



Psalm 69 - Prayer for Deliverance from Persecution

To the leader: according to Lilies. Of David.

Introduction

This is an individual lament, geared especially to a situation in which a faithful Israelite is suffering for wrongs he has done (v.5) but also finds attackers piling on, taking advantage of his suffering and making it worse (v.26). The NT cites several passages from this psalm, applying them to the life of Christ. Some have argued that NT use shows that the right way to read the psalm is as David's personal prayer, which believers sing in order to identify with him. A better approach comes from remembering that David was the representative for the people of God, and in that role he wrote this as a prayer that is well-suited to each of God's people in analogous situations, providing the ideal response to such trials, refer to the comment made on Psalm 3, where the issues are similar; the notes will show how this sheds light on the NT writers' portrait of Jesus.

As with Psalm 45, this psalm is set according to Lilies. The phrase may refer to general beauty of the composition, to the tune, or even to a six-stringed instrument known as the *Shoshannim*, the literal translation of the Hebrew.

Psalm 69:1-4 - I Am in Deep Trouble from Treacherous Enemies

The singer lays the situation before God, first with colourful imagery, like drowning or quicksand (vv.1-2), then with his own sad state (v.3), and finally, with the actual case: <<**those who hate me without cause**>>. Since the psalm will go on to acknowledge that the singer is not perfect, this cannot be a claim of total innocence; rather, it is a claim that the singer has not done harm to the particular people who attack him with lies.

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

2 I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.

3 I am weary with my crying;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God.

Psalm 69:1-3

Save me, O God. David had many times in his life where this prayer was needed. He felt he was about to drown - I have come into deep waters. Centuries later, the Son of David heard a drowning disciple cry out: <<*Lord, save me!*>> (Matthew 14:30b). Sometimes a person may feel like things are rushing in on them, like drowning in a flood. Other times they feel as if the water level slowly rises until they are overwhelmed. Each has its own type of fear and misery.

I sink in deep mire. In other psalms David rejoiced at being set upon a rock (Psalm 40:2). Here he is in the opposite position, sinking down in the mud and the mire, where there is no standing. Jesus can be pictured sinking down into the deep mire of humanity's sin and guilt, coming truly into the deep waters, where the floods overflow. No wonder it was said of Jesus before he went to the Cross, he began to be sorrowful and deeply distressed: <<*He took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee, and began to be grieved and agitated*>> (Matthew 26:37).

I am weary with my crying. David was worn out with all the energy spent in his crying and crying out as he waited for God to rescue him.

4 More in number than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause;
many are those who would destroy me,
my enemies who accuse me falsely.
What I did not steal
must I now restore?

Psalm 69:4

Hate me without cause. This begins the description of the real problems David poetically described in the previous verses. He lived under the great stress of knowing there were many people who simply hated him, and without cause. In John 15:25 Jesus uses these words to describe himself, and to lead his followers to expect the same. In John's presentation of Jesus, he is the perfect embodiment of a faithful Israelite, who may expect the impious to hate him.

Many are those who would destroy me. Among the many who hated David were some who went beyond the feelings of hatred to active efforts to destroy him. Those set on David's destruction were mighty; they could make it happen.

What I did not steal must I now restore? The fundamental injustice of David's misery increased his sense of despair.

David could only imperfectly say, "I have stolen nothing", but his greater Son could say it in a remarkable way. The devil tried to take what was not his, God's honour and glory in heaven. Adam took what was not his, the fruit forbidden to him. Moses took what was not lawful for him to take, the life of an Egyptian foreman. David took what was not his, Bathsheba into his bed. Yet Jesus refused to take what was rightfully his; he did not consider it robbery to be equal with God: <<*who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited*>> (Philippians 2:6), choosing to set aside divine privileges that were rightfully his. For this, Jesus was condemned by humanity: <<*We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God*>> (John 19:7b).

Psalm 69:5-8 - Let Not My Folly Bring Shame on Those Who Love You

The singer admits that he is not perfect, which God knows full well: <<*the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you*>>; he agrees that his wrongs could put others of the faithful, <<*those who hope in you*>>, to shame, i.e. could subject them to scorn, and prays that this will not happen. In singing this the pious acknowledge that they do commit sins, and that these sins can cause trouble for themselves and for others, and even damage the reputation of God and his faithful people. Such acknowledgment should help them to be more honest about their weaknesses, and more careful about their deeds.

⁵ O God, you know my folly;

the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

⁶ Do not let those who hope in you be put to shame because of me,

O Lord God of hosts;

do not let those who seek you be dishonoured because of me,

O God of Israel.

⁷ It is for your sake that I have borne reproach,
that shame has covered my face.

⁸ I have become a stranger to my kindred,
an alien to my mother's children.

Psalm 69:5-8

O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you. In many of the psalms David proclaimed his innocence compared to his adversaries. In Psalm 69 David confessed his sin and failings, appealing to God's mercy. This may be spiritually applied to Jesus, noting the public nature of his humiliation on the Cross. Nailed to the Cross, likely with no clothing at all before a mocking public, Jesus accomplished his great work on the Cross with nothing hidden. He had no sins of his own to bear, but the bearing of the sins of humanity was not hidden from either God or man.

Do not let those who seek you be dishonoured because of me. David's concern was not only the effect of his upon himself, but especially the effect it had upon the people of God. The thought of embarrassing those who seek God was painful to David.

Shame has covered my face. Among the other problems caused by David's sin, he also had to deal with damaged relationships with his siblings - I have become a stranger to my kindred. How strange it was that Jesus' own brothers rejected him and treated him as a stranger: <<*When his family heard it, they went out to restrain him, for people were saying, 'He has gone out of his mind'*>> (Mark 3:21), and: <<*For not even his brothers believed in him*>> (John 7:5). If any should have stood by him and defended him to the death, it should have been his own family.

Psalm 69:9-12 - I Bear Your Reproach

The idea of reproach, introduced in v.7, dominates this section. Here the song is speaking of the current condition: the reproaches that fall on the singer are not really the proper response of other godly people to his wrongs; they are instead the weapons of those who reproach God, scorning God himself, his covenant, and his faithful people. They even turn the signs of devout mourning and repentance, i.e. fasting and sackcloth, into an occasion to mock and humiliate the pious person. Even though the singer is a penitent, he is still consumed with zeal for God's house, i.e. is loyal to the covenant and its ordinances.

- 9 It is zeal for your house that has consumed me;
the insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.
- 10 When I humbled my soul with fasting,
they insulted me for doing so.
- 11 When I made sackcloth my clothing,
I became a byword to them.
- 12 I am the subject of gossip for those who sit in the gate,
and the drunkards make songs about me.

Psalm 69:9-12

It is zeal for your house that has consumed me. In John 2:17, Jesus' disciples remember this text after Jesus has driven the livestock merchants and money-changers out of the temple. Jesus embodies the ideal pious member of God's people, which is the calling of the Davidic king; although, unlike all the heirs of David before him, Jesus does not have 'folly' and 'wrongs' (v.5) to repent of. This is confirmed by Jesus' challenge to the crowd that wanted to stone him to death: <<***Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me?***>> (John 8:46).

The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me. In Romans 15:3, Paul applies this text to Jesus, because he saw Jesus as the ideal covenant member who was willing to suffer reproach for the sake of God's truth. In this he is an example to the Roman Christians, for whom the issue of the weak and the strong probably included elements of shame in Roman society. Romans are known to have looked down upon those with Jewish scruples about food - the weak. The faithful Christian should be willing to suffer the scorn that some people might heap on them if they have close fellowship with the socially 'unworthy'; nothing, not even social reproach, should be allowed to prevent these Christians from worshipping together.

When I humbled my soul with fasting, they insulted me for doing so. David was happy to identify himself with God, counting it an honour to bear the disapproval of those who disapproved of *Yahweh*. The apostle Paul referenced v.9 in speaking of the sacrificial nature of Jesus: <<***For Christ did not please himself; but, as it is written, 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me'***>> (Romans 15:3).

I became a byword to them. The idea is becoming a proverb, a label. In today's world this is a deliberate strategy, to dismiss people simply by giving them a label so that one does not have to think about or engage their ideas. Faithful believers

know the sting of this today. They are derided as religious nuts and fundamentalists and radicals and haters.

I am the subject of gossip for those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me. David became the target of scorn and disapproval from almost everyone, from the leaders of the city to the city drunks. The high priest and the thief on the cross both reviled Jesus.

Psalm 69:13-18 - My Prayer Is Directed to You

The next section of the psalm expresses the singer's reliance on God: 'my prayer is to you', 'answer me', 'do not hide your face', 'draw near'. His case is desperate, and he urgently needs God's help. The prayer appeals to what God has revealed about himself: the abundance of God's steadfast love and faithfulness (v.13) and steadfast love and mercy (v.16) echo Exodus 34:6, God's revelation of his character: <<*The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness'*>>. It is clear in this case that for God to answer (vv.16-17) means for him to do something to relieve the situation; 'no' does not qualify as an answer here!

¹³ But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord.

At an acceptable time, O God,

in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me.

With your faithful help ¹⁴ rescue me

from sinking in the mire;

let me be delivered from my enemies

and from the deep waters.

¹⁵ Do not let the flood sweep over me,

or the deep swallow me up,

or the Pit close its mouth over me.

Psalm 69:13-15

But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord. With the constant disapproval from men, David naturally and wisely turned to God. He would seek God and make his prayer to the one who would hear **in the abundance of your steadfast love.**

At an acceptable time, O God. David recognises that God will answer in his own good time. He hopes that he will receive that answer within the timeframe of his current trial, or at least within his lifetime, but history has shown that God only

answers prayers when the time is right to do so: <<*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance*>> (2 Peter 3:9).

Do not let the flood sweep over me. With poetic repetition, David returned to the image of him drowning, asking God to rescue him from those who hate him. The prophet also expresses similar feelings, although his were from an actual experience of drowning: <<*The waters closed in over me; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped around my head at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me for ever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O Lord my God*>> (Jonah 2:5-6).

- 16 Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good;
according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.
- 17 Do not hide your face from your servant,
for I am in distress – make haste to answer me.
- 18 Draw near to me, redeem me,
set me free because of my enemies.

Psalm 69:16-18

Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good. Appealing to God because of his loyal love, Hebrew *hesed*, David once again asked for the multitude of God's tender mercies: <<*But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation*>> (Psalm 13:5).

Do not hide your face from your servant, for I am in distress. By presenting himself to God as his servant and in trouble, David hoped to appeal to God's compassion. Great men like Moses and Paul were also referred to as God's servants: <<*Remember the teaching of my servant Moses, the statutes and ordinances that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel*>> (Malachi 4:4), <<*Am I now seeking human approval, or God's approval? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still pleasing people, I would not be a servant of Christ*>> (Galatians 1:10), and: <<*Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that would be spoken later*>> (Hebrews 3:5).

Psalm 69:19-21 - You Know My Reproach and Shame

Here the psalm describes the sense of shame, dishonour, despair and abandonment the singer must feel; and, although these are emotions of the heart and not necessarily visible to man, nevertheless he can say to God, 'you know,' for God searches all hearts at all times.

- 19 You know the insults I receive,
and my shame and dishonour;
my foes are all known to you.
- 20 Insults have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none;
and for comforters, but I found none.
- 21 They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Psalm 69:19-21

You know the insults I receive, and my shame and dishonour. The appeal to God's compassion continued, especially because David bore much of this in his loyalty to God (v.9b).

I looked for pity, but there was none. David asked God for help because there was none to help him.

For my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. Vinegar or sour wine would have been very unpleasant to someone suffering from severe thirst. John 19:28-29 uses these words in connection with one of Jesus' last words on the Cross, confirmed by Matthew 27:34 and 27:48; Mark 15:23 and 15:36; and Luke 23:36. The sour wine would have been the cheap beverage that the soldiers used to satisfy their thirst; but Jesus felt God-forsaken (Mark 15:34), and the thirst to which he was testifying must have been far more severe and deep-seated than anything this drink was meant for. When Jesus received it, he briefly prolonged his life, and therefore his agony, and perhaps moistened his lips enough finally to cry out: <<***It is finished***>> (John 19:30b). In Luke 23:34a, Jesus prays: <<***Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing***>>. Since Luke alluded to this psalm, he might well have intended a contrast: the psalm will go on to call down curses on the enemies, while Jesus did not, but instead prayed for mercy. Nevertheless, the judgement requested by the curses is only delayed, and will be set loose when Christ returns as judge of all. This does not exhaust the Christian view of these curses, since other NT texts use them; refer to the comments made on vv.22-23 and v.25.

Psalm 69:22-28 - May They Suffer the Punishment They Deserve

The next section asks God to vindicate his faithful one by bringing on the enemies the troubles they deserve, which they would bring on the faithful if they could. The description in vv.22-25 uses imagery to convey the idea of a life devastated

and sad in various ways: in home life (v.22), in personal health (v.23), and in its posterity (vv.24-25). It is clear from v.26 that these people are grievous sinners; they are Israelites who do not embrace the covenant and who can wield influence to harm the faithful. As with these curses in general, the unstated assumption is that they will not repent, which of course would be preferable; refer to the comments made on Psalms 5:10 and 35:4-8.

22 Let their table be a trap for them,
a snare for their allies.

23 Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,
and make their loins tremble continually.

Psalm 69:22-23

Let their table be a trap for them. In Romans 11:9-10, Paul cites this curse to explain why his fellow Jews who reject the message of Christ have been hardened. Nevertheless, in the rest of Romans Chapter 11, he also explains why the curse is not irrevocable: it is a 'partial hardening,' which will be relieved if and when they repent: *<<And even those of Israel, if they do not persist in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again. For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree and grafted, contrary to nature, into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these natural branches be grafted back into their own olive tree. So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in>>* (Romans 11:23-25).

Let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see. David's enemies had distorted vision when they looked at him; he prayed the distortion would become permanent blindness.

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

25 May their camp be a desolation;
let no one live in their tents.

Psalm 69:24-25

Pour out your indignation upon them. David asked God to fulfil a series of curses upon his enemies, ending with the wish that they would *<<be blotted out of the book of the living>>*, and *<<not be enrolled among the righteous>>* (v.28).

May their camp be a desolation; let no one live in their tents. This line is twice referred to in the NT. Jesus quoted it in sadness over Jerusalem (Matthew 23:38). In Acts 1:20, Peter applied this text to Judas, who had taken part in destroying Jesus, the perfect embodiment of this psalm. If it is part of Peter's speech, then he is combining it with Psalm 109:8 to show why the disciples should give up on Judas and replace him with another.

26 For they persecute those whom you have struck down,
and those whom you have wounded, they attack still more.

27 Add guilt to their guilt;
may they have no acquittal from you.

28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living;
let them not be enrolled among the righteous.

Psalm 69:26-28

No acquittal, blotted out, not be enrolled. These prospects go beyond temporal punishments to include an eternal one: <<***Do not cover their guilt, and do not let their sin be blotted out from your sight; for they have hurled insults in the face of the builders***>> (Nehemiah 4:5). Again, the assumption is that the people in question will not repent. These words could prove to be a mercy to the evildoers, should any of them be present at worship when the congregation sings them, and they heed the warning: <<***Therefore rid yourselves of all sordidness and rank growth of wickedness, and welcome with meekness the implanted word that has the power to save your souls***>> (James 1:21), <<***And have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies***>> (Jude 22-23).

Psalm 69:29-33 - Deliver Me for the Sake of the Humble

The argument of this section is that if God's salvation should set the pious singer on high, he will magnify God with public thanksgiving, presumably in a worship service, as confirmed by the mention of potential sacrifice in v.31; refer to the comment made on Psalm 66:13-15. This will enable the humble, another term for the genuinely faithful, to see it and be glad; they will know that the Lord hears the needy who seek him in faith.

29 But I am lowly and in pain;
let your salvation, O God, protect me.

30 I will praise the name of God with a song;

I will magnify him with thanksgiving.
31 This will please the Lord more than an ox
or a bull with horns and hoofs.
32 Let the oppressed see it and be glad;
you who seek God, let your hearts revive.
33 For the Lord hears the needy,
and does not despise his own that are in bonds.

Psalm 69:29-33

Let your salvation, O God, protect me. David not only prayed for the downfall of his enemies. He also asked God to rescue him from drowning in the mire of hateful men and to establish him up on high: <<*The Lord answer you in the day of trouble! The name of the God of Jacob protect you!*>> (Psalm 20:1).

I will praise the name of God with a song. Moving to greater confidence, the psalmist vowed to praise and magnify God for his rescue. This sincere praise honoured God even more than any animal sacrifice: <<*For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt-offerings*>> (Hosea 6:6), and: <<*With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? Shall I come before him with burnt-offerings, with calves a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with tens of thousands of rivers of oil? Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*>> (Micah 6:6-8).

You who seek God, let your hearts revive. The trial of the psalmist would not be wasted. He would become a lesson to others who seek God and show them how their hearts shall live.

Psalm 69:34-36 - Let Everything Praise the God Who Dwells in Zion

The psalm moves on to sing of all creation praising God, and of God's enduring commitment to populate Zion with the faithful offspring of his faithful servants. Behind this section lies the recognition that God intends the whole world to be able to praise him, and he intends for Zion to flourish as the paradigm of true piety. This cannot happen when the kind of evildoers described in this psalm have a free rein to oppress the faithful and to corrupt the corporate life of God's people.

34 Let heaven and earth praise him,
the seas and everything that moves in them.
35 For God will save Zion
and rebuild the cities of Judah;
and his servants shall live there and possess it;
36 the children of his servants shall inherit it,
and those who love his name shall live in it.

Psalm 69:34-36

Let heaven and earth praise him. As low as this psalm began, it soars to the highest praise in the end. Heaven and earth are not big enough to give God the praise he is due: <<*But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Even heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain you, much less this house that I have built!*>> (1 Kings 8:27). The seas and everything that moves in them will also bring him praise.

For God will save Zion and rebuild the cities of Judah. The vision is lifted high above the problems of one man. Now David prayed for blessing for Jerusalem and Judah, that his servants shall live there and possess it. Some commentators believe that the specific mention of the cities of Judah and no mention of broader Israel means this psalm, or this portion of the psalm, must date to either the days of the divided monarchy or of exile. This is not at all necessary. First, it is not unusual that David would have special regard for the land of his own tribe, Judah. Second, it may have been composed in the seven years and six months when David was king over Judah before he was king over the other 11 tribes (2 Samuel 2:1-11).

Those who love his name shall live in it. Scorned by his enemies, David knew that he and others who love his name would inherit the land and dwell in it.