced with issues such as lawsuits from fellow believers as in Corinth (1 Cor 6), countless divisions as in Rome (Rom 16:17), and pressure from heretical groups such as the Judaizers in Colossae.

This dynamic of persecution from those who claim to be part of the Church may leave people disenchanted with Christianity. Not only this, but there are very few resources available on either a popular or scholarly level to combat this problem. Not only this, but as this thesis will show, a lack of biblical lamentation and teaching on biblical laments is perhaps contributing to the problem.

The prevalence of church infighting as well as persecution from friends and family is why a study of the Psalms that deals with this topic is so important. This thesis will shed light on psalms that were intended to be an invaluable to their own original audiences as well as being intended for generations to come. They spoke to the difficulties of life as a follower of God in Jerusalem as much as it speaks to the difficulties of life as a believer today. A better understanding of these psalms and how they speak to the sufferings of the average Christian would be a valuable resource for counseling, evangelism, and preaching. An increase in scholarly

interest in the lament psalms would no doubt eventually lead to more popular and devotional interest in the valuable understanding that the lament psalms give to the inevitability of suffering at the hands of fellow community members.

Statement of Position on the Problem

The theology of suffering found within the Psalms has been examined by many scholars over the years. There has been discussion of the lament psalms and their prevalence in the first two books of the Psalter, with some of these discussions focusing on the ethnic identity of the psalmist's attackers. There are many scholars such as Westermann, Kraus, Croft, and Mowinckel who have looked closely at the identity of the enemies. In these studies many scholars have agreed that in some of the psalms the enemies of the psalmist are undoubtedly fellow Israelites. This thesis will look at how a handful of psalms in book two deal specifically with this motif.

This thesis will take the idea of persecution from within the community one step further to explore the religious and moral motivations of the psalmist's enemies. This thesis will show how book two was consciously constructed to focus on the suffering of the righteous at the hands of the unrighteous and that these adversaries are often part of the same "believing" community as the psalmist. Not only this, but it will be shown that the righteous psalmist is easy prey as he is vastly outnumbered by the nominal believers who make up the majority of his society.

Although some psalms explicitly name the adversary as a non-Israelite, it would be unwise to assume that every enemy that the psalmist faced was from outside the believing community. There is clear evidence to show that the psalmist often found himself ridiculed, slandered, and hunted by individuals from within his own city and nationality. As citizens of

Israelite towns they would have at least some loyalty, even if just by name, to the God of Israel and were no doubt at least familiar with the Torah. This reality is even more striking if Davidic authorship is accepted as this suggests that the temple city of Jerusalem was full of wickedness opposed to the paragon of virtue it is sometimes idealized as.

If Jerusalem was not as morally pure as what is sometimes naively assumed, there are many implications such as a new understanding of Israel's society. If the superscriptions are accepted, this raises serious questions about the supposed golden age of Samuel, David, and Solomon. This would also show that believers have been persecuted by their own kind for centuries and people holding onto a merely nominal belief are just as ancient. This thesis will hold to the position that the editors included these Psalms for specific purposes, with one of them being to encourage those who find themselves in similar situations.

Statement of Limitations

Given the vast number of Psalms that deal with the topic of suffering at the hands of community members, this thesis will focus on book two of the Psalms, but even more specifically, it will only treat those psalms that more obviously show the enemy of the psalmist as a fellow Israelite. These psalms include 52, 53, 55, 62, 64, 69, 70, and 71. These eight Psalms within book two were selected because they most clearly show persecution from fellow believers. There are other examples of this theme throughout the Psalms, but for the sake of brevity only these eight will be examined. During preliminary research it was found that there are more psalms that contain this theme in book two than in the other books. Although a discussion of the rest of these psalms would be valuable, it goes beyond the scope and length of this paper. The author of this thesis will assume that the canonical order of the Psalms is

purposeful and will not dwell on such arguments. This thesis will not spend much time in discussion of the superscripts. However, their autographical nature will neither be assumed nor denied. Whether they were originally included or were later added is irrelevant as either way these Psalms were intended, by either author or editor, to shed light on the stated problem.

Statement of the Method

This thesis will rely on existing scholarly research on the topic as well as the author's own analysis of the text. It is also the intent of the author to provide his own translation of the Psalms that will be examined at greater length with the help of a standard lexicon.² This thesis will be considered a library thesis for the purpose of examining, evaluating, and adding to the scholarly study of the laments. There will be neither texts or questionnaires used for the purpose of this thesis as all of the research will be done through analysis of primary and secondary sources. Beyond the careful examination of the text in both Hebrew and English, this paper will rely on a variety of secondary sources. Research material such as monographs, journal articles, theses, dissertations, and commentaries will be employed.

The chapters will be laid out as follows: After this introductory chapter, chapter two will introduce the biblical theme of the suffering of the righteous as it develops in the Old Testament. This chapter will systematically explore the theme of the persecution of the righteous few throughout the Bible. This will provide a backdrop for the rest of the thesis but will be fairly brief as the focus of this paper will be how book two of the Psalms portrays this theme. The thesis will move through the sections of the Old Testament while briefly summarizing how each

² See Appendix I

section such as the historical, prophetic, and poetic books develop this theme. The Psalms will be purposefully omitted from the discussion on the poetic books although references to the Psalms in question will be made. These connections between book two of the Psalms and the rest of the Old Testament will be the main focus of this section.

With this groundwork laid, chapter three will show that the enemies of the psalmist in the selected Psalms are clearly fellow Israelites. This section will first look at the times when the enemies are described as an individual. It is in this section that there is even greater evidence to show that the enemy of the psalmist is an Israelite. The next subsection will give similar treatment to the Psalms that are pitted against a group of enemies. It will be shown that the mobs that attack the psalmist are overwhelming to the psalmist for many reasons: They are numerically strong, they are politically strong, and they are relentless in their attacks. It will be shown that there is undeniable evidence in these psalms to show that these wicked gangs are Israelites. Not only this, but it is highly likely that they are citizens of Jerusalem or a surrounding city.

Once the identity of the enemies is understood, chapter four will discuss the ways that these enemies persecute the psalmist. All of these means—especially that of corruption and subversion—will further prove the nationality of the enemies as well as show that the psalmist is indeed innocent of any crimes but is vastly outnumbered by the unrighteous. The first subsection will look at how the enemies employ physical violence and the fear of violence to persecute the psalmist. It seems evident in Psalm 55 that the psalmist's laments are at their most bitter and pained when attacked by a fellow Israelite. The psalmist was no stranger to foreign oppression but does not show the same level of despair in the face of foreigners when they are explicitly shown as such. This will be the shortest of the three subsections as the enemies in these psalms

rarely favor physical violence, the significance of which will be discussed.

The next subsection will examine how the enemies of the psalmist use deceitful words as a weapon as well as examine their effectiveness in discouraging and defaming the psalmist. It will be shown that their methods of character assassination are just as lethal as any literal sword wielded against the psalmist. Moreover, since the words of the enemies are so painful to the psalmist and so effective to those with whom they gossip, it is most likely that the enemies are fellow Israelites.

The violence and cruel words of the enemy all point to a larger issue that will be the largest subsection of chapter four. That these enemies are able to show such disregard for the Law and such contempt for the life of a fellow Israelite shows a severe defect of justice in the land. These psalms comment on the enemies' success in subverting the moral and judicial authority of their city. This section will show that either these enemies have managed to win the masses over to ungodliness or that the majority were already there. Regardless of the cause of the ungodliness of the masses or how deeply entrenched, the circumstances for the psalmist are the same: He is relatively alone in his righteousness and has few allies to turn to.

Chapter five will examine the (ir)religious motivations behind the attacks of the enemies. The first section will deal with those times in the selected Psalms where the enemies are motivated by atheistic attitudes. Their motto seems to be "I am responsible to no one." There are a few psalms just within this selection that deal with the issue of atheism and its folly and there is plenty of both popular and scholarly discussion of the psalmist's treatment of the subject. Some of the psalms that this paper will deal with directly address the issue of atheism. It will be shown that the atheism that is described in these psalms is not the philosophical atheism of the modern

era but a practical atheism that lives a life devoid of consequence and responsibility to any higher power. Not only this, but these enemies have made their own pleasure and success their God. They are atheists in their reaction to God, but their lives are still motivated by worship, even if it is misplaced worship.

The next subsection will discuss those enemies who believe that the psalmist is somehow responsible to them. Although this theme has less source material to work with, it is a very important issue that will take up a large portion of chapter five. It will be shown that the enemies of the psalmist often believe that they have the right to take revenge as they wish without repercussions from God. This is an issue that is very rarely raised in research but is invaluable to understanding these psalms as well as the struggles of many in the church today. This thesis will explore how some of the psalmist's enemies have at least a basic understanding of God and would even claim to be God-fearers on the surface, but that their theology of suffering and justice is so warped that it spurns them to commit cruel acts against the psalmist. When they see the psalmist suffer, they believe they have the right to add to these sufferings because they believe God has forsaken the psalmist. Such a warped view of justice no doubt still motivates people in religious circles today and must be properly examined and addressed by theologians and ministers. The great importance of such conclusions will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six.

Finally, chapter six will take all of the information gleaned from previous chapters and explore the theological and practical implications of the research. The first section of the chapter will deal with how these psalms add to the biblical teaching on how the righteous person interacts with secular society. Admittedly these psalms do not paint a very positive picture;

however, the picture's realism cannot be ignored. The psalmist as the model worshiper, however, shows the proper response to such trials. Chapter six will briefly examine the kinds of responses to attacks from secular society that the psalmist uses.

The final subsection of this thesis will deal with the implications of the psalmist being attacked by his fellow Israelites, including those who believed that they were doing God a service by attacking the psalmist. This section will explore the potential damage that incomplete theology and nominal believism can cause to others within the believing community. It will be shown that those who misunderstand and misrepresent God end up sharing the same fate as those who outright reject God.

CHAPTER 2: THE SUFFERING OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Suffering is universal to humanity so it is little surprise that it is a recurring theme throughout the Bible. Its inevitability is anticipated, though the Bible goes beyond just accepting the reality of pain; it actively comments on the pervasiveness of suffering. The biblical commentary on suffering seems to take two contrary views: On the one hand, it is clearly seen as the consequence of sin while blessing is seen as the reward for righteousness. On the other hand, the opposite is often true for many of the biblical authors. This paradox does not go without comment from the biblical authors. This chapter will examine those points in the Old Testament where the righteous suffer while the wicked go unpunished and sometimes even prosper. It is not the intention of this paper to provide an exhaustive exploration of this topic as such work could easily fill volumes and even just exploring this theme through the whole book of Psalms would go well beyond this paper's intended limit.

Suffering in the Torah

Before sin's catastrophic entrance, the world was described as being “good” and even “very good” (Gen 1:31). This perfect and painless reality was shattered by the fall in Genesis 3 as sin, pain, toil, and death became common refrains for the rest of Genesis, and even the rest of the Bible.³ William La Sor notes that the events of Genesis 3 set the tone for the rest of the Pentateuch as sin undoes God's work of creating a “good” world devoid of agony.⁴ Later in the Pentateuch, Deuteronomy lays out what some have called the Deuteronomistic Code. Although Andrew Hill and John Walton call it the “Retribution Principle,” they describe this belief as the

3 D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord?: Reflections on Suffering and Evil*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1990), 41.

4 William Sanford La Sor, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush, *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1982), 25.

theme in Deuteronomy of obedience resulting in blessing while disobedience results in suffering.⁵ H. A. Thomas suggests that suffering's causes can generally be classified into either suffering caused by sin, or suffering at the hands of an enemy.⁶ There are many times when Thomas' categories blend together as God often uses enemies to accomplish His judgments as is frequent in the prophetic books. It is perhaps better to split the different kinds of suffering into suffering because of justice and suffering because of injustice. This worldview informs the rest of the Old Testament. When judgment does arise, as it often does in the prophetic books, the biblical authors fully understand and accept, even if begrudgingly, that judgment is the inevitable result of sin. They accordingly do not question God's rightness in sending such sufferings even if they question the severity like Habakkuk. The biblical writers accept this but struggle when theory and practice seem to conflict.⁷

Integral to the biblical authors' struggle is their strict adherence to monotheism. Indeed the problem of evil was not unique to Israelite society and is dealt with in other Ancient Near Eastern writings such as "Man and His God" and "The Babylonian Theodicy."⁸ That being said, to polytheistic societies with a myriad of temperamental and often warring gods, however, the problem of the righteous suffering can be more easily understood. This is not so with Israel's belief in one God who is a God of justice. At times when good men and women go weak, hungry, and oppressed, this inevitably brings questions about God's character and His relationship to the evil in the world.⁹ Indeed Abraham's question to God whether he could destroy the righteous

5 Andrew E. Hill, and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1991), 176.

6 H. A. Thomas, "SUFFERING." in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets*. Boda, Mark J., and J. G. McConville Ed. (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012), 759-760.

7 *Ibid.*, 414.

8 David P. Melvin, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? human and divine suffering in Jeremiah 11:18-12:13 and the problem of evil," *Evangelical Quarterly* 83, no. 2 (2011): 99.

9 *Ibid.*, 449.

along with the unrighteous in Genesis 18:25 echoes throughout the pages of the Bible. The biblical writers struggle when the righteous innocently suffer, especially when it is at the hands of those within the covenant community.¹⁰ This dissonance evokes great passion in the biblical writers that drove them to the point of despair—even unto wishing death—in the cases of Elijah, Jeremiah, and Job.

The first instance of the righteous suffering is found not long after the fall in Genesis 4 . Especially with further comment from the New Testament, it is clear that Cain's murder of Abel was prompted by jealousy of Abel's righteousness. Sadly, this event is given little commentary. This theme continues throughout the story of the patriarchs. Abraham's pleading on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 18 is based on God's justice of not destroying the righteous along with the wicked. This theme continues throughout the story of the patriarchs, most notably in Joseph's story. Time and time again, Joseph's righteousness is emphasized and yet he suffers greatly. Despite his arrogance, Joseph does nothing severe enough to warrant being almost killed then sold into slavery (Gen 37). He later suffers because of his choice to keep his purity before God and Potiphar when tempted by Potiphar's wife (Gen 39:9). Lewis Paton brings to light the Torah's painfully honest portrayal of the Patriarchs as they themselves seem to bring suffering on the innocent. He notes that although Pharaoh and Abimelech were innocent, Abraham and Isaac's deceptions brought great sufferings on them and their people (Gen 12, 20, 26).¹¹ Even though Esau seems to be innocent of any crime, Jacob stole his birthright, faced no repercussions, and even prospered greatly.¹² The nation of Israel carried on this trend by hounding one of their

10 Elizabeth Boase, "Constructing meaning in the face of suffering: theodicy in Lamentations," *Vetus Testamentum* 58, no. 4-5 (2008): 454.

11 Lewis Bayles Paton, "The Problem of Suffering in the Pre-Exilic Prophets," *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 46, no. 1-2 (1927): 112.

12 *Ibid.*, 112.

greatest leaders, Moses, to the point of him even wishing to die (Num 11:15).¹³ This theme is played out on a larger scale when Israel's slavery does not seem to be explicitly brought on by unrighteousness. Although Israel is frequently punished for their disobedience in the wilderness, their maltreatment by the Edomites and other groups was often unprovoked (Num 20).

Suffering in the Prophets

Where this theme comes to prominence is in the prophets and writings. In the historical books within the former prophets, there are many times when the righteous suffer. In Judges, Gideon's sons do not seem particularly guilty of any crimes and yet they are brutally butchered by Abimelech (Judges 9). Despite her strong devotion to both her father and God, Jephthah's daughter is presumably sacrificed (Judges 11). Moving into Samuel, Peninnah torments her sister wife, Hannah, for no reason other than perhaps a misguided belief that Hannah was being punished for sinfulness (1 Sam 1).¹⁴ David's early life spent fleeing Saul's wicked insanity is seemingly a testament against the Deuteronomistic Code of goodness producing blessing and evil producing judgment. In Kings, the reign of Ahab was a very dark time for the righteous. Righteous people, whether common people such as Naboth (1 Kings 21), or prophets such as Elijah and Micaiah, suffer at the hands of Ahab and Jezebel. In Kings this theme is also played out on a much larger scale; despite being Israel's most wicked king, Manasseh had the longest reign while Josiah and Hezekiah's reigns were both cut short.

Moving into the major prophets, this problem becomes increasingly more prevalent. Lewis Paton partially attributes this to the increasing luxury and license that the wicked

¹³ Ibid., 126.

¹⁴ Alastair McEwen, "The Suffering of God's Servants in the Psalms," *Vox Reformata* 67 (2002), 6.

experienced coupled with the increasing hardships of the poor during the seventh and eighth centuries; to the prophets of these days, the cosmic laws of retribution seemed either cruelly farcical or impotent.¹⁵ The prophets were men who were senselessly hated by their own people, persecuted by authorities, were hounded by false prophets of both Baal and Yahweh, and were even sometimes sentenced to death by their own peers.¹⁶ Although foreign aggression was a brutal reality in the prophetic books, the prophets' sufferings were the greatest at the hands of fellow Israelites who attacked them for their righteousness.

This is perhaps why the laments in Jeremiah are so bitter and why his tragic ministry is the best example of this theme in the prophetic books. The foreign aggression that Israel experienced was indeed terrible, but the prophet experienced firsthand that even the righteous are not safe in this world. Additionally, but Jeremiah discovered that he was not even safe among his own people who despised him for no reason beyond his devotion to God. Shimon Bakon notes that within Jeremiah's laments some deep cracks in the age-old theology of retributive suffering begin to develop.¹⁷ Jeremiah's laments are some of the most passionate and raw in the Bible and it is no wonder why; Jeremiah was rejected by his own family and friends from his home town—a priestly town no less!¹⁸ Jeremiah 20 is possibly his most bitter and despondent lament, and is caused by the persecution of his fellow Israelites. It was the rejection by his own kinsmen that prompted what David Melvin calls “one of the clearest and most poignant statements of [the suffering of the righteous]” in Jeremiah 11:18-12:13.¹⁹ Not only was Jeremiah rejected and persecuted by friends and family, but by the religious community as well. Although they were

15 Paton, 113.

16 Ibid., 114.

17 Shimon Bakon, "Suffering: Three Biblical Views," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (July 1, 2002), 184.

18 Paton, 116.

19 Melvin, 99.

heretical in their message, the false prophets such as Hananiah in Jeremiah 28 who derided his message had the support of the people and were part of the popular religion of the time. During Jeremiah's imprisonment in chapter 37 and when his scroll was burned in chapter 36, it seems that the righteous in Jeremiah's day were few in number, and lived in fear of the wicked around them who held power. But it is with this select few that Jeremiah found comfort, friendship, and protection beyond the walls of what Paton calls “the Visible Church of his day.”²⁰

Most of what has been said of Jeremiah can be said about most of the other major—as well as minor—prophets. Elijah and Jeremiah both prayed for death in 1 Kings 19 and Jeremiah 20 respectively. Jeremiah and Uriah were both exiled to Egypt in one way or another. Jeremiah and Micaiah were both beaten and imprisoned for their messages. Isaiah's suffering servant, although a complex character, does suffer innocently at the hands of the wicked (Is 53). This theme permeates Habakkuk as he finds himself surrounded by evil men who seek his life despite his innocence.²¹ Hosea's sufferings, although they mirror God's, also cannot be overlooked; because of his devotion to both his God and wife, he suffers profound heartbreak and social derision because of his adulterous wife. All of this has led Bakon, among many other scholars, to conclude that the way of the true prophet is one of inevitable and profound suffering.²² It is cruelly ironic that if the prophets were judged on their fates according to the Deuteronomistic Code, they would seem like the greatest of sinners, and yet these men so strongly clung to their righteousness that they even dared to invoke curses on their enemies.²³ Those more cynical among the prophets' original audiences, and perhaps the more cynical reader today, might have wondered on what basis did these prophets claim righteousness. The prophets mentioned in

20 Paton, 125.

21 Thomas, 761.

22 Bakon, 188.

23 Paton, 119-120.

Kings are seen in a very positive light as righteous sufferers. Their righteousness is also confirmed elsewhere in both the Old and into the New Testaments.

It seems that by the time of the exile, Israel's prophets had grown to strongly question the traditional and simplistic view of the Deuteronomistic Code. Although punishment for sin was a large part of their message, they denied that suffering was always caused by sin. This popular belief in retributive suffering continued beyond the exile and is clearly seen to have survived into Jesus' day (John 9:2). Paton notes with a hint of irony that some "heretics," namely the prophets, dared question its validity.²⁴ Thomas is less likely to believe that the prophets rejected the retributive principle. Instead, he suggests that the prophets are less interested in theodicy as the philosophical issue of the problem of evil and more interested in the motivations of God during times of perceived evil and suffering.²⁵

Suffering in the Writings

In the writings, these questions are explored even more thoroughly. Despite its later canonical order, it is appropriate to begin such a study with the book of Proverbs. It would seem that Proverbs holds to an unwavering belief in the blessings of a righteousness and the destruction of the wicked. Right living is constantly commended as a means of achieving prosperity while evil only brings suffering, poverty, and death such as in Proverbs 3:1-2, 8:32, 20:21, and 28:25. As it will be shown, these theories do not hold up well against the scrutiny of the other wisdom books. In Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 the writer seems to call into question the promise of prosperity to the righteous that was proposed by Proverbs.²⁶ Both the books of Job

²⁴ Ibid., 126.

²⁵ Thomas, 757.

²⁶ Hill, 448.

and Psalms also call this mechanical understanding into question.²⁷ Hill and Walton propose a solution to this problem by suggesting that the words that the NIV translates as “prosperity” are better translates as “well-being” and “righteousness” and that Proverbs promotes good living as a way to build one's character rather than material possessions.²⁸

Despite this suggestion, the fact remains that Psalms, Ecclesiastes, and Job all bring up serious doubts about the validity of such a mechanical view of retribution. Even in Proverbs where the the righteous are most often seen as prosperous and the wicked doomed for destruction as in Proverbs 1, there are some proverbs that call this into question. In Proverbs 28:6 the wicked man is rich while the man of integrity is poor and implicit in Proverbs 10:2 is the fact that the evil men often gain treasure through wickedness. Since the rest of this paper will be devoted to how book two of the Psalms handles this topic, this chapter's exploration of the Psalms will be brief. On the one hand, the Psalms clearly hold to the belief in retribution which is seen as early as Psalm 2 in its description of the fates of the righteous and the wicked.²⁹ Although this understanding is fundamental to the Psalms, the psalmist openly calls this theory into question when exceptions arise as in Psalms 73.³⁰ In this way, the themes of the Deuteronomistic Code and questioning righteous suffering are inseparable. Without their understanding of Yahweh as a just God, there would be no cause for lament, but because He is both just and all-powerful, the reality of suffering causes deep theological questions in the Psalms.³¹

Similarly, Job shows a radical break from the traditional view of retributive suffering. Job, more than any other book, raises serious questions about the idea that all suffering is the

27 Ibid., 449.

28 Ibid., 449.

29 Ibid., 432.

30 Ibid., 432.

31 Ibid., 433.

consequence of sin.³² Although Job and his friends firmly held to a view that sin causes sin—a very common theme in Proverbs, Psalms, and the Pentateuch—Job's friends take this view too far while Job brings up questions about God's justice.³³ One theme that is very important in this paper that frequently appears in these Psalms, is the parallels between Job's friends brutally attacking him for theological reasons and the psalmist's enemies doing the same. They believe that Job had sinned and that it was their place to rebuke their friend. In his most difficult time, Job's friends abandoned him and even became his enemies. When God appears, their reasoning and arguments are shattered. Although the theology of Job's friends and their understanding of suffering was not innately flawed, their understanding was incomplete and their application of their belief was incorrect.³⁴ With the revelation at the end of the book, Job is clearly seen as righteous even though he was needlessly hounded even by his “friends” during his darkest hour. The insistence on Job's righteousness, especially in the opening chapter, serves to make it clear that the Old Testament holds to the view that in this fallen world the righteous are vulnerable to pain just as any other—possibly even more vulnerable.³⁵ Hill and Walton propose another solution to the questions that Job raises. They suggest that the book shows that the principle of retribution cannot be used to demand action from God, nor can it be used as a basis of judging a person's character; this principle is the ultimate rule, but not in every situation.³⁶

Moving onto the rest of the writings, the book of Ruth highlights the faithfulness and righteousness of both Ruth and Naomi, and yet Naomi suffered so profoundly she believed that God had afflicted her and that she should be renamed Bitter (Ruth 1:20). Lamentations explores

32 Bakon, 184.

33 Ibid., 414.

34 Geoffrey Grogan, *Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 336.

35 Carson, 158.

36 Hill, 415.

the deep and troubling questions raised by the profound sufferings that the people experienced during the fall of Jerusalem. It assumes that their sin merited punishment, but not to the degree that they suffered.³⁷ In this way, the Lamenter seems to echo the words of Abraham in Genesis 18:25. The cynical approach to material success in Ecclesiastes 2:14-17 seems to be the antithesis of the positive assumption of blessing. Not only this, but the the writer of Ecclesiastes openly criticizes cosmic justice as fortune and destruction seem to befall people at random. Although he does not outright deny the retributive principle, he does refuse it as a universal law and as a means to success.³⁸ In Esther, although they are in exile for their forefathers' sins, Haman's jealousy-turned-attempted-murder-turned-attempted-genocide is directed at a people who seem innocent of any crime. This theme is even more clear in Daniel as he and his friends are put in harm's way over and over again because of their devotion to God, despite their righteousness and faithfulness to those around them. Ezra and Nehemiah show very clearly that the righteous often find themselves surrounded by evil. Ezra, Nehemiah, and those close to them find themselves faced with constant opposition with other peoples around them, even though they have done nothing wrong to any of their attackers. These unprovoked attacks are the least of their problems as they face them with courage. What caused some of the greatest strife for those who returned from the exile were other Israelites who refused reformation and even outright opposed it.

All of the aforementioned evidence seems to suggest that the biblical authors seriously question a mechanical understanding of the Deuteronomistic Code. David Melvin concludes that the way of the righteous is suffering while the way of the wicked is abundance.³⁹ Melvin perhaps

37 Ibid., 450.

38 Ibid., 463.

39 Melvin, 99

goes too far in his conclusion. The Bible contains evidences for either side of the argument. In Deuteronomy, much of the wisdom writings, and a great number of Psalms, the righteous are promised blessing while the unrighteous are promised destruction. In other instances, even within these same books, there are plenty of times when the righteous do suffer and the wicked do prosper.

To more cynical readers this would show a glaring contradiction in scripture, but this is one reason why this thesis is so important. This seeming contradiction of justice in scripture and injustice in life is an issue that the psalmist, along with Job, Jeremiah, and many others, wrestles with. It is because of this that this study is so important; the book of Psalms tackles this issue head-on. It does not do so through theological discourse, but through the theologically-motivated outpourings of the psalmist's heart. The issue of good people hurting at the hands of those around them is neither unique to the Psalms nor unique to the Bible. This is an issue that still confounds believers today, but it is in the Psalms that the godly can find the proper response to these issues.

CHAPTER 3: THE IDENTITY OF THE ENEMIES

This chapter will look at the identity of the enemies in the psalms selected for this paper to prove that the psalmist's enemies were most likely fellow Israelites. This chapter will begin with a brief overview of historical scholarship in this area. Many of the ideas discussed attempt to narrow down the enemies far too narrowly and/or attempt to fit every enemy into one category. The psalms selected for this thesis were chosen because they most clearly represent this theme. As such, the second and third subsections will look at each individual psalm to prove that the enemies within these specific psalms are indeed Israelites. The second subsection will explore the theme of the enemies as an individual while the second subsection will look at the enemy as a group. It will be shown that the Psalmist is more often pitted against a large group of enemies, and rarely, if even ever, is confronted by a single Israelite.

The Enemy in Historical Scholarship

Studies into the identities of the psalmist's enemies are still a relatively new field within biblical studies. Stephen Croft suggests that if Davidic authorship is assumed for the Psalms then the question of the identity of the antagonists is easily answered by simply recounting his enemies mentioned in the historical accounts.⁴⁰ This understanding of the identity of the enemies has been accepted by scholars to varying degrees throughout history even unto today. However, there have been many who have argued differently. In his dissertation on the identity of the enemies, Daniel Pettus Caldwell found that several scholars during the Maccabean era believed that the occasion for the Psalms was that of conflict between competing religious groups within

40 Stephen J. L. Croft, "The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms," *Sheffield: Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*, (1987): 15.

Israel.⁴¹ It is very possible that these Maccabean scholars were merely projecting their own party conflict onto the Psalms.

Most scholarship up to recent centuries took for granted that the enemies in the Psalms were a combination of foreign enemies and unrighteous Israelites. Harris Birkeland radically challenged this notion. He suggested that the laments were written by communities suffering at the hands of Gentiles before the exile to the point where he went as far as to state that “the evildoers in the book of Psalms are Gentiles in all cases where a definite collective body or its representatives are meant.”⁴² Sigmund Mowinckel criticized Birkeland for assuming that since some psalms describe external enemies in ways that are the same as other psalms, that they too must also describe the enemies as Gentiles.⁴³ Birkeland's thesis not only made unreasonable assumptions about the language used in the Psalms, but also ignored psalms such as 55 which most clearly show the enemy to be a fellow Israelite. In his summation of the material, Croft notes that Birkeland's thesis rests on a supposed theological ethnocentrism wherein Israel is always righteous and that they are forever pitted against the ever-unrighteous Gentiles.⁴⁴ The Old Testament promotes no such view and is often brutal in its condemnation of Israel while being remarkably kind in its dealings with Gentiles. Last, it is unrealistic to assume that the people of Israel never faced opposition from others within their society. Surely the psalmist—whether a king, priest, or common Israelite—faced varying levels of opposition throughout his life.⁴⁵

Despite some of these criticisms, many scholars accept that the psalmist was often pitted against fellow Israelites. For example, Hermann Gunkel believed that the enemies in the Psalms

41 Daniel Pettus Caldwell, "An Investigation of the Enemy in the Psalms of Lament," Order No. 9325883, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, (1993): 6.

42 Harris Birkeland in Croft, 17.

43 Croft, 17.

44 Ibid., 18.

45 Ibid., 17.

were rich and powerful Israelites and made connections between the Psalms and the trials of Jeremiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah.⁴⁶ Other examples of scholars who agree with this notion will be discussed on an individual basis. Edward Dalglish makes a very astute observation that it seems the Apostle Paul believed the psalmist's struggles were some times against other Israelites. Dalglish notes that Paul identifies the enemies of the psalmist in 69 with the unbelieving Jews in Romans 11:9.⁴⁷ It is clear that it is not unheard of for there to be enemies of the righteous from within Israel. In John Wiles' doctoral dissertation he finds enough examples of persecution from within in the wisdom works that he creates a separate category called the “family and friendship group.”⁴⁸

Some scholars have looked to the language used to describe the psalmist's enemies to draw distinctions between the different kinds of enemies the psalmist faced. Othamar Keel and Lothar Ruppert split the enemies of the psalmist into two categories: the first being אֹיֵב (enemy) who is usually engaged in personal attacks against the psalmist, and רָשָׁע (wicked) who usually attacks the psalmist for moral or religious reasons.⁴⁹ Caldwell takes this further and suggests that אֹיֵב is used in the Psalms to describe those who are opposed God-fearers from outside Israel's borders, while רָשָׁע is used to describe those Israelites who have strayed from Yahweh's moral law.⁵⁰ In his study, Daniel Caldwell found that the אֹיֵב is characterized by arrogant outward violence towards the psalmist such as in Psalm 17:9, 25:19, and 83:2.⁵¹ Those enemies who are characterized by רָשָׁע typically have an inner rebellious and cruel spirit as in 2 Chronicles 19:2

46 Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), 33-34.

47 Edward R. Dalglish, "The Use of the Book of Psalms in the New Testament," *Southwestern Journal Of Theology* 27, no. 1 (1984): 31.

48 Wiles, John Keating. "The 'Enemy' in Israelite Wisdom Literature." PhD Diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, (1982).

49 Caldwell, 12.

50 Ibid., 14, 24.

51 Ibid., 17.

and Malachi 3:18.⁵² Although his conclusions on the characteristics of the enemy and the wicked are valuable, especially to this study, his conclusion that one word inherently describes non-Israelites while the other Israelites does not hold up under closer examination. For example, in Psalm 55:3 the two words are parallel. Not only this, there are times when the אֹיֵב quite clearly appears to be an Israelite as in Psalm 69.

While many scholars agree that the psalmist's enemies are fellow Israelites, some of them try to narrow down their identity even further. Some scholars have suggested that the enmity in the Psalms arose out of post-exilic conflict between fragmented groups within Judaism that were struggling to define righteousness and orthodoxy in the face of the diaspora.⁵³ J. Olshausen dated the Psalms at an extremely late date and suggested that they were written in the face of attacks from groups of impious Jews who harassed the psalmist and his kin during the Maccabean era.⁵⁴ There are indeed clear times in the psalms where the oppressed (עֲנִי) and the righteous (צַדִּיק) are pitted against the enemies. In reference to Psalm 53, Kraus argues that the phrase פְּעֻלֵי אֹן, often translated as “evildoers,” is too weak as its antonymous phrase פְּעֻלֵי צַדִּיק is best translated as “doers of righteousness.”⁵⁵ The use of this phrase draws a clear line between these two parties as evil and righteousness define each respective party's actions and motivations. It is possible that different groups or sects grew up in Israel such as the different sects in Jesus' day. Like their first century counterparts, these supposed groups thought of each other as unrighteous and needing judgment. from God. It is also possible that there were more politically-oriented factions that were vying for the favor of the monarchy. In both cases, the psalmist would be using exaggerated rhetoric to contrast the rightness of their position over their competitors.

52 Ibid., 24.

53 Croft, 15.

54 J. Olshausen, *Die Psalmen*, (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1853).

55 Kraus, 131.

The view that they were organized parties has been widely criticized by many. Arthur Weiser strongly criticized this theory as it neither had sufficient scriptural backing nor did it fit the psalmist's theological worldview.⁵⁶ The psalmist's dismal view of human nature in 53 shows a humanity that naturally gravitates to cruelty, with or without the help of any groups. Although the wicked do seem well organized at times, the same cannot be said of the righteous. They are not an organized unit but are simply those who share the common experience of persecution. Since the psalmist is generally alone in his plight, and since there are no suggestions from within the text to suggest differing political, social, or religious groups within Israel, Claus Westermann concludes that the psalmist is being attacked by his own peers rather than a rival faction.⁵⁷ In fact, Westermann goes as far as to suggest that the enemies in the individual laments are always members of the psalmist's own believing community.⁵⁸ Although Westermann has swung the pendulum too far in the other direction as there are some examples that would suggest otherwise, his criticisms and many of his conclusions are very valuable. Westermann expertly notes that in the individual laments, the Psalmist is the only one being attacked, not a group, so it is highly unlikely that these psalms reflect bi-partied conflict.⁵⁹ It is clear that the psalmist's struggles cannot be entirely attributed to party struggles, nor can scholars be absolutely certain that this was never a factor in the psalmist's writing. One can reasonably posit that the struggles in the psalms selected for this study did not arise from simple party struggles as will be discussed throughout the remainder of this chapter.

Attempts to “localize” the enemies of the psalmist into specific ethnic or religious groups

56 Artur Weiser, *The Psalms, a Commentary*, (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), 449.

57 Claus Westermann, *The Psalms : structure, content & message*, (Augsburg Pub. House, Minneapolis, 1980), 194.

58 *Ibid.*, 194.

59 Claus Westermann, "Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament," *Interpretation* 28 (1974): 63.

have waned in recent years.⁶⁰ Patrick Miller suggests that given the stereotypical nature of the language, it would be unwise to try to suggest that all of the enemies in the Psalms fit into one category.⁶¹ The kinds of enemies and the language used to describe them is far too varied from psalm to psalm to suggest that the psalmist's enemies were all cut from the same cloth. Even so, there is definitely some value in trying to discern some details in specific Psalms rather than trying to pigeonhole all psalms into one category.

The Enemy as an Individual

The most effective—although much less cut-and-dry—approach to determining the nationality of the enemies is on a case-by case basis examining cues found within individual Psalms. There are relatively few examples in the selected psalms where the psalmist is pitted against a single enemy. Of the two psalms that do deal with a singular enemy, the enemy who is singled out is just one of many as in 55 or he is a representative of the enemy's erroneous kind of thinking as in 52.

The first of these psalms, 52, is directed against an anti-hero that is terrorizing the psalmist. The superscription connects this Psalm to Doeg's slaughter of the priests at Nob in 1 Samuel 21. Scholars have debated the validity of the superscription as well as authorship. This psalm has been connected to David's trials with Doeg, Saul, and even Absalom. Others have suggested Jeremiah as the author or have denied any possible knowledge of authorship.⁶² Even if the superscription was not part of the autograph, an editor must have connected this psalm with the event and wished his readers to see the connection. Michael Wilcock suggests that Psalms

60 P. D. Miller, "Trouble and Woe : Interpreting the Biblical Laments," *Interpretation* 37 (1983): 33.

61 Ibid., 34.

62 J. J. S. Perowne, *The Book of Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1976), 424-425.

52-54 were purposefully arranged to focus on David's trials during Saul's reign.⁶³ The editor seems to have wanted the reader to be aware of the struggles of the king, struggles that more often involved his own people than not.

The kinds of struggles that the psalmist faced in Psalm 52 were brutal; the enemy is equipped with great wealth and power, possibly more than the psalmist. The psalmist's courage in the face of this tyranny must not detract from the reality of the threat that the enemy posed to him. Perowne suggests that the psalmist's imprecation in verse 5 could suggest that his enemies are trying to ban him from entering the Tabernacle.⁶⁴ It is interesting that גִּבּוֹר, which is normally translated as a “hero” or “mighty man,” is seen in such a negative light in verse 1.⁶⁵ Elsewhere in the Old Testament, גִּבּוֹרִים are usually Israelites with the exceptions of Nimrod and Goliath, so although this does not necessarily prove the nationality of the enemy, it could possibly suggest that he was an Israelite. Not only this, when גִּבּוֹר is used in the Old Testament, the hero is rarely alone. He is usually either part of a group of heroes or even the leader of one of these groups. It is possible that the same could be said of this anti-hero, that he is the figurehead of a group of cruel men within Israel. Craig Broyles further generalizes the psalmist's message and suggests that this psalm was not directed to any specific enemies but it is a general address to the temple community as a polemic against the ways of the wicked.⁶⁶ Although this psalm has polemical use, given the passionate tone and specific attacks against the enemies, it is much more likely that this arose from a specific situation. Despite writing each of his psalms from within a specific situation, the psalmist no doubt intended for his psalm to be read by others and to serve as a

63 Michael Wilcock, *The Message of Psalms: Songs for the People of God*, Vol. 2. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 199.

64 Perowne, 427.

65 James Luther Mays, *Psalms*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), 205.

66 Craig C. Broyles, *Psalms*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 232.

warning.

Psalms 55 shows the enemy as both a group and as an individual. The former topic was dealt with later in this chapter. If the superscription is accepted, the nationality of the enemies is a fairly simple matter whether Absalom, Ahithophel,⁶⁷ or some other adversary. Wilcock sees Psalm 55 as marking the end of David's flight and the beginning of his relative security within Jerusalem.⁶⁸ Robert Alter believes that the corrupting force within the city in this Psalm must have been a group of rogue Israelites.⁶⁹ Others have argued that this psalm was written by an Israelite living in a foreign city with another Israelite who later betrays him.⁷⁰ This theory does not consider the clear reference to the house of God in verse 14. Marvin Tate notes that there is not enough evidence to prove this hypothesis soundly, but regardless of its setting, it is not the attacks of the larger group of the wicked that has brought the psalmist down to the depths; the psalmist was prepared for this but was not prepared for attacks from his own countryman.⁷¹ Others in the Bible have desired to escape disaster, such as the prophets Elijah⁷² and Jeremiah⁷³, both of which were hunted by fellow Israelites like Ahab and Pashhur, respectively. Similar descriptions of social and moral collapse can also be found in Isaiah 1:21-23; Micah 7:1-6; and Habakkuk 1:2-6. Whether this mention of the house of God is taken as the tabernacle of David's time, Solomon's temple, or the second temple, it is clear that the psalmist experienced this strife from within Israel's borders. Samuel Terrien, for one, believes that this psalm was written by a king, even if not necessarily David, and notes the startling truth that even a king can find himself

67 Wilcock, 199.

68 Ibid., 199.

69 Robert Alter, *The Book of Psalms: a Translation With Commentary*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 192.

70 Marvin E Tate, *Psalms. 51-100*, (Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1990), 55.

71 Tate, 55-56.

72 Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*, (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), 200.

73 Broyles, 239.

driven into exile by the evil around him.⁷⁴ Although evidence of the nationality of the larger group of enemies is less conclusive, it is abundantly clear that the individual that the enemy faces off against is an Israelite. Charles Spurgeon suggested that the psalmist's enemy only ever pretended to be the psalmist's friend.⁷⁵ A much more natural reading is that the psalmist and his enemy were once close friends but that the psalmist's former friend has now betrayed him. The friendship once shared between the psalmist and his enemy was both social and spiritual.⁷⁶ Such social proximity would not have been shared between an Israelite and a foreigner. Not only this, a foreigner would not have been allowed access into the Temple with the psalmist. This man was treated like the psalmist's equal, so if the city described is indeed an Israelite city, even its most influential people seem to have become corrupt. The status of the friend as an equal and fellow worshiper, as well as the close proximity to v10-11 is designed to intensely show that all aspects of society, now even the religious life, have become corrupt.⁷⁷

The Enemy as a Mob

The vast majority of the psalms selected for this paper deal with the enemy as a group that is pitted against the psalmist for whatever reason. Psalm 53 is a strong polemic against those רשע and נבל men who deny God and are pitted against the psalmist. This godless fool is characterized by profound hubris, deceit, oppression, and godlessness.⁷⁸ It would be possible to use the fool's atheism to suggest that he was a non-Israelite but this is unlikely. It is unlikely, given the cultural context and worldview of the time, that the enemy is making any metaphysical

74 Samuel L Terrien, *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2003), 424.

75 C. H. Spurgeon, *Psalms*, (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1993), 224.

76 Broyles, 240.

77 Konrad Schaefer, and David W. Cotter, *Psalms*, (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2001), 137.

78 Croft, 48.

claims toward true atheism, but he is more likely living a life believing he is not morally responsible to any higher being.⁷⁹ Not only this, but to assume that only a non-Israelite would make such atheistic claims both disregards the strong religiosity among neighboring cultures in the ancient near east and is unrealistic in its estimation of Israel's devotion to God. Here, the fool is not the one who has not heard of God, but the one who has but has rejected his love and law.⁸⁰

Psalms 55 and 14 are nearly identical copies of one another. One important difference between the two is the addition of the word “all” in 14:4 compared to its absence in 53:4.⁸¹ The “all” in 14 creates a universal understanding of evildoers while the reference to evil in 53 could be a more specific group. Psalm 53 seems to be a polemic against a specific group of evildoers rather than their category in a broader sense. Although verse 6 gives this psalm a post-exilic sense, its universality is also obvious. Many other commentators also see the universality of human corruption in this Psalm but they focus on how all *other* peoples are corrupt. An acceptance of the corruption of pagan nations seems almost pointless for the psalmist to mention nor would this cause the anguish that he experiences. His feeling of overwhelming loneliness is much more likely caused by being surrounded by lawlessness in the immediate context. The psalmist finds himself surrounded with foolish Israelites who refuse to call upon God and who in the depths of their hearts have abandoned Him. Schaefer asks an important question about this psalm: are the righteous here all God-fearers across ethnic and temporal borders and thus the enemy the larger culture that oppose them, or are the righteous here just the Israelites?⁸² If it is understood as Israel being the righteous few while the nations are inherently evil, this psalm, and many other psalms in question in this thesis become nothing more than empty nationalism and

79 John Goldingay, *Psalms Vol. 2*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 151.

80 Wilcock, 194.

81 Kidner, 196.

82 Schaefer, 33.

borderline racism. If Schaefer's interpretation of Psalm 53 is accepted, then this psalm shows both the universality of this psalm's application and the universality of its occasion.

As was discussed in the earlier overview of 55, a man of high esteem has so far been able to amass a group of cruel, ruthless, and godless men who are openly attacking the psalmist within Israel's borders and has thus far not faced any known consequences. Not only is there just a group of unrighteous Israelites within Jerusalem, the kind of moral collapse described in Psalm 55 would suggest that the righteous are the minority within the city of both the king and the Temple. Since “Harm” and “Troublemaking” are the only two named subjects in verse 10, it is more likely that the whole city is in a state of lawlessness rather than just a small group or gang within the city.⁸³ Kidner suggests an intentional link between “hide not yourself” in verse 1 to Deuteronomy 22:1-4 and its command to not hide oneself from the affliction of a fellow Israelite.⁸⁴ If the psalmist had this command in mind while crying out for God's deliverance, it would then mean that the people in the psalmist's day were not following this command and that they were hiding themselves from the sufferings of their brothers. Similarly, some scholars believe that Psalm 62 was written while taking refuge within the Temple from fellow Israelites.⁸⁵ The psalmist in 55 is not as fortunate as even the sanctuary has become a dangerous place to him. That the psalmist sought sanctuary in the wilderness rather than the Temple or Tabernacle's sanctuary is also unnerving. It seems that even the city's moral and religious leaders have turned their backs on righteousness and the psalmist.

Moving on to Psalms 64 and 69, the psalmist finds himself in a similar position. Tate suggests that the psalmist in 64 is a community leader whose leadership is under attack by

83 Goldingay, 171.

84 Kidner, 199.

85 Tate, 120-121.

unscrupulous men.⁸⁶ Similarly, Goldingay suggests that the psalmist's zeal and reproach on God's behalf in 69:7-12 point to the psalmist being someone who has a “distinctive religious commitment” and thus his enemies could be others who are involved in Israel's religious life who are promoting aberrant beliefs and must be removed from the community.⁸⁷ In both situations the psalmist is in a leadership role in Israel, whether political or religious, and yet he faces fierce opposition to the point of him making some fairly strong accusations and imprecations. Not only this but despite the psalmist's position of authority, he is not only opposed in his beliefs but opposed by many within Israel. In Psalm 69, the psalmist's enemies are not only extremely numerous, but are also very close to his heart as his own friends and family seem to have turned their backs on him.⁸⁸ It is highly unlikely that foreign enemies would have held such sway in the political and religious community of Israel. The enemies are closely related to the temple and so could not be non-Israelites. Discussions of whether the psalmist was zealous for pre-exilic temple reform or post-exilic temple reconstruction overshadows the larger issue here; the enemies described here are of the psalmist's own religion, country, social circle, and even family.⁸⁹

Issues within the religious community are also the source of enmity in Psalm 70. The psalmist's “us” and “them” speech clearly dichotomizes those around him into two groups: the righteous and the wicked.⁹⁰ Arthur Wieser and Marvin Tate both take this proposition even further by suggesting that the enemies here are a group within the cultic community itself.⁹¹

Again, trying to reconstruct any sort of bipartite conflict is futile but that there is a distinction

86 Tate, 133.

87 Goldingay, 338.

88 J. W. Rogerson, and J. W. McKay, *Psalms 51-100*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 92.

89 Mays, 231.

90 Wilcock, 244.

91 Tate, 206.

between the two is important to note. Although some could write off the psalmist's imprecations and accusations as overreaction and over-simplification, it is much more likely that there were indeed some individuals within the psalmist's society who were opposed to righteous living. Although most commentators understand the psalmist's plight as one of sickness, his affliction is also possibly one of legal troubles.⁹² If the psalmist was facing legal troubles, this would mean that the conflict had gone far beyond petty rivalries and had exploded into full public scandal with the psalmist attempting to maintain a pious faith.

Last, this discussion of book two closes with Psalm 71 and more conflict within Israel. There is good evidence to suggest that the psalmist here was either a worker within the temple, or at least someone who was heavily involved in its affairs, possibly as an official songwriter.⁹³ It is also possible that the psalmist is the king and that his enemies are waiting for his power and divine favor to wane with age such as in 1 Kings 1.⁹⁴ What is unique about this Psalm is the combined vulnerability and retrospect that comes with old age. The psalmist here is at a point in his life when he is perhaps at his most vulnerable as he no longer has the physical aptitude to defend himself and is thus very easily manipulated.⁹⁵ Perhaps the “do not cast away” in verse 9 is in reaction to a feeling of abandonment that the psalmist could be feeling at the hands of his enemies and community. It is highly unlikely that an aged temple worker and/or songwriter would be living in a foreign city. As will be shown in chapter five, the motivations behind their attacks are also evidence of their Israelite nationality.

This chapter has shown that the enemies within the Psalms are not disorganized or simply rogue elements within Israelite society, but are a structured, influential, and rich body that at

92 Croft, 62.

93 Terrien, 511.

94 Croft, 45.

95 Broyles, 290.

times seem to dominate the socio-political scene.⁹⁶ Conversely, the righteous are ones who are few in number, isolated, and have neither the financial or political power to protect themselves. Even within the Temple city, the unrighteous have risen to dominate the city. It is no wonder, then, that they are prideful, even to the point of elevating themselves above both God and the law. Their numerical power has reshaped and degraded society to the point of it allowing them, or perhaps even helping them, to prosper.⁹⁷

It is not only plausible, but hard to deny that the psalmist faced strife from those closest to him in at least some of the Psalms. The psalmist's friends, family, neighbors., and fellow-worshippers all brutally assaulted him. This has been shown through both the exegetical work of this paper along with the scholarly work of many before. This fact becomes more obvious the closer one studies these psalms, but what is often overlooked are the implications of this fact. This is the main focus of the rest of the thesis. Since the identity of the psalmist's enemies are his peers and loved ones, this must raise questions about how these types of enemies act, what motivates them, and, most importantly, how the psalmist reacts to their attacks. Again, as so many in churches today suffer at the hands of those closest to them, such a study would prove to be invaluable to pastors and counselors.

96 Kraus, 130.

97 Melvin, 105.

CHAPTER 4: THE TACTICS OF THE ENEMIES

Closely tied to the question of the enemies' nationality is a discussion on the kinds of tactics that they employ. In the psalms where the enemy mentioned is connected to the psalmist as a friend, family member, neighbor, and/or fellow worshiper, the enemy uses a certain set of tactics that he can be safely used to destroy the psalmist. The enemies in the individual laments use tactics that are different than the ones the enemies in the communal laments use. The vast majority of scholars agree that the enemy in the communal laments is usually a foreign nation. In these cases, they often plot and scheme but are generally interested in the physical destruction of Jerusalem and its people. In the psalms where the enemy is most clearly a fellow Israelite, he employs a different set of tactics to destroy the Psalmist. Instead of actual violence, he uses the threat of violence; instead of battle cries, he uses deceit; and instead of breaking down the city's walls, he corrupts the city from within. This chapter will look at each theme as it develops in the psalms selected for this study to show specifically how these kinds of enemies operate. Following a similar approach to the last chapter, each of the three themes will be individually explored as they develop in the psalms selected for this study.

Fear and Violence

The first tactic that the enemy uses against the psalmist is the threat of physical violence or other threats to cripple the psalmist with fear. Claus Westermann suggests that the enemies in the individual laments merely threaten the psalmist while it is only in the communal laments that the enemies actually act out their threats.⁹⁸ Violence is definitely a theme found within the psalms

⁹⁸ Claus Westermann, Keith R. Crim, and Richard N. Soulen, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*, (Atlanta, Ga: J. Knox Press, 1981), 193; Westermann (74), 64,

selected for this paper but whether Westermann was correct in his conclusion must be looked at carefully. If Westermann is correct and these individual enemies are men of threats but not necessarily action, this would suggest that they are cut from a different cloth than the enemies in the communal laments.

Starting with Psalm 52, the theme of violence is introduced as early as the superscription. The story of Doeg in 1 Samuel 21-22 is one of brutal slaughter and with words like “hero” and “razor” in verses 1-2, violence is clearly on the mind of the psalmist. Unlike a real warrior, the enemy's weapons are just words, but that does not diminish their lethality.⁹⁹ Since sarcasm is common in these sorts of polemical psalms, there is perhaps a hint of irony in verse 6. The psalmist describes the people's fearful reaction when they see the enemy's ruin, rather than any fear of the enemy himself. Despite the psalmist's fearless praise and exhortation, it seems that the enemy had been attempting to intimidate the psalmist. Similarly, Psalm 53 seems to be written just outside the shadow of violence. Many commentators note several allusions in his psalm to the violent chaos of the world in Genesis 6 as the psalmist's world is also completely corrupt with but one man who remains righteous in God's eyes.¹⁰⁰ Also in line with its predecessor is the fear caused by God's response to those who would attack His followers in verse 5. It is highly possible that they are in a state of terror because they terrified others and God is repaying them for this.

This theme comes to the forefront in Psalm 55. In verse 5, fear does not well-up within the psalmist but enters into his heart. He is not normally a man of fear but his persecutors have brought this state upon him;¹⁰¹ they have done so through the threats of their angry grudges that

99 Goldingay, 143,

100 Rogerson, 26,

101 Goldingay, 169,

have possibly even lead to death threats in verses 3-4. The violent nature of the enemies has become so extreme that they have become the personifications of violence, strife, and destruction.¹⁰² Later in verse 18 the psalmist uses the imagery of war to describe the attacks of his enemies. It would be easy to assume that the enemies were carrying out violent acts in the city, but this is not necessarily the case. In verse 20 he stretched out his hand against his friends by violating his covenant, rather than physical abuse. In the next verse, war imagery is applied to the enemy's speech and the inclinations of his heart, not the actions of his hands. The key is verse 12 where it is clear that the enemy is taunting the psalmist rather than physically attacking him.

In Psalm 62 the battering attacks of the enemies seem to be mostly figurative as they are more interested in seeing the psalmist fall from power rather than physically be harmed. Although they relentlessly attack the psalmist in verse 3, their weapons are falsehood and a two-faced nature in verse 4. The motivations of the enemy are clearly seen in verse 10 as being economic gain rather than physical harm. In Psalm 64, the enemies are seeking the life of the psalmist in the first two verses and it seems that they are preparing to do so through violence, but verse 3 makes it clear that their weapons are not physical. Some have used this Psalm to suggest that the enemies were magicians who were casting spells on the psalmist, but J.W. Rogerson suggests that mere words of slander could easily be as potent as any perceived "magic."¹⁰³ Psalm 69 also begins with speech that would suggest physical peril but in verse 4 the psalmist makes it clear that again the enemy's attacks are non-physical. Psalm 70 follows this same pattern but is much more subtle. The first two verses seem fairly clear that the psalmist's life is in literal peril but this is not necessarily the case. If the psalmist was in danger of being physically killed, it

102 Goldingay, 171,
103 Rogerson, 69.

would be much more likely that he would pray for the physical destruction of his enemies as he does in countless other psalms. He instead prays for their shame, confusion, and dishonor, which could easily be a reminder to God of the *lex talonis*. In verse 5, the psalmist is not nearing death but is merely poor and needy. Psalm 71 makes no references to the enemies physically harming the psalmist despite his weakened physical state so their reluctance to use force cannot be attributed to a fear of the psalmist fighting back although this is not conclusive.

In all of the psalms in question, only 52, 53, and 55 seem to suggest the enemies using the threat of physical violence. There is not conclusive evidence in any of these psalms to show that they openly attacked the psalmist; in fact there is overwhelming evidence to show that overt violence was not the way of the psalmist's enemies. In 55 the threats and taunts of violence posed a serious danger for the psalmist, but in all of these psalms it is the power of words, not swords or fists, that truly struck fear into the heart of the psalmist. If Davidic authorship is accepted, it is highly unlikely that David, the killer of Philistine giants, would have been brought to such levels of fear in the face of foreign enemies. Even if David was not the author, the psalmist generally laughs in the face of foreign enemies as in Psalms 46 and 48. Even in times of national desperation, the psalmist is confident in his God to save him from all distress as in Psalm 59. Not only this, but foreign enemies would not be interested in simply threatening their adversary but would actively seek his death. If the enemy was not a Gentile but a fellow Israelite, it makes sense why he would not attempt physical harm against the psalmist. Murder was met with the death sentence in ancient Israel and physical violence is much too obvious and would leave the enemy open to all sorts of legal troubles. Violence is such an uncommon tactic of the enemy because he has other means with which to destroy the psalmist.

Deceit and Slander

Although blatant violence is an uncommon and dangerous tactic for the enemy to employ, he finds different ways to bring down the psalmist and these alternatives are deviously clever; he knows that he cannot openly assault the psalmist so he resorts to deception and character assassination to take down the psalmist.¹⁰⁴ Hans-Joachim Kraus notes that persecution, through means of false accusations and gossip, is a clearly recurring theme throughout the Psalms as in 4:2, 10:7, and 31:18.¹⁰⁵ The selected psalms in this thesis are definitely no exception to this rule. This is the most obvious and prevalent tactic in these psalms that also seems to cause the psalmist the most profound grief.

In the first four verses of Psalm 52, the enemy is quickly called out on being a deceiver who loves lies more than truth. J. Henk Potgieter makes a connection between the deceitful tongue of the enemy and his trust in riches.¹⁰⁶ Not only this, the enemy seems to have gained both his power and status as a hero through this same deception or through the wealth it has made him.¹⁰⁷ Although the enemy's words are like a sharpened razor, in the end they are nothing but empty threats. Even though he brags as if he was some sort of valiant hero, in the end his heroism is just as much of a deception as his speech once God brings him down. In 53 this theme is not as prevalent but it is still very interesting to note that the fool says in his heart that there is no God, rather than openly admitting it. This could indicate the dicephalus nature of the fool as he will claim adherence to God but inwardly rejects Him; he may do abominable things and

104 Perowne, 436.

105 Kraus, 129.

106 J. Henk Potgieter, "The Profile of the Rich Antagonist and the Pious Protagonist in Psalm 52 : Original Research," *HTS : Theological Studies*. 69, no. 1 (2013): 2.

107 Perowne, 426.

reject God, but he will not openly admit his evil.

Again, in Psalm 55 there is a unique chance to compare the attacks of a group of enemies to the attacks of a single former friend. For the first 8 verses, the larger group seems to be engaged more in fear tactics. Wilson suggests that the verb that is often translated “confound” in verse 9 literally means to split¹⁰⁸ as the earth was divided in the days of Peleg (Gen 10:25, 1 Chron 1:19). This could suggest that the psalmist wishes that his enemies' two-tongued nature would come back on their own heads. Many other commentators instead suggest that this division of speech is a reference back to the tower of Babel. Even if this not a hope that the enemies' deception would be turned back on them, fraud is part of their nature in verse 11.

Starting in verse 12, the betrayal that the psalmist faces at the hands of his former friend is the climax of several betrayals that the psalmist has faced up to this point in the preceding verses as well as the preceding four Psalms.¹⁰⁹ Although Spurgeon suggests that the enemy here had only ever pretended to be the psalmist's friend,¹¹⁰ the wording makes much more sense if we take this as a friend who has, for whatever reason, turned his back on the psalmist and has become antagonist. This man was someone who was within the psalmist's closest inner circle of friends who at some point turned from the covenant-keeping friend that he was into the betrayer with buttered words that he became. The similarities between this psalm and the betrayal of Jesus at the hands of Judas are astonishing and it is no doubt why the Church, from very early on, has applied this to Christ. The betrayal of the psalmist's friend runs even deeper than just their friendship; as the psalmist is betrayed, so too is the whole community.¹¹¹ This Psalm provides important background information that is foundational to understanding the other psalms in

108 Wilson, 810.

109 Wilcock, 200.

110 Spurgeon, 224.

111 Croft, 44.

question. In verse 12 the psalmist makes it clear that insults and violence from outside the community are both easily-overcome and even expected, but that it takes attacks from his fellow Israelite to bring him to this point of despair. Even though there are many different authors that are responsible for the Psalms, there is a prevailing worldview behind them. It is safe to assume that in many cases where the enemy's identity is unclear but his *modus operandi* is one of deceit, insult, and betrayal, it would be safe to assume that he is a Hebrew by birth and upbringing.

In Psalm 62, given the talk of deceit and two-faced friendship and religiosity in many of the preceding Psalms, Spurgeon prefers to translate the *ak* in verse 1 as "truly," to mark the contrast of the psalmist's genuine faith.¹¹² Verse 4 would suggest that the enemies here are false friends like those in Psalm 55.¹¹³ There is also a connection between this psalm and Psalm 52; In 52 the power and prestige of the anti-hero amounts to nothing more than a lie, and in 62 the enemy weighs nothing more than his deceitful breath in verse 9. The enemy's cowardice is also made abundantly clear here. He only attacks the psalmist when he is already weakened and dares not directly confront the him in verse 3. His choice of lies and defamation in verse 4 reflects the cowardice of a man worth nothing more than a breath of vapor.

As was previously noted, some scholars have suggested that the psalmist in 64, along with the situations in other psalms of individual lament, is battling magicians. Sigmund Mowinckel, among others, poorly translates the participial form of *ra`a`*, and ignores the two-faced nature of the enemies as they are presented. This psalm strongly highlights the destructive nature of deception. The enemies have both numbers and organization working to their benefit but they are also confident that their deception goes unnoticed. This confidence leads them to

112 Spurgeon, 250.

113 Tate, 121.

think they can assault the psalmist without fear of repercussion from either God or man.¹¹⁴ The deceitful words of the enemies have the potency of weapons of warfare but unbeknownst to the enemies, the psalmist also has a secret form of combat. There seem to be two different forms of secrecy in this Psalm: first, the psalmist's attackers plot in secret just out of earshot, but, second, the psalmist makes his prayer in secret.¹¹⁵ In the end, their deception falls back upon them and is even more destructive once reversed.

Whereas Psalm 64 focuses heavily on the use of lies and scheming to ruin the psalmist, Psalm 69 focuses heavily on the use of defamation. Rather than lying to the psalmist, the enemies here lie about him. In this psalm it is not just the number of the enemies that is beating down the psalmist but the baselessness of their attacks.¹¹⁶ They hate him without cause but also accuse him of crimes he has never committed. The psalmist's forced restitution mentioned could be understood figuratively as the psalmist is being punished despite his innocence.¹¹⁷ It is despicable that the psalmist is mocked for wearing mourner's clothing in verses 11-12. The evil influence of the psalmist's enemies have turned the city's gates, a place of justice, into a place of gossip and mocking. This level of public shame, although still a part of life in smaller communities, was absolutely devastating in the psalmist's day as it crippled a person's ability to worship or conduct trade, as well as the shame it would bring on a person's entire family.¹¹⁸ It is no wonder why the imprecations at the end of this psalm are so harsh as they are simply reversals of what the enemies have caused to the psalmist.¹¹⁹ Similarly, much can be learned about the

114 Gerald Henry Wilson, *Psalms: From Biblical Text-- to Contemporary Life*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2002), 899.

115 Spurgeon, 258-259.

116 Rogerson, 95.

117 Franz Delitzsch, and Francis Bolton, *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1949), 465.

118 Kidner, 247.

119 Broyles, 288.

enemies in both Psalm 70 and 71 from looking at the imprecations. Here, too, shame and dishonor are wished upon the enemies.

Corruption and Subversion

As was mentioned in the above discussion on Psalm 52, the enemies of the psalmist seem to have achieved their level of wealth and prestige through the use of deception and defamation. This fact scratches the surface of a larger issue caused by the corrupt and two-faced nature of the psalmist's enemies. In his discussion of the social factors of lamentation, Walter Brueggemann notes that “those who [prosper] are those who benefit from the best rewards of the social system.”¹²⁰ The enemies of the psalmist prosper because their society allows and encourages them. Through their influence, the society around them has accepted wickedness as normative and even admirable. This societal collapse necessitated Jeremiah's prophetic ministry and even led to the destruction of Israel.¹²¹ This theme requires a careful reading to find but is a very present reality in these psalms. One important question in this discussion will be whether the enemies have corrupted the society around them to love evil and pervert justice, or if they are simply the by-products of their society. Both present troubling implications as the former would show the contagious nature of evil in a society and that even those within a religious community are susceptible to these corruptive forces. The latter conclusion would raise alarming questions about the kind of society that the psalmist was writing from within. The level of isolation and abandonment would make perfect sense if the psalmist was part of a very small minority of counter-culturally pious people.

¹²⁰ Walter Brueggemann, “Theodicy in a Social Dimension”, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33 (1985): 11.

¹²¹ Melvin, 105.

In Psalm 52 it is clear that the wicked man has accepted as normative, and has even embraced in love that which is malicious and deceitful.¹²² As if this was not enough, the enemy has the audacity to boast about his wickedness. Although this boasting is not met well by the psalmist, the enemy must be part of a group or even a larger society that promotes this kind of wickedness. The psalmist paints the *gibbor*, which is normally understood as a “hero” or “mighty man,” in such a negative light,¹²³ but he seems to have been given such an honorary title by those around him for his acts of wickedness. The enemy's sense of justice is warped and twisted, which seems to be typical of those around him. Taking the superscription at face-value, Keil and Delitzsch point out the injustice of seeking to harm a man who is already homeless.¹²⁴ The sort of society that could produce such a cruel and ruthless anti-hero is described in the following psalm. In this psalm society is altogether corrupt and unjust; the state of the community described in 53:1 strongly echoes Judges 2:19, Isaiah 1:4, and Ezekiel 16:52.¹²⁵ This is a society that consumes the righteous as easily as they consume bread. This is the kind of society that would quickly elevate the wicked man of 52 to the status of hero.

At first glance it definitely seems that the enemy is merely the product of his society, however, he is something more. He is the champion and hero of its cause and actively works to wipe out godliness around him. The enemy's moral compass is a corrupted shadow of the truth, much like his ironic description as a hero. Spurgeon suggests that the enemy's wickedness is nothing more than thinly-veiled and self-proclaimed justice that covers his desire to subvert and wipe out truth and holiness.¹²⁶ Although this enemy reflects the society around him, he is an

122 Tate, 37.

123 Mays, 205.

124 Delitzsch, 373.

125 Goldingay, 152.

126 Spurgeon, 216.

outlier attempting to pull those around him deeper into his depravity while also wiping out all who would oppose him.

The grim picture of society in Psalms 55 and 69 is not much better. The enemies are just as bold and public with their attacks as before,¹²⁷ but here the effects on the city are more clearly seen. In Psalm 55 the walls and marketplace of Jerusalem no longer serve their respective intended purposes as the reassurance to God's people as in Psalm 48:12 and a place above reproach as in Psalm 144:14.¹²⁸ In Psalm 69, the evil influence of the psalmist's enemies have turned the city's gates, a place of justice, into a place of gossip and mocking. Instead of pious worshipers and loyal servants of the king, the city is populated by violence, strife, wickedness, toil, destruction, oppression, and deceit. True morality has been replaced by a new way of thinking that promotes lawlessness rather than Torah. Kidner suggests an intentional link between “hide not yourself” in Psalm 55:1 to Deuteronomy 22:1-4 and its command to not hide oneself from the affliction of a fellow Israelite.¹²⁹ If the psalmist had this command in mind while crying out for God's deliverance, it would then mean that the people in the psalmist's day were not following this command and that they were hiding themselves from the sufferings of their brothers. Furthermore, verse 11 suggests that not only are the people not caring for one another, they are actively oppressing one another.

Assuming that the city in these Psalms is Jerusalem, there are questions of what has happened to the moral center of the city, the Temple. First, if the wilderness is the only place that can provide safety for the psalmist in 55, it would be safe to assume that even the safety and morality of the Temple has been profaned. Second, the status of the enemy in 55 as an equal and

127 Wilcock, 199.

128 Kidner, 200.

129 Ibid., 199.

fellow worshiper, as well as the close proximity to verses 10-11 is designed to intensely show that all aspects of society, including even the religious life, have become corrupt.¹³⁰ Quite different from many other scholars, Keil and Delitzsch do not see the psalmist's friend as the ring-leader of this upheaval but one who has been swept up into it.¹³¹ Although contrary to many scholars, their interpretation makes much more sense. It would be unlikely that the psalmist would not have caught onto his friend building up a band of wicked conspirators. It makes much more sense that he was a turncoat who chose to follow along with the larger society. The corruption of the enemies has spread even unto the psalmist's closest friends and fellow worshipers. Similarly, the psalmist's enemies in 69 are both extremely numerous and very close to his heart as his own friends and family seem to have turned their back on him.¹³² It is important to note that the psalmist is counted among the guilty because of his devotion to God rather than any true criminal offense. It seems that proper worship of Yahweh has nearly been outlawed by the broader community. Zeal for “Your house” in 69:9 does not necessarily have to mean the physical building's upkeep but could be a metonymy for the mercy, justice, and righteousness that the Temple is meant to uphold.¹³³

Whether one accepts Keil and Delitzsch's understanding of the former friend in Psalm 55 or whether one accepts other scholars' understandings changes how one answers the question of whether society creates evil or evil men create a corrupt society. If Keil and Delitzsch's understanding is accepted then a naturally evil society naturally corrupts even the most righteous. If the alternative is accepted than those in positions of political or religious power who fall into wickedness will inevitably take society with them. In 69 there is little evidence either way but it

130 Schaefer, 137.

131 Delitzsch, 383.

132 Tate, 196.

133 Tate, 196.

does seem more likely that the psalmist's brothers were merely caught up in the lawlessness of their day.

In some ways Psalm 71 is the sequel to 55 but set several years later. Here too there are boastful and brash enemies who seek the destruction of the psalmist and his authority. Croft suggests that the enemies are perhaps those waiting for the king's power and divine favor to wane with age such as in 1 Kings 1.¹³⁴ Like the other Psalms discussed, the enemies seems to show a complete disregard of the high level of justice and care that the Torah demands. Rather than displaying the care of the elderly that Torah prescribes, they find their delight in the sufferings of the psalmist. Not only this, but there seems to be no one to stop them but God. It is not that there are none able to stop the enemies as their weapons are merely words, but no one seems to desire to come to the psalmist's aid. This Psalm, like the others, makes no mention of others struggling to bring justice to the psalmist's world.

It is clear that the psalmist is not the only one who would lose if his enemies triumphed. The isolation and corruption of society caused by these internal enemies threatens the very spiritual life of the community, not just the life of the psalmist.¹³⁵ It is clear from these psalms that wickedness is an infection that spreads throughout the community. In Psalm 52 the evil of one man affects an entire community's moral compass. In both Psalms 53 and 69 it seems that society is naturally corrupt and that the psalmist must constantly go against the grain to stay on the right path. Psalm 55 seems to show that corruption goes both ways; society can influence individuals but those individuals can also cause other parts of society to become corrupt as well. In all of these situations the enemies of the psalmist either use the warped societal structures

134 Croft, 45.

135 Philip Johnston, and David G. Firth, *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*, (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 76.

around them for their personal gain, or they bend society around their twisted ideals. These psalms, especially 55, seem to expand on Proverbs 11:11 and its warning against corruption in a city.

This chapter has shown that when the psalmist is attacked by those closest to him, his enemies use a certain set of tactics. Civic law would prevent the enemies from openly and physically assaulting the psalmist so rather than break the rules, they either work around them through the use of threatening and deceitful words, or they reshape the rules in their favor. Most Western Christians do not regularly face physical violence, but threats, slander, gossip, and lying are all common in the world today, even within churches. Paul and Jesus both warned about false teachers who would lead the church astray into abhorrent practices and beliefs which seems to be what the psalmist experienced as his enemies corrupted society around him (1 Tim 4:1-5, Matt 24:24). Today church schisms and in-fighting are frequently caused by the issues that were discussed in this chapter. These issues are not unique to Christians today but have been both experienced and responded to by biblical writers including the psalmist. The responses of the biblical writers to these challenges should be the responses of biblical Christians today which makes this study extremely important for Christians today.

CHAPTER 5: THE MOTIVATIONS OF THE ENEMIES

This chapter will dive deeper into the minds of the psalmist's enemies to discover the motivations behind their actions. The enemies in the psalms selected for study can be separated into two groups according to their motivations: First, there are those who attack the psalmist because they live a life devoid of responsibility. They believe that they are responsible to neither God nor man. They accordingly live a life of hedonism where their success and comfort is more important than the well-being of others. Through their pride, their personal gain, whether wealth, power, or comfort, becomes their god. Second, there are those who are motivated by a distorted and mechanical view of retributive justice. They believe that they have the right to enact justice on the psalmist by persecuting him when they see that God's favor has perhaps waned.

The characterization of the enemy in the previous chapter was altogether negative with threats, deceit, and subversion being typical of their words and actions. Potgieter categorizes the words and actions of the wicked and narrows them down to the following: boasting of evil, plotting of destruction, loving evil, hating good, loving deceit, and not loving truth.¹³⁶ After the study explored within the previous chapter it is possible to assume that the enemy was merely a product of his society. It is possible to lessen the force of their evil by saying that as members of a collective society, the enemies were just doing what they needed to survive and fit in. Although it has been shown that in many times wickedness was the norm in the psalmist's society, there is still a level of personal intention and responsibility. One of the things that separates Psalm 53 from its nearly-identical Psalm 14 is the use of כָּלֵו (everyone) instead of הַכֹּל (all of them) showing that these individuals are morally responsible and are not just guilty as a collective.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Potgieter, 4-5.

¹³⁷ Delitzsch, 376.

“I am Responsible to No One”

The enemies in these psalms seem to show a sub-human disregard for the well-being of anyone but themselves and will do anything it takes to succeed in life, often at the psalmist's expense. The psalmist wonders in Psalm 62 how long his enemies will attack him despite him having such a strong fortress. Implicit in this is a question of the motivation behind such attacks. What could persuade a man to repeatedly attempt to assault the psalmist and rely on vain riches rather than a steadfast God? This could lead the reader to assume that when the psalmist calls his enemy a fool in Psalm 55, that he is making a statement about his enemy's level of intelligence. It is much more likely that, to the psalmist, foolishness is not a passive measure of intelligence or witlessness, but an active decision to live a life that denies the existence of God.¹³⁸ The fool does not brainlessly attack the psalmist, but in these psalms their wickedness is repeated over in several different ways to emphasize the enemy's “deliberate willfulness” rather than just “accidental attraction” to cruelty.¹³⁹ The “deliberate willfulness” towards sin that is typical of the Psalmist's enemies seems to be motivated by one of two worldviews among those enemies who are clearly fellow Israelites. In some cases the enemy is motivated by the idea that he is not morally responsible to anyone and that his own benefit supersedes the health or well-being of anyone around him. In other cases the enemies are motivated by erroneous theology of suffering that prompts them to take justice into their own hands. While some live by the motto “I am responsible to no one” others live by the phrase “you are responsible to me.”

In Psalm 52, the man who believes he is responsible to no one is center stage as this psalm provides a unique look at several ways his worldview manifests itself. One thing that is

¹³⁸ Wilson, 287.

¹³⁹ Rogerson, 22.

clear is that the enemy puts his trust in riches rather than God. Verse 7 would suggest that the enemy had once had the chance to put his trust in God, but refused that option in favor of riches. Potgieter agreed that it is his trust in riches rather than God that motivates his deceitful tongue that was previously discussed.¹⁴⁰ The enemy in this psalm has elevated riches to be his God; it is the motivation for his life, his greatest good (vv 3-4), and the place where he turns in times of trouble (v 7). In verse 7, the psalmist's opinion is altogether different as he critiques his enemy's riches and self-sufficiency. In the end, his riches are just as much a lie as his words. Verse 3 could be taken ironically as the enemy claims to love good but in reality loves evil. Different commentators have also suggested that the enemy here is falsely religious. Given the theme of deceit and inward murmuring, the enemy seems to put on a facade of religiosity on the outside but on the inside he rejects the God of Israel.

There is also evidence in Psalm 53 that the enemies are motivated by financial reasons to attack the psalmist. As the enemies eat the psalmist's people like bread, it is possible to see verse 4 suggesting the enemies employing political or legal oppression to rob the righteous of their means of sustenance. The obvious theme of oppression has already been noted in Psalm 55 but it is worth noting that it is very probable that this oppression is for financial gain. Both Psalms 62 and 71 suggest that the enemies are seeking the downfall of the psalmist for political or financial gain. Not only this, but 62:10 warns the community not to trust in exhortation, robbery, and riches as the enemies seem to have done. Here the psalmist encourages those around him to put their faith in God rather than in riches, unlike the anti-hero of 52. The psalmist in Psalm 62 pleads with those around him to turn from the perverted worldview of the wicked and back to God's truth. He could be exhorting those around him to keep on the path of the righteous, rather

¹⁴⁰ Potgieter, 2.

than fall in line with the wicked around him. Given the original audience of this psalm, the psalmist is making an implicit statement on his community; that they too are liable to stumble into wickedness and oppression.

In Psalm 52 the enemy has most obviously rejected God in favor of riches, but this is part of a larger issue for the enemy. This merely reflects the self-worship and pride that motivates the psalmist's enemies. Goldingay notes that the psalmist's enemy in 52 not only trusts in his own strength, rather than God's, but goes as far as to elevate himself to God's position by worshipping himself.¹⁴¹ The enemy is an idol worshiper but not in the standard sense. Instead of putting God in the proper place as Lord of his life, he elevates himself beyond divine power in verse 7. In this sense, it should come as little surprise that he is engaged in deceit and cruelty in verses 2-4 as he is simply devoting himself to his own worship and service. Derek Kidner suggests that the enemy's boasting is not external but internal and simply reflects an attitude of self-satisfaction.¹⁴² Although the psalmist's enemy is open and public in the use of his razor-like tongue, he loves to hear the sound of his own voice.

With all of this information and the brazen claim of the enemy in 53:1, it would be easy to assume that the enemy of the psalmist is a staunch atheist. Despite his love of self and love of money, the enemy seems to have no love for any god. That being said, it is unlikely, given the cultural context and worldview of the time, that the enemy is making any metaphysical claims toward true atheism, but he is more likely living a life believing he is not morally responsible to any higher being.¹⁴³ This is not dogmatic atheism as is typical of atheism today, but is practical atheism wherein the fool lives in a manner that rejects God's existence and therefore any

141 Goldingay, 143.

142 Kidner, 194-195.

143 Goldingay, 151.

accountability to any higher being.¹⁴⁴ This is not an overt atheism that holds open debates or uses Darwin fish stickers. The fool says in his heart that there is no God, rather than openly admitting it. This could also indicate the dicephalus nature of the fool as he will claim adherence to God but inwardly rejects Him. In the end, the fool is not the one who has not heard of God, but the one who has but has rejected his love and law.¹⁴⁵ It is this rejection of God as his moral compass that has led to his most heinous acts against the psalmist and his community. It is the fool's rejection of God that has led to his objectification and inevitable abuse of his fellow man.¹⁴⁶

Psalm 64 also showcases the pride of the Psalmist's enemies. In verse 5, they believe that their stealth, cunning, and trap-setting will keep them from harm—perhaps that God is somehow blind or impotent.¹⁴⁷ The enemies have both numbers and organization working to their benefit and so they assault the psalmist without fear of repercussion from either God or man.¹⁴⁸ The enemy in many of these psalms uses the power of words to hound the psalmist, but Schaefer notes that the psalmist also relies on the power of words. Unlike his enemies who rely on curses and deceit, the psalmist trusts that God will be faithful in hearing the psalmist's words.¹⁴⁹ Beyond the more obvious offensive versus defensive use of words, there is another way the power of words is contrasted in these Psalms. The enemies' words are focused on man. They are either focused on destroying another, or boasting of themselves. The psalmist's words are radically different in that they are God-focused. The psalmist knows that his spoken words will be heard by his God and can boast in his *hesed*-keeping God in verses 7-10 knowing that his prayer in verses 1-2 will be answered.

144 Weiser, 165.

145 Wilcock, 194.

146 Wilson, 793.

147 Rogerson, 70.

148 Wilson, 899.

149 Schaefer, 154.

“You are Responsible to Me”

After the previous discussion it would seem that Israel was entirely apostate, but such was not the case. Along with the psalmist there were others who claimed allegiance to, or at least acknowledgement of God. Although the faithful and righteous few are mentioned in the Psalms, sometimes the psalmist's enemies are aware of God and attack the psalmist regardless. In some of the Psalms discussed in this thesis, it is fairly clear that the enemies are in open rebellion against God's followers, despite being aware of God's presence and protection. What is most shocking, sometimes they are unaware that they are in the wrong; in fact, in many situations they are convinced that they are in the right. Whereas the enemies in the previous category were theologically motivated by their disbelief in the potency and justice of God, these enemies either believe in God's justice even to a fault or they openly defy it. The justice that they follow is their own. It is perhaps a perversion of God's justice, and perhaps something entirely of their own hearts. They believe that justice is their own to deal out and that the psalmist is somehow responsible to them. As is the case in Psalm 62, the enemies seem to be aware of God and His protection, and thus only prey on the weak and abandoned by God. That the psalmist's enemies in these psalms seem to grasp the basic idea of God's retributive justice shows that they are at least aware of Yahweh and his laws but their knowledge is twisted and perverted.

In some of the Psalms selected for this thesis, the enemies seem intent on harming the psalmist because he is already afflicted. Their main motivation is not just to see him suffer more, but because it is within their right to cause the psalmist even greater suffering. They either believe that they are doing the right thing by punishing the psalmist or they are in open defiance against God by attacking the psalmist. This theme is most clear in Psalms 69-71. Tate concurs

and suggests that Psalms 69-71 form a thematic unit that was purposefully designed by the editors of book two.¹⁵⁰

In 69:26-27 the enemies only attack those who God has already afflicted. In Psalm 69 the psalmist is clearly being attacked because he is in a weakened state and because of this his enemies think he is forsaken by God.¹⁵¹ They either take his mourner's clothing in verse 11 as a symbol of his guilt and assault him with lies because of this, or they understand his sackcloth as a sign of divine abandonment. It is possible to see their false accusation in verse 4 as part of their slanderous attack. In the following verse, the psalmist openly confesses that God is aware of his sins, but he also acknowledges that his current sufferings have not come as a result of his sins.¹⁵² In verse 4 it is not just the number of the enemies that is beating down the psalmist but the baselessness of their attacks.¹⁵³ In the next verse the psalmist makes it clear that he freely accepts the chastisement of God but not the chastisement of man who erroneously act out their own revenge.

Craig Broyles notes that Psalm 71 adds a unique element of old age to the discussion in verse 9. The psalmist here is at a point in his life when he is perhaps at his most vulnerable as he is portrayed as one who no longer has the physical aptitude to defend himself in verse 9 and is thus very easily manipulated verse 4.¹⁵⁴ The enemies of the Psalmist see his waning strength as a sign that God's presence and favor has left him in verse 11.

The sense of hopeless abandonment that those around him have caused have brought the psalmist to the point of feeling that even God has forsaken him in Psalm 69.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, the “do

150 Tate, 206.

151 Alter, 240.

152 Terrien, 502.

153 Rogerson, 95.

154 Broyles, 290.

155 Rogerson, 96.

not cast away” in 71:9 could be in reaction to a feeling of abandonment that the psalmist could be feeling at the hands of his enemies and community. The enemies are numerous in 69:4 and 71:4 which would no doubt contribute to the psalmist's sense of abandonment. His sense of abandonment could also have been caused by their overwhelming opinion that he was indeed forsaken by God as in 71:11. If all those around him were spreading this rumor behind his back and especially if they were telling it to his face, this would no doubt shake his faith in his standing before God.

This thesis is not the first study to suggest that the psalmist was under attack because of such erroneous religious beliefs as the early Christians applied this to the scandal of the Lord of the cross.¹⁵⁶ Wilcock, among other scholars, connects the psalmist's sufferings in 71:7 with the way Job was treated by his friends.¹⁵⁷ Here and in other passages these psalms bring up the same issues that the book of Job raises over whether suffering is always a direct result of sin.¹⁵⁸ In many ways the psalmist mirrors Job and his enemies Job's friends.¹⁵⁹ Herman Gunkel maintained that the afflicted psalmist was the butt of either those who inferred that his sufferings were the divine punishment on him and therefore that he must have sinned grievously, or, in other psalms, of cynical enemies who denied the outworking of divine justice in human affairs and derided the psalmist who, in spite of his piety, had to endure suffering.¹⁶⁰ Mowinckel notes that the psalms traditionally understood as individual laments focused on being afflicted by illnesses that were directly caused by God.¹⁶¹ Although it is true that this was the popular belief in Israel, there are

156 Terrien, 505.

157 Wilcock, 248.

158 Bullock, 147.

159 C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2001), 145-147.

160 George W. Anderson, “Enemies and Evildoers in the Book of Psalms,” *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1965): 22.

161 Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2004), 2.

many points where the psalmist challenges this notion. It is this erroneously fatalistic view of suffering that the enemies use as an excuse to attack the psalmist. Most scholars note that in some psalms the psalmist attributes the cause of his distress to God's punishment of his sin as in 51, but very few of these commentators note that in many more psalms he also protests his innocence to both God and to his enemies despite his distress.

These psalms address a very important question: does God use persecution as a means of punishment. This theme is similar to the theme of God using enemy nations to punish Israel which could lead to the believer's enemies either misunderstanding or twisting this separate theme to their advantage. This similar theme of God using others to punish Israel is extremely prevalent in Judges as God uses the Canaanite nations to punish Israel (Judges 10:6, 13:1, etc). The prophets also expected this same situation to repeat itself unless the nation was to repent. The post-exilic prophets clearly saw their sorry state as the result of the sins of their fathers. In all of these situations God used nations to punish Israel, but that does not necessarily mean that God uses the same means when dealing with individuals. After being cursed by Shimei, David told his men to not strike Shimei because he believed it was possible that God had told him to curse David (2 Sam 16:10). The narrator makes no comment on the rightness of Shimei's attack. It is more likely that David was incorrect in his preliminary understanding of Shimei's attack. It is possible that even David had confused God's use of others to punish sin, and the baseless attacks of sinners as David later ordered for Shimei's death for his insolent and unwarranted cursing (1 Kings 2). Looking back to the study of suffering in the second chapter of this thesis, more often than not, persecution is seemingly unwarranted. Again, the importance in and parallels with the book of Job cannot be overlooked. Job no doubt suffered greatly and yet

innocently, even so his friends felt the need to add insult to injury. Their hounding caught the ire of God and Job had to offer a sacrifice for their presumptuous behavior.

Likewise, the Psalmist's enemies are painted in an altogether negative light. They are devoid of pity, prayer, or humility. Pitying one's brother is a major theme in the Pentateuch and yet the psalmist's enemies are devoid of pity in 69:20. Integral to answering this question is the enemy's response to the psalmist's suffering. In Psalm 70 the psalmist records the boastful cruelty of his enemies in verse 3. Similarly, in the next psalm the enemies find their delight in the sufferings of the psalmist rather than displaying the care of the elderly that the Torah prescribes. In 69 the enemies join in with the town drunks in singing hurtful songs. Their choice of company is a clear reflection of the quality of their character. In a strong contrast, the psalmist's desire is to sing in God's presence in verse 30. The enemies in these psalms serve as an anti-type to the psalmist in 51 and others as they gloat over the psalmist's destruction, while in 51 the psalmist rejoices, rather than gloats, in God's justice and conquest of the wicked. The psalmist's enemies are definitely painted in a negative light and are no doubt defying God's commands to take care of the poor, needy, and elderly. One final point is that the enemies will face a disastrous fate—a fate that all enemies of the psalmist and his God are consigned to. At least on a national level, God definitely does use others to punish the wicked, but even when God allows this punishment to happen, he will even punish those who he has used if they step out of line (Habakkuk 1:5-11). Like other forms of suffering, the psalmist does not believe that persecution is always caused by sin. As in 69:4, the psalmist holds onto his innocence along with the fact that he is being attacked without cause. In none of the psalms looked at in this paper does it even suggest that his enemies are justified in their attacks. These men are acting the psalmist contrary to God's wishes while

still pretending to be in his court.

All of this information brings up one last point that is crucial in understanding the motivations of the psalmist's enemies. While the enemies of the psalmist accuse and hound the psalmist before man, the psalmist pleads his case before God. In none of these Psalms is there any indication that he has gone before any other authority. No other authority exists before the psalmist. He consciously leaves justice in the hands of an all-powerful God. Both the psalmist and his enemies believe in a God of justice, but it is only the psalmist that believes this God is powerful to deal out justice Himself. Instead the psalmist's beliefs about God's justice are seen in 62:11-12; that it is God alone who has the power and authority to give to a man according to his deeds. The enemies here do not deny the existence of God, and even seem to claim to be part of his camp but the psalmist clings to the fact that their perception of God and his judgments are flawed.¹⁶² The importance of this point must not be overlooked; the psalmist's enemy thinks he is following God by attacking the psalmist but in reality is working contrary to how the Torah describes God's character and how Israel is to treat the elderly and the weak. Their religious devotion cannot be denied, but the psalmist's enemies have a twisted view of who God really is and show a dangerous lack of knowledge of the character of God.

Atheists, whether philosophical or practical, commonly assault believers today, just as they assaulted the psalmist. Although they cannot physically assault Christians for fear of legal repercussions, they can use means of character-assassination, gossip, insults, etc to destroy believers. This is not too different from the experiences that the psalmist went through. He found himself pitted against those who lived dangerously and recklessly irresponsible lives. These were people within his own community, friends groups, and family who cared so little for the psalmist

¹⁶² Wilson, 972.

and his God that they felt no shame in tearing him down to promote their own agendas. This chapter has also shown that the psalmist's enemies are sometimes motivated by a mechanical view of retributive justice along with a skewed understanding of revenge. They use their religious beliefs to justify their persecution and oppression of the weak, poor, and elderly. As will be shown in the next chapter, this dangerous lack of understanding about God's style of justice can be partially attributed by a lack of understanding of laments. This again underscores the importance of this study and others like it.

CHAPTER 6: IMPLICATIONS FOR WORSHIP AND THEOLOGY

Validity for Modern Believers

All of the evidence in the previous chapters has made it clear that the psalmist frequently faced trials and hardships that were caused by his own people. The psalmist's enemies used methods that kept them under the radar of civic laws but were in no way less destructive to the psalmist's well-being. These attacks were motivated by a dangerous misplacement of responsibility in life away from God and onto themselves. These themes would not have been included in the Psalter unless the writers and editors believed that they were valuable for the community throughout the ages. These themes even seem to be grouped together as is seen in 69-71, as all show persecution by Israelites who believed that the psalmist had been forsaken by God. The editors no doubt saw that persecution from within was a reality in life that would always exist for believers. Many studies have looked at the identity of the enemies, and others have looked at the tactics that they employ. Few scholars have looked at the motivations behind these attacks, but even fewer still have looked at the theological implications of the psalmist's enemies being theologically motivated Israelites. This chapter will examine some of the serious practical and theological implications and questions that the above chapters have raised.

For many in the world today, frequent hardship is not the norm and so the reading of these psalms can become a struggle rather than a joy.¹⁶³ From the comfort of middle class Western living, these psalms become pointless, exaggerated, and depressing rather than uplifting. It is no wonder they have fallen out of use in the devotional lives of most Christian in the West. Not only this, but laments have fallen out of style in most pulpits. The relative lack of scholarly

¹⁶³ Johnston, 64.

and definite lack of pastoral interest in the Psalms, especially the laments, is doing both areas a great disservice. Brian Webster and David Beach list several important uses for the laments in modern ministry: pastoral counseling, journaling, prayer, confession, reconciliation, and liturgy.¹⁶⁴ They also see lament as an important aspect of spiritual formation in the pursuit of truth, relationship, proper witness, and Christ-likeness.¹⁶⁵ Without scholarly interest in these Psalms in seminaries, there will be no interest in them in the pulpit or in the counselor's office.

One possible reason as to why the issue of enemies in the Psalms has fallen out of scholarship and ministry has been the many voices who have claimed that lament no longer has any place in the Christian's life. One of the most recognizable voices in both seminaries and church offices is C.S. Lewis whose *Reflections on the Psalms* is an excellent primer on reading the Psalms. Although most of the book is invaluable, Lewis' low view of the psalmist's reaction to persecution and his imprecations as something not befitting a New Testament Christian has no doubt swayed many to avoid these psalms. Westerman was also convinced that repentance has replaced lamentation in the Christian life: "The believing Christian should bear his suffering patiently; he should not complain about it to God. The 'sufferings of this world' are unimportant and insignificant. What is important is the guilt of sin."¹⁶⁶ These and other scholars think that lamenting these sufferings would diminish one's status, but this was clearly not true of Jesus in the passion narratives. With frequent allusions to the Psalms, Jesus is elevated through his suffering. Because he becomes the fulfillment of Psalm 69:21, he also becomes the fulfillment of the righteous sufferer exemplified in the Psalm.¹⁶⁷

164 Brian L. Webster, and David R. Beach, "The Place of Lament in the Christian Life," *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 164 (Oct 2007): 398-401.

165 *Ibid.*, 401-403.

166 Westermann (74), 33.

167 Joshua W. Jipp, "Luke's Scriptural Suffering Messiah: a Search for Precedent, a Search for Identity." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2010): 262.

Contrary to these opinions, Kushner sees God as the source of our sense of outrage, rather than the source of our sufferings themselves as God is a God of justice and we have inherited His sense of justice.¹⁶⁸ Paul Baglyos suggests that lamentation is a natural by-product of our desire to return to the state of the world in Genesis 1:31 as a world that is “very good” and a “refusal to accommodate or to acquiesce in a contradiction of the very goodness of God's creation.”¹⁶⁹ Brueggemann suggests that the laments were written to vocalize the stress and disorientation when the psalmist's presuppositions about the order and morality of the universe are challenged by experience.¹⁷⁰ They are the reactions to when the godly individual is seemingly betrayed by the good and orderly world that is presented in the Psalms of orientation.¹⁷¹ Being mistreated by those within the faith community might certainly cause the psalmist to question deeply the concept cosmic justice. Strangely enough, Westermann makes an excellent point in his article “The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament.” He shows that lament was a necessary part of the theological life of Israel as it was their lament that lead to the Israelites' salvation from Egypt.¹⁷² He later concludes that “the true function of the lament is supplication; it is the means by which suffering comes before the one who can take it away.”¹⁷³ These laments do not fall on deaf ears, but onto the heart of a God who Himself is given to lament in the face of injustice.¹⁷⁴ There is not a single hint in the Bible that lamentation has been replaced or removed from the spiritual lives of the godly. There are no distinctions within the

168 Harold S. Kushner, "Why Do the Righteous Suffer : Notes Toward a Theology of Tragedy." *Judaism* 28, no. 3 (1979), 323.

169 Paul A. Baglyos, “Lament in the Liturgy of the Rural Church: An Appeal for Recovery,” *Currents in Theology and Mission* 36, no. 4 (August 1, 2009).

170 Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*, (Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984), 19.

171 *Ibid.*, 19.

172 Westermann (74), 21-22.

173 *Ibid.*, 32.

174 *Ibid.*, 37.

Psalms between praise and lament as legitimate forms of worship.¹⁷⁵ Throughout both the Old and New Testaments there are no passages that even come close to forbidding lament, let alone suggesting that it is not a healthy expression of a good relationship with God or that a relationship with Him would exclude someone from situations that require lamentation.¹⁷⁶ Not only is lament invaluable for personal use, but it is also exceptionally useful, and even necessary, in both pastoral and counseling ministries as the laments give the believer a God-centered interpretation of and God-centered counsel for human experience.¹⁷⁷

Importance for Modern Believers

Rather than suggest removing lament from the believer's life, the exact opposite seems to be a more biblical response; The Bible instead strongly warns against the removal of lament from the public and private lives of the godly. The importance of lament is highlighted in Exodus as God would not have seen, heard, nor acted to save them from their plight had it not been for their groanings.¹⁷⁸ Bagylos makes a compelling case that without biblical laments being shared within Christian circles today, people will inevitably turn to non-biblical sources to find solace in the storms of life—even to the point of idolatry.¹⁷⁹ Suffering and pain are universal to the human condition but without a biblical release for these issues, people will inevitably turn elsewhere. Whether they turn to other religions or philosophies, or substance abuse to dull the pain, no human efforts can bring true healing the way that biblical laments can.¹⁸⁰

175 Westermann (1981), 264.

176 Ibid., 25.

177 C. Richard Wells, and Ray Van Neste, *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship*, (Nashville: B&H Academic 2012), 174.

178 Bagylos.

179 Ibid.

180 Wells, 152.

Although suffering is a well-known reality in places like China, Egypt, North Korea, and parts of Africa, suffering and persecution are becoming part of life in the west as well. The same lies, defamation, corruption, and violent threats combined within these psalms are a very present reality today in a world where evil and corrupt people lead gangs, companies, and even governments with seemingly no one to stop them.¹⁸¹ If the only God that is preached and studied is one of happiness and blessing, those who find themselves destitute, persecuted, and oppressed will find neither interest nor solace in that god. Instead Churches must “bear witness to the God who becomes a guest among sinners.”¹⁸² Psalm 52, although it begins with the question “why,” focuses on God's providence and not the reasoning behind man's evil inclinations.¹⁸³ This is typical of the Psalms. Later in 64 the psalmist seems baffled by the actions of his enemies. The psalmist seems aware of the existence of the evil inclinations of people's hearts to the point that he does not question how or why people could be so cruel. The psalmist is not naïve to the reality of evil but instead addresses the temple community and sings a polemic against the ways of the wicked.¹⁸⁴ Theologians, pastors, and counselors. must battle this naiveté and prepare their flock for the harsh realities of life on earth and even the reality of suffering within the church.

Brian Webster presents another extremely dangerous outcome of not making lament a regular part of the spiritual lives of believers. He makes a compelling argument that without the questioning of cosmic justice, this will lead to people believing that all suffering is just retribution for great social and moral evils which can lead to witch-hunting and demon-chasing to purge the reason for the nation's suffering.¹⁸⁵ This thinking can also be misused on the personal

181 Wilcock, 190.

182 Balygos.

183 Rogerson, 22.

184 Broyles, 232.

185 Webster, 391.

level as is shown in Psalms 69 and 71. Had the enemies been steeped in lament theology, they would not have committed such acts of cruelty against the psalmist. It is not illogical to suggest that if Christians today do not wrestle with issues of justice and suffering as the psalmist did, that they too could adopt the enemies' twisted and fatalistic view of suffering. Without a theology of suffering steeped in biblical lament, the natural response to the suffering of others would be to sneer or gossip.¹⁸⁶ The opposite logical extreme is also a danger in churches where laments are not preached. If suffering only happens to the wicked, then the way to avoid suffering and to be blessed is to be as righteous as possible. As the psalmist in 62 warns against envying the prosperity of the wicked,¹⁸⁷ implicit in this statement is the fact that the wicked also prosper. This is quite contrary to the emergence of the “prosperity gospel” movement but churches without lament cannot understand a world where righteousness does not always result in earthly blessings. The sense of abandonment that the psalmist feels in several of the psalms discussed could indicate that the his faith in his own righteousness could be waning under the attacks of his enemies. Calvin Seerveld suggests that a lack of lament in churches today leads to crippling false guilt because of the attacks of others.¹⁸⁸

Applicability for Modern Believers

Brueggemann notes that the lament Psalms serve both to legitimize the suffering of the lamenter, and to give the proper framework with which to cope in any such situation.¹⁸⁹ The question is if the laments were intended to be used in any situation, or if they simply reflected the lives of their writers. Famous rock drummer, Dave Grohl once said that “one of the great things

¹⁸⁶ Wells, 144.

¹⁸⁷ Delitzsch, 419.

¹⁸⁸ Wells, 141.

¹⁸⁹ Brueggemann, 86.

about music [is] you can sing a song to 85,000 people and they'll sing it back for 85,000 different reasons.” Although this may be true of secular music, the question remains if the same can be said of the Psalms. Common in critical scholarship of the Psalms are attempts to narrow down the *sitz im Leben* of the psalms. These different theories are legion but one of the most famous and narrow views was that of Sigmund Mowinckel. He suggested that the psalms could only be fully understood and appreciated within the context of their specific cultic scenario.¹⁹⁰ He also believes that that all of the psalms which speak in the first person are representative of the whole community, whether they use “I” or “we.”¹⁹¹ Another theory is that of Northern authorship of some of the psalms. George Anderson, following scholars like William Holladay and Gary Rendsburg, suggests that among some of the pre-exilic psalms, a number are from the northern kingdom.¹⁹² These scholars see differences Phoenician and Aramaic-influenced dialect along with descriptions of locations in the north that they suggest point to northern authorship.¹⁹³

It is undeniable that most of the theories that have been proposed on the *sitz im Leben* of the psalms hold at least some value to them and all shed light on different possibilities of the origins of the Psalms. Given the breadth of interpretive possibilities of the Psalms, it seems that the answer to all of these hypotheses is a resounding “yes!” The Psalms seem to fit well in both cultic and in personal situations. Not long after his above assertion, Anderson notes the universality of the Psalms; how they are purposefully vague and can be applied to a myriad of situations.¹⁹⁴ Whether or not any psalms were written by northern believers, they could no doubt be applied to them, and to any society where simple yet vibrant piety is scarce and scorned.

190 Mowinckel, 34.

191 Ibid.

192 Anderson, 28.

193 Holladay, 27-28.

194 Anderson, 28.

Among the Psalms discussed in this thesis, 53 is suggested as one of the northern psalms. Although it is a near replica of Psalm 14, this psalm contains language that these scholars suggest to be typical of the Northern dialect.¹⁹⁵ Anderson rightly suggests that any attempt to narrow down the *sitz im Leben* of all of the laments to one category fall flat, in part, by both ignoring and neutering the universal nature of the Psalms.¹⁹⁶ The psalms that were written during the time of the first temple took on new meaning during the second temple period. Psalms like 55 were easily applicable to a people who were broken in spirit, few in number, and sociopolitically crushed.¹⁹⁷

Scholars today are much more inclined to suggest that the psalms are purposefully vague and stereotypical so that they can be applied to a limitless range of situations.¹⁹⁸ Miller makes a superb suggestion that by trying ascertain the specificities of the Psalms, scholars work in the opposite direction of the psalmist of trying to make the psalms readily applicable, and they have, in the process, made the Psalms irrelevant to modern audiences.¹⁹⁹ Even so, attempting to understand situations where these psalms would be appropriately applied is a very valuable venture. Using Psalm 51 as an example, Miller goes on to suggest that the superscriptions that give historical reference do not neuter their universality but further reinforce that these Psalms can be applied to the many situations of real people.²⁰⁰ It has been one of the aims of this paper to open the Psalms back up to modern applications; to free the Psalms from recent impositions of strict historical situations in order that the average believer might find the encouragement,

195 William Lee Holladay, *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 34.

196 Anderson, 28-29.

197 Holladay, 63-64.

198 Miller, 35.

199 Ibid., 35.

200 Ibid., 37.

release, and wisdom that the psalmist intended all to read in his words. Phillip Johnston adds to the idea of the psalms being purposefully vague in their descriptions of the enemies and remarks that the psalmist's time frames are also purposefully ambiguous.²⁰¹

The psalms pertinent to this study contain plenty of evidence to show that they were crafted in a way to allow them to be applied to any sort of situation. In Psalm 55, the name of the city is not given and perhaps this is purposeful; Tate suggests that this can, and should, be understood as any city where evil flourishes.²⁰² Debates over the authorship of many of the psalms explored in this thesis have gone on for decades. For example, Psalm 69 does not seem to fit with the history of David as there is no story that seems to fit this psalm, especially with the psalmist's zeal for the temple which had not yet been built. This has led some scholars to suggest that it was Hezekiah who wrote this psalm but Wilcock shows that this is unlikely and would only fit with some modification with the Assyrian attack.²⁰³ The closest biblical character who would fit as author of this Psalm would be Jeremiah but even this is uncertain.²⁰⁴ Regardless of whether a named biblical character wrote this psalm or if it was someone not mentioned in the Bible, this psalm was later applied to Christ,²⁰⁵ this shows this psalm's flexibility to fit a number of different situations. None of the psalms in either this thesis or outside its scope with the exception of some of the national laments mention the enemies by name. Themes of lying, slander, threats, and subversion in these psalms all use fairly stereotypical language and do not narrow down the situation to any specifics.

It is clear that the psalms were written in a way to be applicable to a multitude of

201 Johnston, 73.

202 Tate, 59.

203 Wilcock, 240.

204 Ibid., 241.

205 Ibid., 241.

audiences in a multitude of different situations. However, the life situations of Western Christians who live in a postmodern, individualistic society varies drastically from the pre-modern lives of pre-exilic Israelites. Although there are a great deal of cultural differences, these psalms are still extremely applicable today. Christians in the West are far less likely to face persecution from foreign enemies than perhaps the psalmist did, but they are just as likely to face troubles from those around them. Atheism today has evolved from being the simple practical atheism that the psalmist confronts in Psalm 53 to a realized philosophical atheism. That being said, the outcomes are the same. Hatred of God will lead to hatred of his people (John 15:18), and so Christians today experience the same persecution that the psalmist felt in Psalm 69:9 because of his zeal for God. Not only this, but practical atheism is still alive and well within believing communities. A large portion of North Americans still claim to be Christians on census information, but that does not mean that many of these professing Christians do not live as practical atheists. Again, cultural differences aside, similar situations arise when practical atheists exist within a believing communities. Last, with increasing biblical illiteracy both inside and outside the church, the growing prosperity gospel movement, and cultural influences from Eastern religious philosophies like karma, people will inevitably be swayed into believing the same kind of skewed and mechanical cosmic justice that the psalmist's religiously motivated enemies were driven by. In all of these situations, Christians must be prepared to respond biblically to these challenges.

Universality of Suffering for Believers

Not only are these challenges universal, they also seem to be frequent as they appear so often in the Psalter. Irene Nowell suggests that there are such a plethora of laments because pain is such a common part of life and each person experiences different pains in different ways.²⁰⁶ In a different approach to many other scholars, Gunkel categorizes the Psalms according to the *Sitz im Leben* of the singer and audience rather than solely on their content.²⁰⁷ Given the number of life situations that Gunkel discusses, it is safe to say that the Psalms were crafted in order to address any sort of life situation. It should not come as any surprise then that the Psalms contain evidences of persecution from friends, family, neighbors., and religious kinsmen as this is the reality of life in the religious community. It seems that there is a psalm written for any and all life situations. With this in mind there should be no doubt that there are psalms written to deal with issues of persecution from friends and family.

The prevalence and universality of biblical laments suggests something about the theology of the psalmist and the editor of the Psalms. If the psalmist purposefully wrote in a way that his psalms could later be applied to a plethora of situations, this would suggest that he foresaw others suffering as he did. The editor saw fit to preserve these psalms for the edification of the community. Westermann agrees that since the Psalms do not mince words about this kind of suffering and that these psalms were included in the final edition of the Psalter, the psalmist and the editors saw that persecution from within the community is an inevitable part of life.²⁰⁸

The psalmist not only saw persecution by those around him as part of his experience but he also

²⁰⁶ Irene Nowell, *Pleading, Cursing, Praising: Conversing with God Through the Psalms*, (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2013), 21.

²⁰⁷ Gunkel.

²⁰⁸ Westermann (81), 261.

foresaw this as a tragically normative experience for the godly.²⁰⁹ That these Psalms were popular and important enough to have been transmitted and included in the final canon shows that the editors also saw the universality of their themes. The Psalms often explicitly invite others to join in with the psalmist's experiences; they are prayers that are meant to be prayed by others.²¹⁰ Many of these psalms have an implicit and focused theodicy; they question how it is that those who serve God are destined for persecution while the wicked go on persecuting without fear of judgment.²¹¹ In his exploration of Psalm 62, Dave Bland calls the reader to explore the theological and social implications of the text. He suggests that the enmity expressed in this psalm goes beyond simple personal quarrel as the enemies do not just oppose the psalmist but what he stands for—righteousness.²¹² Bland goes on to suggest that those who are set apart by God will inevitably find themselves “in battle with those of the world and rejected by those who are indifferent.”²¹³

This inevitability is made even more clear in Psalms 69 and 71. The oppressed and those who seek God are equated in 69.²¹⁴ This Psalm also shows the common theme throughout the individual laments that as the psalmist suffers, he does so for God.²¹⁵ Looking ahead to the New Testament, Jesus used this psalm to show that the way of the righteous is inevitable suffering at the hands of those around them, including those who are closest to them.²¹⁶ The early church, who knew all too well the pain of betrayal at the hands of family and friends who were acting

209 McEwen.

210 Brueggemann (95), 33.

211 Kraus, 168.

212 Dave Bland, "Exegesis of Psalm 62," *Restoration Quarterly* 23, no. 2 (1980): 90.

213 Ibid, 90.

214 Schaefer, 166.

215 Weiser, 494.

216 Dalglisch, 30.

because of their religious beliefs applied this to the scandal of the Lord on the cross.²¹⁷ Psalm 71 seems to rely heavily on reflection on past experiences throughout the psalmist's life and would suggest that the psalmist is now advanced in years.²¹⁸ If this is the case, this shows that the psalmist has had to endure such sufferings at the hands of the unrighteous from childhood even unto late in his life.

Another point that this thesis has revealed in these psalms is that life even within the religious community is not devoid of suffering. It is true that those who attack the psalmist because of their errant view of justice are at fault, this does not diminish from the fact that they are motivated by belief in what they consider to be the same God as the psalmist. Not only this but Psalms 52, 53, and 55 show that there are those who masquerade as righteous believers within the community whose motivations are altogether corrupt. In reference to the religious facade of the enemy in Psalm 52, Spurgeon notes that “men can manage to say a great many furious things, and yet cover all over with the pretext of justice” and that “they claim they are jealous for the right, but the truth is, they are determined to put down truth and holiness.”²¹⁹ This raises an important and difficult issue that people, whether simply misguided or malevolent, can use religious beliefs to commit great cruelty. These psalms can and should be applied to situations where other Christian groups, whether merely nominal or just misguided, use religion as a means to justify atrocities such as hate crimes against races, religions, or the LGBTQ community. This can also be applied to smaller scale situations where church members might use slander, gossip, lies, or other methods to drive out those whom they deem unfit to be part of their church. These are the prayers that should be prayed in these situations, but not only this but they

217 Terrien, 505.

218 Mays, 231.

219 Spurgeon, 216.

should be used to console those who have been assaulted by those who have misused religion to promote their own evil agendas. With the rise of the new atheist movement's emphasis on the harm caused by religious groups, these psalms could not be more valuable.

It has been shown that the enemies of the psalmist are not contained to just the laments but are also seen in psalms of trust and wisdom psalms. In Psalm 62 the psalmist's exhortation in verse 10 could be making an implicit connection with the enemies of the psalmist. He could be exhorting those around him to keep on the path of the righteous, rather than fall in line with the wicked around him. Given the original audience of this psalm, the psalmist is making an implicit statement on his community; that they too are liable to stumble into wickedness and oppression. Psalms 53 and 55 show the potential of the religious community to fall into horrible injustices. In 53 the fool's rejection of God has led to his objectification and inevitable abuse of his fellow man.²²⁰ Wilson connects this objectification with human trafficking and the drug trade.²²¹

A Biblical Response for Believers

These psalms, including the laments, do not leave the reader in a hopeless situation. They go beyond painting the dismal inevitability of suffering and give the proper response to these situations. Although the existence of enemies seems like an unavoidable reality, the psalmist shows that the situation is far from hopeless. Kraus notes that the enemies of the psalms are “not some unavoidable destiny, some fate, to which the weak must submit” and that even though their powers seem “terrifying and uncanny, or even inescapable,” the very act of petition rests on the knowledge that these enemies will be overcome by God.²²² It would be unwise to reduce the

220 Wilson, 793.

221 Ibid., 796.

222 Kraus, 133.

function of the Psalms down to simply didactic material on how to pray. The Psalms are not just instructions, rather invitations to share in life with the psalmist.²²³ They not only show how the believer should react to seasons of persecution but also that they are far from alone in their struggle. It is in this way that the poet transcends the role of teacher and assumes the role of pastor.

One of the most prevalent themes that this poet-pastor writes about is confidence in God in times of persecution. In Psalm 55, the psalmist's grief is so great that he cannot even form complete sentences to God and can only form a mournful noise or sound in verse 2 and yet he is confident in God's ability to make sense of the unutterable chaos in his heart.²²⁴ The psalmist in 62, after a brief telling of his troubles, completely redirects his thoughts on God and His faithful protection.²²⁵ In 69:19-20 there is a contrast between God who hears and knows, and those around the psalmist who ignore his plight. Despite the desperateness of the psalmist's condition here, he knows that God has not abandoned him. God knowing of the psalmist's situation implies God's eventual intervention. In 69 the psalmist implicitly expects God to come to his defense since he is persecuted on His behalf.²²⁶ He expects God to defend Himself by defending the psalmist. Last, the age of the psalmist in 71 also affords him the gift of being able to look back on God's previous acts of deliverance and faithfulness which provide him the strength and faith to carry on.²²⁷ The hope that the psalmist expresses here is no mere fleeting emotion but it solidly founded on his faith that he has developed throughout his life.²²⁸

Closely connected to the psalmist's confidence in his own safety is his confidence in the

223 Brueggemann, 34.

224 Spurgeon, 221.

225 Kidner, 222.

226 Broyles, 287.

227 Broyles, 291.

228 Rogerson, 107.

inevitable downfall of the wicked. Psalm 52, as a wisdom psalm, makes this a central point in its message. Although the enemy is powerful, he is evidently transient; whereas the psalmist is a lasting and firm olive tree that grows over time, the enemy is one who dwells in tents which can be blown away by a strong desert wind.²²⁹ Not only this, but despite all his great power, the inevitable fate of the wicked is one of downfall and derision.²³⁰ Although the enemies of the psalmist seem unstoppable in their power over other men, the psalmist remarks that their downfall will come because they have not made God their stronghold.²³¹ In the next psalm there almost seems to be a note of sarcasm when the psalmist foretells the fool's eventual judgment before God; that regardless of his denial of God and his Torah, he cannot avoid his destruction at the hands of He who was denied. This psalm shows the potential for despair and questioning God's existence in times of being overwhelmed, especially by one's own social, familial, and religious relatives, and yet the psalmist clings to what he knows to be true of God and of the eventual fate of the fool.²³² The psalmist's question in 62 is not one of lament but of confidence. He sarcastically wonders how long his enemies will continue to attack him despite so many before them who have tried and failed to assail against the righteous.²³³ Despite their greater numbers and varying level of political power, the psalmist seems to anticipate their eventual ruin by calling them mere vanity (*hevel*).²³⁴

The previous paragraph assumes that the imperfect verbs are to be taken as futuristic, but if they are taken as jussives, different questions are raised. Many believe that the imprecations of the Psalms arise from attitudes that are now irrelevant in the church age; simple forgiveness is

229 Schaefer, 134.

230 Potgieter, 6.

231 Wilsonm, 789.

232 Goldingay, 155.

233 Spurgeon, 251.

234 Spurgeon, 253.

the new *modus operandi*.²³⁵ Recently scholars have been reassessing this view. Kidner takes a moderate approach to this topic. In his analysis of Psalm 66, he notes the striking similarities between this psalm and the passion narrative.²³⁶ Instead of a “Father, forgive them,” the psalmist asks for their destruction because of their perversion of the law and his own desire to see justice carried out in the land.²³⁷ Central to these imprecations is the theme of the *lex talionis* or retributive justice. This is best described in 62:12 as the idea that God renders a man according to his work. The imprecations in these psalms are not baseless attacks but are rather the desire that God uphold justice and return to the wicked what they have inflicted on the righteous.²³⁸ Kidner affirms the psalmist's desire for justice but adds that Jesus “crowns justice with atonement.”²³⁹ In his view justice should still be a concern for the Christian, but only second to mercy. That being said, the psalmist is no vengeful brute. Alter suggests that the severity as well as the plural direct object of the imprecation in 55:16 would suggest that he wants the larger group, not the individual attacker, his former friend, to be taken down to Sheol.²⁴⁰ The psalmist is potentially conflicted between justice and mercy. He still cares for his friend despite his betrayal and wants to forgive him, but justice must still be brought back to the city. Nowell suggests that imprecation is healthy for the Christian as it leaves vengeance in the hands of God as well as robs hatred of its potency through expressing it in prayer.²⁴¹

Not only does imprecation diffuse hatred, it takes revenge out of the hands of the lamenter and puts it back into God's righteous hands. With its strong insistence on God's

235 C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace), 1958.

236 Kidner, 247.

237 Ibid, 248.

238 Broyles, 288.

239 Kidner, 248.

240 Alter, 193.

241 Nowell, 30-31.

faithfulness, Psalm 52, along with others, clearly commends the audience to leave the work of judgment and retribution up to God rather than taking things into their own hands.²⁴² McEwen notes that these imprecations “reflect an explicit concern for God's honor, not just the comfort of the sufferer.”²⁴³ The joy that the psalmist seeks is not a sinful gloating over another's demise, but a joyful return of justice to the land.²⁴⁴ It has also been shown previously that the psalmist reacts strongly against the idea of taking justice into his own hands. He is attacked by those who think vengeance is their own but instead he puts vengeance back into God's hands and holds fast to the fact that God is the only one with the right to exact revenge. Personal vengeance is the response of the wicked man and the fool, not the righteous.

Last, just as the enemy's destruction will serve as a warning in other psalms, in Psalm 69 the praise of the psalmist at the sight of the enemy's destruction will be an encouragement to his peers. The theme of proclamation and encouragement that is in these psalms cannot be overlooked. Although the enemies are a big part of Psalms 52, 53, and 62, these are psalms of wisdom and trust. They were written as encouragement to all those who are going through through what the psalmist has already gone through. Similarly, the psalmist in 71 reacts to persecution by telling the younger generation of God's deliverance. He explains that he has been delivered countless times already by God throughout his life. In those psalms where the lament is still a painfully present reality, the psalmist asks the reader to cry with him. His response is not to theologize suffering or explain it away, but to run the full gambit of experience and emotion.

Kushner suggests that comfort, not reasoned explanation, is the biblical response for those who are in contact with the bereaved.²⁴⁵ Rather than trying (with inevitable futility) to theologize or

242 Broyles, 233.

243 McEwen, 11.

244 Delitzsch, 374.

245 Kushner, 323.

philosophically reason away the problem of evil, the Bible asks the comforter to sit in ashes with the sufferer. If applied to the present discussion of book two of the Psalms, there is a wealth of wisdom and experience in these psalms for those suffering at the hands of their peers. These Psalms do not shy away from the ash heap and through their use the comforter can join the sufferer in true biblical comfort through their use.

APPENDIX I

Ps 52

To the head musician, a Davidic maskil
When Doeg the Edomite came and revealed to Saul and said to him that David had entered Ahimelech's house

1 Why do you boast in evil, “hero?”
God's faithful love lasts all day.

2 Your tongue plans machinations
like a sharp razor working deceit

3 You love evil more than good
Lies more than righteous words

Selah

4 You love all the words that devour
You deceitful tongue.

5 Yet God is going to bring you down for good
He will snatch you up and yank you from your tent
and uproot you from the land of the living

Selah

6 And the righteous will see and fear
So they'll laugh at him:

7 “Check out the *mere*²⁴⁶ man who didn't make God his stronghold
but trusted in his abundant riches
and found strength in his machinations”

8 But I will be like a verdant olive tree in the house of God
I trust in God's faithful love forever and ever

9 I will give you thanks forever
because you have done this

And I will wait on your name
because it is good, in the presence of the godly.

Ps 53

246 To signify the wordplay between הַגִּבּוֹר (hero) and הַגִּבּוֹר (man)

To the head musician, according to Mahalath, a Davidic maskil

1 The fool has said in his heart “there is no God.”
They are broken, and have done abhorrent injustice.
There is no one who does good.

2 God has looked down from heaven
on the children of Adam.

To see if there are any with prudence,
any who seek God.

3 Everyone has turned.
Together they have become morally corrupt.
None do good.
Not even one!

4 Do the troublemakers not know?
Those who eat up my people like eating bread,
and have not called on God.

5 There they are absolutely terrified when there is nothing to fear,
for God has scattered the bones of the one who besieged you.
You put them to shame.
Because God has rejected them.

6 If only Israel's salvation would come from Zion.
When God returns the captives of His people
Jacob will rejoice,
Israel will be glad.

To the head musician, on strings, a Davidic maskil.

1 Hear my prayer, God,
and do not hide from my plea.

2 Listen to me and answer me.
I am restless in my complaint and I mutter
3 because of the enemy's voice,
because of the presence of the wicked man's oppression.
For they drop trouble on me,
and in rage they hate me.
4 My heart is spinning inside me
and the terrors of death have fallen on me
5 Fear and trembling have come inside me
And horror has overcome me.

6 And I said "If only wings like a dove's were given to me,
Then I would fly away and stay there!"

7 Look, I would wander far away

I would live in the wilderness

8 I would rush to my hiding place

away from the rushing wind,

away from the tempest.

Selah

9 Engulf, Lord!

Divide their tongues!

For I have seen Violence and Strife in the city

10 Day and night they walk around on the walls

and Wickedness and Toil are in the midst of it.

11 Destruction is in the middle

and Oppression and Deceit aren't leaving.

12 For it wasn't an enemy who reproached me,
or I could have handled it.

Nor was it a hater who rose up against me,

Then I would have hid myself from him.

13 But you are a man like my equal

My dear friend, one I know well

14 We who had a sweet friendship

Who walked in God's house among the crowd

15 May death deceitfully overtake them!

May they go down to Sheol alive!

For Evil is in their homes,

living among them

16 I will call on God
and Yahweh will save me.
17 Evening and morning and mid day,
I will complain and I will holler
and he will hear my voice.
18 He redeems my soul in peace from my battle
although many have risen against me.
19 God will hear and afflict them,
the One who was enthroned long ago,

Selah

Since he is unchanging
and does not fear God,
20 he has swung his fists
at one who was at peace.
He has broken his covenant.
21 He spread the words of his mouth like butter
but warfare was in his heart.
His words were smoother than oil
but they were drawn swords.

22 Dump your burdens on Yahweh
and he will provide.
He will never allow the righteous to lose their balance
23 But you, God, you will bring them down to the pit of destruction
Men of blood and deceit won't live out half their days
But I will trust in You.

Ps 62

To the head musician, according to Jeduthun, a Davidic song

1 My soul quietly waits for God alone,
my salvation comes from him.

2 He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I won't be severely shaken.

3 How long will you threaten a man?
How long will you all attack him
like a crumbling wall,
like a battered fence?

4 From his high position
they suggest to throw him down.

They delight in lies.

They bless with their mouth
but in their hearts they curse.

Selah

5 It's only for God that my soul will calm down
for my hope is from Him.

6 He alone is my rock and my salvation,
my fortress; I won't be severely shaken.

7 In God is my salvation and my glory,
the rock of my strength.

My refuge is in God.

8 Trust in him at all times.

People, pour out your hearts before him.

God is our own refuge.

Selah

9 The children of Adam are just a mere vapor.

The children of man are a lie

Weighed on the scales they are altogether less than a vapor.

10 Don't trust in oppression or in robbery.

Don't vainly trust in strength;

if it increases, don't be heart-set.

11 God has spoken once;

I have heard this twice:

Strength is from God,

12 and faithful love is yours, Lord.

For you repay a man according to his work.

Ps 64

To the head musician, a Davidic song

1 Hear, God, my voice in my complaint:
Keep my life from the enemy's terror.

2 Hide me from the secret counsel of evildoers,
from the throng of those who commit injustice.

3 Who sharpen their tongue like a sword.
They bend an arrow of bitter words

4 to shoot from concealment at the guiltless.

Suddenly they shoot but don't fear.

5 They bolster themselves for evil words.

They talk about hiding traps
and say "who can see them?"

6 They seek out malice:

"We have finished a diligent search"

So each man's inner thoughts and heart are deep

7 But God will shoot an arrow.

Suddenly they will be wounded.

8 He will cause them to stumble over their own tongues

All who see will flee.

9 And everybody will fear,
and declare what God has done,
and consider what he has done.

10 The righteous will celebrate in Yahweh
and will seek refuge in him
and the upright in heart will praise.

Ps 69

To the head musician, to the tune of "Lilly." Davidic

1 Save me, God, for the waters have come up to my neck!

2 I'm sinking into the muddy depths,
and there is no foothold.

I've entered the deep end
and the floodwaters flow over me.

3 I'm sick of crying out,
my throat is parched.

My eyes stopped working
from waiting for my God.

4 More numerous than the hairs on my head
are those who hate me without cause;

my deceitful enemies are numerous.

That which I didn't steal,
must I now repay?

5 God, you yourself know my foolishness,
and my guilt is not hidden from you.

6 Don't let those who hope in you be ashamed because of me,
oh Yahweh of armies.

Don't let those who seek you be dishonored,
oh God of Israel.

7 For your sake I have carried this reproach;
shame has covered my face.

8 I have become estranged from my brothers,
and am unfamiliar to the children of my mother,

9 because of the zeal for your house that has consumed me
and the shame of those who taunt me that has fallen on me.

10 And when I and my soul wept while fasting,
it became my reproach.

11 And when I gave up clothes for sackcloth,
I became a proverb to them.

12 Those who sit in the gates talk about me;
I am the song of drunkards

13 As for me, my prayer is to You, Yahweh:
at the best time, God,

in your great faithful love,
answer me in with true salvation.

14 Rescue me from the muck,

and don't let me sink.

Rescue me from my haters
and from the watery depths.

15 Don't let the floodwaters flow over me
and don't let the deep swallow me
and don't let the pit close its mouth over me.

16 Answer me, Yahweh
for your faithful love is good.
According to your great compassion
turn to me.

17 Do not hide your face from your servant
for I am in trouble.
Answer quickly!

18 Draw near to redeem my soul,
rescue me from my enemies.

19 You yourself know my reproach, my insult,
and my disgrace before all my adversaries.

20 My reproach has broken my heart
and I am sick
so I hoped for sympathy but there was none
and comforters but I didn't find any.

21 Then they gave me bitter food for my scraps
and in my thirst they made me drink vinegar.

22 May the table they set be a trap
and their peace be a snare.

23 May their eyes go dim so they can't see
and their loins constantly shake.

24 Pour out on them your indignation,
and let your burning anger overtake them.

25 May their camp deserted;
may no one dwell in their tents.

26 For they persecute whom you have struck,
and on the one you pierced they add pain.

27 Lay iniquity on their iniquity,
and don't let them enter into your righteousness.

28 Let them be wiped out from the book of the living,
and not be recorded among the righteous.

29 But I am oppressed and in pain
Let your salvation, God, lift me up.

30 I will praise God's name through song
I will make him great in a thanksgiving song.
31 And it will please Yahweh more than an ox
or a bull with horns and hooves.
32 May the oppressed see and party;
those who seek God, may your hearts live.
33 For you hear the oppressed, Yahweh
And you don't look down on the prisoner.
34 Let them praise him: heaven and earth,
the sea and all that teems in it.
35 For, God, he will save Zion
and he will build the cities of Judah
and they will live there and own it
36 His servants descendants will inherit it,
and those who love his name will dwell in it.

Ps 70

To the head musician. Davidic. A memorial.

1 God, save me!

Yahweh, hurry to help me!

2 May those who shame me be ashamed,
may those who seek my life retreat back,
may those who delight in my adversity be dishonored.

3 May they turn back because of their shame,
those who say "Aha! Aha!"

4 May those who seek you be delighted and party in you!
And may those who love your salvation constantly say "God is great!"

5 But I am oppressed and poor.

God, hurry to me.

You are my helper and my deliverer.

Yahweh, don't delay!

Ps 71

1 In you, Yahweh, I take refuge.
Don't ever let me be ashamed.
2 In your righteousness find me and save me,
bend your ear to me and save me.
3 Be to me a rock of habitation
to which I can always go.
You have issued the command to save me
for you are my rock and mountain fortress.
4 My God, save me from the hand of evil
from the palm of the unjust and the oppressor

5 For you are my hope, Lord
Yahweh, my trust from my youth.
6 On you I have leaned from the womb,
from my mother's womb you took me;
my praise is always for you.
7 I am a bad omen to many
but you are my fortified shelter
8 My mouth is full of your praise,
your honor all day.

9 Don't throw me out in my old age,
when my strength is spent, don't forsake me.
10 For my enemies talk about me,
and those who seek my life plot together
11 saying, "God has abandoned him.
Let's hunt him down and seize him
since no one will save him."

12 God, don't be far from me,
my God, hurry to help me.
13 Let the adversaries of my soul be put to shame, finished,
may they who sought my pain be wrapped in disgrace and insult.

14 But I will constantly hope
and add to your praises.
15 My mouth will retell your righteousness,
every day of your deliverance,
for I can't comprehend their number.
16 I will arrive with the mighty deeds of Lord Yahweh
I will remind them of your righteousness, yours alone.
17 God, you have taught me from youth

Even now I preach about your wonderful acts.

18 Now even in old age and grey hair
God, don't forsake me,
until I preach your might to this generation,
to all who come, your strength.

19 And your righteousness, God, is up to the heavens
You do great things—who is like you?

20 You who have made me see much need and evil,
you will revive me again;
from the depths of the earth,
you will return me.

21 Multiply my greatness
and comfort me again.

22 I will also praise you with a harp
I will sing to you your truth, God;
I will sing praise to you with a lyre,
Holy One of Israel

23 My lips will shout out
for I will sing to you,
along with my soul which you redeemed

24 My tongue will also talk about your righteousness all day long
for they are disgraced, for they are ashamed,
those who sought my pain.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Anderson, George W. "Enemies and Evildoers in the Book of Psalms." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* 48 (1965): 18-29.
- Alter, Robert. *The book of Psalms: a translation with commentary*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2007.
- Baglyos, Paul A. "Lament in the Liturgy of the Rural Church: An Appeal for Recovery." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 36, no. 4 (August 1, 2009).
- Bakon, Shimon. "Suffering: three biblical views." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (July 1, 2002): 183-190.
- Bland, Dave. 1980. "Exegesis of Psalm 62." *Restoration Quarterly* 23, no. 2: 82-95.
- Boase, Elizabeth. 2008. "Constructing meaning in the face of suffering: theodicy in Lamentations." *Vetus Testamentum* 58, no. 4-5: 449-468.
- Broyles, Craig C. *Psalms*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999.
- Brueggemann, Walter, and Patrick D. Miller. *The Psalms and the Life of Faith*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995.
- Carson, D. A.. *How Long, O Lord?: Reflections on Suffering and Evil*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Book House, 1990.
- Brueggemann, Walter. 'Theodicy in a Social Dimension', *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 33 (1985).
- Brueggemann, Walter. *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1984.
- Bullock, C. Hassell. *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2001.
- Caldwell, Daniel Pettus. "An Investigation of the Enemy in the Psalms of Lament." Order No. 9325883, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 1993.
- Croft, Steven J. L. *The Identity of the Individual in the Psalms*. Sheffield: JSOT, 1987.
- Dalglis, Edward R. 1984. "The use of the Book of Psalms in the New Testament." *Southwestern Journal Of Theology* 27, no. 1: 25-39.

- Delitzsch, Franz, and Francis Bolton. *Biblical Commentary on the Psalms*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1949.
- Futato, Mark David, and David M. Howard. *Interpreting the Psalms: An Exegetical Handbook*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2007.
- Goldingay, John. *Psalms Vol. 2, Vol. 2*. Psalms. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Grogan, Geoffrey. *Psalms*. Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008.
- Gunkel, Hermann. *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967.
- Hill, Andrew E., and John H. Walton. *A Survey of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1991.
- Hobbs, T. R.. "The Enemy in the Psalms" *Biblical Theology Bulletin*. 21, Issue 1, (1991): 30.
- Holladay, William Lee. *The Psalms Through Three Thousand Years: Prayerbook of a Cloud of Witnesses*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993.
- Jipp, Joshua W. 2010. "Luke's scriptural suffering messiah: a search for precedent, a search for identity." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 72, no. 2: 255-274.
- Johnston, Philip, and David G. Firth. *Interpreting the Psalms: Issues and Approaches*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Kidner, Derek. *Psalms 1-72: An Introduction and Commentary on Books I and II of the Psalms*. London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973.
- Kraus, Hans-Joachim, and Keith R. Crim. *Theology of the Psalms*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1986.
- Kushner, Harold S. 1979. "Why do the righteous suffer : notes toward a theology of tragedy." *Judaism* 28, no. 3: 316-323.
- La Sor, William Sanford, David Allan Hubbard, and Frederic William Bush. *Old Testament Survey: The Message, Form, and Background of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 1982.
- Lewis, C. S. *Reflections on the Psalms*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1958.
- Mays, James Luther. *Psalms*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994.

- McEwen, Alastair. "The Suffering of God's Servants in the Psalms." *Vox Reformata* 67 (2002): 3-23.
- Melvin, David P. 2011. "Why does the way of the wicked prosper? human and divine suffering in Jeremiah 11:18-12:13 and the problem of evil." *Evangelical Quarterly* 83, no. 2: 99-106.
- Miller, P. D.. "Trouble and woe : interpreting the biblical laments" *Interpretation*. 37, (1983): 32-45.
- Mowinckel, Sigmund. *The Psalms in Israel's worship*. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2004.
- Nowell, Irene. *Pleading, Cursing, Praising: Conversing with God Through the Psalms*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2013.
- Olshausen, J. *Die Psalmen*. Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1853.
- Paton, Lewis Bayles. 1927. "The problem of suffering in the Pre-Exilic prophets." *Journal Of Biblical Literature* 46, no. 1-2: 111-131.
- Perowne, J. J. Stewart. *The Book of Psalms*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan Pub. House, 1976.
- Potgieter, J. Henk. 2013. "The Profile of the Rich Antagonist and the Pious Protagonist in Psalm 52 : Original Research". *HTS : Theological Studies*. 69, no. 1: 1-7.
- Rogerson, J. W., and J. W. McKay. *Psalms 51-100*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977.
- Schaefer, Konrad, and David W. Cotter. *Psalms*. Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2001.
- Spurgeon, C. H. *Psalms*. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Books, 1993.
- Tate, Marvin E. *Psalms. 51-100 51-100*. Dallas, Tex: Word Books, 1990.
- Terrien, Samuel L. *The Psalms: Strophic Structure and Theological Commentary*. Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub, 2003.
- Thomas, H. A. "SUFFERING." in Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets. Mark J. Boda and J. G. McConville Ed. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2012.
- Webster, Brian L., and David R. Beach. "The Place of Lament in the Christian life". *Bibliotheca Sacra*. 164:656 (Oct 2007): 388-403.
- Weiser, Artur. *The Psalms: A Commentary*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962.

- Wells, C. Richard, and Ray Van Neste. *Forgotten Songs: Reclaiming the Psalms for Christian Worship*. Nashville: B&H Academic, 2012.
- Westermann, C.. "Role of the lament in the theology of the Old Testament" *Interpretation*. 28, (1974): 20-38.
- Westermann, Claus. *The Psalms: structure, content & message*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Pub. House, 1980.
- Westermann, C., Keith R. Crim, and Richard N. Soulen. *Praise and Lament in the Psalms*. Atlanta, Ga: J. Knox Press, 1981.
- Wilcock, Michael. *The Message of Psalms 1-72: Songs for the People of God*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001.
- Wiles, John Keating. "The 'Enemy' in Israelite Wisdom Literature." PhD Diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1982.
- Wilson, Gerald Henry. *Psalms: From Biblical Text-- to Contemporary Life*. Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2002.