

IMPRECATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS IN PSALM 35

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Biblical Theological Seminary, 1978

A THESIS
Submitted to the Faculty of
Biblical Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
MASTER OF SACRED THEOLOGY
Hatfield, Pennsylvania, 19440
May, 1980

Digitized by Ted Hildebrandt and proofed by Dr. Perry Phillips,
Gordon College, MA April, 2007.

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Acknowledgments

Although the final responsibility rests upon the author, without the help and succour of many people this thesis would not have been possible. The library staff of Biblical Theological Seminary was most patient with my long-term borrowing of books for research; the staff of Tenth Presbyterian Church has graciously tolerated my constant presence for study, writing and typing; Richard C. Wolfe, J.D. deciphered and transcribed the manuscript (sic!) into typed form; my professors at Biblical Seminary who have taught me to desire the proper understanding of the Word of God and the true knowledge of its Author; my advisor, Mr. Thomas V. Taylor, who allowed me to go my own way in study and guided in the most gracious way possible; the other members of my advisory committee--Mr. James C. Pakala, who helped with the format of footnotes and bibliographical entries and made many helpful suggestions concerning the body and message of the thesis, and Dr. Robert C. Newman, whose comments and corrections were an invaluable aid in eliminating errors in the text. Special mention must also be made of my family: my daughter, Kiersten, copied and collated the final copies and was understanding of my absence and pre-occupation; my wife, Emilie, has been my constant support, help and encouragement in ways innumerable for these many busy months. Above all, my Lord, Jesus Christ, has strengthened me and given me the perseverance necessary to bring this work to completion. To Him be the praise!

INTRODUCTION

Problem

This thesis seeks to answer the question: How can the psalmist curse his enemies and still claim to be righteous? At times one verse contains both a prayer for their destruction and an assertion of his own righteousness (or at least of his innocence). On what basis does the psalmist write these words? This thesis, by the approach described below, will arrive at a suggested answer for these questions.

It does not attempt to answer the questions of Edwards, Hammond, or Vos.¹ Neither is the larger question of the presence of the imprecatory psalms in Scripture addressed.² The question of this thesis was answered on the basis of one particular text, and extrapolation of the

¹B.B. Edwards, "The Imprecations in the Scriptures," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 1 (February 1844): 97-110. Edwards shows that the presence of imprecations does not negate the doctrine of divine inspiration. Joseph Hammond, "The Vindictive Psalms Vindicated," *The Expositor*, series 1, 3 (1876): 27-47, 101-118, 188-203, 402-471. Hammond demonstrates that the imprecations are comminations (statements of belief), not curses, and pose not ethical problem for the Christian. J.G. Vos, "The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms," *Westminster Theological Journal* 4 (May 1942): 123-138. Vos discusses the ethical implications of the imprecations for Christians and their use by the Church.

² There may be only a fine semantic difference between the problem of the presence of the imprecatory psalms in Scripture and the question of the psalmist's profession of righteousness in the face of his curses. In both cases the presence of the curse raises the question. Therefore, although it is necessary to examine some of the proposed answers to the question of the *presence* of the imprecatory psalms in order to recognize "what has gone before," this thesis will address the problem as it is stated in the paragraph above. A section dealing briefly with the question of the Christian's use of the imprecatory psalms (and of imprecations in general) will be found in the section entitled "New Testament Considerations," pp. 86-89, below.

proposed solution to every curse in either the Psalter or all of the Bible was not considered.

Approach

After a brief introduction to the genre of the individual lament and a statement of the problem in terms of a suggested sub-genre (the imprecatory lament) various attempted solutions are discussed.¹

Psalms 35 is the passage chosen for exegesis and the results of that exegesis were then compared with certain New Testament considerations because of the apparent contradiction between them. The question of the Christian use of these psalms was considered briefly and these conclusions were drawn together to make application to and, hopefully, give understanding to the Church of Jesus Christ our Lord.

¹It will be noticed that although many of the approaches examined quote from and allude to the psalms and even refer to them, this writer did not read one book or article approaching the question from an exegetical base. The only exception to this is a paper: Thomas V. Taylor, "A Short Study in the Problem of Psalm 109." (Elkins Park, Pa.: Taylor Press, n.d.).

I. CLASSIFICATION OF THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS

Form-critical analysis of the psalms of lament

It is "by now a dictum of psalter studies that an investigation of literary patterns is basic to programs in these studies."¹ Thus does J.W. Wevers begin his "Study of the Form Criticism of Individual Complaint Psalms" in which he analyzes the general form-critical approach to the individual psalms of lament. In seeking to discover, therefore, whether or not a class of psalms could be called "imprecatory psalms," we shall use this approach also, especially since most of the psalms traditionally called imprecatory are also commonly called laments (by followers of Gunkel as well as by others).²

Wevers has analyzed the individual complaint (lament) psalm into five components.³ These are: (1) the invocation of the divine name--both אֱלֹהִים or יְהוָה are used, the determining factor is direct address,⁴ (2) the complaint--the reason compelling the psalmist to approach God in

¹J.H. Wevers, "A Study of the Form Criticism of Traditional Complaint Psalms," *Vetus Testamentum* 6 (1956): 80.

²John H. Walton, *Chronological Charts of the Old Testament*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1978), p. 73. Cf. Ian Ross McKenzie Parsons, "Evil Speaking in the Psalms of Lament" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Drew University, 1971).

³Wevers, "A Study," pp. 80f. The components are his but the examples are my own, selected intentionally as explained below.

⁴Psalms 35.1, 17, 22(twice), 23, 24; 55.1, 9; 58.6 (twice); 59.1, 5, 11; 69.1, 16, 29; 83.1(twice), 13; 109.1, 26; 137.7.

this way;¹ (3) the prayer--that which the psalmist wants the Lord to do to his enemy, which may or may not have motivations (reasons why the Lord should answer his prayer) and is in either the imperative or the jussive mood;² (4) either an expression of certainty--the psalmist is now sure that the Lord has heard his cry--or a vow of that which the psalmist will do in thanksgiving for God's gracious intervention (these complete his analysis, since both may be present in the same psalm).³ It is worth noting that the order of the elements in several of the psalms approximates the order given by Wevers.

Brueggeman's analysis differs only slightly:⁴ (1) the address, which establishes the covenantal context of the psalmist's relationship with God and therefore his "right to expect action from God;"⁵ (2) the complaint or lament, which is the psalmist's "expression of anguish or betrayal by God or others;"⁶ (3) the petition, in which the psalmist "requests a solution" from God to the problem; (4) motivations, which are

¹Psalms 35.1a, 3a, 4, 7, 11, 12, 15-16, 17b-c; 55.3, 10-11; 58.2-5; 59.1-4, 6-7; 69.4, 7-9; 83.2-8; 109.2-5; 137.7b.

²Psalms 35.4-6, 8, 19, 25-26; 55.9a,15; 58.6-8; 59.11b-13a; 69.22-28; 83.9-16a,17; 109.6-15,19-20; 137.8-9.

³Psalms 35.9-10; 55.16b, 17b-18a, 23; 59.10; 69.32-36; 109.31.

⁴Walter Brueggemann, "From Hurt to Joy, From Death to Life," *Interpretation* 28 (January 1974): 6-8. Both the form-critical analysis and the examples are his, although some examples could be added from the psalms examined above.

⁵Psalms 4.1; 5.1; 12.1; 16.1; 17.1.

⁶Psalms 6.2; 13.3; 22.14-15; 38.5-6; 39.4ff; 41.11; 48.11.

reasons why God should answer his prayer;¹ (5) the last component of the lament has three elements: the "assurance of having been heard,"² the "singing of praise and expressions of thanksgiving in the congregation because the situation has been transformed,"³ and the "paying of promised vows."⁴ A brief examination of the psalms considered by Wevers's analysis (e.g., Psalms 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 83, 109, 137) shows that these same elements are also present in them.

R.E. Murphy, S.J. has outlined Claus Westermann's approach to the structure of the individual lament psalms.⁵ This form-criticism by Westermann yields seven parts of the individual lament:

- Address and introductory cry
- Complaint (of the form: "my enemies...I/me...you")
- Confidence motif
- Plea ("Hear my prayer/save me")
- Reasons to induce God to act
- Vows to praise
- Motif of certainty of hearing (which blends into factual praise in pleas that are answered).⁶

From the comparison of these three examples with the contents of

¹Brueggemann "From Hurt," pp. 6-8 lists seven basic motivations: appeal to God's reputation (Ps 13.14; 25.11; 57.5); appeal to past action with which He should now be consistent (Ps 22.4f; 143.5); the guilt of the speaker (Ps 25.11; 38.18); the innocence of the speaker (Ps 26.3-7; 35.7; 69.7); a promise of praise (Ps 6.5; 22.22); the helplessness of the speaker (Ps 25.16; 55.18; 69.17; 142.4,6); the trust of the speaker in the Lord (Ps 17.8f; 22.9f; 43.2; 57.1; 71.6).

²Psalms 13.5f; 17.15; 28.6; 69.33.

³Psalms 7.17; 16.9-11; 22.22-31; 35.27f.

⁴Psalms 26.12; 54.6f; 56.12f.

⁵Roland E. Murphy, "A New Classification of Literary Forms in the Psalms," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 21 (1959): 87.

⁶Ibid.

of the Psalter, many psalms are to be classified as individual laments. Mowinckel claims that many psalms which use the "I-form" are to be understood as communal laments in which the king, as representative of the nation, would pray for the nation rather than as an individual praying for his own needs.¹ Gunkel and Soggin² agree that there is no reason other than compelling contextual evidence³ to read the "I-psalms" as communal rather than individual.

From these analyses and Gunkel's statement, it is clear that the psalms generally classified as imprecatory may also be called individual laments or complaint psalms. This is demonstrated by a comparison of the psalms most commonly advanced as imprecatory with these patterns adduced by form criticism.

Fifty-two psalms are commonly listed as either imprecatory or psalms which contain imprecations.⁴ Eight of these are mentioned four

¹Sigmund Mowinckel, *The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2 vols., trans. D.R. Ap-Thomas (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 2:39.

²Hermann Gunkel, *The Psalms: A Form-Critical Introduction*, trans. T.M. Horner (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), p. 15; J. Alberto Soggin, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, in Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 373.

³Gunkel, *The Psalms*, p. 33.

⁴The following statistics reflect a comparison of lists of psalms labelled imprecatory either in part in whole. These lists are found in: Hammond, "The Vindictive Psalms," p. 238; Meredith G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1975), p. 161; Chester K. Lehman, *Biblical Theology*, Vol. I: *Old Testament* (Scottdale, Pa.: Herald Press, 1971), p. 439; Chalmers Martin, "Imprecations in the Psalms," in *Classical Evangelical Essays on Old Testament Interpretation*, ed. Walter C. Kaiser (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1976), pp. 113ff; Charles F. Kent and Frank K. Sanders, ed., *The Messages of the Bible*, 12 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1904). Vol. 5: *The Messages of the Psalmists*, by John Edgar McFadyen, p. 178; R.H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), p. 638; Vos, "The Ethical Problem," p. 123; "The Imprecatory Psalms," *Presbyterian Quarterly Review* 9 (April 1861):

times or more:¹ Psalms 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 83, 109 and 137. These psalms (with the possible exception of Psalm 137), because of their relatively close adherence to the form-critical analysis of the individual lament, as well as the common element of the severity of their imprecations, can be considered a class of psalm literature--the sub-genre of the imprecatory laments.

Both Martin and Mennenga say that we should speak only of "the imprecations in the psalms"² because they are so scattered in nature (even throughout the entire Bible), but in order to consider the question of this thesis a particular group of psalms is necessary (and easier) to work with instead of a mass of unconnected verses.³

The line of demarcation between these psalms and other psalms with some or most of these elements, however, is the relative severity of the imprecations contained within these eight psalms.⁴ We will thus consider them a sub-type of the larger type of laments.

p. 575. Also: H. Osgood, "Dashing the Little Ones Against the Rock," *Princeton Theological Review* 1 (July 1903): 213; Edward A. Park, "The Imprecatory Psalms Viewed in Light of the Southern Rebellion," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 19 (January 1862): 165.

¹Four times among these ten authors who come from extremely diverse theological backgrounds.

²Martin, "Imprecations," p. 113. Cf. Mennenga, "The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms," Th.M. thesis (Westminster Theological Seminary, 1959), p. 4.

³Table One shows the consistent adherence of these psalms to this form-critical pattern.

⁴Admittedly a subjective criterion, but there is a vast difference between, e.g., Psalm 5.10 and 35.1-8 or between Psalm 10.12-15 and 55.5,15. This consideration and their common classification as imprecatory psalms help to decide the members of this sub-genre.

Definition of the imprecatory laments

What, then, is the definition of an imprecatory lament? Wevers tells us that there are three types of complaint psalms: (1) the psalmist finds himself falsely accused and is thus protesting his innocence; (2) the psalmist is seeking to cause the curses or actions of his enemies to fall upon their own heads; (3) the psalmist is sick with an illness from his enemies by means of magical curses or from the Lord as punishment for his sin.¹ Westermann says that the basic attitudes of man to God must be the determining factor because they reflect the *sitz im leben* of the psalm.² Oehler says that these psalms relate to "the contradiction existing between the moral worth of an individual and his external circumstances."³ Park defines them as those psalms which "contain a wish or even willingness that moral agents be chastised or punished; and also those which express gratitude for the past afflictive event, or even submission to it."⁴ These definitions, however, all erect boundaries that are too broad to refer only, or even principally, to our group of psalms. On the basis of their general form and of their content within that general form, we define them as laments (of the individual) which contain within them imprecations of extraordinary degree--the destruction or annihilation of the enemies of the psalmist, as well as his own

¹Wevers, "A Study," p. 88.

²Murphy, "A New Classification," p. 87.

³Gustave Friedrich Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament*, rev. ed., trans. George E. Day (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 558. This, however, could encompass all laments.

⁴Park, "The Imprecatory Psalms," p. 165.

(possibly tacit) claim to a right standing before God.¹

The problem of the imprecatory laments

The problem that becomes apparent upon even a casual reading of these psalms is the paradox between the curses rained down on the enemies by the psalmist and his constant claim of righteousness, innocence, or both.² This is the problem which this thesis addresses: How can the psalmist curse his enemies and still claim to be righteous? It is obvious that the psalmist does this--what is his basis for doing it? In order to answer this question Psalm 35 will be exegeted, which exegesis constitutes the third chapter of this thesis.

¹This is a working definition and is open to change and revision if that should prove necessary.

²Cf. Psalm 35, imprecations: vv 4-6, 8, 19, 25-26; protestation of innocence: vv 7a α , b α , 11-14, 27a β . Psalm 55, imprecations: vv 9a, 15; protestation of innocence: vv 14, 20a, 22b. Psalm 58, imprecations: vv protestation of innocence: v 10a(?). Psalm 59, imprecations: vv 11b-13a; protestation of innocence: vv 3c, 4a α . Psalm 69, imprecations: vv 22-28; protestation of innocence: v 4. Psalm 109, imprecations: vv 6-15, 19-20; protestation of innocence: 2b, 3b β , 4a α , 4b.

II. SCHOOLS OF INTERPRETATION OF THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS

Introduction

There are as many different approaches to the problem of the presence of the imprecatory psalms in the Bible as there are writers on the subject. We will consider seven basic varieties of approaches which have been or are being currently suggested by various writers.¹

Imprecation as quotation

Two older authors argue against this interpretation, which says that the imprecations in the psalms are quotations by the psalmist of the curses of his enemies against him.² Hammond claims that Psalm 69.27-28 is a "probable quote because of verse twenty-six,"³ but this is not necessary, and is only an isolated case. It seems that McFadyen is correct when he says that this approach only serves to illustrate the lengths gone to reach a desired conclusion.⁴ At any rate, this view is not held as a viable option today.

Imprecation as prophecy

A more common view of the imprecations is that they consist of

¹It will be noted that several names arise under different theories. Few men attempted to use only one theory to explain the presence of the imprecations. Most depended upon several in various combinations, perhaps realizing the truth of Eccl. 4.12b.

²Hammond, "The Vindictive Psalms," p. 28; McFadyen, *The Messages*, 5: 176.

³Hammond, *ibid.*

⁴McFadyen, *The Messages*, 5: 176.

prophecy, not petition. Thus the moral problem disappears because the psalmist only predicts the result of his enemies' sins against him; he does not seek it. All of the Old Testament literary prophets do this without hesitation and are not questioned. If this is the case in these psalms, the imprecations become a moral force for good--a warning to sinners to compel their repentance. Thus Oehler says that in the imprecatory psalms "the judgment of God is simply announced,"¹ and DeWitt that David here acts as a prophet--all men characterized by these sins must and will be judged.² Although he claims that there is "no reason for the passion of the Psalmist here," McFadyen states that the ambiguity of the Hebrew imperfect tense "allows them to be interpreted as predictions,"³ and Davies says that the "imperfect is used in several of the passages, and they cannot be made optatives without violence to the text." Davies also says that they are not "wishes or prayers that such calamities should overtake their enemies" (Cf. Psalm 137.8,9; Isaiah 13.16).⁴

There are several problems with this view. First, even if they are interpreted as predictions, most of the imprecations are not explicable in this way because they consist of "actual 'proper' prayers

¹Oehler, *Theology*, p. 558.

²John DeWitt, *The Psalms: A New Translation with Introductory Essay and Notes* (New York: Anson D.F. Randolph, 1891), p. xvi. That this is an historic view of the Christian Church can be seen in that Augustine saw some of them as "prophecies or predictions of doom, not prayer or petition for that doom." Philip Schaff, gen. ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, 14 vols. (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1888), Vol. 3: *Expositions of the Book of Psalms*, by Augustine, p. 308.

³McFadyen, *Messages*, p. 176.

⁴W.W. Davies, "The Imprecatory Psalms," *The Old and New Testament Student* 14 (March 1892): 155.

addressed to God." Therefore this explanation is "contrary to the language of the psalms themselves."¹ Second, even if certain passages are rendered by the future, others, in the imperative, remain.² Driver says that the jussive is used "to express an entreaty or request. . . and in particular blessings or imprecations,"³ and Gesenius adds that the optative is (commonly) a combination of the jussive with .⁴ For these reasons this explanation is rejected as inadequate. A more accurate approach of this type is found in Delitzsch's commentary on the Psalms. He explains that condemnation for eternity reflects the prophetic spirit⁵ which is (in the instance of Psalm 109) the Old Testament type being raised beyond David to New Testament fulfillment in Judas Iscariot.⁶ Even if this were appropriate at some points it does not do justice to the nature of the imprecations, because not every imprecation can be so raised.

Imprecation as moral indignation

This approach is a combination of two--the imprecations as moral indignation and as personal desires for vindication. These both arise from a certain perception of human nature and so are grouped together.

¹Vos, "The Ethical Problem," p. 126.

²Edwards, "The Imprecations," p. 100 (e.g., Ps. 5.10; 9.21; 17.13; 55.9; 59.13; 69.23 as listed in Mennega, "The Ethical Problem," p. 30).

³S.R. Driver, *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1881), p. 65.

⁴Kautzsch, E., ed., *Gesenius's Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd ed., trans. A.E. Cowley (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1910), p. 321.

⁵Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 3 vols., (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1867), 1:75.

⁶*Ibid.*, 3:177.

DeWitt expresses this viewpoint well, if somewhat wryly by saying, "If the critics of the imprecations would have enemies like David, they might not be so hard on him."¹ Mickelsen calls the imprecations:

...poetic expressions of individuals who were incensed at the tyranny of evil, yet whose attitude towards retribution is so colored by their sense of being wronged or of the blasphemy committed that they speak out in language far removed from the teaching that one should leave judgment to God, or from Jesus' statements on the treatment of enemies.²

C.S. Lewis's approach to the imprecations falls into this category--he saw that "the reaction of the Psalmist to injury, though profoundly natural, is profoundly wrong,"³ and thought that they arise from a confusion on the part of the psalmist between his desire for justice and desire for revenge.⁴ Hammond's comment on this approach--that its proponents tell us that the inspiration of these verses is limited to their having been recorded in Scripture⁵--is also reflected in Lewis when he tells us that we must not think that "because it comes in the Bible, all this vindictive hatred must somehow be good and pious."⁶

As Vos points out, the major problem with this approach is that it teaches against the plenary inspiration of Scripture--it acknowledges

¹DeWitt, *The Psalms*, p. xi. Cf. W.O.E. Oesterley, *The Psalms* (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), p. 461: "His physical suffering excuses (to some extent) the severity of these imprecations."

²A. Berkeley Mickelsen, *Interpreting the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), p. 643.

³C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958), p. 26

⁴Ibid., p. 18.

⁵Hammond, "The Vindictive Psalms," p. 38.

⁶Lewis, *Reflections*, p. 22.

inspired recording of words, but not the inspiration of the thoughts and emotions of the writers.¹ This also makes the imprecations "totally the product of human experience and feeling, not of divine inspiration."² Another variety of this approach is that of Edwards, who says that the emotions of indignation, compassion for the injured, and a growing desire for justice arise in all men when they witness gross sin.³ These combine to cause men to seek the good of society in the destruction of the sinner.⁴ That this principle is one implanted within us by our Creator is obvious because it is common to all men.⁵ Being implanted, therefore, it is "as valid as any emotion we may have."⁶

A criticism of Edwards's theory is that there is little place for the dynamic presence of God. Neither is there any attempt to find a resolution to this problem by means of exegesis; he bases his argument on experience which he then universalizes.⁷ For these reasons this approach is inadequate.

Imprecation as cultural phenomena

There are three aspects of this approach: the imprecations as magical curses, as examples of sub-Christian morality, as Oriental hyperbole.

¹Vos, "The Ethical Problem," p. 128.

²Ibid., p. 129.

³Edwards, "The Imprecations," pp. 103f.

⁴Ibid., pp. 105f.

⁵Ibid., p. 108.

⁶Ibid.

⁷That this universalization is a weak prop for his argument can be seen in the reactions of men to any morally evil situation. Some men are not indignant, some men are indignant but powerless (either internally or externally) to act, and some men fit his experience.

Imprecation as magical curse. Both Gunkel and Mowinckel claimed that the imprecations in the psalms developed out of the pagan curses and magical formulae of the countries around them.¹ C.F. Kent says that the imprecatory psalms are a survival of the ancient belief that a curse had a certain potency in itself,² and Oesterly tries to have it both ways by saying that imprecations show the religious superstition of the day, but that Psalm 109 is an example of a magical, and not religious, curse and is therefore full of "exaggerated vindictiveness."³ The curses are an attempt by the psalmist to "boomerang" the effect of something (the curse of his enemies) instigated against him, thereby changing their thrust from vengeance to escape and preservation.⁴

As Robinson notes, however, the word "cursed" (אָרֵר) does not occur in the Psalter, and Pfeiffer says that there is "no reason" to assume sorcerers using spells to attack the psalmist.⁵ When this theory is compared with the warnings of Deuteronomy 18.9-13 and the time of the composition of most of the imprecatory psalms (the early monarchy, when true religion was strongest in Israel), an explanation more consistent with the Scriptural evidence is necessary. When it is seen that

¹Mennega, "The Ethical Problem," pp. 9, 11.

²Charles Foster Kent, *The Student's Old Testament*, 6 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914). Vol. 5: *The Songs, Hymns, and Prayers of the Old Testament*, p. 238.

³Oesterly, *The Psalms*, p. 460, cf. p. 457.

⁴Theodore H. Robinson, *The Poetry of the Old Testament* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1969), pp. 139ff. Cf. also J. Pedersen, *Israel: Its Life and Culture*, 2 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), pp. 449ff for an excellent discussion of "curse" in the ancient Near East.

⁵Robinson, *The Poetry*, pp. 139ff; Pfeiffer, *Introduction*, p. 639.

they are outpourings of the hearts of men to the true God, this explanation totally loses its force--they knew that He was not one who could be coerced by formula or incantation.

Imprecation as sub-Christian morality. The second of these cultural explanations sees the imprecations as pre-Christian and therefore "sub-standard" morally. Oesterly says that Psalm 35, for example, shows an underdeveloped view of God--a low religious standard, although he notes that the psalmist calls on God rather than on his army or friends for vengeance.³ The main thrust of this approach is true--that the Old Testament is of a different time, far removed "temporally and spiritually from the sphere of the New Testament."⁴ This is underscored by the statement that "these imprecations. . . cannot be satisfactorily interpreted without grasping the idea that revelation has been gradual and progressive...and therefore. . . the standard of morality has been gradually but constantly advanced."⁵ Being part of the Old Testament, they "should be interpreted in accordance with this part of the Bible." The Old Testament law ordered retribution, so they should not surprise us.⁶ The most ardent proponent of this type of approach, Rudolf Kittel, says that these psalms are inferior things belonging to the

¹R.H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction*, p. 639.

²Lehman, *Old Testament*, 1:440.

³Oesterly, *The Psalms*, p. 218.

⁴DeWitt, *The Psalms*, p. x.

⁵Davies, "The Imprecatory Psalms," p. 158.

⁶Lehman, *Old Testament*, p. 439.

past--to a primitive stage in the evolution of religious knowledge.¹ It is an offense against the Bible, he says, when their expressions are condoned,² and "it is wrong to expect Christian religious and moral perfection from Israelites."³

As Edwards says, however, we cannot destroy the unity of the two testaments because God is the author of them both. The imprecations cannot, therefore, be reflections of mere pre-Christian morality now abrogated by the teachings of the New Testament.⁴ We also must recognize that the psalmists cannot be excused because they were not Christians.⁵ This view is a direct reflection of the evolutionary theory of the growth of the Israelite religion as outlined by Julius Wellhausen: Judaism underwent religious evolution; her sacred writings underwent the same evolution; the imprecatory psalms are one example of this evolution in the area of morality. This view, like the last, is insufficient because of its theological base and lack of exegetical evidence.⁶

Imprecation as Oriental hyperbole. The third cultural explana-

¹Rudolf Kittel, *The Scientific Study of the Old Testament*, trans. J.D. Hughes (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1910), p. 143.

²Ibid., p. 195.

³Ibid., p. 285.

⁴Edwards, "The Imprecations," p. 101.

⁵Lewis, *Reflections*, p. 26 (cf. Lev. 19.17-18; Ex. 23.4-5; Pr. 24.17).

⁶Although some say that the standard of morality is higher in the New Testament than in the Old, it is not true that the absolute standards of morality change. God is the Law-giver and He does not change. His Law, therefore, although revealed in different ways at different times, is absolute and non-evolutionary in either form or substance.

tion says that the imprecations are the product of the "intense hyberbolic nature of the Semites."¹ Because "feeling of any kind was scarcely thought of as genuine unless it was expressed exaggeratedly,"² and since this feeling was being expressed poetically,³ it is only natural to find such shocking expressions as these in the Old Testament. This approach says, in essence, that the imprecations are not as bad as they sound, but they are writings of men who would get tired and then "explode from exasperated exhaustion."⁴

This puts the psalmist on a level slightly lower than any person who is grumpy or edgy from too little sleep. It also overlooks the literary nature of these compositions which were written, not in the heat of anger of the moment, but after careful thought and reflection.⁵ It is also a rewording of the position of imprecation as moral indignation and is therefore subject to some of the same criticisms.

¹R.K. Gottwald, *A Light to the Nations* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1959), p. 513. Cf. also "The Imprecatory Psalms," *Presbyterian Quarterly Review* 9 (April 1861): 586.

²DeWitt, *The Psalms*, p. xi.

³J. Barton Payne, *Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1962), p. 202.

⁴Gottwald, *A Light*, p. 513.

⁵That these psalms were probably not written at the time of the events which they describe can be seen from the inscriptions of Psalms 56-60 (for example). It is doubtful that David would have been able to feign the madness described in 1 Samuel 21.13-15 and write Psalm 56 at the same time (cf Ps 56.1). It is possible that he wrote Psalm 57 while hiding in the cave from Saul (cf Ps 57.1). David did not stay at his house when he learned of the plot to murder him (cf Ps 58.1). Psalm 60 was probably not written during the campaign against the Arameans. This is not meant to suggest when these psalms *were* written, but only to demonstrate that it is not possible to assign their composition to the time of the events which they (albeit poetically) describe.

Imprecation as philosophy

This approach to the imprecations attempts to explain the ethical problem by saying that the imprecations are not directed toward any real person. There are two varieties of this approach.

The first variety is that of most of the Church Fathers, who saw the enemies against whom the imprecations were written as either the enemies of the psalmist or our own spiritual enemies.¹ We are to understand them as personifications of demonic powers, lusts, or temptations which would ensnare us or conquer us to pull us from God. The psalmist is not morally questionable because every Christian is to hate sin and pray for its destruction. In Psalm 109.6 there is a clear demarcation between the human and the demonic, and when Psalm 109.8-9 is coupled with Acts 1.20 a personal being (Judas Iscariot) is clearly in view.²

The second variety of this approach is that which says that these psalms represent a philosophical wrestling with the problem of evil in the world (Cf. the book of Job). Because they saw suffering and misfortune as visible signs of the wrath of God, the psalmists knew that the righteous should prosper and the wicked perish.³ Whereas Psalm 1 describes the "traditional view,"⁴ the imprecations are the philosophical quests for the reason for the apparent contradiction.⁵ This view falls

¹Hammond, "The Vindictive Psalms," p. 35.

²Vos, "The Ethical Problem," p. 127.

³W.O.E. Oesterly, *A Fresh Approach to the Psalms* (London: Ivor Nicholson and Watson, Ltd., 1937), p. 239.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Hammond, "The Vindictive Psalms," p. 186; Oesterly, *A Fresh Approach*, p. 241.

short of the needed explanation for the same reasons as the view of the Fathers. These psalms do not seem to be the philosophical discussion of an abstract topic. They are the agonized cries of men living in these circumstances with enemies and haters seeking to slander their reputation and destroy their honor or even their lives.

We sense the close relationship between this approach and the next when we consider that the next step in this philosophical process would probably be for the psalmist to call upon God to exercise His rule and judgment to destroy the wicked exactly as is happening here in the imprecatory psalms. The reason that this approach is separated from the following is that the following sees the enemies as personal agents whereas this approach does not.

Imprecation as zeal

The righteousness of God was an axiomatic truth which the psalmists took for granted.¹ The imprecatory psalms are to be seen as expressions of longing of Old Testament saints for the vindication of God's righteousness.² The demand for retribution was, therefore, a means of ensuring the truth of their world view--that God "indeed worked in the trials of men to punish the wicked and restore the righteous."³ The psalmists demanded retribution in the present⁴ because they had no doctrine of a future life and consequently no concept of the final judgment.

¹Oesterly, *A Fresh Approach*, p. 223.

²Martin, "Imprecations," p. 121.

³Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, vol. 1, trans. J.A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961), p. 180.

⁴R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1969), p. 1000.

This is seen in Israel's laws, which were based on a system of temporal rewards and punishments--the highest (most severe) penalty being death.¹ The convergence of these factors--the righteousness of God, the impossibility of an ultimate judgment after death, the failure of events to "harmonize with the postulate of the doctrine of retribution" (i.e., that God would punish the wicked and prosper the righteous)²--leads to the conclusion that the Jews were "bound to pray for those specific temporal punishments which were the sanctions of the Old Testament law."³

Every Jew saw this as a *moral* obligation because if the wicked were to defeat God's people, God Himself is defeated.⁴ The psalmists are seeking the honor of God's kingdom⁵ and the vindication of His name in the sight of the peoples and the nations. The imprecations are the cries of the psalmists for God to vindicate His nature and name, which vindication "may involve as a corollary the vindication of the individual himself."⁶

This approach has much that is commendable--among other things it recognizes the enemies as personal agents, it deals directly with the moral problem and works it out to a straightforward solution. Yet, if it is correct, does it not make the psalms containing imprecations--or at

¹Hammond, "The Vindictive Psalms," pp. 112ff. (Contrast this with the promise of "length of days" as reward for obedience and righteousness. E.g., Dt. 30.20; Ps. 21.4; Pr. 3.2). Cf. also Lehman, *Old Testament*, p. 439.

²Oehler, *Theology*, p. 556.

³Hammond, "The Vindictive Psalms," p. 198.

⁴McFadyen, *The Messages*, p. 178.

⁵Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 1:418.

⁶Payne, *Theology*, p. 202.

least the imprecations themselves--inapplicable for the Christian? Having the doctrine of final judgment, of ultimate retribution or reward, as well as the example and teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, can we any longer consider them to be "useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness:" (2 Timothy 3.16b)? Does this not ultimately yield to the approach which says that the imprecations are the result of a sub-Christian morality--that we, with the more refined teachings of the New Testament, can ignore these verses as inapplicable to us today? For these reasons this view is deficient in its explanation of the imprecations in the psalms.

Imprecation as ethics of the consummation

Within this final and major approach are included three views of the imprecatory psalms which, considered as aspects of one approach, are complementary rather than contradictory or conflicting.

Imprecation as identification. The first of these is closely related to the last view examined (imprecation as zeal). David, being conscious of his identity as the chosen (anointed) of God, saw that sin perpetrated against him was done against Christ as well.¹ Because he thought of himself as being "in Christ," David cried out for vengeance as the souls in Revelation cry out for vengeance.² David, seeing himself as representing Christ, counted his enemies as God's enemies;³ thus the

¹Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 3:177.

²Cornelius Van Til, "Christian Theistic Ethics," (Class syllabus, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1952), p. 85. "They love what Christ loves and hate what Christ hates."

³"The Imprecatory Psalms," pp. 577ff. This conclusion is based on the following points: (1) mingling of piety with maledictions, (2) the psalmist usually refers to the wicked in general, not as personal enemies (e.g., the honor of God and the good of men is sought, not personal

imprecatory psalms express the “awful conditions and deserved rewards of the incorrigible enemies of Christ and His Kingdom.”¹ The psalmist may be seen, therefore, as a type of Christ, “imprecating the impenitent from among his enemies.”²

Imprecation as representation. This identity carries over into a larger sphere when David is seen, not only as a private person, but, because he is the king of the earthly visible aspect of the Kingdom of God, as the representative of God's people.³ The psalmist identifies his enemies with the enemies of God. As such he identifies the course of Israel with the course of the side of righteousness and justice, as symbolic of the great unending conflict.⁴ This is an important step because the psalmist can now call on God to do that which He has promised to do concerning sin.⁵ That this is true can be seen by the many imprecations which can also be found as statements of fact in other psalms.⁶

revenge), (3) David had authority and power over his enemies (Cf. 1 Sa. 24.1-7; 26.6-12)--he was king, (4) several of these psalms are Messianic, thus David is speaking about Christ, (5) cf. the imprecations of Jeremiah (18.21ff) and Paul (2 Ti., 4.14).

¹A. C. Douglass, "The Ethics of the Psalms," in *The Psalms in Worship*, ed. John McNaugher (Pittsburgh: The United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1907), p. 283.

²Moir Dearnley, "Expressions That Seem Contrary to Christ," *Theology* 73 (April 1970): 164. As Davies, "The Imprecatory Psalms," p. 156, "These prayers for judgment upon enemies are in entire harmony with Ps. 2.9."

³Martin, "Imprecations," p. 124.

⁴Lehman, *Old Testament*, p. 439.

⁵Howard Osgood, "Dashing the Little Ones," p. 37. He notes that this is not inconsistent with God's character because of such references as Isaiah 11.4; Matthew 24.41; Galatians 5.12; Hebrews 10.28ff.

⁶Martin, "Imprecations," p. 189. (Cf. Ps. 35.5 with Ps. 1.4; Ps. 58.6 with Ps. 3.7; Ps. 35.8 with Ps. 9.15p Ps. 35.26 with Ps. 6.10). Cf. also Mennega, "The Ethical Problem," pp. 64ff, 70ff, 75ff.

The people pray, in times of trouble, that God will accomplish His vows of protection. Thus, the psalmist is not initiating a curse, but merely praying for the fulfillment of a promise.¹ The imprecations are "governmental psalms; staid, regular, reverential invocations upon the Monarch to wield his own scepter."²

Thus we see that identification with Christ can lead to imprecation as can the identification of one's enemies with the enemies of God. Ultimately, however, this explanation is victim to the same criticism as the approach above entitled "imprecation as zeal." There is posited a gap between the testaments which is unable to be bridged.

Imprecation as Kingdom ethics. After examining this view we will see why the two aspects of imprecation as identification are to be considered parts of this final approach.

Intrusion ethics are the "anticipation in the present age of the ultimate realities of the consummation in the age to come."³ This is to say that at various times it has been not only proper, but morally necessary to use a "pattern of conduct which conforms to the ethics of the consummation." We are confronted with such an occasion in the imprecatory psalms.⁴

Kline's view seems to flow directly from the theistic ethics of

¹Mennega, "The Ethical Problem," pp. 63, 66.

²James A. Reed, "The Imprecatory Psalms," in *The Psalms in Worship*, ed. John McNaugher (Pittsburgh: The United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1907), p. 319.

³Kline, *The Structure*, p. 160.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 162ff. Some other examples of "intrusion ethics" listed by Kline are: the annihilation of the Canaanites, Rahab's lie, the Hebrew midwives (Ex. 1), and Samuel's deception of Saul.

Cornelius Van Til, so a brief presentation of his thought concerning the biblical *summum bonum* is appropriate here.

- (1) The ethical ideal is an absolute.
- (2) The kingdom of God--the ethical ideal is a gift of God.
- (3) Destroying the works of the evil one is an important part of attaining the *summum bonum* (kingdom of God).
- (4) Because the evil one's works continue until the consummation, the ideal or absolute *summum bonum* will never be reached on earth.¹

The important portion of this analysis is (3) Part of the ethical ideal of man is destroying the works of the evil one, which is the negative but unavoidable task of every Christian.² Seen in this light, even the Lord's Prayer seeks the destruction of the wicked when we pray "Thy kingdom come" because His kingdom cannot come without the destruction of the works and systems of the kingdom of Satan.³ Delitzsch states even more strongly that because we desire the advance of the kingdom of God we can desire the destruction of those who oppose it.⁴ The psalmists, thus, pray for that which they know will be true at the consummation.

This view has the force of its several parts because it is precisely the identification of his enemies with the enemies of God and His kingdom that allows the psalmist to pray as he does in this consummatory manner. These psalms become the product of a special revelation to their authors who thereby knew that it was proper for them to pray as it may not be proper for us as Christians to pray.

¹Van Til, "Ethics," pp. 73ff.

²Ibid., p. 82. We begin by destroying evil within ourselves (i.e., sanctification), then within the theocracy, then within the world; p. 86.

³Vos, "The Ethical Problem," p. 138.

⁴Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 1:74.

Therein lies the major problem with this approach to the imprecations: Can something be wrong and yet right? Do ethical standards given as absolutes change because revelation progresses? How are we to tell what is intrusion ethics and what is not? Is there any authority for this interpretation or is it a pattern to be fitted to whatever we cannot explain? It seems that these questions show up the inadequacies of this view.

Having examined these basic approaches to the ethical problem of the imprecatory psalms, we turn to the burden of this thesis which is inextricably bound up with this whole question. The means by which righteousness and imprecation are compatible are at the same time the means by which the ethical problem of the psalms is answered. Rather than base our discussion on purely (or mainly) philosophical and theological considerations, we will examine the texts of a psalm in which the crux of this problem is most clearly seen. In order to do this we will briefly examine the Psalter form-critically in order to select those psalms which are in the sub-genre with which we are concerned and then exegete particular passages as appropriate.

III. A STUDY OF PSALM 35

The Basis For The Selection of a Text

The Reason for Selecting a Text

In order to approach this "problem of the imprecatory laments" exegetically, it is necessary to select a particular passage on which to center the study. Psalm 35 has been selected for three reasons: (1) it is an imprecatory lament, (2) it is a crux passage for this question, (3) it is the clearest example of the proposed solution.

Psalm 35: An Imprecatory Lament

That Psalm 35 is an example of the sub-genre of the imprecatory lament is seen from a brief form-critical analysis of its components. Psalm 35 contains every element of a lament as advanced by various men except the certainty of hearing (which may be present implicitly).

The *vocative* is used by the psalmist in verses 1, 22, and 24 with יְהוָה, in verses 17, 22, 23 with אֱדֹנָי and in verses 23 and 24 with אֱלֹהִים. The *complaint* is developed elaborately (vv. 1aβ-b, 3aβ, 4aβ, 4bβ, 7, 11-12, 15-16, 17bβ, 19, 21, 25-26) as is the *prayer* (vv. 4-6, 8, 19, 25-26). The *confidence motif* (vv. 9-10), *vow to praise* (v. 18), *paying of promised vows* (vv. 17-18; cf. Ps. 22.20-22) and *singing of praise* in the congregation (vv. 27-28) are also present. The special distinguishing feature of the imprecatory laments--the protestation of innocence--is in Psalm 35 also (vv. 7aα, bα, 11-14, 27aβ). On the basis of these particulars this Psalm is an imprecatory lament. That the imprecations are unusually severe can be seen by a brief reading of verses 4-6, 19, 24b-26.

Psalm 35: A Crux Passage

Psalm 35 is a crux passage for this question for several reasons. It is an imprecatory lament. It contains fearful imprecations (e.g., the opposition of the angel of the Lord, destruction, shame, humiliation and dishonor). His own innocence and righteousness are consistently maintained by the psalmist (vv. 7,19,27a). For these Psalm 35 has been chosen for exegesis to answer the burden of this thesis.

Psalm 35: Clear to Unclear

A generally accepted principle of hermeneutics is that our understanding of the clear passages of Scripture is to be the basis on which we interpret the unclear passages. As will be shown below, Psalm 35 is a clear passage with regard to this question. On the basis of our understanding of its truths we can interpret some other Scriptures related to the problem of the imprecatory laments.

For These three reasons Psalm 35 has been selected as the text for exegesis after consideration of some introductory matters and will be the basis of the proposed solution to the question of this thesis.

Introduction to Psalm 35

Authorship of Psalm 35

In order to understand the psalm, it is helpful to be able to identify the author of the psalm. Psalm 35 is one of 122 psalms with titles indicating authorship (Ps. 35.1—**דָּוִד**). The answer to the question of authorship depends therefore on the view taken regarding the psalm titles. This writer accepts the titles of the psalms as part of the original text,¹ and therefore inspired. The author of Psalm 35 is

¹ This is discussed briefly in an Appendix at the end of this thesis.

David, and it is within the range and experience of his life that we may try to discover its setting.

Setting of Psalm 35

It is often alleged, by those who accept Davidic authorship of this psalm, that David was referring to 1 Samuel 24.15-16 when he wrote Psalm 35.¹ This is based on the similarity of language between the two passages.² The content of the psalm is also said to suit David's experience at the time. Doeg and others of Saul's servants were certainly men of low enough moral character to slander David for their own advancement.³ The contents of Psalm 35 could also reflect David's situation in 2 Samuel 16ff--the revolt of Absalom his son. Ahithophel, David's chief advisor (2 Sam. 15.12) joined the revolt, as did many men of the nation (2 Sam. 15.10-13). David was betrayed by those whom he had befriended.

Since there is no clear statement in either the title⁴ or the body of the psalm, the assignment of a specific historical context to it is not possible. It was definitely written by David at or about one of several periods of persecution which he endured. Probably it was written during Saul's persecution of David, but we cannot be dogmatic. Although we will mention David as the author, therefore, reference to either a particular historical situation or person(s) will not be made.

¹J.J. Stewart Perowne, *The Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1976), p. 301; Joseph Addison Alexander, *The Psalms Translated and Explained* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1977), p. 149; Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 1:416.

²Cf. **שָׁמַר** with the Lord as subject (1 Sam. 24.16; Ps. 35.24), with the lord as subject (2 Sam. 24.16; Ps. 35.1), **יְיָ** used of David (1 Sam. 24.16; Ps. 35.23).

³Cf. 1 Sam. 21.7-22.19.

⁴As there is in, e.g., Pss. 51, 52, 54, 56, 57.

A Literal Translation of Psalm 35

- 1 Belonging to David, as author:
Contend, O Lord, with my contenders;
Fight with my fighters.
- 2 Seize a shield and a large shield
And stand up in my help.
- 3 And draw out a spear
And stop up (the way) against my pursuers;
Say to my soul, "Your salvation am I."
- 4 Let them be ashamed and humiliated--the ones seeking my soul;
Let them move away behind and be abashed--those desiring my hurt.
- 5 Let them be as chaff before the wind,
And the angel of the Lord thrusting (them);
- 6 Let their path be dark and slippery,
And the angel of the Lord pursuing them.
- 7 For without cause they hid for me (in) a pit their net;
Without cause they dug for my soul.
- 8 Let destruction come upon him unawares;
And his net which he hid, let it capture him:
With destruction let him fall into it.
- 9 And my soul will rejoice in the Lord,
And it will exult in His salvation:
- 10 All my bones shall say, "Lord, who is like You,
Who delivers the afflicted from the one who is stronger than him,
And the afflicted and the needy from him who tears him away?"
- 11 Malicious witnesses shall rise;
That which I do not know they ask me.
- 12 They repay me evil after good;
Desolation (is) for my soul.
- 13 And I? In their sickness my clothing (was) sackcloth;
I bowed down my soul with fasting;
And my prayer--it returned unto my bosom.
- 14 Like a neighbor, like a brother to me I went about;
As a mourner for a mother--dressed in black I was bowed down.
- 15 But at my Stumbling they rejoiced and gathered themselves together;
Smiters gathered themselves together against me and I did not know;
They tore and were not silent
- 16 With godless mockers (for) a cake; gnashing against me their teeth.
- 17 Lord! How long will You watch?
Cause my soul to turn back from their ravages;
From lions my only one.
- 18 I will praise You in a great congregation;
With a mighty people I will praise You.

- 19 Do not let my false haters rejoice at me;
My haters without cause--do not let them wink an eye
- 20 Because they do not speak peace
And against restful ones of a land words of deceit they conspire.
- 21 And they made their mouths large against me:
They said, "Aha! Aha! Our eyes have seen!"
- 22 You have seen it, Lord, do not be dumb;
Lord, do not be far from me.
- 23 Rouse Yourself and awake for my judgment;
My God and my Lord (Master) for my lawsuit.
- 24 Judge me according to Your righteousness, O Lord my God,
And do not let them rejoice at me.
- 25 Do not let them say in their hearts, "Aha! Our soul!"
Do not let them say, "We have swallowed him up!"
- 26 Let them be ashamed and abashed altogether--the ones seeking my evil;
Let them be clothed (with) shame and ignominy--the ones who are making
themselves great against me.
- 27 Let them give a ringing cry and rejoice--who delight (in) my
righteousness;
And let them say continually, "The Lord be exalted (Who) delights (in)
the peace of His servant."
- 28 And my tongue shall meditate aloud on Thy righteousness;
All the day it shall praise You.

Exegesis of Psalm 35

Strophe I: Verses 1 - 10

Verses 1-3

- 1 *Belonging to David, as author:
Contend, O Lord, with my contenders;
Fight with my fighters.*
- 2 *Seize a shield and a large shield
And stand up in my help.*
- 3 *And draw out a spear
And stop up (the way) against my pursuers;
Say to my soul, "Your salvation am I."*

In verse one of Psalm 35, David calls upon the Lord to strive or contend with his contenders.¹ The verb **רִיב** is commonly used of a court process,² and here the Lord is summoned as David's vindicator in court. **רִיב** is used as a noun for a lawsuit or court contention³ and as a verb of the contention or conducting of a legal case.⁴ Since this is the first word of the psalm it is a clue to the character and theme of the psalm as a whole. David is going to set forth his lament (and its imprecations) under the poetic imagery of a court of law. **לֵאמֹר**, is qal in a verb which is usually niph'al, perhaps to express the simplicity of the psalmist's basic request. In both clauses the meaning is not affected if we take **אֶת**

¹Wevers, "A Study," p. 87, suggests that the invocation of the divine name guarantees the effectiveness of the prayer (Cf. vv. 9,10, but particularly 1,22,24).

²C.A. and E.G. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, in International Critical Commentary (London: T. & T. Clark, 1907-07), p. 302. Cf. Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 307. Their interpretation that this is a decision by force of arms is based on the military terminology in vv. 1-3. It does not, however, seem to take the context of the entire psalm into account.

³Cf. Ex. 23.2, 3, 6; 2 Sam. 15.2, 4; Ho. 4.1; Mi. 6.2.

⁴Cf. Is. 3.13; 57.16; Ps. 103.9; Am. 7.4.

as either the sign of the accusative¹ or the preposition.² The sense of the verse is an application of the *lex talionis* (repayment in accord with their sins). David uses **לְיָב** in parallel with **לְחַם** and the picture of the warrior-hero to emphasize the ferocity of the struggle, not to change the image of the psalm.³

The weaponry of the Lord as heroic warrior⁴ is described as only David, the great warrior-king of Israel, could describe it. He asks the Lord first to defend him. Both the **מִגָּן** (a small shield for the cavalry) and **צִנְהָה** (a large shield for the infantry) were primarily defensive weapons.⁵ Since they both were shields used by different branches of the military, it is obvious that David is not picturing an ordinary warrior. He is using this hyperbole to emphasize his need for total protection. Having armed himself, the Lord is to stand up for David's help. This use of the *beth essentiae*⁶ is referring to the Lord's appearance

¹Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:419. The Septuagint (LXX), by not translating it, seems to understand this as the sign of the accusative.

²Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 307; Cf. Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, s.v. "לְיָב." It is "often with verbs of fighting, striving, contending" as a preposition (Gn. 14.2, 8; Nu. 20.13; Is. 45.9a; Pr. 23.11). This resolves the alleged "conflicting metaphors" advanced to deny the identification of this psalm as a lawsuit. Cf. Herbert Leupold, *An Exposition of the Psalms* (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1959), p. 285; A.F. Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms*, 3 vols., The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: The University Press, 1903), p. 176; J.W. McKay and J.W. Rogerson, *Psalms 1-50*, The Cambridge Bible Commentary on the New English Bible (New York: Cambridge Press, 1977), pp. 160f.

⁴Cf. Ex. 15.3; Dt. 32.41; Ps. 24.9.

⁵John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, 5 vols., trans. J. Andersen (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1963), 1:576n. Cf. 1:64 for offensive qualities of **צִנְהָה**.

⁶Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:420.

"in the capacity" of my help.¹ The Lord is thus more than David's *helper*; He is David's help.

Having described the strength and surety of his defenses, David now calls for primarily offensive weapons. The Lord is to draw his spear and close up the path of pursuit against his pursuers. Since סָגַר is qal imperative of סָגַר ("close, shut up") we supply the word "path" or "way" as its object² and לְקִרְבָּאת is used as preposition ("toward, against").³ This interpretation is supported by the LXX which reads σύγκλεισον ἐξ ἐναντίας . . . Σύγκλεισον, aorist imperative of συγκαλείω, means "to close up, hem in, surround or imprison." The passages where it has this meaning are battle contexts in the Old Testament, so we see that David employs vocabulary that matches the seriousness of his situation. The pursuit is to be stopped. David is defended against injury by the shields of the Lord, but defense alone is not enough.

The second half of verse three is a plea for assurance. David again uses the imperative to explain that which he desires from the Lord, only this is a personal request following the military images in the beginning. The Lord has already been called David's help; now he wants reassurance that He is his salvation as well.⁴ This is simply a guarantee that help will be effectual.

¹Kautzsch, *Grammar*, p. 379.

²This is a simple ellipse of the object of the imperative. Cf. Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 307.

³Cf. 2 Sa. 10.9,10,17; Nu. 21.23; Jg. 7.24; 20.31.

⁴יָשָׁר need not imply spiritual salvation, although the assurance of one may be assign of the other (i.e., having confidence in the Lord that He will indeed deliver one from danger may be a sign of true faith in the heart of an individual).

Verses 4-8

- 4 *Let them be ashamed and humiliated--the ones seeking my soul;
Let them move away behind and be abashed--those desiring my hurt.*
- 5 *Let them be as chaff before the wind,
And the angel of the Lord thrusting (them);*
- 6 *Let, their path be dark and slippery,
And the angel of the Lord pursuing them.*
- 7 *For without cause they hid for me (in) a pit their net;
Without cause they dug for my soul.*
- 8 *Let destruction come upon him unawares;
And his net which he hid, let it capture him:
With destruction let him fall into it.*

In these verses David calls for judgment upon his enemies in the form of the *lex talionis* and protests his own innocence. Although he has asked for action on the Lord's part, verse four is the first indication of the effect that he wants the Lord's intervention to have on his enemies. They are to be ashamed (יִבְשֹׁׁׁ), humiliated (יִכְלְמוּ), turned back (יִסְגּוּ אַחַת) and abashed (יִחַפְּזוּ). This upheaval is the first of a series of imprecations in this psalm.¹ בּוֹשׁ has the concept, not of the emotion of shames, but more of the fact of shame. Shame is the overthrow of one's position, place, pride or plans so that all of one's former advantages are annulled. He prays this prayer, according to Seebass, "not out of revenge. . ." but that the falsehood with which his enemies view his relationship to God may be manifest in their own lives and that their lives may be bereft of that relationship.² He again asks that they be repaid in kind for their treatment of him. In spite of the seriousness of these desires they are less severe than the desires of his enemies to slander and confuse him. His enemies are seeking his soul (נַפְשִׁי) and this verse, as a synthetic parallelism, goes on to explain that the

¹Cf. vv. 5-6,8,19-21, 24b-26.

²*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, revised ed., s.v. "בוֹשׁ," by Horst Seebass (Hereafter *TDOT*).

seeking for his soul entailed at least the thinking of evil thoughts about him. His prayer for their defeat, therefore, is a prayer for physical (סָגַר, v. 3) and mental (v. 4) defeat. He is still remaining within the bounds of the *lex talionis*.

In verse five David's imprecation turns to the essence of his enemies' being—their כְּבוֹד. Although כְּבוֹד does not appear in this verse, the concept of a man's glory, honor or weight (all possible translations of כְּבוֹד) being removed so that he becomes light is a familiar one (Cf. Ps. 1.4).¹ Their dismay and defeat outlined in verse four is intensified in verse five.

Now, for the second time, the phrase מַלְאָךְ יְיָ appears. Who is this person, mentioned twice in this psalm? מַלְאָךְ shares with the Greek ἄγγελος (used here in the LXX) the primary meaning of messenger,² which is extended when referring to the super-human messengers of God--the angels--³ and even to the special angel known as "the angel of the Lord."⁴

¹Although I disagree with Pedersen's view of the imprecation as magic formulae, his point that the curse "eats away at the כְּבוֹד the soul of one who was honored" is valid. Pedersen, *Israel*, 2:452. To become like chaff is to have no weight or metaphorically, no honor or glory of one's own. Cf. Ps. 1 where the wicked, as chaff, have no place in the judgment.

²Cf. Gn. 32.4; Dt. 2.26; Jg. 6.35; Is. 14.32.

³Cf. Gn. 19.1,15; 32.2; 2 Sa. 14.17,20; Ps. 91.11; 103.20.

⁴Since this phrase is used to refer to what are commonly regarded as pre-incarnate appearances of our Lord Jesus, it is important to understand the meaning of the phrase in these verses. Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 303, sees this as an angel of the Lord and specifically states that this is "not the theophanic angel of the ancient tradition. . . but the angel whom Yahweh had given charge over Israel." Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 302, thinks that no particular angel is in view, but Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 1:421, says that this is the angel "who took off Pharaoh's chariot wheels so that they drove them heavily." The evidence of Scripture favors understanding this as an angel of the Lord because we do not see *the* angel of the Lord elsewhere being the agent of personal revenge. For these reasons this angel is any one of his host whom God might choose.

Although some think the figure of **הַמַּלְאָכִים** inappropriate and feel that verses 5b and 6b should be transposed to better suit the meaning,¹ this is not necessary for a clear and proper understanding of the text.² As the wind pushes chaff, so they are to be pushed and thrust by the angel of the Lord. (Although we will continue to refer to the angel of the Lord, this is the angel referred to in this psalm; the term is not being used in its technical sense.)

Verse six intensifies the horror of their plight, both by grammar and language. As Calvin notes, David expresses

. . . his prayer of verse five more clearly in verse six, praying that the angel of the Lord would drive them through dark and slippery places, so that reason and understanding might fail them, and that they not know whither to go, nor what to become, nor have even time given them to draw their breath.³

David intensifies his prayer of verse five as well--thrusting or pushing is a single action, but pursuit (**רָדַף**) is a continual action which has an end in view beyond itself.⁴ David thus emphasizes by the use of **רָדַף** and the intensive form **לִקְחוֹתָם לְלֵקָה** (for **לִקְחוֹתָם**)⁵ the precarious nature of their position, which is his desire for them. Not only are they to be pursued along a slippery path but the way is to be in darkness as well. David again uses a noun to emphasize the concrete nature of the disaster

¹Briggs, *Commentary*, pp. 303f; Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 421; Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 178.

²Even a translation so free with the text as the *New English Bible* does not change the order of this text.

³Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:578.

⁴I.e., the pursuit is the emphasized part of the action, but the end of the chase, the final battle or stand-off, is also in view.

⁵Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:421.

which he desires for them.¹ This is the darkness of the ninth plague of Egypt (Ex. 10.21-23), the destruction or complete covering of all light, which is used here perhaps symbolically of confusion--lack of guidance or direction. David has called upon the Lord to judge his enemies with increasing severity in these verses and now turns to plead his own cause before the Lord--asserting his innocence and the causeless antagonism of his foes.

Verses 7 - 8 contain the first lament section of this psalm.² Twice in verse seven David claims that everything done to him was **חֵנֶם**, or without cause or reason. He had done nothing to deserve their actions toward him either in his actions or his words. They were acting out of self-motivated spite and malice, not legal retaliation for wrongs done (Contrast this with David's own prayer of verse one.). **כִּי** at the beginning of this verse tells us that it contains the reason for his imprecations; this is the first set of accusations as he bears testimony against his foes.

He tells the Lord that they had hidden³ a pit of their net (or *with* their net or *for* their net), and were seeking after his soul (or life). There is no need to transpose **שָׁחַת** to the following line⁴ because the net could be hidden within the pit, or used with it in some way to

¹See **יִשְׁעֲתֶךָ**, v. 3b, above.

²Verses 1-3 are an implicit lament (see **יָרִיבִי**, etc., as representing his foes and their antagonism), but these verses are true laments.

³For the ability of the Hebrew perfect to be represented by English perfect or pluperfect see Kautzsch, *Grammar*, p. 125n.

⁴Contra: Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 304; Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1.422; Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 178; Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 308 (As Perowne notes, the versions support the Masoretic Text).

snare or entrap him; it could even be a net-pit, as Leupold suggests.¹ Verse 7b is parallel with 7a in that it explains the trap as one which will aid the search for David's soul. **חַפֵּר** can have the meaning "to search for" and is used this way in terms of military spies searching out the land,² as well as of an eagle's search for food.³ His foes are searching for his soul (**לְנַפְשִׁי**) and using every means possible (Cf. the pit and the net) to find and trap him. This again, as in verses 1-3, indicates the danger in which David portrays himself and is not necessarily a literal picture. Verse seven, therefore, describes the means by which the enemies hope to accomplish their evil ends, the gratuitous nature of their hate, and David's own claim of righteousness.

Verse eight concludes the first set of imprecations with the wish for destruction and one-for-one recompense for their traps for David. That **שׁוֹאָה** is a stronger word than "confusion"⁴ can be seen from some of its other uses in the Old Testament. Isaiah 47.11 seems to be related to this verse⁵ and uses three words in a synthetic parallelism that builds throughout the verse from **רָעָה** (evil, calamity) and **הִנָּה** (ruin, disaster) to **שׁוֹאָה**, showing the suddenness and terrible nature of the destruction which was to be wreaked upon Babylon. Zephaniah 1.15 is another verse with several words paralleling **שׁוֹאָה**. Speaking of the great day of the Lord, Zephaniah calls it a day of **עֲבָבָה** (wrath, fury), of **צָרָה** (distress, travail) and **מַצִּיקָה** (straits, stress), of **שׁוֹאָה** (used here) and **מְשׁוֹאָה**

¹Leupold, *An Exposition*, p. 291. His next statement, that **שֶׁחַת** is to be understood as the object of **חַפֵּר** in line 7b is not necessary.

²Cf. Dt. 1.22; Jos. 2.2,3.

³Cf. Jb. 39.29.

⁴Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:580.

⁵Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 304 calls this a "condensation."

(destruction, desolation). To say that שׁוֹאָה means only "confusion" is euphemism.¹ David is praying for the death of his enemies.² This desire, without the New Testament knowledge of the after-life, is the ultimate judgment upon any man. David asks that this destruction come upon his enemies without their knowledge (לֹא יָדְעוּ is an adverbial phrase, with an ellipsis of אֲשֶׁר).³

David then asks for the just recompense of his enemies' sins--that which they were trying to do to him should be done to them. The net which they had concealed in verse seven will capture them. Here is another word reminiscent of David's warfaring background. לָכַד is used of something captured in war (often a town or city).⁴ It is used five times of entrapping men.⁵ This helps to see the weight of the word; this is a violent capture which David seeks, not a slight discomfiture.

The last phrase of this verse again voices the same desire, but from a different point of view. In verse 8a was destruction coming upon David's foes. Here they are to fall into it--they are the active agents instead of the destruction. There is some question regarding the correctness of this text. Kittel suggests that שׁוֹאָה should read בְּשׁוֹהָר.⁶ giving the enemies something into which to fall and using both images of

¹For further examples, cf. Is. 10.3; Pr. 1.27; 3.25.

²שׁוֹאָה is also used to describe the resultant waste or ruins from such destruction in Job 30.3,14; 38.27. This is the judgment for which David prays.

³Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 308.

⁴Cf. Dt. 2.35; 3.4; Jos. 11.12,17; Jg. 1.8,12,18; 7.24.

⁵Jer. 5.26; 18.22; Ps. 35.8; Jb. 5.13.

⁶Rudolf Kittel, ed., *Biblia Hebraica*, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1937), p. 1003n.

verse seven. What did David mean in this phrase?

Delitzsch sees this as an example of the basic meaning of שׁוֹאֵץ as the loud noise or rumbling with which the wicked will fall into his pit.¹ Some say this is another instance of the recurring error of these verses² (This conclusion is hardly necessary, however.). The desire to reorganize the text should be restrained unless there is no possible interpretation of the passage which makes sense. In this phrase there is such an interpretation. If we understand the net to be somehow used in conjunction with the pit, the verse could be translated:

*Let destruction come upon him unawares;³
And his net which he hid, let it capture him:
With destruction let him fall into it.*

David's foe is captured by falling into his net to his own destruction.

David's desire is the destruction or incapacitation of his foes.

The translation given above raises another question about verse eight: Why is there a change from the plural (enemies) of the first seven verses to the singular of verse eight? This may be understood as either a collective treatment of the group⁴ or the individualization of each of his foes⁵ without affecting the meaning of the text, but, in keeping with the plurals in the rest of the psalm, it is probably a collective plural. As he began verse one with the *lex talionis*, so David ends verse eight.

¹Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:422.

²Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 304; Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 178; Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 308. The alleged error is the mis-positioning of תּוֹצֵאֵם.

³Kautzsch, *Grammar*, p. 490.

⁴Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:422.

⁵Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 178.

Verses 9-10

*9 And my soul will rejoice in the Lord,
 And it will exult in His salvation:
 10 All my bones shall say, "Lord, who is like You,
 Who delivers the afflicted from the one who is stronger
 than him,
 And the afflicted and the needy from him who tears him away?"*

Until verse nine there is little of positive note in this psalm.

With the exception of verse 3b David has been accusing his adversaries, pleading his own innocence and calling for the execution of righteousness. In verse nine, however, the mood of the psalm lifts and we find David rejoicing in the Person of God--in both Who He is and what He does. What caused this dramatic change in David's outlook and language?

One theory seeks to explain this phenomenon by naturalistic means by saying that the imprecations are actually part of a cursing ritual in the temple which, after the petitioner had made his desire for vengeance known to the priest, was followed by a sign or statement that guaranteed the petitioner his desire.¹ Thus reassured, he could rejoice and praise the Lord for answering his prayer(s).

There is, however, another explanation which is in accord with the Scriptural evidence. David has nowhere expressed doubt concerning the Lord's ability to answer his prayers, and this outburst of praise in verses 9 and 10 is the expression of his confidence in the Lord. What is implicit in verses 1 - 8 is explicit in verses 9 and 10. The Lord will hear him; He will answer his prayers.

In verse 9a David says that his soul will rejoice in the Lord and in 10a that all of his bones will confess the awesome majesty and might

¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2 vols., trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 1:401f, Cf. discussion on verses 27-28, below.

of the Lord. His entire body and soul are united in praising his God.¹ The object of his soul's rejoicing is the Lord. His soul will rejoice **בַּיהוָה**, and by this phrase David says that he is not only praising the Lord, but he is realizing the content and cause of his joy as the Lord's Person. His soul not only rejoices in the Lord as Lord; it also rejoices in Him as his Saviour or Rescuer. The Lord is the one who will accomplish the deliverance and rescue of David. He tells us not only His name but His role or mission as well. David makes clear that he has entrusted the situation to the Lord and expects Him to care for him regardless of the eventual outcome.

Every bone is continually asking the rhetorical question, "Lord, who is like You?"² He gives no answer since he knows that none is needed, for there is no one like the Lord. This question echoes that of Moses in Exodus 15.11 which is answered earlier in that book as well as throughout the Old Testament.³ The action of this divine Deliverer in verse 10b is a continual action as indicated by the participle (**מַצִּיל**) which emphasizes the continual aspect of the action without specifically tying it to one time-place event. It is clear from the context of the psalm and the wording of this verse that David considers himself one of the afflicted, one of the needy who will be rescued by the Lord. This is perhaps a further implicit claim to innocence on David's part--he is afflicted, not an

¹Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols. (New York: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.). Vol. 3: *Job to Song of Solomon*, p. 361. **נַפְשׁוֹ** here is to be understood as "soul" not "life." It is used in synthetic parallelism with **עַצְמוֹ** as metonymy for the entirety of David's person.

²The imperfect emphasizes the continual, ongoing nature of this proclamation.

³Cf. Ex. 8.10; 9.14; Dt. 33.26; Is. 46.9; Jer. 10.6,7; Ps. 86.8.

afflictor; he is needy, not one of those who have everything in their own strength. David's neediness arises out of his trust in the Lord. He was not needy in the sense of monetary poverty, but he was needy in his dependence upon the Lord as his defender instead of depending upon his own strength or friends to deliver him. The fact that the Lord accomplishes this deliverance shows that He is unique--that there is no other god who will act on behalf of those who cannot repay him in some way. He rescues the poor and oppressed from those who would tear away from them the last of their belongings.

David concludes the first strophe of this psalm with praise to the Lord, proclaiming his confidence in both the Lord's answer to his prayer and the reason for that confidence. David has proclaimed his own innocence and endangered state since verse seven. Since the Lord delivers the afflicted and needy from the strong who would plunder them completely, and David considers that to be his situation, David is confident that he will be delivered. The consideration of God's attributes and His actions together strengthens David in his time of need.

Strophe II: Verses 11 - 18

In this section of the psalm David strengthens his argument that the actions of his enemies are truly **הֲנֵם** (v. 7). He does this by contrasting their unrighteousness (vv. 11-12, 15-16) with his concern for them and his conduct toward them (vv. 13-14). There is no imprecation in this strophe because the emphasis has been changed from that of the first strophe. In the first David made his initial plea for aid as well as his initial lament. He was not emphasizing his own position, but was sketching the entire scope of his situation, both his predicament and the hoped-for deliverance. In the second strophe, however, David emphasizes his righteousness and the forensic climate in order that his prayer will be seen as more reasonable than it might at first appear.

Verses 11-12

*11 Malicious witnesses shall rise;
That which I do not know they ask me.
12 They repay me evil after good;
Desolation (is) for my soul.*

With **יָקוּמוּן**,¹ David uses the imperfect to describe a condition that was both present and had already existed for a period of time.² He emphasizes the desperateness of his circumstances and the determination of his foes. **קוּם** is the same verb as was used in verse 2b in his call to the Lord to arise for his help.

Who are the **עֵיִדִּי שֹׁקֵר**? They are witnesses of some kind because **עֵיד** is a word commonly used for "witness" in a court of law.³ This is

¹The peragogic *nun*, commonly used for emphasis, is probably used here to avoid an hiatus before the **ע**. Kautzsch, *Grammar*, p. 128.

²Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:583; Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 423.

³**עֵיד** used of witness giving testimony in a court of law in Nu. 5.13; Jos. 24.22; 1 Sa 12.5 (cf. **עֵיד שֹׁקֵר** in Ex. 23.1; Dt. 19.16ff.).

the second occurrence of specifically legal terminology in Psalm 35 (Cf. on **בְּרִי**, v. 1, above). Are these persons who rise up witnesses of violence¹ or are they violent (i.e., malicious) witnesses?² The question asks whether the construct noun is modified by the following word or not. When we consider other places where this phrase is used, it seems clear that these witnesses are "false" or "malicious" witnesses (i.e., their violence is in their hearts). In Exodus 23.1 Moses forbids the Israelites to be partners with a wicked man (**עִם־רָשָׁע**) and thereby become **עֵד הָמָס**. Deuteronomy 19.16ff. points out the difference between these men and those who are usually called false witnesses. If the **עֵד הָמָס** is found to be **עֵד־שָׁקֶר**, having accused his brother, he is to be killed in order to purge the evil from the midst of the people. **עֵד־יִהְיֶה־הָמָס** thus emphasizes the intent and motivation, whereas **עֵד־שָׁקֶר**³ emphasizes the nature of the testimony being offered.⁴

Therefore David's foes were either accusing him directly or were paying others to accuse him falsely. They were probably doing the accusing themselves because it would be difficult to ascribe true malice to mercenaries, whereas from what he has said so far in this psalm his foes were working and conspiring against him.⁵ That they were malicious

¹Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 305; Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:582n, quoting Horsley; Leupold, *An Exposition*, p. 288.

²Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 423; Henry, *Commentary*, 3:362; Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 179; Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 303.

³See commentary on verse 20, below.

⁴Dt. 19.16ff is one of several dealing with the nature of testimony given in a court of law. It closes with a recapitulation of the *lex talionis*.

⁵The LXX refers to them as **μάρτυρες ἄδικοι**. This emphasizes their personal nature rather than the nature of their testimony.

witnesses would only lead us to suspect that their testimony would be false--a conclusion borne out by Deuteronomy 19.16ff.

These malicious witnesses were not only rising up but were also seeking information which David did not--could not--have. Since he was innocent, he had no way of answering their charges or their questions. Yet they continued to press him for an explanation of the actions which they were (albeit falsely) ascribing to him. By **לֹא** with the perfect David categorically denies any knowledge of the accusations¹ and confesses his ignorance before he tells us what they were doing. **שָׁאֵל** here simply describes their actions. David says that they are inquiring of him with no modifiers concerning the nature of their inquiry--he has described the nature of their attitude toward him in the first half of the verse.

The imperfect of **שָׁלַם** as of **יְקוֹמוֹן** in verse eleven, describes a present state as well as a continual action in the past. Although more familiar as "complete, whole, healthy" **שָׁלַם**, here in piel, has the sense of "repaying something." David's cry is that he did good (**טוֹבָה**) but that his foes repaid him--not in kind--but with evil (**רָעָה**).² The good David had done for his enemies was physical good; bounty, good things, prosperity are all implied by **טוֹבָה**. Their response to this was anything but equally gracious. Instead, they had been and still were causing David injury (not necessarily physically) and doing wrong to him. All of this is contained in the direct contrast between **רָעָה** and **טוֹבָה**.

¹A denial emphasized by the accents. The *mer^ekha*, as the major conjunctive accent for the books **אִמְתָּ**, binds **אֶשָּׂא** with **יִדְּעֵתִי** and the *rebhi^a mugras* separates this phrase from **יִשְׁאֵלֵנִי**.

²This use of **שָׁלַם** is also seen Gn. 44.4 and Ps. 38.21. The general thought expressed here can be seen in Ps. 109.5 where **שִׁים עָלַי** is used, rather than **שָׁלַם**. This action is condemned in Jer. 18.20.

Describing his own state, David then says that all that is left to him in this life is bereavement. Used only thrice in the Hebrew Bible, שָׁכַל signifies a deep personal loss. In Isaiah 47.8, 9 שָׁכַל is twice used in conjunction with אֶלְמָן (widowhood) as part of a judgment being prophesied against Babylon. Isaiah says that these two things will come upon her suddenly and in one day, a prophecy realized in her destruction in 539 B.C.¹ The verb to which this noun is related (שָׁכַל) means to be bereaved, and from several occurrences we can understand David's meaning. Israel (Jacob) uses שָׁכַל in Genesis 43.14 to express the fate which will come upon him if Benjamin does not return from Egypt ("If I am bereaved, I am bereaved."). This is the loss of only some of his children (two of twelve) but they were his sons by his favorite wife. In 1 Samuel 15.33 Samuel uses שָׁכַל when he described the state of Agag's mother immediately before killing him. There are other uses of שָׁכַל as well,² but the most explicit example is Deuteronomy 32.25 where the Lord, warning Israel through Moses of their fate if they choose to disobey and go their own way, says that the young man, the virgin, the nursing infant and the man with gray hair will all be killed by the sword and terror. "The sword shall bereave" (תִּשְׁכַּל - חֶרֶב) and the result of that bereavement will be the death of some from every portion of society. David is expressing his intense isolation and sorrow. No one is left to whom he can turn.³

¹J. Barton Payne, *Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), p. 301; Jack Finegan, *Light From the Ancient Past*, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974), 1:229f.

²Cf. Ex. 23.26; 2 Ki. 2.19, 21; Ezk. 14.15; 36.14.

³Understanding נַפֶּשׁ, as metonymy for the person, not just the non-material part of David's being. Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 304.

In these two verses David further describes his situation both positively (that which his enemies do to him) and negatively (his lack of aid or comfort). He is laying the foundation for verses 13 and 14, where he describes clearly the fact of his own righteous and irreproachable behaviour, especially in the light of his enemies' conduct toward him.

Verses 13-14

*13 And I? In their sickness my clothing (was) sackcloth;
I bowed down my soul with fasting;
And my prayer--it returned unto my bosom.
14 Like a neighbor, like a brother to me I went about;
As a mourner for a mother--dressed in black I was bowed down.*

By beginning the verse with the copula and pronoun David emphasizes his personal conduct¹ as the subject of these verses and contrasts himself with his detractors.² The *waw* may be rendered "and" in spite of the contrast in content between this verse and the preceding. It is as if he does not know how to express himself. He says, "And I in their weakness. . ." and goes from their state to his own actions as if overcome by emotion because of the anomaly between his behavior and theirs. The degree of their sickness is not plainly stated. **חֲלָהּ** can be weakness, as used to describe Samson after his hair had been cut,³ or sickness that is near death (e.g., Hezekiah's condition).⁴ The severity of David's response--dressing in sackcloth and ashes and interceding for them--indicates that they may have been seriously ill, even near death. If this is David's meaning, which it seems to be, he emphasizes the efficacy of his prayers for them, because their lives were spared⁵ due at least in part

¹Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 305.

²Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:423.

³Judges 16.7,11,17.

⁴2 Kings 20.10; Isaiah 38.1.

⁵That these are the same persons is shown by the pronominal suffixes.

to his prayers; their healing may be seen as a sign of his righteousness.

David does not merely express his sympathy for their situation, however. He changed his lifestyle to bring it into conformity with the demands of the moment. His clothing was made of sackcloth, he fasted, he prayed most earnestly, he acted as one who mourned after his own neighbor or brother. By describing this behavior David asserts not only his outward, visible innocence and the innocence of his motivations, but his positive and visible acts of mercy as well. He realized that the action was proof of his heart.

Sackcloth was a sign of repentance or sorrow,¹ showing his identification with them in their distress.² He afflicted his soul by fasting,³ which is a sign of either mourning⁴ or of dedication to the occasion at hand.⁵ David fasts in order that he might better pray for his foes in their illness. What is more precious to a man than his stomach?⁶ What better way to demonstrate his sincerity toward them?

David advances as another sign of his sincerity and righteousness **וְתִפְּלֵתִי עַל-חֵיקַי תָּשׁוּב**--a clause that has caused much discussion and has produced two main points of view. The first of these suggests that David is to be pictured with his chin sunk upon his breast as he prays, and the

¹McKay, *Psalms 1-50*, p. 162.

²Cf. Job 2.12 where Job's three friends tore their robes as a sign of their sorrow and desire to identify with him in his distress.

³**נִפְשִׁי** is, therefore, his entire being, since the non-material part of his person would not be affected by fasting.

⁴1 Sam. 31.13; 2 Sam. 1.12.

⁵Cf. Lv. 16.29, 31; 23.27 (**נִפְשִׁי** + **עֵנָה** which does not use **צוּם**, which is not *commonly* used until 1 Sam. (Cf. Jg, 20.26).

⁶Rom. 16.18; Php. 3.19; Eph. 5.29a.

clause illustrates David's physical posture.¹ The second suggestion emphasizes the concept of return (שׁוּב) into David's bosom, saying either that David's prayer will be without effect on them and will be turned to his benefit² or that he is so honest that he could pray that prayer for himself.³

The LXX and David's use of these two verses to emphasize his righteous behaviour together point to Perowne's suggestion as the proper interpretation of this clause. David's motives, thoughts, intents of his heart all work together to produce a prayer so honest and righteous that he would that others had prayed it for him.

The figurative use of חַיִּים in the hithpael to suggest "living" or "manner of living" emphasizes David's exemplary conduct⁴ while they were sick and miserable. David tells the Lord that he had behaved toward them as he would have toward his own brother or his own friend in similar circumstances. The *athnah* here is for a dramatic pause--the ascending nature of the relationships cited⁵ (from friend to brother to mother) shows the depth of his emotions toward his foes. How far need a man go to assert his innocence? David claims that he would be no more solicitous of his own mother than he was of these, his persecutors. His mourning at their sorry state was like the mourning of one who had lost

¹Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:424; Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:585 also allows this interpretation.

²Cf. LXX (ἀποστροφῇ). Alexander, *Psalms*, pp. 151f; Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 180.

³Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 304.

⁴Cf. חַיִּים Psalm 1.1.

⁵Alexander, *Psalms*, p. 152.

his mother.¹ He wants no doubt concerning his sincerity of motives and actions.

Again stressing the continual nature of his actions² by using the qal participle, David says that he was bowed down because he was in mourning, or in other words, dressed darkly. He went about softly, quietly, as one troubled by pain or sorrow.³ David has illustrated his two-fold use of חָנַם in verse seven in these two verses and now turns to contrast the conduct of his enemies in his misfortune with his conduct in their misfortune.

Verses 15-16

*15 But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered themselves together;
Smiters gathered themselves together against me and I did not know;
They tore and were not silent.
16 With godless mockers (for) a cake; gnashing against me with their teeth.*

How do David's enemies respond to his calamities? In these two verses he shows that their attitudes are none other than those which their actions and attitudes discussed earlier in the psalm would lead one to expect. They rejoice in his misfortune, they are continually gathering together against him (even those whom he does not know), and they refuse to give him any peace in which to collect his thoughts or muster

¹אָגַל as the construct state with an objective genitive (cf. Gn. 27.41; Dt. 34:8); Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1.425; Kautzsch, *Grammar*, p. 271.

²David emphasizes his righteousness by describing the continual oppression of his foes (cf. the imperfect tense in vv. 11,12) and his own consistent and continual goodness.

³Delitzsch, *Psalms*, p. 425.

his defense. He is without rest and weary which may contribute to the images that he uses in these verses.

David's description shifts to a different scene. He is now the one in distress, the one “in עָלָץ.”¹ He uses stumbling or limping as a symbol for distress and trouble. Bildad, in Job 18.12 uses this image to describe the ever-present danger of disaster being prepared to take advantage of any slipping (עָלָץ) of a man's foot. So it is with David. His foes rejoice when he slips or has a problem or trial. They gather together in their joy and laugh and taunt David.² Having done this they again gather together. This time perhaps a different group of people is involved--the smitten ones of low social estate,³ the disreputable and base persons of society.⁴ These smitten ones are those who, because of their low social standing, were unknown to David⁵ (thus לֹא יָדַעְתִּי). He did not know them, yet they too were gathering together, not to rejoice over his calamities, but because they were against David's person (עָלָי). Perhaps these were more active in seeking trouble for him. Not content to merely sit and watch, they had gathered behind his back and would soon move openly against him.

At the end of verse fifteen David further describes their actions against him. Their attack was so constant that it seemed to him that they were never quiet. These men, like wild beasts tearing their prey (קָרַע; cf. Hosea 13.8), were continually bringing false and unjust

¹Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:425.

²The combination of *galgal* and ‘ole w^eyored with שָׁחַח and וּנְאָסָפוּ, respectively, emphasizes the combination of these two verbal concepts.

³Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:425f.

⁴Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:587.

⁵Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:426.

accusations against David. These tearings are a vivid picture of the false charges which David was forced to face. Not only were they tearing at him, they were not ceasing from their antagonism (לֹא־דָמּוּ). David was being overwhelmed by their hatred and feels that he has no opportunity to attempt an answer to their attacks.

Verse sixteen gives no sign of hope for his situation. The profane godless ones are among his opponents and they are the type of persons who mock someone else for a piece of cake.¹ These men therefore have no moral standards which would cause them to hold back or cease their mockery. They are an excellent example of the description "whose god is their belly." They are men from whom David can hope for no mercy.

Their mocking, however, did not cease with mere words, but increased in intensity until they were gnashing their teeth at David (חָרַק עָלַי שְׁנִימוֹ).² This expression is used in the Old Testament to describe the intensity of one person's hatred toward another.³ David uses this infinitive absolute as one of attendant circumstance, paralleling and defining more closely קָרַע of verse fifteen, above.⁴ His enemies are acting exactly in accord with their character. As wild beasts tear at their prey with their teeth, so do they show their desire to do so by

¹Alexander, *Psalms*, p. 152; Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:426; Leupold, *An Exposition*, p. 288. These are men who mock their master's enemies in return for his favor. That לֶחֶם a "cake" can be demonstrated from 1 Kings 17.12. The LXX reveals the idiomatic nature of this expression by translating 1 Kings 17.12 with ἑγκρυφίας (a loaf baked in ashes, or a cake), whereas here they use μυστήριος (mockery, scorn).

²Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 307.

³Cf. Ps. 37.12; 112.10; Lam. 2.16.

⁴Kautzsch, *Grammar*, p. 341.

gnashing their teeth at him. That he feels the personal force of their hatred is seen both by the use of **עַל** (stronger word meaning "against" than **בְּ**) and by its position in this phrase. **עַל**'s two original meanings were "upon" (**ἐπί**) and "over" (**ὑπέρ**) and the derived meaning "against" carries the picture of a warrior or an aggressor standing in or struggling to attain a position of superiority over his opponent.¹ David, thinking of the wild beast standing over its prey ready to devour it, or of the soldier, standing over his fallen foe ready to dispatch him, pictures in carefully chosen language the desperation of his plight. He writes, in a word-for-word translation, "to gnash against me his (their) teeth." By putting himself in the middle of this construction rather than saying **חָרַק שְׁנֵיהֶם עָלַי** he emphasizes again his hopeless state.

In these two verses David has illustrated the implacable hatred of his enemies and the hopelessness of his own situation. His flow of thought throughout this passage (vv. 11-16) has been to show his own righteous conduct and attitudes in the light of his opponents' sinfulness. The structure of these six verses further illustrates this by his careful use of a chiasmic pattern whereby his righteous deeds are centered between two sections recording their sins. The progression is not so much logical as didactic--David is teaching by structure. These verses could be diagrammed:

- | | |
|---|-----------------------------------------------|
| A | 11 Their false accusations |
| B | 12 Their shameful conduct |
| C | 13 ("But I . . .") David's righteous conduct |
| C | 14 David's righteous conduct, personalized |
| B | 15a-b ("But at . . .") Their shameful conduct |
| A | 15b-16 Their False Accusations |

This device heightens the contrast between David and his enemies. He also

¹Kautzsch, *Grammar*, p. 383.

contrasts the two lifestyles by putting in expressions and words that are antithetical to each other (e.g., at their sickness he was solicitous of God for their health, but as soon as he slipped they were attacking and deriding him; he fasted but they feasted on payment received for mocking him; he acted toward them as if they were his own kin, but they mocked him without knowing him; the honesty and fervency of his prayer contrasted with their lack of any thought of God). From this bleak outlook on events, David again (Cf. vv. 4-8) turns to the Lord with a petition and ends the strophe with a promise of praise to the Lord for the deliverance that will come.

Verses 17-18

*17 Lord! How long will You watch?
Cause my soul to turn back from their ravages;
From lions my only one.
18 I will praise You in a great congregation;
With a mighty people I will praise you.*

David begins with the vocative, calling upon the Lord. This is the first time that he has called God אֱלֹהֵי in this psalm and he repeats it later in verses 22b and 23b. אֱלֹהֵי (אֱלֹהֵי) emphasizes the superior position of the one addressed. Sarah called Abraham her lord (Gn. 18.12). Eissfeldt's suggestion that the *yodh* be understood as a pronominal affirmative and that the *qames* shows a plural of majesty, resulting in the meaning "Lord of all" for אֱלֹהֵי, is true in essence.¹ David, recognizing his helpless position, calls on the One Who is superior to every circumstance and able to help. His question is a cry of anguish: "How long will you watch?" כִּמָּה is a combination of the preposition כִּי with מָה, the interrogative. Literally meaning "the like of what?" the resultant

¹TDOT, revised ed., s.v. "אֱלֹהֵי אֱלֹהֵי," by Otto Eissfeldt, p. 69.

meanings "how much?" "how many?"¹ become "how long?" when joined to the infinitive verb. Since the imperfect implies unfinished or incomplete action, David is asking the Lord, "How long are You going to keep standing by, looking on?" We do not interpret this, however, as a cry of frustration but as a desire for the justice of God.² David's meaning was not simply to ask about the length of time during which the Lord would observe, but to ask how long would the Lord wait before intervening on his behalf, as the rest of verse seventeen shows.

He changes the nature of his prayer (from vv. 4-8) in language although its subject is still the same. Here is no recrimination, no protestation of innocence. He is concerned for his life and asks the Lord to cause his soul to return (i.e., be rescued). He is not speaking only of his soul, however (Cf. on v. 4, above), for his soul here is synecdoche for his entire person. David's request for rescue is not aimless because he refers back to verse eight where he asked that devastations come upon them because of their sin. He now asks for deliverance from the destruction that they have planned for him.

The נַפְשִׁי that David wants delivered from them is his soul, as the synthetic parallelism indicates. He refers back to verses 15 and 16, picking up the image of the wild beasts. These enemies of his were like young lions (כַּפִּירִים)--strong, bold, eager to kill, with no respect for man. David describes his soul as his precious one because he recognizes its importance. He has nothing else to lose--if he loses it everything else is gone--so he calls it "precious." It is not precious to his adversaries, but it is important to him. Having unburdened his soul with this cry for help, David turns to vow his praise in the midst of the nation.

¹BDB, s.v. "מָה."

²Cf. Rev. 6.10.

Verse eighteen is a reprise and expansion of verses 9 and 10. In those verses the whole person of David, represented by his soul and bones, was rejoicing and exulting in the Person and salvation of the Lord. Here nothing is mentioned as the cause for thanksgiving; he simply states his intention to thank and praise the Lord publicly (בְּקֶהֱל רַב בְּעַם עֲצוּם). The imperfect verbs reveal his intention and the nouns the circumstances under which he will perform it.

If אֶתְּהִל be understood as the imperfect of תְּהִל, it is a prediction of what David will do after his rescue. It would then emphasize David's faith that the Lord will deliver him and bring him through his trials safely. If, on the other hand, it be seen as cohortative, David is *lay* stress on his personal determination underlying his action.¹ The answer to this question is found in the form אֶתְּהִלְּךָ because the *dagesh* is gone from the first ל, as it is in the cohortative.² Since these two verbs are parallel in usage it is reasonable to assume that their forms are parallel as well.³ David is stating his determination to praise the Lord. His ability to state this comes from his certainty that the Lord will not stand by as a spectator looking on, but will involve Himself on David's side and intervene effectually on his behalf.

His confession (תְּהִל) will center on the Person of the Lord. He will be confessing the great deeds of the Lord on his behalf and will praise Him (לְהִלֵּל) for them. He again positions the words to emphasize

¹Kautzsch, *Grammar*, p. 319. LXX, reading ἐξομολογήσομαι, does not help here, because the Greek future can be either, though it tends to parallel the Hebrew imperfect of intent.

²BDB, s.v. "

³Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:427. He states that אֶתְּהִל is cohortative without giving any reasons. Perhaps his thinking is reflected in this discussion.

his point--the first word in the verse (אֵלֶיךָ) and the last (לְאֵלֶיךָ) show that his actions are his main concern, not the location.

That David expected to be in the company of the Lord's people again cannot be doubted. Verses 11 and 12, 15 and 16 picture him surrounded by his enemies, but he draws a sharp contrast with that situation in verse eighteen. He will be in the great congregation (קָהָל רַב), presumably people who will either serve as witnesses to his confession of praise or who will join him in praise, or both. קָהָל usually refers to a group gathered together¹ for a specific purpose.² David, aware of the significance of his anointment by Samuel,³ anticipated the day when he would be able to convocate the people of Israel in a ceremony of thanksgiving and praise to the Lord for his deliverance out of the hands of his enemies. עֲצוּם does not only mean "mighty" in the sense of "powerful," because, as Delitzsch says, it "always refers, according to the context, to strength of numbers or to strength of power."⁴ Since it is parallel with רַב it is a picture of a numberless multitude.⁵

In this strophe David again asserts his innocence. He does not use נִמְנֵם as in verse seven, for his aim is different from the first strophe. There he is content to protest his innocence, but here he uses his good works as proofs of his righteousness. As was his intent, this

¹See LXX ἐκκλησία πολλή--the "great called-out group" which was called out for a purpose:

²E.g., for war (Nu. 22.4; Jg. 21.5,8), for religious ceremonies (Dt. 5.19; Jos. 2.16; Jer. 44.15). It can also refer to general gatherings (Gn. 35.11; Nu. 27.4; Pr. 21.16).

³1 Sam. 16.13.

⁴Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:427; Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:590f.

⁵*BDB*, s.v. "עֲצוּם." In every occurrence of עֲצוּם, with this meaning, it is parallel with רַב.

intensifies the picture of his innocence and righteousness against his enemies' sinfulness. He is thus increasingly confident in the Lord's deliverance of him and anticipates the ceremony of praise at his vindication. David now returns, in the final strophe, to the ungodliness of his enemies and assertions of his own righteousness, but the tone of these verses is more sedate and controlled than in the beginning of the psalm. Even his prayers change somewhat in emphasis as he calls for the Lord's condemnation and judgment upon his enemies.

Strophe III: Verses 19 - 28

Verses 19-21

19 *Do not let my false haters rejoice at me;
 My haters without cause--do not let them wink an eye*
 20 *Because they do not speak peace
 And against restful ones of a land words of deceit they
 conspire.*
 21 *And they made their mouths large against me:
 They said, "Aha! Aha! Our eyes have seen!"*

על with the jussive, often used for negative wishes or imprecations,¹ here expresses David's strong desire that his enemies not be allowed to rejoice over him. Widespread debate on the meaning of אִיב has not brought agreement on its meaning--if anything, it has splintered what agreement there may have been.² Ringgren says in summarizing Widengren's thought:

On the basis of his comparisons of the Old Testament psalms with the Akkadian psalms of lament, Widengren emphasizes that the same expressions can be used differently in different contexts, and that stereotyped phrases by no means justify a uniform explanation of the enemies; rather, in each individual case, one must make his investigation on the basis of other criteria in order to determine those to whom the expressions refer.³

David here refers to his personal enemies and says that they are his enemies שָׁקֵר, usually translated "wrongfully."⁴ שָׁקֵר is used elsewhere in

¹Kautzsch, *Grammar*, pp. 321f.

²*TDOT*, revised ed., s.v. "אִיב," by Helmer Ringgren.

³*Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁴Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:592; Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 181. John T. Willis, ed., *The Living Word Commentary on the Old Testament* (Austin: Sweet Publishing Company, 1980). Vol. 10: *Psalms*, by Arthur L. Ash and Clyde M. Miller. They suggest "treacherous (lying) foes" (p. 130). Cf. on שָׁקֵר, p. 46, above.

the Old Testament to refer to witnesses in a court situation who are giving false testimony in order to cause a false judgment against the accused.¹ Its primary meaning is deception or falsehood and by using it in parallel with **הָנִם** (cf. v. 7, above), he is emphasizing his claim of verse eleven. His enemies pretend to have a reason for hating him. This excuse is a falsehood, a lie, and reveals both their hatred of him and the lack of any restraint upon their behaviour. Any testimony they may give against him is not likely to be trustworthy.

His enemies are not only **אֹיְבֵי**, however. **אֶיֵב** is a passive verb usually meaning "be hostile to,"² but they go beyond being his enemies and actively hate him (**שָׂנְאוּ**), seeking ways to effectively employ (or deploy) that hatred against him. They hated him gratuitously (**הָנִם**), for no reason (Cf. v. 7, above).

The force of **אֶל** carries over to the second half of the verse. The verb may be read as if it were **עַל־יִקְרָצוּ** and the same urgency given to its interpretation as we saw above. **קִרְץ** refers to the compression of something; it can be rendered "to pinch," or "to nip." When referring to the eyes it means to compress the eyelids or "wink" and always bears a negative connotation.³ David asks the Lord to prevent their joy at his misfortune and their evil plans.

As in verse seven, so in verse twenty. David is careful to give a reason for his request. He explains their conduct so that their

¹BDB, s.v. "שָׁקַר." שָׁקַר as a substantive is used of "injurious falsehood, in testimony, especially in courts" (cf. Ex. 20.16; 23.1; Dt. 19.16-19; Ps. 27.12; Pr. 6.19; 14.5; 25.18; 12.17; 19.5, 9).

²Only in Exodus 23.22 and 1 Sa. 18.29 does **אֶיֵב** have an active meaning (i.e., "act as an enemy"). All of its other occurrences are substantival uses of the participle.

³Cf. Pr. 6.13 (cf. vv. 12-15); 10.10; 16.30.

judgment might be seen as just. He is trapped by their carefully planned testimony against him, and realizes the futility of seeking justice from a human judge.

They do not speak peace which is a major complaint of David.¹ Verses 11, 15, and 16 tell what they do speak and David emphasizes the continual nature of their refusal to speak peace with the imperfect. By this he means that they had not (in the past), they were not (in the present) and they would not (in the future) speak peace. This was a pervasive part of their personalities. David understands this to be important because of Psalm 34.11-14, especially verse 14b.² Far from pursuing peace, these men will not even discuss it, although they would profess to seek peace if asked.³

Instead of seeking or speaking peace they think and plan treachery against those who are causing no trouble, and are the last ones who should be regarded as worthy of persecution. David uses the plural רִגְעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, but primarily considers his own plight (perhaps as the archetype). He may be widening the scope of the אֹיֵב to show that they not only plot against him but also against anyone who is in their path. The רִגְעֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל are those who live in the land of Israel and are quiet, peaceful folk. The verb related to this adjective is used of a sword resting in its sheath⁴ and suggests pastoral life in its law-abiding extreme. These are the intended victims of David's enemies.

¹The *ole w^eyoredh* breaks the verse here and shows that this is a major complaint of David by separating it from the next phrase.

²Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 181.

³Briggs, *Commentary*, p. 308.

⁴Cf. Jer, 47.6.

The paragogic *nun* with יַחְשְׁבוּן emphasizes the plotting nature of their opposition to David. These enemies commune together to plot¹ the destruction of the righteous. He again is pointing to this as a characteristic of their lives (cf. verse four, above). Now, instead of רָע, however, they are planning deceit and treachery (מַרְמָה).

מַרְמָה is used in parallel construction with שֶׁקֶר in Amos 8.5 to describe false balances used in trade. The scale would thus say that the customer owed more than the actual cost in order to create greater profits for the merchant.² The more common meaning however is treachery, and the question becomes one of identification based on the meaning of דְּבַר. דְּבַר has a wider scope of interpretation than its basic meaning "word, speech" signifies. Like λόγος, דְּבַר can mean word, but also it means thing, matter or affair. It is used in legal cases to name either the trespass under investigation or the legal case and process of investigation itself.³

Because of the legal terminology in this psalm and the parallelism in thought between verses 20b and 11 (the speaking of lies and false testimonies against David) דְּבַרֵּי מַרְמוֹת are "words of treachery or guile,"⁴ i.e., false testimony, accusations and slander⁵

¹For other examples of this use of חָשַׁב (normally "think/regard") see Gen. 50.20; Zech. 7.10, 8.17; Ps. 140.3. See *BDB*, s.v. "חָשַׁב" for further examples.

²See also Hos. 12.8; Mic. 6.11; Prov. 11.1, 20.23.

³For examples of דְּבַר as the trespass (or accusation) being investigated see Jg. 6.29, 13:1, 25.12, 21; Neh. 2.19, 13.17; Ex. 1.18; Dt. 13.15 (14), 17.4. For examples of דְּבַר as the legal case itself see Ex. 18.16, 22, 26; Dt. 1.17, 19.15; Is. 29.21. For further discussion of its use in legal terminology see *TDOT*, s.v. "דְּבַר," by W.H. Schmidt.

⁴Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 181.

⁵Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:428.

prepared against David and the godly in the land.

Verse twenty-one describes the results of their secret consultations. רָחֵב (רָחֵב) is used generally to describe the state of something as large or great or to speak of something as becoming large or great.¹ Here it describes the mouths of David's enemies. They open their mouths wide² against (עַל) David. This is a picture of their eagerness to testify against him as well as a gesture of contempt for his person.³ They are prepared to bear against David the false testimonies which they prepared and rehearsed for this time.

What is their testimony? It is ambiguous and therefore unanswerable, humanly speaking. They say (אָמְרוּ), “הָאֵחַ הָאֵחַ.” This word meaning “aha!” is always introduced by אָמַר and so is an actual spoken expression; indicating joy or satisfaction, it can have either a negative or positive connotation.⁴ David's enemies thus express their joy at his misfortunes (cf. verse fifteen, above). They confess further that their eyes have seen (רָאִתָּה עֵינֵינוּ), but they do not tell what they have seen. They may have seen the fall of their

¹The second is the more common meaning (Gen. 26.22; 2 Sam. 22.37; Ps. 4.2).

²See Ps. 81.11, where Israel is instructed to open her mouth as a baby bird would for food.

³Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 181; Murphy, *Psalms*, p. 234.

⁴הָאֵחַ has a negative connotation when, as here, it is used of the joy of enemies in the trials and downfall of the righteous (see Ezek. 25.3, 26.2, 36.2; Ps. 35.21,25, 40.16(15), 70.4(3)). Each of these references shows someone's joy at another's expense. It is used positively in Is. 44.16. The man feels relief because of his fire. It is true relief even though the passage teaches him that this is the only benefit which he will receive from his idol.

prey--David--as he finally lost his coveted position.¹ Or this may be their means of expressing their false testimony against David.² They were trying to frighten him with vague and false accusations. If this is the case פִּנְיָה may be seen as joy that they can finally accuse him of wrong. The LXX uses ἑὐγαε εὐγαε which supports the second view. ἑὐγαε, an interjection meaning *well! good!* expresses the same delight and approbation found in the Hebrew פִּנְיָה. A great joy for David's enemies would be his downfall or its beginnings. The opportunity to give false testimony contributing to that fall would probably, in their cases, give greater joy. These were not far-off observers watching and hearing about events in David's life by means of messengers. These were personal, spiteful, vindictive enemies who, from their description in the rest of the psalm would like nothing better than to do the treason themselves.

They are rejoicing that they can bear testimony against him that will bring him down and cause him to fall. David now pleads with the Lord, using a two-fold request. He asks for God's intervention *for* him (vv. 22-24) and *against* his foes (vv. 25-26), and anticipates joy at his vindication (27-28).

Verses 22 - 24a

- 22 *You have seen it, Lord, do not be dumb;
Lord, do not be far from me.*
23 *Rouse Yourself and awake for my judgment;
My God and my Lord (Master) for my Lawsuit.*
24 *Judge me according to Your righteousness, O Lord my God*

¹So Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:593; Delitzsch, *Psalms*, 1:428; Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 182.

²Allowing for Briggs's pluralizing of the psalm, this is his view.

David cries out to the Lord that He has seen it (רָאָה יְהוָה) and that God sees truly is the idea behind David's words. The Lord has seen the truth of what happened or had been done to David, therefore David summons Him as a true witness to counteract these false witnesses.¹ David's cry, therefore, is that the Lord be not silent. He uses אֵל with the jussive of חָרַשׁ to signal his desire and concern that the Lord not be silent.² David thus seeks the active participation of God as a witness--hearing his cry and speaking for him. David, realizing that his only hope comes from the Lord, calls upon Him by his covenant name, יְהוָה,³ to intervene in his case (see below).

Having said this, he immediately uses another name for God (אֱדֹנָי, cf. v.17, above) to stress his realization of God's sufficiency and authority. This combination of names shows David's insight into the divine nature. God is personal, covenantal, and thus, personally concerned for and interested in men to whom He has extended His covenant-mercies. His personal nature, however, does not imply any limitations on His ability to know (to see--רָאָה) all things and thus to be a true witness in David's, or any, situation.

David's fourth request in this strophe is another use of אֵל

¹רָאָה יְהוָה is used in this legal sense in Lamentations 3.59f.

²The expressions אֵל-לֹא-תִחַרֵּשׁ could also be translated "do not be deaf," because of the ambiguity of the verb חָרַשׁ. חָרַשׁ can mean both "be deaf" (cf. Mic. 7.16; חָרַשׁ as adjective, "deaf" in Ex. 4.11; Is. 29.18; Ps. 38.14) and "be dumb/silent" (especially of the silence of God to men's prayers--in qal (*BDB*, s.v. "חָרַשׁ"). See Ps. 39.13(12); 50.3; 83.2; 109.1). Ps. 50.3 specifically asks God to act as judge; Ps. 83.2 and 109.1 are the beginning of imprecatory laments (God summoned for judgment); Ps. 35.13(12) is a cry that God be merciful to the psalmist. Gen. 34.5; Prov. 11.12; Ps. 32.3 shows that חָרַשׁ can also refer to the silence of men.

³This is a יהוה section of the psalter, but this does not negate the emphasis arising from David's choice of the divine name.

with the jussive. This time he repeats **לֵא**,¹ perhaps for added force.

His plea is that he not be abandoned by the Lord. **קִרְחָ** means "become far" or "be distant," but it connotes neglect or abandonment in several passages and this is David's fear here.² He cries out requesting that he be not abandoned to the mercy of his enemies (or their lack of it). David desires the close presence of the Lord for several reasons in addition to His testimony, which are given in the next verse.

In verse twenty-three David uses two imperatives. He is not commanding or ordering God to act, but uses the imperative to emphasize the strength of his request.³ Here **עִירָ** is used in synonymous parallelism with **קִרְחָ** ("awake, break off from sleep"). An imperative depending (with *waw* copulative) upon a preceding imperative shows a definite progression of thought. The first imperative states a condition and the second a consequence dependent upon the fulfillment of that condition.⁴ David's request is that the Lord will bestir Himself to action and, having done this, that he will be awake to defend David. As noted above, David's not viewing the Lord as actually asleep. He is saying that he *feels* as if the Lord were asleep because of the seriousness of his situation and the lack of apparent action by the Lord on his behalf. What is it that David wants from the Lord? What is that for which he calls so strongly?

¹Cf. on v. 19, above.

²Cf. Ps. 22.12,20; 38.22; 71.12; Jb. 30.10; Pr. 19.7. In Psalm 38.22 it is parallel with **עִזַּבְנִי**:--to "forsake, abandon." LXX has ἀποστόσης, imperative of ἀφίστημι, "shrink, leave, depart."

³BDB, s.v. "עִירָ." "Rouse from sleep" in Zch. 4.1 and Ps. 7.20 is not common for the hiphil of עִירָ;

⁴Kautzsch, *Grammar*, pp. 324ff.

David asks the Lord to rouse Himself, to stir to activity for His judgment, His **מִשְׁפָּט**. Here, as in many other occurrences, **מִשְׁפָּט** refers to judgment in the sense of the "act of deciding a case" or the due process of a court of law.¹ This use of **מִשְׁפָּט** is another indication that this psalm is a poetic description of a lawsuit.²

The divine name **אֱלֹהִים** occurs only fifteen times in the first book of the Psalter (Psalms 1-42).³ **אֱלֹהִים**, the name of God used in Genesis 1 to emphasize His power and strength, is used by David as the One capable of counterstanding his opponents. **אֱדֹנָי** is used here, as in verse seventeen above, to denote God's authority.⁴ He calls on God as the powerful and authoritative One, to intervene in his lawsuit (**רִיב**).

Used for the third time in Psalm 35, **רִיב** is literally a strife or dispute. It is especially used of a dispute which is a controversy or case at law.⁵ David calls for God's intervention in this lawsuit which has been brought against him. This is not a literal lawsuit.

¹Cf. Ex. 28.15, 29-30; Dt. 1.17 (1.9-17); 1 Ki. 3.28; Pr. 16.33.

²**מִשְׁפָּט** is used with various meanings in Scripture. Among them are: (a) the act of deciding a case (Dt. 1.17; Ec. 11.9; 12.14; Is. 3.14), (b) a case presented for judgment (Is. 50.8; 2 Sa. 15.4; 1 Ki. 3.11), (c) execution of judgment (Dt. 32.41; Is. 26.8-9; Zp. 3.15; Ps. 97.8), (d) a legal requirement (1 Sa. 8.9,11; 10.25; Jer. 8.7; Is. 58.2).

³Jehovah, on the other hand, occurs 272 times. Joseph Francis Thrupp, *An Introduction to the Study and Use of the Psalms*, 2 vols., second ed. (London: Macmillan, 1879), 1:33a. His figures do not reflect divine names used with sufformatives, as this is here.

⁴Clarence E. Mason, "Names of God," in *Doctrine Syllabi* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia College of Bible, 1970), pp. 3f.

⁵Cf. Ex. 23.2-3; Dt. 21.5; 25.1; 2 Sa. 15.2,4 (cases of **רִיב** of men); Jer. 25.31; 50.34; Lam. 3.58; Hos. 4.1; Mic. 6.2 (cases of the Lord's **רִיב** against His people).

David is writing poetry and a characteristic of poetry is figurative language. David is describing his situation as a trial where he is being sued for crimes which he did not commit and of which he is ignorant (Cf. on v. 11b, above).

Now, having called God to action and explained the nature of the requested intervention, David makes the ultimate request that will either totally exonerate him or condemn him. He again uses the imperative to make his request known to God, showing his awareness of the solemnity of the request. David calls God **יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים** (Jehovah, my God). Jehovah, as the name of God personally associated with His covenant people Israel (and thus with His anointed king, David) and Elohim as the strong and powerful One. By combining these two concepts in this divine epithet, David calls upon the covenant-Lord of Israel, who had given the Law to Moses, and who was powerful to do whatever is necessary to enact to assure righteousness at his trial.

David summons this One to judge him. **שֹׁפֵט**, the verb related to **מִשְׁפָּט** (Cf. v. 22, above), signifies the execution of judgment--the decision of the judge concerning the guilt or innocence of the accused.¹ David asks the Lord to act as his Judge--to make that decision. He asks that this judgment be made on the basis of the absolute righteousness (**צְדִיק**) of God. **צְדִיק** is a quality of God that is ascribed to a man when he has been vindicated by God (Cf. v. 27, below) and is one of the qualities required of a judge.² David is saying to God that He is qualified

¹**שֹׁפֵט** has this meaning in Gn. 18.25; Is. 33.22; Ps. 82.1; Jg. 11.27; 1 Sa. 24.13; Ps. 9.5.

²It is used of a man who has been vindicated by the Lord in Is. 53.11; 60.21; Ps. 33.1 and as a quality required of a judge in Dt. 1.16; 16.18; Ezk. 23.45; Ps. 7.12; 58.2.

to act as his Judge because He is **קִדְּשׁ** Himself and because any judgment so rendered will be in perfect accord with the righteousness of the Lord. David knows that he is not perfectly righteous. He also knows that he is innocent as accused. He is asking God, then, to judge him with the righteousness that will result in the absolute vindication of the righteous and the eternal condemnation of the wicked.¹

Verses 24b-26

(24) And do not let them rejoice at me.

25 Do not let them say in their hearts, "Aha! Our soul!"

Do not let them say, "We have swallowed him up!"

26 Let them be ashamed and abashed altogether--the ones seeking my evil;

Let them be clothed (with) shame and ignominy--the ones who are making themselves great against me.

Antithetically parallel to the first half of the verse, 24b uses **לֹא** with the jussive to express a negative desire of David (the first of three such desires). He requests that his enemies not be allowed to rejoice over him (i.e., over his disgrace for which they long). They had already rejoiced at his troubles (vv. 15-16) and they were rejoicing at his troubles (v. 26). David asks for respite from their persecution; by putting this in antithesis with his request for judgment, he suggests that such behaviour is not in accord with the righteousness of God.

With two more negative commands David requests that which he does not want his enemies to do, then (in v. 26) he describes the end that he desires for them. There are two things which he does not want them to say. He does not want them to speak in their heart (collective use of the singular) because he knows that if they do not speak in their heart

¹ Cf. Kirkpatrick, *Psalms*, p. 156 on Psalm 31.1; Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:594.

they will never say it aloud.¹ David asks that they not be able to see their desire accomplished against him. They have no reason for thus speaking in their heart. The lack of such speaking is, therefore, a sign to David and to all around him of his vindication from their charges.

הָאֵחַ נִפְשָׁנוּ is that which he does not want them to say. **הָאֵחַ** is an interjection of joy (often unrighteous, cf. v. 20, above) at David's misfortune. **נִפְשָׁ** is used here of the seat of the emotions and passions,² the source and breeding ground of ideas, desires and plans (which are the implementation of desires and ideas). Here it means "our desire" and is a statement of their confidence in the accomplishment of their plots, traps and schemes against David's life (vv. 1,3-4,7).

What is their desire? It is expressed by **בָּלַעְנוּהוּ** ("We have swallowed him up!"). **בָּלַע** originally had the concept of swallowing a tasty morsel before someone else could get to it.³ When applied to men, however, it connotes the destruction or downfall of a person, especially in the intensive stems (here it is *piel*).⁴ Depending on the context it can have in view either the process of being destroyed "or the end result of this process."⁵ Here, due to the nature of the context and the expression of his foes' glee, it is clear that the final result is in view. David does not want this rejoicing because their failure to rejoice will mean that he has been vindicated. David knows that their desire is his downfall and complete ruin and prays that it not be realized.

¹Cf. Pr. 4.23; Mt. 12.34; Lk. 6.45.

²*BDB*, s.v. "נִפְשָׁ."

³*TDOT*, s.v. "בָּלַע," by J. Schupphaus, p. 137.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 138.

⁵*Ibid*

He turns for the final time to positive requests¹ on behalf of his enemies in verse twenty-six. He requests again that they be ashamed (Cf. v. 4, above) and abashed (הָפַר). Every qal use of הָפַר is parallel with בּוֹשׁ in the Old Testament;² there does not seem to be any difference in meaning between them. David uses both terms to intensify his prayer for their shaming. יִחַדָּו states his desire that this happen to all of them together at the same time. Apparent from this word is the great number of David's enemies³--he has not been speaking of a few foes, but of a host of opponents desiring to see his end.⁴

The phrase שִׂמְחֵי רָעָתִי combines several of the expressions already used by David to describe his enemies. In verse four they conspired to do evil against him (רָעָתִי) and they rejoiced over his stumbling in verse fifteen (שִׂמְחוּ). David, in requesting the Lord's intervention in verse twenty-four, foresaw their rejoicing as a sign of his condemnation and prayed that it might not happen (וְאַל יִשְׂמְחוּ לִי). He combines these thoughts carefully to identify the specific people who should be ashamed.

לְבִשׁ portrays the effect of the shame for which he prayed in verse twenty-six. Shame is an invisible quality or emotion, but he prays that it be made visible. Seebass's understanding of בּוֹשׁ would thus be vindicated.⁵ David's enemies are reduced from their self-exalted station

¹Positive ("Let them be. . .") *versus* negative ("Let them not. . .").

²Cf. Jb. 6.20; Ps. 34.6 (opposite נִהַר); 35.4, 26; 40.15 (=70.3); 71.24; 83.18; Pr. 13.5; 19.26; Is. 1.29; 24.23; Jer. 15.9; 50.12; Mi. 3.7.

³Calvin, *Commentary*, 1:595. Cf. 1 Sa. 31.6; Is. 18.6; 40.5.

⁴The close conjunction of these desires in David's mind is shown by the use 'azla over יִבְשׁוּ, tying it to the following thought, and the 'azla over יִחַדָּו, connecting it with the second phrase.

⁵*TDOT*, s.v. "בּוֹשׁ;" cf. v. 4, above.

in life, their duplicity is revealed and David is exonerated. They are to be so completely covered with shame that it will be as a garment to them. Their clothing, their finery, their persons will be swallowed up with shame. They are not only to be covered with shame. They are also to be clothed with ignominy (from כָּלַם “be humiliated”) and reproach--the active counterpart to their shame.

The objects of David's prayer are the ones who made themselves great against David (הַמִּגְדִּילִים עָלַי). They had sought to exalt themselves at his expense. By this and the preceding epithet David presses his argument: No man has the right to exalt himself against another, especially when they do it at his expense--when he is trodden or stumbling (v. 15). In these verses is contained the culmination of David's cry for the intervention of the Lord's Person in his predicament. David has called on the Lord to judge, and then asked Him to prevent the sinful joy of his enemies and to cause them just retribution according to the *lex talionis*. He now, in the final verses of Psalm 35, promises the continual praise and worship of his heart and lips to the Lord, showing his assurance in the faithfulness of the Lord to intervene and then exonerate him from the false accusations against him.

Verses 27-28

*27 Let them give a ringing cry and rejoice--who delight (in)
my righteousness;
And let them say continually, "The Lord be exalted (Who)
delights (in) the peace of His servant."
28 And my tongue shall meditate aloud on Thy righteousness;
All the day it shall praise You.*

The last two verses of Psalm 35 constitute the final praise section of the psalm (cf. vv. 9-10, 18, above). Their presence here illustrates Murphy's observation that in contrast to the Babylonian psalms,

where praise precedes prayer as if to gain the request by flattery, the Israelites followed their pleas with praise because of their assurance that God hears the prayer.¹ The question most naturally asked concerns the source of this change of mind, attitude and expression. Von Rad felt that this change was due to the priest's pronouncing a blessing of assurance upon the suppliant.² Having made his prayer in front of the Tabernacle, the petitioner is assured of the Lord's hearing and answering their prayer.³ Wevers rejects a "psychological" explanation for the change "from earnest complaint to joyous certainty" because these psalms were cultic in origin (therefore part of public liturgy) and such a psychological explanation could only properly apply to private prayer.⁴ Because David was the psalmist and the presence of the Holy Spirit was within him, the change is explicable: David was completely free from any of their accusations; he has called upon God to judge him and to exonerate him before his enemies; he knows his own innocence and their guilt. On the basis of the absolute righteousness of the Lord David can be confident of his vindication.

These verses are an excellent example of what Oehler calls the psalmist's tendency to come to conclusions that are personal and subjective, rather than dogmatic (i.e., doctrinal).⁵ At the same time, however, apart from the knowledge of the doctrine of God as **קִיּוֹן** and His ways,

¹Murphy, "A New Classification," p. 86n.

²von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:401. Also Claus Westermann, *The Psalms: Structure, Content & Message*, trans. Ralph D. Gehrke (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1980), pp. 55-56. He uses the examples of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 and Hezekiah in Isaiah 38 as illustrations.

³von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 1:402.

⁴Wevers, "A Study," p. 81.

⁵Oehler, *Theology*, p. 559.

David could not arrive at such a conclusion.

The substance of these two verses is universal rejoicing--of both the righteous (v. 27) and David (v. 28). The righteous (חֲפִצֵּי צְדָקָה) are those who delight in the righteousness of David--who are glad and rejoice in his vindication (צָדִיק).¹ They are said to do three things. They will give a ringing cry (רָנָה; which in *qal* primarily signifies a cry of joy and exultation).² Here, as in several other occurrences it is used in synonymous parallelism with שִׂמְחָה,³ "to rejoice (Cf. vv. 15, 24, above); thus their loud cries are of joy and confidence. They also say continually (תְּמִיד) "The Lord be exalted. . ."⁴ The first activities center on David's vindication as it relates to him (חֲפִצֵּי צְדָקָה); the third centers on the Person of the Lord and His glorification. Weiser notes that:

. . . in the Old Testament hymns the *glorification of Yahweh* as Judge occurs more frequently than the ideas of Yahweh as Creator or King, which are occasionally associated with it . . .⁵

¹ צָדִיק connotes (besides the righteousness noted above, v. 24) the innocence of man from a specific offense (2 Ki. 10.9; 1 Sa. 24.18), his vindication by the Lord (Ps. 33.1), or the state of righteousness more familiar to readers of the New Testament (LXX reads δικαιόσυνη) as in Gn. 7.1; 18.23ff; Hab. 2.4; Mal. 3.18. David is not claiming absolute righteousness for himself--he knows that is not true. He is anticipating the Lord's pronouncement of innocence concerning the slander of his enemies (cf. v. 24, above).

² Especially in the prophets (12 of 19 *qal* occurrences are prophetic, 10 in Isaiah alone) רָנָה emphasizes the joyful shouts of the people because the Lord is now present (Is. 12.16; Zch. 2.14(10); Zph. 3.14); because of His Person and majesty (Is. 61.7; 35.6; 42.11; 24.14); because He had cleared the judgments against them (Zph. 3.14); because of the regathering of the nation Israel (Jer. 31.7).

³ Cf. Zph. 3.14; Zch. 2.14; Pr. 29.6; Is. 65.14.

⁴ Artur Weiser, *Commentary on the Psalms*, Old Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), p. 64.

This appears to be the case here. David's vindication is a cause for joy and gladness, but the continual activity for which it calls is the glorification of God.

גָּדַל speaks of the "greatness of dimension and size."¹ The Lord is not thought of as finite--the reference is rather to the dimension of His glory. The Lord, יְהוָה, is the One Who is magnified. The One called as Judge in verse twenty-four is the covenant-keeping God of Israel. The basis for this praise and confession is found at the end of the verse: The One Who is God is constantly delighting Himself in the peace of His servant.

יְהִי refers to desiring, with the implication of satisfaction in the object, therefore both desire and delight are included in its meaning here.² God desires the peace (or prosperity, or health) of his servant. It will therefore come to pass and He will delight in that prosperity while His servant is blessed by it. Both the Lord and the righteous delight in the same thing, i.e., David's vindicated righteousness and consequent peace. The joy of men is all the greater because by His vindication of David He has vindicated their faith in His righteousness.

The last verse of the psalm describes David's future actions on the basis of the results of this trial.³ David promises that his tongue will speak the righteousness of the Lord. הִגִּיד is of uncertain meaning

¹TDOT, s.v. "גָּדַל," by R. Mosis, p. 392.

²Alexander, *Psalms*, p. 155.

³For the basis upon which Psalm 35 is referred to as a trial, see "Evidences of Trial in Psalm 35," below; Table Two, "Legal Terminology in Psalm 35;" Table Three, "Interrelationship of Characters in Psalm 35;" as well as comments throughout the "Exegesis of Psalm 35," above.

due to its wide range of usage.¹ As in Psalm 63.6-7 the verbs **הִלֵּל** and **רָנַן** are used in synthetic parallelism, it may be that meditation is expressed in a song of praise.² Because of its synthetic (climactic) parallelism with similar verbs here (Cf. v. 27-- . . . **אָמַר** . . . **שָׁמַח** . . . (31) it probably has the same meaning. David, having meditated upon the righteousness and justice of God, vows to praise Him continually (**כָּל-הַיּוֹם**).³

The righteousness of the Lord is that righteousness on the basis of which David was acquitted, and the result of his proclaiming it will be the praise of God continually from that day on.

Three times David has described the person of his enemies. Three times he has called for the intervention of God on his behalf. Three times he has described the judgment which he desired to be meted out against them. Here for the third and final time he expresses his freedom from guilt and the sin(s) of which he was accused by lifting his voice confidently in the assurance that the Lord would judge him to be innocent of the charges.

The judgments which he has prayed upon his foes are terrible. David claims to be righteous even in the midst of these judgments. This is not due to myopia on David's part. He knew the law and its

¹*TDOT*, s.v. "**הִלֵּל**," by A. Negoita and H. Ringgren, pp. 321ff. Negoita lists four general meanings for **הִלֵּל**: (1) to utter inarticulate sounds (Is. 31.4; Jb. 31.2), (2) to mutter or whisper (Is. 8.19), (3) to speak (Ps. 37.30; Jb. 27.4), (4) to speak in a particular way (Is. 16.7; Ezk. 2.10).

²*Ibid.*, p. 323.

³It is important to note that David in no way suggests joy or celebration because of the judgments upon his enemies. He instead turns his face to the Lord and refrains from the malicious gloating which all too easily might have been his response.

requirements and this psalm reflects that legal framework. His claim to righteousness is based on adherence to the law, which adherence is vindicated by his righteous Judge. There is, therefore, no incompatibility between the two--his imprecations are the outworking of his righteousness.

Evidences of Trial in Psalm 35

Legal Vocabulary in Psalm 35

Throughout the exegesis of Psalm 35 David's use of forensic language has been noted. In this section these uses are collated so that they may be seen together, demonstrating that Psalm 35 portrays a trial scene, a lawsuit in progress, against David by his enemies. With this in mind, the imprecations are explained in the conclusion, below.

The first word (לִיָּצֵחַ), as Perowne states, "is properly used of a court of justice."¹ Since it is "properly" so used, why change its meaning here?² The לִיָּצֵחַ are those bringing David to court. As seen above,³ verses 4-8 are an application of the *lex talionis* to David's situation. הִנָּחַם (v. 7), though not legal terminology, certainly portrays David's protestation of innocence. The first strophe (vv. 1-10), therefore, is concerned with justice upon his enemies. That the particular justice sought is not undeserved is demonstrated below.

In the second strophe (vv. 11-18) the number of allusions increases. In verse eleven false witnesses were shown to be witnesses in a court of law by comparison with Deuteronomy 19.16-19.⁴ שָׁאֵל may refer to the legal process of questioning the witness or defendant. A common meaning is to ask for something rather than about something, but its second (listed) meaning is "to ask" or "to inquire," or, as Gesenius,

¹Perowne, *Psalms*, p. 307. Cf. on v. 23, below. For examples of לִיָּצֵחַ meaning "to conduct a lawsuit" see Is. 3.13; 59.16; Ps. 103.9; Am. 7.4; Jb. 10.2; Is. 27.8; 1 Sa. 24.15; Mic. 7.9; Jer. 50.34; 51.36; La. 3.59.

²Cf. p. 32, footnotes 3 and 4.

³Cf. "Exegesis of Psalm 35," verses 4-8, above (pp. 35-41).

⁴Cf. "Exegesis of Psalm 35," verses 11-12, above (pp. 45-49).

"to interrogate."¹ The second strophe thus centers on the nature of the testimony being given against David and the truth regarding his conduct toward them.

David's emphasis changes in the third strophe (vv. 19-28)—his language is taken from neither the battlefield nor the experience of the past, but centers upon the court in session. שֶׁקֶר (v. 19) refers to the false pretences which his foes are using against him. They are using them both as false testimony in the court² and as their excuse for hating him. They also devise words of deceit (דְּבָרֵי מְרִמוֹת, v. 20) to be used as testimony against David.³ רָא יְהוָה (v. 22) is used only six times in exactly this form in the Bible,⁴ and has certain legal overtones from those verses.

מִשְׁפָּט (v. 23) is undeniably a term from the law court, as is at the end of the verse. The Lord is asked to "judge" David (שִׁפְטֵנִי) according to His righteousness (צִדְקָה) which speaks of the justness of both judges Ezk. 23.45; Pr. 29.2) and the law by which they judge (Dt. 4.8).

¹*Gesenius's Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*, s.v. "שָׁאַל." It is so used in Job 40.7 of the Lord asking Job and commanding him to answer; in Haggai 2.11 the prophet is commanded to ask the priests for an interpretation of the law.

²*BDB*, s.v. "שֶׁקֶר," and exegesis on verse 19, above (pp. 61-62).

³Cf. "Exegesis of Psalm 35," verse 20, above (pp. 61-64).

⁴Nu. 27.13--part of Moses' judgment is that he only see the Promised Land; 2 Sa. 18.21--Joab orders the Cushite to report to David the death of Absalom (the Cushite thus becoming a witness to his death); Ps. 10.14--the Lord is invoked to destroy the wicked because He had seen their impenitence and atheism; Ps. 35.20--the Lord is not to be silent, nor far, but to awake and judge David; La. 3.59,60--the Lord is called upon to judge Jeremiah's case because He has seen the plottings of his foes. While not a technical legal term, רָא יְהוָה has strong legal overtones.

In verse twenty-seven **יָצַד יְקֹ** refers to David's vindication before the Lord as Judge, and the Lord, magnified as Judge, receives the praise of His servant for His **יָצַד יְקֹ** (v. 28).

That this psalm is the description of a court scene should now be clear. Ringgren states that "reference is made to a lawsuit" in this psalm¹ on the basis of only a few of the above references; surely this is a valid conclusion on the evidence cited above.

The language is not more explicit because David is writing poetry, not a prose account of his life. He uses imagery and figures of speech to describe his enemies, their plans and testimony against him, and his own desires against them. This does not mean that David is saying these imprecations in a fit of temper. David truly desired the destruction of his enemies and a brief examination of Deuteronomy 19.16-19 will explain his reasons.

Deuteronomy 19.16-19

This is the main passage in the Mosaic law concerning the nature of testimony in a court of law. After forbidding a negative decision on the testimony of only one witness (v. 15) Moses deals with the possibility of a malicious witness (**עֵד־רָמָס**). If a man who is a malicious witness rises up against someone a definite procedure was to be followed. The accused and accuser were to stand before the Lord. This location could have been at the Tabernacle, but it certainly was a public place for a public trial. They were to stand there before whatever priests and judges were over Israel in that day. These judges² would

¹*TDOT*, s.v. "**יָצַד**," by Ringgren, p. 217.

²These judges were probably the leaders of the system of judges which Jethro had helped Moses to install (Dt. 1.9-18; Ex. 18), rather

inquire diligently (דָּרַשׁ הַיָּטֵב) and, upon discovery of the duplicity of the עֵד־שָׁקֶר (as his designation became), would mete out to him the punishment which he (the false witness) had hoped to visit upon his opponent (the innocent defendant). There was to be no mercy (לֹא־תַחֲסֹם עֵינָךְ); the *lex talionis* ends this account. This was the law of the Lord.

Two chapters earlier (Dt. 17.18-20) the king was to write a copy of the law and read it all the days of his life. If any king did this at any time during Israel's history, it would have been David. He would know this law concerning false testimony. From David and Solomon we learn that Israel's king was her highest court of appeal during the monarchy.¹ David could not go to a higher authority for his judgment. Even if he were not yet the king, he soon would be and, in either situation, he could not judge his own case. David therefore asks the Lord to judge.

Knowing his innocence and the false hearts and desires of his foes, he asked that this law be carried out. They had desired his destruction--he prayed for theirs (vv. 1-8). They desired to rejoice over him and to see him swallowed up--David sought to rejoice in the Lord and their downfall and shame (v. 26). He does not, however, press the law to its fullest possible extent. He only desires to delight in the Lord's righteousness, not in their destruction. David is exonerated from any personal revenge or malice--he seeks the careful legal fulfillment of the Law of God. He is asking the Lord to do--not what He had said He would do--what He had said should be done.

than the judges of the book of Judges. Judges during the monarchy were under the direct control of the king (cf. 1 Ch. 26.29).

¹Cf. 1 Ki. 3.9, 16-28; 2 Sa. 15.2-4, 6.

Conclusion

Psalms 35 is a poetic description of David's situation wherein, using the figure of a lawsuit and trial,¹ David portrays the slander of his enemies against his innocence. His enemies desire his downfall and ruin and he sees no way of appeal except to the righteousness of the Lord on the basis of the Mosaic Law. Basing his prayer on the principles of Deuteronomy 19.16-21, he asks for the righteous Judge to judge righteously. We see, therefore, that David's prayers, rather than negating his claims to righteousness, show his concern for the honorable keeping of the Law and the doing of God's good pleasure.

¹Several respected commentators differ with this interpretation. Leupold (*Psalms*, p. 285) says that this cannot be understood as lawsuit because "the first figure used is taken literally without further proof for this approach; all the rest are allowed to remain as figures." McKay (*Psalms 1-50*, pp. 160f) alleges "conflicting metaphors" which deny the interpretation of this thesis. Kirkpatrick (*Psalms*, p. 176) says that the psalmist drops the figure of a lawsuit for that of the battlefield. It is the contention of this thesis that these statements miss the image of the psalm *as a whole* and do not, therefore, do it proper justice.

*New Testament Considerations**The Problem*

Can Christians pray the imprecatory laments? How do David's prayers relate to the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ who said "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." (Luke 6.27f NIV)? We will answer the second question first to gain more light for the first. An examination of these verses and Psalm 35 will show that David's words are not antithetical to the commands of Christ, but that, inspired by the same Holy Spirit, they speak and write in harmony with that Spirit.

A Resolution

Jesus' words encompass a four-fold command: love, do good, bless, and pray. These constitute a four step program of response to the hatred of one's foes.¹ *Love* (ἀγάπη, here the imperative from ἀγαπάω) is the preliminary requirement because apart from it all would be a meaningless waste of energy² David says that he acted toward these opponents with increasing love--first as his friend, then his brother and finally as his own mother (v. 14). Each of these relationships would be impossible to emulate without some degree of love--even if the friend is only a neighbor (LXX—πλησίον). David fulfilled the first command--to love his enemies.

¹I am indebted for the following analysis to a paper by Thomas V. Taylor, *A Short Study in the Problem of Psalm 109* (Elkins Park: Taylor Press, n.d.).

²1 Cor. 13.1-3.

To do good (καλῶς ποιεῖτε) is to actively seek to improve the welfare of the other. In verse 12 David laments that his enemies repaid him evil for good (תַּיֵּט תַּחַת תַּיֵּט; Lxx—πονηρὰ ἀντὶ καλῶν), thus implying that he did good to them and for them.¹ *To bless* (εὐλογεῖτε) connotes calling down the gracious power of God on someone's behalf. This relates closely to *prayer* (προσεύχεσθε) on behalf of our enemies. David states that he has done this in a specific situation (v. 13) on their behalf. Is it a coincidence that David has thus fulfilled every part of the law of love which Jesus taught? Were it not for the fact of the verbal inspiration of the Scriptures we would be forced to this conclusion. We can, however, confidently say that the same Holy Spirit who recorded Christ's words directed David's life and the writing of this psalm.

David's claim to righteousness, up to this point, is still justified. How are we to rectify his imprecations with this statement? David, having followed the outline of Christ, realizes that the hatred of his enemies is maintaining its intensity, and is not diminishing. He therefore prays that the Lord will fulfill His desire upon them as is revealed in Scripture--"a life for a life, an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, a hand for a hand, a foot for a foot." Just so will the Lord Christ say in that day, "Depart from me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels."²

David illustrates the consistency of God's dealings with men throughout history. This psalm is an example of how godly men obey their Lord in all things.

¹Cf. "Exegesis of Psalm 35," verses 11-12, above (pp. 45-49).

²This enables us to understand Christ's use of Ps. 35.19 (cf Ps. 69.4) in reference to Himself.

The Christian and Imprecation

Having said this, may the Christian pray the imprecatory psalms? If they show the harmony and continuity of God's revelation are we to pray them as David wrote them? "The imprecation of a calamity upon another would seem to be wholly adverse to the spirit of the New Testament."¹ Does this mean that Christian should not utter the imprecations, but skip over them in reading the psalms, or should one heed Darton when he says that if we are to use the psalms at all, we must use them in their entirety or else we will not understand the individual psalm?²

We have seen David's problem and his response to it. His Christ-like response to the allegations of his enemies is finalized in the imprecations; He has done everything that he should, and he then commits them to the will and judgment of God. Whatever should come upon them would. The Christian is free (is obligated) to follow the steps outlined by Jesus and has the responsibility to turn such persons over to the hand and will of God (2 Timothy 4.14), whatever that action may bring forth.

May Christians pray them? We cannot use them for personal vindication but we may and should use them as warnings of God's judgment.³ We may and should use them in worship because:

their effect is to restrain us from sin, to make us love and value justice, to lead us to commit vengeance into the hands of the Lord,...and to

¹Edwards, "The Imprecations," p. 99.

²G.C.1Darton, "The New Abuse of the Psalter," *Theology* 73 (January 1970): 26.

³Derek Kidner, *Psalms 1-72*, The Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1973), p. 32.

show us that God is to be praised for His
justice as well as His mercy.¹

We can read them with thanksgiving that our God is the Judge of all the
Earth and our hope is in our vindication at His tribunal.

¹J. H. Webster, "The Imprecatory Psalms," in *The Psalms in Worship*, ed. John McNaugher (Pittsburgh: The United Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1907), p. 309.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Summary

The burden of this thesis has been the interrelationship between the righteousness of the psalmist and his imprecations against his enemies. The genre of the lament has been examined briefly, and the existence of a sub-genre (the imprecatory lament) has been suggested from a form-critical analysis of the Psalter.

Psalms 35 was selected as the passage to be exegeted because of its nature as a crux passage regarding this question. A literal-grammatical exegesis of this psalm demonstrated it to be a poetic description of David's situation using the imagery of a lawsuit. David, as the psalmist, was seen praying for the fulfillment of the Law of Moses with regard to false witnesses. His righteousness was not mitigated because he was praying for the working out of God's perfect will, not for personal vengeance.

The New Testament passage Luke 6.27f, as the *locus classicus* of Jesus' teaching concerning enemies and abuse, was then studied. David was shown to be in complete accord with the teaching of the Lord in this situation. Christians, however, are urged not to pray the imprecations in these psalms for vengeance, but rather to learn from them the consequences of rejecting the Truth and protection of accepting it.

Conclusion

David's righteousness is thus maintained in the midst of these prayers because he was innocent of the charges brought against him and

was praying only for the fulfillment of the Law and justice of God.¹

¹The question which naturally arises concerning the universal applicability of this proposed solution to all of the imprecations in the psalms and the rest of the Scriptures is not answered in this thesis. This solution does not apply necessarily to other imprecations. This is not to say that it does not apply to other passages. What this thesis does demonstrate is that it is not proper to seek justification for the imprecations *only* by a philosophical argument which then extends over the complete corpus of imprecatory passages *en masse*. They must be exegeted within the context of their particular psalms, prophecies or writings. We leave this as a challenge to others to seek solutions to the other instances--to come to a solution for each passage *on its own merits*, not on the merits or exegesis of another.

Appendix One

The Titles of the Psalms

Introduction

Attitudes toward the psalm titles range from that of the *New English Bible* which says "they are almost certainly not original"¹ and therefore omits them from the text, to Sampey, who says, "The inscriptions cannot always be relied upon,"² to Clarence Mason who writes that the titles are "*part of the inspired text*"³ (emphasis his). If we accept the third position, authorship and the historical background of some of the psalms are no longer questions--the answers are in the titles. Is this a reasonable conclusion? There are two basic lines of evidence which show that it is.⁴

Antiquity of the Psalm Titles

To demonstrate the existence of psalm titles in antiquity, four periods of their use are briefly noted: the second, seventh, eighth and tenth centuries B.C.

The Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint (LXX), was translated in the third and second centuries B.C. Thirty-two psalm

¹*The New English Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. xviii.

²*The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, s.v., "Book of Psalms," by John R. Sampey, p. 2487.

³Clarence E. Mason, Jr., "Old Testament Poetic Books," in *Bible Syllabi* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia College of Bible, 1970), p. 28.

⁴William Harding, *Old Testament Poets*, unpublished class lecture (Hatfield: Biblical Theological Seminary, 1977). The following discussion is based upon this material.

titles were added to the psalter. Since, as far as we know, there were no titles for them to have copied and since they added titles to the text they may have been copying the then-current procedure of using psalm titles. This does not prove that psalm titles were in use at that time. It only shows that the translators felt the need for a certain level of conformity within the psalter. They added titles, thus, to give the book greater regularity.¹

The prophet Habakkuk gives evidence of the use of psalm titles in the seventh century B.C. Written shortly before the Assyrian conquest of Israel, Habakkuk 3 is a psalm with a superscription (3.1) and subscription (3.19b). תְּפִלָּה (3. 1) is used to designate five psalms (see Ps. 17.1; 86.1; 90.1; 102.1; 142.1) and the ל *auctoris*² describes Habakkuk as the author. This *lamedh* is typical of most of the psalms with titles. שְׁגִינוֹת is a word of uncertain meaning,³ but it too is found in Psalm 7.1 (its only other occurrence in the MT). The subscription of Habakkuk's psalm contains a word used in fifty-five psalms—לְמַנְצֵחַ, meaning "to the overseer." Psalm titles were therefore in use in the seventh century B.C.

In Isaiah 38, a psalm of Hezekiah shows that they were also in use in the eighth century B.C. Entitled (v.9) a מִכְתָּב לְהִזְקִיָּהוּ or "a writing of Hezekiah," and subscripted עַל־בֵּית יְהוֹנָדָה, this

¹Their addition of Ps. 151 to the Masoretic Text (MT) should show the need for caution.

²Kautzsch, *Grammar*, p. 420. See also *BDB* s.v. "ל".

³See the LXX which renders it with ψάλλμος in Ps. 7.1 but ὠδή in Hab. 3.1.

shows the use of psalm titles in the eighth century B.C.

2 Samuel has two examples of psalm titles which may indicate their use in the tenth century B.C.¹ The psalm beginning in 2 Samuel 22.1-2a² has an historical prologue,³ and is called a song (שִׁירָה).⁴ 2 Sam. 23.1-7 is also a psalm, and is entitled "The last words of David."⁵ This too is a psalm with a title, proving that during the tenth century B.C. titles may have been commonly used with psalms.

Psalm titles were in use at the appropriate times so that they could have been part of the original Hebrew text.

Historical-Textual Evidence

The oldest complete MS of the Hebrew Bible (Leningrad Codex B₁₉) is dated A.D. 1008-1009. In this codex the psalm titles appear as an integral part of the text of each psalm with which they occur.⁶

A psalter manuscript found in Cave 4 at Qumran, dated in the second century B.C. also has the titles of the psalms as an integral part of the Hebrew text. Psalms 1-69 are in basically the same order

¹The events certainly take place during the tenth century B.C., but the books of Samuel may not have been finally compiled for another generation or more after the events which they describe.

²See Psalm 18. Therefore, this is definitely a psalm.

³See Psalms 18, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, 142.

⁴This term is used in Ps. 46.1 and 28 other times in psalter.

⁵וְאֵלֶּה דְּבָרֵי יְדִיד הָאֲחֵרִים

⁶See Kittel, ed., *Biblia Hebraica*, pp. 978-1100 for an example of this.

as in today's Bibles¹ and again show the antiquity of their presence in the text. Another scroll discovered at Qumran in Cave 11 was dated to the early first century A.D. Many of the psalms from 118-150 are contained in it and verse one is legible in seventeen of them (the absence of psalm and verses is due to the deteriorated condition of the MS, which has many *lacunae*). In psalms with *lacunae*, these are approximately the correct size for the insertion of the missing words. Only one of these seventeen has a title unknown to the MT (Ps. 144.1 לַדָּוִד is omitted with no gap). Psalm 130.1 also adds the word אֲדֹנָי to the title. The titles are otherwise nearly identical to the MT. These scrolls are further proof of the presence of the titles in the text in antiquity.

The LXX Translation

The LXX was mentioned above as evidence for the presence of psalm titles in the second century B.C. The translation of psalm titles in the LXX shows that they were at least present at that time. It also is a strong argument for the antiquity of the titles because of the way in which many of them were mistranslated.

That many of the psalm titles were mistranslated² suggests that the psalm titles were old enough for their meanings to have been forgotten by the second century B.C. This would require a gap of at

¹Ps. 32 is omitted; Ps. 71 is inserted following Ps. 38.

²E.g., LXX translates לַמְנַצֵּחַ by εἰς τὸ τέλος (Ps. 4.1; 5.1; 6.1).

least several centuries.¹

Conclusion

These evidences are not advanced as proof of the originality of the psalm titles. Apart from the recovery of the autographs no such absolute proof is possible. They do combine to yield a high degree of probability that the psalm titles are original, authentic and inspired.

The burden of proof, however, does not rest upon those seeking to demonstrate their inspiration, but upon those who would deny it. The titles of the psalms, in all of our MSS, reveal a high degree of stability and regularity. They present themselves as a part of the text (in the original language). Until they are proven otherwise, they should be accepted as such and their accuracy and validity recognized.

¹Derek Kidner (*Psalms 1-72*, pp. 32f) says that the New Testament recognizes the psalm titles as authoritative (see Mark 12. 35ff; Acts 2.29ff, 34ff, 13.35ff), but this is not conclusive. These references are too general to be asserted as proof of inspiration.

TABLE 1-A

TABLE 1-A
FORM-CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF
PSALMS IDENTIFIED AS IMPRECATORY

| Psalm Number | Address/Vocative | Lament/Complaint | Confidence Motif ¹ | Prayer/Plea | Motivations/Reasons | Vow to Praise ¹ | Certainty of Hearing | Singing Praise ² | Paying Vows ² |
|-----------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 3 ³ | 1a, 7a | 1b-2 | 3-6 | 7a | | | 4 | | |
| 5 | 1-3 | 9 | 12 | | 4-6, 10 | 3, 7 | | 11b | |
| 6 ⁴ | 1a | 6-7 | 10 | | 2-3a, 4b-5 | | 8b-9 | | |
| 7 | 1a, 3a, 6a, 8b | 2 | 10-11 12-16 | 1b, 6-9 | | 17 | | | |
| 9 | 2b, 10b, 13a, 19a | 13b | 3-6, 7-10 | 13a, 19-20 | 13c | 1-2b, 14 | 12b | | |
| 10 | 1a, 12a | 2a, 3-11 | 16 | 2b, 12b 15 | | 13-14 | 17-18 | | |
| 11 | | 2-3 | 4-7 | (1) ⁵ | | | | | |
| 12 ⁶ | 1a | 1b-2, 8 | 5-7 | 3-4 | | | | | |
| 17 | 1, 6 | | 2-5, 7-14 | | (7a) | 15 | | | |
| 18 | 1a | 4-6b | 1-3, 16-19(-45) | | | | 6c-d | (49-50) | |
| 21 ³ | 1a | (11a-b) | 7, 11-12 | | | 13 | (2b) | | |
| 28 | 1 | 3b-d | 5c | 4 | 5a-b | | 6 | (7-9) | |
| 31 | 1 | 9-13, 15b | 3-4, 20-21 | 15b-18 | (19) | | 22 | (23-24) | |

¹Westermann was the only author advocating this element of an imprecatory psalm (lament).

²Brueggeman was the only author advocating this element of an imprecatory psalm (lament).

³Park was the only author calling this an imprecatory psalm (in part or in whole).

⁴Pfeiffer is the only author calling this an imprecatory psalm (in part or in whole).

⁵() around a verse number indicates that the presence of an element in that psalm is questionable.

| Psalm Number | Address/Vocative | Lament/Complaint | Confidence Motif1 | Prayer/Plea | Motivations/Reasons | Vow to Praise1 | Certainty of Hearing | Singing Praise2 | Paying Vows2 |
|--------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|--------------|
| 344 | | | 4-7, 9b-10 19-22 | | | | 4, 6a, 15, 17 | 1-3 | |
| 35 | 1, 17, 22, 24 | 1, 3a, 4, 7, 11-12 15-16, 17b, 19, 21, 25-26 | (9-10) | 4-6, 8, 19, 25-26 | 18, 29-30 | (9-10) (18-28) 27-28 | | (27-28) 18 | |
| 37 | | 12, 14 | 4-5, 23-26 28a-c, 39-40 | | | | | | |
| 40 | 13 | | | 14-15 | 16-17a, (9-10) | (9-10) | 1b | | |
| 416 | 1a | 5-9 | 1-3 | | | | | 13 | |
| 52 | | 1a, 2-4 | 5 | | | 9 | | | |
| 54 | 1-2 | 3 | 4-5a | 5b | (5b) | 6 | | | |
| 55 | 1-2a, 16a, 17a | 3c, d, 9b-11 18b-21 | | 9a, 15 | | 23c | 16b, 17b-18a, 23a | | |
| 566 | 1a | 1b-2, 5-6 | 3-4, 9b-11 | 7 | (7) | 12 | | | |
| 58 | 6a | 2-5 | | 6-8 | 10-11 | | | | |
| 59 | 1, 4b | 2-4a | | 11b-13a | 13b, c | 16-17 | 10 | | |
| 63 | 1a | 9a | 7a, 8b | | | 3-4 | 11 | | |
| 643 | 1a | 1b-6 | 7-8 | | 9-10 | | | | |
| 68 | | | 5-6, 21-23 | 1-4 | | | | 24-27, 32-35 | |
| 69 | 1a, 13-18 | 4, 20b-21 | 32-33(36) | 22-28 | 6-9 | 30-31 | | | |
| 70 | 1, 5b, d | 2b, d, 3b | 2a, c, 3a | 5c | (5c) | | | 4 | |
| 71 | 1a, 4a, 5b, 12, 17a, 18a | 10-11 13 | 5, 3c, 14 | 2, 4, 9, 21 | 17-18, 19-20 | 15-16 22-24 | | | |
| 746 | 1a, 18, 22 | 1b, 3b-8, 10, 20b | | 11b, 22 | 20a, 21 22b-23 | | | | |

| Psalm Number | Address/ Vocative | Lament/ Complaint | Confidence Motif ¹ | Prayer/ Plea | Motivations/ Reasons | Vow to Praise ¹ | Certainty of Hearing | Singing Praise ² | Paying Vows ² |
|--------------|---------------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 754 | 1 | | 1-3, 6-8 | | | 9 | 1b | | |
| 79 | 1a, 5a | 1b-4 | | 6, 8-9, 10b-12 | 7, 10a, 12b | 13 | | | |
| 83 | 1, 13a | 2, 3-8 | | 9-16a, 17 | 16b, 18 | | | | |
| 864 | 1a, 2b, 3a, 6a, 14a | 1b, 14 | | 1a, 2, 3a, 4a, 6, 11, 16-17a | 3b, 4b, 5, 15, 17b-c | | | | |
| 914 | 2b | | 1, 3-4, 7-13, (14)-16 | | 14 | | | | |
| 924 | 1b | | 10-15 | | | | | 1-4 | |
| 94 | 1, 2a, 3a, 5a | 4-7, 21 | 14, 18, 22-23 | 26 | | | 9a | | |
| 109 | 1a, 21a, 26a | 2-5, 16-18 | 31 | 6-15, 19-20 | 21-25, 26b-27 | 30 | | | |
| 1124 | | | 7-8, 10 | | | | | | |
| 1184 | | | 6-7 | | | | | 24-25 | |
| 1204 | 2a | 5-7 | | 2 | | | | | |
| 129 | | 1-2a, 3 | 2b, 4 | 5-8 | | | | | |
| 1353 | | | 5-6 | | | | | 1-4, 19-21 | |
| 137 | 7a | 3, 7 | | 7, 5-6 | | | | | |
| 139 | | 20 | | 19 | 20 | | | | |
| 140 | 1a, 4a | 2-3 4-5 | 12-13 | 1, 4, 6b 8, 9-11 | | | | | |
| 141 | 1a, 8a | 5d-7 | | 1b-5c, 8b-10 | | | | | |
| 143 | 1a | 3-4 | | 1-2a, 7a, 8a, 9-12b | 2b, 7c, 8b, d, 10b-11a, 12c | | | | |

| Psalm Number | Address/ Vocative | Lament/ Complaint | Confidence Motif ¹ | Prayer/ Plea | Motivations/ Reasons | Vow to Praise | Certainty of Hearing | Singing Praise ² | Paying Vows ² |
|------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 144 | | 7c-8, 11b-c | 15 | 5-7b, 11a, 12-14 | | | | | |
| 145 ⁴ | 1a | | | | | | | 21 | |
| 146 ⁴ | | | 5 | | | | | 1-2, 10c | |
| 147 ⁴ | | | | | | | 12, 20 | 12, 20c | |

COMMENTS:

1. Certain psalms conform to the general pattern elicited by form-criticism.
2. Many psalms do not conform to this pattern. One or two vocabulary words or verses have affinities with the pattern, but this does not justify their inclusion in the category of imprecatory psalms.
3. Several psalms conform closely to that pattern and are more carefully examined in Table 1-B, below.

TABLE 1-B
FORM-CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PSALMS

| Psalm Number | 35 | 55 | 58 | 59 | 69 | 109 |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------|---------|-------------|------------------|
| Appeals for Help | 1,17, 22,24 | 1-2a, 16a,17a | 6 | 1,4b | 1a | 1, 26 |
| Imprecations | 4-6,8, 19,25- 26 | 9a,15 | 6-8 | 11b-13a | 22-28 | 6-15 19-20 |
| Prayers | 17, 23-24 | 6-8 | | 1-2 | 1, 14-18 | 21, 26 |
| Accusations | 1,3a, 4a, 7, 11-12 15-16 17b, 19-21 25-26 | 3c,c, 9b-11 18b-21 | 2-5 | 2-4a | 4, 20-21 | 2-5 16-18 |
| Incen- tives | 18,27 | | 11 | 13b-c | 6-9 | 2b, 3b 4a, 4b |
| Promises | 18, 28 (9-10) | 23c | | 16-17 | 30-31 | 30 |
| Protesta- tions of Innocence | 7a,b, 11-14, 19, 20b | (22b) | (10a) | 3c,4a | 4 | 2b, 3b 4a, 4b |
| Certainty of Hearing | (9-10) | 16b,17b 18a, 23a-b | 10 | 32-33 | (30) | 31 |
| Witnesses | 17a, 22a | 9b | | 4b | (5), 19 | |

These psalms were selected out of the larger list (Table 1-A) because of their high degree of conformity to the general elements of Table 1-A, above. The names of several of the elements have been changed because it is felt that these (suggested) names reflect the nature of those elements more accurately than do the names in Table 1-A.

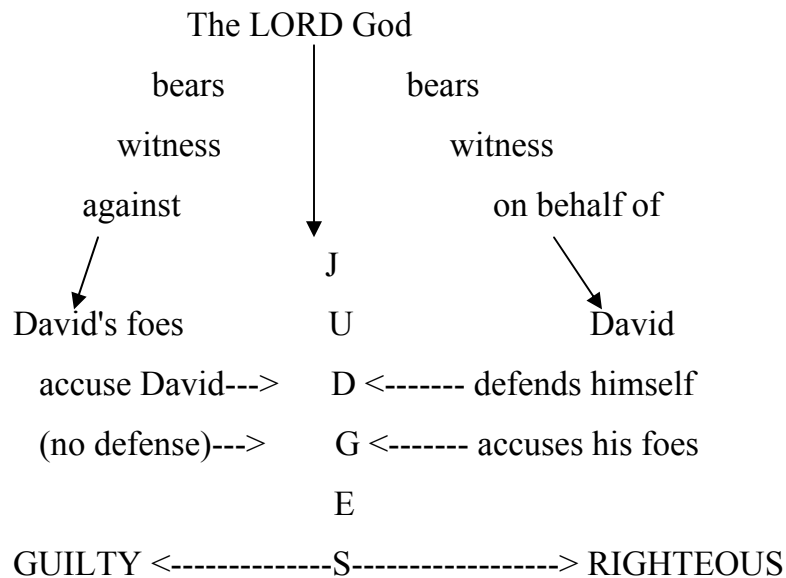
These name changes are the following: (1) "Address" was changed to "Appeals for Help," because not every vocative is a cry for help; some are only a cry for hearing--the Lord is requested to listen to the voice of the psalmist. (2) "Lament/Complaint" was changed to "Accusations," because not every complaint is an accusation. (3) "Prayer/Plea" was changed to either "Imprecation" or "Prayers:" because (a) "Imprecation" because some prayers are requests for judgment upon the psalmist's foes; (b) "Prayers" because some prayers are requests for deliverance without reference to the desired effect upon his foes. (4) The element of "Witnesses" was added because this is an important part of these psalms, especially Psalm 35, as seen in the body of this thesis. (5) The element of "Protestation of Innocence" was added for the same reason.

Only one of these psalms lacks more than one element (Psalm 58), two lack one element (Psalms 55 and 109), and three have all nine elements. There may be other psalms which correspond with this analysis to some degree, but these are most generally accepted as imprecatory. Because they are also all classified as laments, these psalms are suggested for the sub-genre of imprecatory lament.

TABLE 2
LEGAL VOCABULARY IN PSALM 35

| Hebrew Vocabulary | Location in Psalm 35 | Basic Meaning(s) | Passages for Comparison |
|----------------------|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| דָּבַר | 20 | 1. dispute, legal case. 2. trespass, dispute. | 1. Ex 18.16,22,26; Dt 1.17; 19.15; Is 29.21. 2. Jg 6.29; 8.1; 25.12,21; Ne 2.19; 13.17; Ex 1.18; Dt 13.15; 17.4. |
| מִשְׁפָּט | 23 | 1. judgment (the act of deciding a case) 2. a case presented for judgment. 3. execution of judgment. | 1. Dt 1.17; Ec 11.9; 12.14; Is 3.14. 2. Is 50.8; 2 Sa 15.4; 1 Ki 3.11. 3. Dt 32.41; Is 26.8; Zp 3.15; Ps 97.8. |
| עֵד | 11 | a witness; a person giving testimony. | Nu 5.13; Jos 24.22; I Sa 12.5 (cf. under). |
| צָדִיק | 24, 27 | 1. righteousness, having been vindicated by God. 2. a quality required of a judge. | 1. Is 53.11; 60.21; Ps 33.1. 2. Ps 7.12; 58.2; Ezk 23.45; Dt 1.16; 16.18. |
| רָאִיתָהּ 22 רִיב | 1, 23 | "you have seen it" 1. (n) lawsuit, court contention. 2. (v) to contend, conduct a legal case. | Lam 3.59,60. 1. Ex 23.2,3,6; 2 Sa 15.2,4; Ho 4.1; Mi 6.2. 2. Is 3.13; 57.16; Ps 103.9; Am 7.4. |
| שָׁפַט | 24 | to judge, govern. | Ge 18.25; Is 33.22; Ps 82.1; Jg 11.27; 1 Sa 24.13; Ps 9.5. |
| שָׁקֵר | 19 | false; malicious (used of witnesses). | Ex 23.1; Dt 19.16ff; Ps 27.12. |

TABLE 3
INTERRELATIONSHIP OF THE
PARTIES IN PSALM 35



There are three parties involved in the lawsuit of Psalm 35. They are David, his foes or enemies and the Lord. The interrelationship of these three parties makes clear the setting and content of Psalm 35.

David. As the defendant, David protests his innocence (vv. 7, 11-14, 19, 27). As the unjustly accused one, he asks for the fulfillment of the Mosaic Law upon the false witnesses. Needing defense he asks God to judge between himself and the enemies.

As the witness against his enemies' slander, David bears testimony concerning their lives and wards (vv. 4-7, 11-12, 15-16, 20-21). He reveals their duplicity and asks for their judgment.

David's enemies. The witnesses for the prosecution, they bear testimony (albeit false) against David (vv. 11-12, 20-21) and seek his downfall (vv. 7, 19, 25-26). David's counter-testimony is ignored--they, like the Sanhedrin of the Apostles' day could not answer because the testimony was true.

The Lord. The Lord is summoned by David to act as the Judge (vv. 1, 23-24). David knows that He is שֹׁפֵט צָדִיק. In spite of his innocence David realizes that he needs a truly righteous judge to exonerate him because their plots against him are thorough (vv. 4b, 20).

He also requests the Lord's presence as a witness who has seen the truth. He knows of God's omniscience and that His testimony will be complete and true, including his (David's) innocence and their (David's enemies') guilt. David will entrust his cause to the One who knows truly and both bears testimony to that knowledge and acts in accord with it.

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