

Summer in the Psalms: Threatening Waters

Psalm 69
ABC 8/21/22

Ever felt like you're treading water, struggling to keep your head above it? In these situations, when you feel like you're drowning, where do you go? Ps 69 tells us. It reveals a man who'd been wronged & is in crisis mode. The waters of discouragement threaten his life. His misfortune comes from his enemies, who hate him without reason & want to destroy him. Even his family turns from him. Why such personal catastrophe? Rather than his own sin, the source of his trouble comes from advocating God's cause. He shares the reproaches that are aimed at God & His house. In this psalm, the suffering is distressing, the praise strong, the curses severe, & the anticipations of Jesus are detailed. While this psalm arises out of personal crisis, it's also prophetic. Vss throughout it find their fulfillment in Jesus. There are other allusions to this psalm in the NT as well. This psalm needs to be read, not only in the immediate context of the author, but also with an eye for passages pointing to Jesus' own experiences. We're going to read it through, touch on it, explore its curses, & see how it points to Jesus. **Ps 69:1-36**

1. The Psalm A. Cry for Help The psalmist begins by calling upon God for deliverance: **Save me, O God**. That's the only request in the 1st 5 vss. The reason for this cry is because **waters** are rising his footing is giving way. He's **weary with his crying**. His **throat is parched** & his **eyes fail** as he waits for his God. He has enemies: **those who hate him without a cause** (4). These opponents are vast, **more than the hairs of his head**, & **powerful** & numerous. But they're unjust in their attack. They are **wrongfully my enemies**. Nothing in Scripture tells God's people they won't experience these times. As a matter of fact, as Christians we're to expect suffering in this world. Peter tells us not to **be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you** (1 Pt 4:12). David's in a place we've all been.

B. Confession of Folly (5-12) Tough times come to us all. How do we respond? David confesses his **folly** to God (5). David doesn't claim to be perfect. He admits he's committed wrongs & that God knows it. But the hostilities against him aren't because of those wrongs. He's being falsely accused, but he knows that if someone were looking for things to accuse him of, they could find them. He's

conscious that God knows him better than he knows himself. He doesn't want his life to be a stumbling block to others: **May those who wait for You not be ashamed through me, O Lord GOD of hosts** (6). The parallel clause in vs 6 asks that those who **seek God not be dishonored**. The **folly** the psalmist has experienced has come, not in his relationship to God, but in his relationship to people. He has **borne reproach** for the **sake** of his faith & **dishonor has covered his face** (7). He experiences the rejection of his family. He is **estranged** from his brothers & **an alien** to them. Why this hatred & rejection? Vs 9 gives the positive answer: **For zeal for Your house has consumed me**. The positive reason for rejection is followed by a negative: **& the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me** (9b). He's suffering because he bears God's rejection as his own. In his zeal for God & His house & in his willingness to bear rejection, David weeps & fasts for the restoration of proper worship which brings him further rejection: **It became my reproach** (10b). As a result of all this, he **became a byword** or a proverb **to them**. He was also attacked by **those who sit in the gate** (elders & judges) & was **the song of the drunkards** (12). He's the subject of coarse humor & public rejection. His signs of humility & repentance make him a laughingstock rather than bringing God's people to repentance.

C. Cry for Deliverance In vss 13-18 he returns to the cry & themes of vss 1-4. In the crisis David calls out, **my prayer is to You** (13). His expectation is that God will answer **at an acceptable time** of God's choosing, not his. We want God to answer as fast as Google does. Often, however, He doesn't. David doesn't presume upon God. In God's time the answer will come. The basis for this confidence is the **greatness of Your lovingkindness** (13) or the **multitude of Your mercy** (NKJV). God will be true to His commitment to Israel & will keep His covenant. David says, **Answer me with Your saving truth** (13). God's **truth** is His faithfulness, never breaking a promise. His salvation is His deliverance or rescue. David's petition is rooted in the character of God.

So far we have no specific petition from David yet. We've got the general cry, **Save me**, in vs 1. Now, in vss 13-18 the petitions begin to roll.¹ *Answer me. Deliver me. Don't let me sink. Deliver me from my foes. Don't let the water overflow me. Don't let the deep swallow me. Don't let the pit*

¹ Tremper Longman III, *Psalms: An Introduction & Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 15-16, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, p 264

devour me. Answer me. Turn to me. Don't hide Your face. Answer me quickly. Draw near. Redeem my soul. Ransom me. What are these requests based on? They're based on who God is. He addresses God as **O LORD, O God, O LORD** (13, 16). He's already called Him **Lord God of hosts & God of Israel**. He prays according to **the greatness of Your lovingkindness... Your saving truth... Your lovingkindness is good; according to the greatness of Your compassion** (13, 16). David's reminding himself of who it is he's praying to. He's praying to the Lord, the Redeemer. He's praying to **the LORD** who is gracious, compassionate, full of lovingkindness, & who is faithful to His promises. It's important for us as we pray to remember that prayer is rooted in God's character.

David asks God for deliverance from the **mire** (14). The positive cry is for God to pull him out of the mud into which he's sinking. This is immediately followed by the negative cry: **Do not let me sink**. This metaphor for rescue now becomes literal: **May I be delivered from my foes** (14). This deliverance will be from the **deep waters** (14) that are rising. That this flood bears the threat of death becomes clear. The cry that the **flood of water** not engulf him & the **deep** not **swallow** him is really a cry that the **pit** not **shut its mouth on** him (15) that is, that he not die & go to the grave. He then asks that God **turn to** him (16). This request is reinforced by its negative opposite: & **do not hide Your face from Your servant** (17). This request for God's attention is based on need: **I am in distress** (17). David wants God **to draw near to His soul, & redeem it** or set it free. He wants deliverance from his enemies' attacks, his family's rejection, & the threat of death over him.

D. My Reproach The depth of David's feelings in vss 19-21 aren't inconsistent with our experience. Not only are these things David experienced, they're the experience of Jesus, & our own experience as well. David's lament continues as he builds his case against his enemies. He reminds God of his **reproach, shame, & dishonor** (19). All of this has resulted from his identifying himself with God's cause & his zeal for God's house. He says, **Reproach has broken my heart**. This causes physical stress as well. **I am so sick** (20). It's the sense of isolation & rejection that hurts so deeply. **I looked for sympathy, but there was none** (20b). No **comforters** could be found. Neither was there any solace in food, because his enemies gave him **gall for food & vinegar to drink** (21). Life wasn't fun. Things were tough. What does he do next?

E. Cry for Judgment (22-28) He invokes curses on his enemies. He devotes 7 vss to calling on God to punish his enemies. Someone may say that whatever use the rest of the psalm may be to Christians today, the imprecations are to be foreign to us. But the NT contradicts this. The imprecations are quoted in the NT. Does this mean we can do this? Doesn't sound too loving, does it? Many Christians believe the NT & the OT are at odds at this point. That in the NT love & forgiveness have replaced this kind of desire for justice. Is that true? All of it is God's Word to us so what do we do with these kind of curses? There are several psalms like this that include curses & judgments against God's enemies. These psalms are often considered problems because Jesus taught us, **love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you** (Lk 6:27–28). Jesus prayed for His enemies on the cross, **Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing** (Lk 23:34). It looks like these psalms are doing the opposite of what Jesus said & did.² How are we to understand this? How should it shape how we think & feel? David prays that these enemies experience the full force of God's judgment & that they not be acquitted. He's not praying for their salvation; he's praying for their damnation. Just because we aren't to take judgment into our own hands doesn't mean we shouldn't want justice to be done or that God won't punish sin eventually. It's significant that Paul, the same author who says, **Do not take revenge.... but leave room for God's wrath**, also quotes verses 22–23 of Ps 69 (Rom 11:9–10) as a prophecy of a judicial blinding of the majority of the people of Israel because of their rejection of Jesus Christ.³ But Ps 69 wasn't a personal vendetta against his enemies. David writes as the anointed of the Lord & writes under inspiration (2 Sam 23:1ff). It's therefore not possible he'd write something unworthy of a Christian. Although David is calling for God's swift vengeance on his enemies, it's significant he's asking God to render judgment & not proposing or even wanting to take vengeance himself. His enemies are God's enemies. David's calls for vindication aren't an individual matter.⁴ These words probably aren't best suited for us to pray for the simple reason that we're so tainted with sin that personal vengeance will creep in. & personal

² W. Robert Godfrey, *Learning to Love the Psalms*, p 114-115

³ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42–106: An Expositional Commentary*, p 580

⁴ Boice, *Psalms*, 2:569

vengeance is never justifiable (Rom 12:17–21). Just because we're not to take judgment into our own hands though, doesn't mean we shouldn't want justice to be done or that God won't punish sin eventually. We can take comfort from this passage knowing that one day the enemies of the Lord, who remain enemies of the Lord, will be judged for their evil treatment of the Lord by their evil contempt for His people. David was seeking justice. Having thought of his own diet of gall & vinegar, he pronounces his opponents' **table** a **snare**, & **their well-being** a **trap**. He calls down illness upon them, asking that **their eyes grow dim** or that they become blind & that **their loins shake continually**, symbolizing the strength of the body. He calls for God's **indignation** to be poured out & His **burning anger** to **overtake** these enemies. The consequences of this vengeance are that **their camp will be desolate**, their tents empty. Both his enemies & their descendants will perish. The call for judgment is again sounded in vs 27: **Add iniquity to their iniquity**. Then the psalmist prays: & **may they not come into Your righteousness**. The alternative to **righteousness** is then set out: **May they be blotted out of the book of life & may they not be recorded with the righteous** (28). This possibly indicates a written register of the righteous (Rev 13:8) or simply one of those who are alive. This call for judgment is offensive to our NT sensibilities. To wish sickness, suffering, death, & even eternal damnation to one's enemies appears mean, hot-headed, vengeful, & vindictive. But we must remember that the psalmist experiences these attacks upon himself as if it were upon God Himself. In calling for God's judgment the psalmist is calling for the vindication of God's name. There's no higher calling than this. Jesus taught us to pray, **hallowed be Your name** (Mt 6:9). Yes, we should pray & work for the conversion of the wicked. But for those who are confirmed in sin (Heb 6:4-6; 1 Jn 5:16), God has promised judgment. Surely it's right to pray for that which God has promised to do. Paul utters such an imprecation in 1 Cor 16:22, **If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed**. We must remember that if we diminish the necessity & righteousness of God's judgment, we diminish the work of Jesus on the cross. & so it was zeal for God that motivated David. He says, *I'm not defending myself; it's You I'm defending*. It's one thing to defend the glory of God & the honor of God & we're to do that. It's entirely something else to hate people personally. What is to be our attitude toward anybody, even our worst enemies? It's

to be one of forgiving love. But, at the same time, we can pray, *Oh God, don't let Your enemies continue to dishonor Your name & take the glory that You are due*. Our attitude toward an enemy is to love them & to pray God would save them. & if God doesn't save them, that God would judge them justly. Yes, we pray for God's glory to be vindicated. Yes, we pray for an end of the unrighteous who curse His name. Yes, we allow God to come in fire & flaming vengeance. Yes, we know the same Jesus who said, **Love your enemies**, said to the Pharisees, **Woe to you** 7x in Mt 23, pronouncing doom upon them. Yes, we know that judicially there will be a judgment. God will act in punishment, but that's for God to do & not us. In our relationships, we're to be characterized by loving our enemies. That'll make us different than everybody else in the world. We must because we're commanded to.

F. Cry for Salvation (29-33) In the psalmist's cry for judgment on his enemies there's no arrogance. He confesses here: **I am afflicted**, *poor, or humble* (29). He's a broken man & **in pain**. His need is for God to lift him & **set him securely on high** (29). With this deliverance there will be song, in which he'll **praise God's name & magnify Him with thanksgiving** (30). To **magnify** God is to make His reputation or honor great through praise. It's to make God seem as He truly is: Magnificent! This worship is more pleasing to the Lord than animal sacrifices such as a **young bull with horns & hoofs** (31). He's not denying the sacrificial system but stressing the importance of the attitude behind the act.

G. Call for Praise Now there's a shift in the tone of the psalm. Up to this point, crisis has been the heartbeat. Suddenly the psalmist shifts to a focus on worship & witness. It's as if the psalmist breaks through to hope & victory. All creation including **the seas & everything that moves in them** is to join in shouts of worship & praise (34). The reason for this is that **God will save Zion**. He will **build the cities of Judah**. This is deliverance for all Israel. The result of the cities' being built is that Israel will live in them & **possess** the land. **The descendants** of God's people, **His servants**, will **inherit** the land. Their descendants will go on & **those who love His name will dwell in it** (36). As God promised Abraham, **I will give to you & to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; & I will be their God** (Gen 17:8).

David's anguished cry is answered & the psalm ends on this victorious note. But this psalm doesn't just apply to David. It's also a...

2. Psalm of Jesus Jesus found solace & direction from this psalm for His own ministry & suffering & the apostles found in this psalm prophetic words concerning Jesus. Ps 69 is the 3rd most quoted Psalm in the NT (following Ps 22 & 110). Christians weren't just whimsically applying this psalm to Jesus after His Resurrection. Long before His Resurrection He'd already applied this psalm to Himself. This cry of a vulnerable, mistreated man isn't only the cry of a believer putting his difficulties into words, but this is the cry of Jesus in the experience of the wrongful suffering which He endured on our behalf. Jesus read this psalm & saw His own mission being lived out in advance.

A. Jesus Cleansing the Temple In Jn 2:13–17 we read about how Jesus drove the sellers out of the temple. Vs 16 tells us, **to those who were selling the doves He said, "Take these things away; stop making My Father's house a place of business."** The disciples saw this passion for God's house, & they hear Jesus call the temple **My Father's house**, & they remember the words of Ps 69:9. **His disciples remembered that it was written, "ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME"** (Jn 2:17). In other words, they see in David's words & actions a foreshadowing of Christ's words & actions.

B. Jesus Hated By His Own In Jn 15:24–25, Jesus is hated by the Jewish leaders just the way David was hated by his own people (Ps 69:8). Here Jesus quotes Ps 69 & says,

If I had not done among them the works which no one else did, they would not have sin; but now they have both seen & hated Me & My Father as well. But *they have done this* to fulfill the word that is written in their Law, 'THEY HATED ME WITHOUT A CAUSE.'

This is a quote from Ps 69:4. Jesus is aware of David's experience & sees it as foreshadowing His own & says, *When David's hated by his adversaries it points to My experience & must be fulfilled in Me.*

C. Jesus Enduring Reproach David says to God, **The reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me** (Ps 69:9). In Rom 15 Paul calls Christians to be patient with the weak & to deny themselves & humbly receive others. He reaches back to Ps 69 & says, **Each of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification. For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME"** (Rom 15:2-3). In other words,

Paul takes the words of David & sees them fulfilled in Jesus. & the thing he focuses on is that Jesus endured the reproaches of men willingly. Paul is saying, *If Christ could bear reproach for God, certainly we could at least bear with one another's weaknesses.* If Christ could bear that reproach for God, &, of course, on our behalf, certainly we can bear with the weaknesses of one another in the church.

D. Jesus' Adversaries Ps 69:22-23 says: **May their table before them become a snare; & when they are in peace, *may it become* a trap. May their eyes grow dim so that they cannot see, & make their loins shake continually.** This prophecy was fulfilled in Rom 11:5-10.

In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to *God's* gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, & the rest were hardened; just as it is written, "GOD GAVE THEM A SPIRIT OF STUPOR, EYES TO SEE NOT & EARS TO HEAR NOT, DOWN TO THIS VERY DAY." & David says, "LET THEIR TABLE BECOME A SNARE & A TRAP, & A STUMBLING BLOCK & A RETRIBUTION TO THEM. LET THEIR EYES BE DARKENED TO SEE NOT, & BEND THEIR BACKS FOREVER."

E. Jesus' Betrayal Ps 69:25 says, **May their camp be desolate; May none dwell in their tents.** This prophecy was fulfilled in Acts 1:20 quotes & applies Ps 69:25 to explain the loss of Judas: '**Let his homestead be made desolate,**' & '**let no one dwell in it & let another man take his office.'**

F. Jesus on the Cross On the cross, in the most important moment in history, Jesus brings His life to a close by intentionally fulfilling Ps 69 in His own experience. Not many verses in the OT are quoted in the NT. Even fewer are quoted more than once. Ps 69:21 is cited or alluded to in each of the 4 gospels in the accounts of Christ's crucifixion (Mt 27:34, 48; Mk 15:23, 36; Lk 23:36; Jn 19:29). The reference in John is most explicit, because John says that Jesus was offered wine vinegar to drink **so that the Scripture would be fulfilled**, an unmistakable reference to this psalm.⁵ According to the gospels, Jesus died fulfilling Ps 69. Jesus explained His utter commitment to the cause of God, even to death, by quoting this psalm.

Ps 69 takes us into Jesus' heart. In this context, too, cannot vss 1-3 be read before the cross? There Jesus cries for deliverance as the waters of death rise & the earth gives way. As He dies He weeps

⁵ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 42-106: An Expository Commentary*, p 578

for us, His throat is dry, & He waits for God. Doesn't vs 7 give us a clue as to what Jesus will suffer in this world? Jesus experienced Ps 69:8, estranged & alienated from his brothers & in Mk 3:31-35 He calls His disciples to the same destiny (Lk 14:26). The references to reproach, shame, dishonor, adversaries, a broken heart, heaviness, & the absence of pity or comfort all paint a vivid picture of Jesus at the cross. It's the very commitment to God's cause that took Him to His final hour. We can be certain that this psalm must have coursed through His mind as His tormentors killed Him. It must have also offered comfort since it ends in a resolution of praise.

It seems that Ps 69 has 2 prongs in the NT. One prong is judgment: the imprecations aren't sinful personal retaliation but prophetic approval of God's just retribution for sin. The other prong is the suffering of God's Anointed. This suffering is endured for God's sake. & the suffering is either the means by which the adversaries are brought to repentance & saved or the means by which they are confirmed in their hardness & condemned.⁶

3. Lessons for Us How shall we think & feel when we read Ps 69 today?

A. God's Word is True When our faith is shaken, we can wonder if everything we read in Scriptures is true & sure. Seeing Jesus in the Psalms reminds us of how faithful God is to not only fulfill prophecy from hundreds of years ago through Jesus, but also that the future prophetic words we read in Scripture are sure to come to pass as well.

B. We Must Love Our Enemies According to Ps 69, judgment is sure to come. It's because we know that judgment is sure, that we can love our enemies & obey Rom 12. **If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord (18-19).** Justice is coming & in the end God will reward those who are faithful. What God says He will do, He will do! Rest in these truths today & keep believing.

C. Approval of God's Judgment There's a divine judgment coming, & on that day all Christians will approve what God does. That is what David's imprecations make plain.

⁶ John Piper, *Pour Out Your Indignation Upon Them*, <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/pour-out-your-indignation-upon-them>

D. Foreshadowing the Ministry of Jesus We should hear David as foreshadowing of the ministry of Jesus. His suffering is a saving & a condemning suffering. For those who accept it as their glory, it will save. For those who are hardened by it, it will condemn. As Paul says,

Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness & tolerance & patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness & unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath & revelation of the righteous judgment of God (Rom 2:4–5).

E. Incentive to Forgive When we read Ps 69, what should we think & feel & do? We don't take the imprecations as encouragements or incentives to curse our enemies. In fact, in Paul's mind the psalm takes us in the exact opposite direction. Paul writes, **For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "THE REPROACHES OF THOSE WHO REPROACHED YOU FELL ON ME"** (Rom 15:3). In other words, forbear & forgive. This isn't because there's no wrath, no punishment, & no judgment in Ps 69. It's precisely because there is judgment. & it isn't our job to execute it. The fact that God will do it & that it's right for Him to do so is the very means by which we're able to follow Jesus in suffering for the sake of others who've wronged us. May God teach us to love the people who hate & curse us. May He teach us to love the people who would harm us, our families, & those we love most dearly. Let Him teach us to hate the sin & the unrighteousness all around us. May He give us a perfect hatred that calls for a righteous day, a righteous Kingdom, with a righteous King who will make things right.

F. Be A People of Faith We're to be a people of faith, & faith-filled people are thanks-filled people; they're grateful that they'll one day have every reason to be grateful. God is at work & therefore we can be thankful in our waters of trouble (1 Thes 5:17–18). This is the kind of faith Hebrews exhorts us to. It's the a faith that emanates from knowing that Jesus has been set on high & therefore, as we look to Him, we're encouraged to run the race set before us (Heb 12:1-2). May we love people who don't love us & so they may say of us, *They must be Christians for no one else can love that like*. May ABC be known as a place where people love with a love that is unearthly, supernatural. May we not retaliate. May we not give back what is due, but may we give

back forgiveness & love. May we love like God loves, like Jesus loves, even those who hate us most.⁷

⁷ John MacArthur, *Love Your Enemies, Part 1*, <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/2225/love-your-enemies-part-1>