

Psalms 69 | 4/26/20

I. Context of Ps 69 (credit to O. Palmer Robertson, *The Flow of the Psalms*, here)

A. Broader context (Book 2 of the Psalter)

1. There is a progression through the Psalter, almost like a sort of storyline. Book 1 (Pss 1-41) of the Psalter emphasizes *confrontation*. We see in Book 1 God establishing his kingdom through his king in the midst of the king's enemies. Let me point out just three things that point to this:

- a. Ps 2: God sets his anointed one as king over the nations. Establishment of the king and his kingdom in the midst of his enemies who plot against him.
- b. Psalms written by David: 37 of the 41 psalms in Book 1 are attributed to David. Emphasizes the *kingly* nature of these psalms.
- c. References to enemies: 30 of the 41 psalms make specific references to the enemies of the psalmist. Of the remaining eleven, 3 imply the presence of enemies, and 5 refer to death (which is also an enemy of God's people!). Emphasizes the establishment of David as king *in the midst of his enemies*.

2. Book 2 highlights the expansion of God's kingdom outward. There is an outward-facing element where psalmist addresses the nations directly. You could say that Book 2 emphasizes *communication*.

- a. Usage of the name Elohim ("God") versus Yahweh ("LORD")

Book 1:	Elohim	48x
	Yahweh	278x

Book 2:	Elohim	198x
	Yahweh	32x

Elohim is a more general word. It merely means "God." There is nothing about the term Elohim that is specific to the Israelite's God. Other nations also worship Elohim—they just use the term to refer to a *different* god. Yahweh, on the other hand, is the name which God reveals as particularly *his name*, the name of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yahweh is *Israel's* God and nobody else's. The preference for the general term "God" in Book 2 over "Yahweh," despite places where one would expect Yahweh to be used, shows how often the psalmist addresses other nations.

b. General flow of Psalms 42-72:

42-44	Introductory psalms of hope despite distress
45-48	Celebration of kingship of God & king over nations
49	The LORD summons the nations
50	The LORD summons his people
54-60	Seven enemies of the king
61-64	Cry of the king to God
65-68	God affirms the reign of the king
69-71	Ongoing struggles of the king
72	Description of glorious extension of kingdom throughout all time and space

You can see a sort of progression. Despite distress, the psalmist declares his hope in God (Pss 42-44). Four psalms then celebrate the kingship of God and the king over the nations (45-48). The next two psalms are a summons from the Lord, first to the nations (49) and then to his people (50). Psalms 54-60 reveal seven different enemies of the king. The next four psalms then express a cry of the king to the Lord (61-64), followed by four psalms where God affirms the reign of the king (65-68). Yet even after God affirms the king's reign, the king has ongoing struggles (69-71). Book 2 ends with a description of the glorious extension of the king's kingdom through all time and space.

3. Book 2 looks at outward expansion of the kingdom, with calls to the whole earth and the nations to worship the LORD. God affirms that king will reign, and yet even with this promise, the king faces enemies and difficulties. He is living in a sort of already/not-yet reality, where the kingdom has been established and God has promised that it will endure forever, and yet the king still faces trials and enemies.

B. Narrower context (comparison of Ps 69 with Pss 68 and 70)

1. Ps 68

- a. Declares that God helps those who are weak/needy ("Father of the fatherless and protector of widows" (v5)—just like David says he is in Ps 69

- b. Says that God leads out prisoners to prosperity (v6)—and says that his ppl are themselves prisoners in 69:33
 - b. Declares that God will judge *God's enemies* (v1)—in Ps 69, he asks for God to judge *David's enemies* (who are the same as God's enemies!)
2. Ps 70
- a. Another psalm of imprecation, asking both for the Lord's help and judgment on his enemies
 - b. In Ps 70, David declares that he is "poor and needy"; in Ps 69, David confesses that the Lord "hears the needy" (v33)

II. Content

A. The situation/problem

1. What is the problem/situation?
 - a. God himself has struck down David (v26)—perhaps b/c of his sin (v5)?
 - b. Human enemies persecute him (v12, 26)
 - c. God doesn't seem to hear him (v3)
2. How does David describe his situation? What pictures does he use?
 - a. Flood/drowning
 - "the waters have come up to my neck" (v1)
 - "let me delivered ... from the deep waters" (v14)
 - "Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up (v15)
 - b. Sinking in mud/mire/quicksand
 - "I sink in deep mire" (v2)
 - "Deliver me from sinking in the mire" (v14)
 - c. Well/pit (of the grave)
 - "Let not ... the pit close its mouth over me" (v15)

B. The enemies

1. Who are the enemies?

- a. Fellow Israelites—perhaps close friends of David?

“I am the talk of those who sit at the gate,
and the drunkards make songs about me.” (v12)

“I looked for pity, but there was none,
and for comforters, but I found none.
They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.” (v20-21)

“Let them be blotted out of the book of the living” (v28)

2. How do they attack David?

- a. They attack him with lies (v4)
- b. They gossip about him / slander him / make fun of him / reproach him (v11-12)
- c. They reproach him / shame him / dishonor him (v19-20)
- d. They show him no pity or comfort (v20)
- e. They rub salt on his wounds (v21)
- f. They recount his pain (v26)

3. Why do they attack David?

- a. Without cause (v4)
- b. Because David is consumed with zeal for the Lord’s house (v9), and they despise his humbling himself and fasting for the Lord’s sake

“The reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me” (v9)

“When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting,
it became my reproach.” (v10)

“When I made sackcloth my clothing,
I became a byword to them.” (v11)

C. What are some of the things David asks for from God?

1. Salvation for himself

“Save me, O God!” (v1)

“At an acceptable time, O God,
in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness” (v13)

“Deliver me from sinking in the mire;
Let me be delivered from my enemies ...” (v14-15)

“Draw near to my soul, redeem me;
Ransom me because of my enemies!” (v18)

“Let your salvation, O God, set me on high!” (v29)

2. Vindication/Salvation of the Lord’s people through his own salvation

“Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me,
O Lord GOD of hosts;
let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me,
O God of Israel.” (v6)

3. Judgment against his enemies (vs. 22-28)

D. Imprecatory Psalms (psalms in which the speaker curses his enemies)—how are we to think of them? Here are a few thoughts to help guide you:

1. Remember the covenantal context of these curses

a. David lived at a time when judgment against God’s enemies was expressed in space and time, on a national level.

b. As God’s representative, as the king of God’s kingdom, those who attacked David were attacking God. It’s appropriate for him to write these psalms in a way that it would be for somebody else to.

2. There is a present deferral of judgment

a. We live in an era where end-time judgment is put off until Christ returns.

b. Christ said to bless those who curse us; Paul said to bless those who persecute us, bless and do not curse.

- c. As Christ came to have mercy on us, his enemies, by saving them, so we are to show mercy to the world by proclaiming the gospel. This is how Christ's kingdom goes forth today.
- 4. There is certainty of future judgment
 - a. The principle of conflict, of salvation/judgment, is not abrogated; judgment is merely delayed. We do pray for Christ to return and to judge the world. We do pray for his kingdom to come.
 - b. We need to hold both of these in balance—blessing those who curse us while also praying for God's kingdom to be consummated.
- 5. What about the question from a few weeks ago, "How does a Christian despise a vile person today?" (from Ps 15)
 - a. First, there is a need for humility—we are *all* sinners, *all* vile, in a sense
 - b. Yet we also need to recognize that there *is* a distinction made between the righteous and the vile, and that the command is indeed to despise the vile person.
 - c. A good start in obeying his command is to despise vileness in yourself as well as in others ... yet there is more than that: despise the vile *person*, Psalm 15 says.
 - d. The Bible presents us with tension: on one hand, love your enemies, understand the depth of sin in your own heart so that you can say "I am the worst of sinners," do not judge, do not call brother "fool" ... on other hand, we are commanded to "despise the vile person"
 - e. It is helpful to look at Christ's example. He is supreme singer of Ps 15, which means he obeyed this perfectly. He despised vile people ... yet he was a friend of sinners. This doesn't dissolve the tension for us, but does help me live with the tension more comfortably.
 - f. Whatever "despise a vile person" does mean, it cannot mean "be a jerk toward vile person." Whatever despising them means, it can't conflict with showing love toward them.
- 6. See "What Do I Do with Imprecatory Psalms" on church website
- E. How do verses 34-36 relate to the rest of the psalm? Why are they there?
 - 1. There is an identification of David with the people of God—his hope for salvation is also their hope for salvation (cf. v6).

- a. David's psalms are surprisingly universal/vague—they are written in such a way so as to be intentionally adopted by the rest of Israel. The specifics are not so great as to make so that other people cannot also sing them for themselves.
 - b. David doesn't just write for himself—writes *for the people*. He is concerned not just for himself as an individual but for himself as the king of his people.
2. These verses show that there are still enemies living in the land. The hope is that all the enemies will one day be gone.

III. Christ in Ps 69

A. Allusions in NT

- 1. "More in number than the hairs on my head are those who hate me without cause" (v4)
 - a. Quoted in John 15:25
 - b. Jesus quotes this about himself to tell his disciples to expect the same
 - c. Interesting to see how this fits into the conflict/enmity theme in Scripture
- 2. "Zeal for your house has consumed me" (v9)
 - a. Quoted in John 2:17 when Jesus cleanses the temple
 - b. Think of broader context of psalm: David's zeal for the Lord's house is why others are persecuting him. It is Christ was zealous for the Lord's house (not just the physical temple but the very people of God!) to the point even of being killed by his enemies.
- 3. "The reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me" (v9)
 - a. Quoted in Romans 15:3
 - b. Applied to Christ
 - c. Used as example to for Roman Christians to please their believing neighbors
- 4. "I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched" (v3)
 - a. Fulfilled in John 19:28, "I thirst."
- 5. "For my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink" (v21)

- a. Alluded to in John 19:28-29 (cf. Matt 27:34, 48; Mk 15:23; Lk 23:36)
 - b. Surprising literal connection
 - c. Heart-breaking, especially if we think of verse 20, “Reproaches 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.”
 - d. Lk 23: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” may be intended as contrast with the imprecations of Ps 69, considering the allusion to drinking sour wine. (ESV Study Bible)
6. “Let their own table before them become a snare;
and when they are at peace, let it become a trap.
Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see,
and make their loins tremble continually.” (v22-23)
- a. Quoted in Romans 11:9-10. Paul uses it to show how part of Israel was hardened, not finding what they sought—salvation in God.
 - b. Notice how even though Paul only quotes two verses, he has the whole context of Ps 69 in mind—Israelites (not foreigners) who reject their king (David) are condemned ... Jews who reject their king (Jesus) are condemned.
 - c. In Rom 11, the hardening of Jews could be undone by repentance. They could be re-grafted into the tree. So, we should also understand the curses in Ps 69 to be upon condition of no repentance. ** This can also help inform the way we sing imprecatory psalms: “... [I]mprecations apply to those who intransigently and unrepentantly persevere in evil against God. They apply especially to those who have known the covenant of God and have knowingly spurned it” (Godfrey, *Learning to Love the Psalms*, 115).
 - d. In Rom 11, the hardening is to have mercy on Gentiles, which is to make Israel jealous and repent, and thus for God to have mercy on Israel. The result is mercy upon mercy:

“For just as you were at one time disobedient to God but now have received mercy because of their disobedience, so they too have now been disobedient in order that by the mercy shown to you they also may now receive mercy. For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all.

“Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Rom 11:30-33)

The result is praise abounding because of God's mercy abounding. God's mercy and praise to God grows through Rom 11. So also with Ps 69: "Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them" (Ps 69:34)!

7. "May their camp be a desolation,
let no one dwell in their tents" (v25)
 - a. Quoted in Acts 1:20, referring to Judas
 - b. The enemies in Ps 69 are Israelites, "brothers" of David. So Judas was an Israelite, one of the Twelve, close to Jesus.
 - c. Judas is the ultimate betrayer

B. How do the NT writers view Ps 69? Who do they see in it? Do you think they picked out random verses which in isolation speak about Jesus?

1. They see Christ as the perfect embodiment of this psalm
2. They understand the whole psalm to be fulfilled in Christ, not random isolated verses.

C. What about v5, "O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you"?

1. Obviously, in one sense, this cannot be a description of Jesus. Jesus was sinless (Heb 4:15). But this doesn't mess up the fact that this psalm is fulfilled in the person of Jesus. It is a description of the ideal Israelite, who is zealous for God, confesses his own sin, and suffers for the sake of God's name. If Jesus is perfect in this way, yet even more righteous than the psalmist, he is still the perfect embodiment of the ideal Israelite, and so still perfectly fulfills the ideals of this psalm as far as righteousness is concerned.
2. (Credit to Vern Poythress here): But I think there's also a sense in which Jesus still *does* sing Ps 69:5—not for his own sin, but for ours. Believers are sinful *even in their repentance*. As the Valley of Vision prayer puts it, "We need to repent of our repentance"—that is, our repentance of sin is not perfect, not whole-hearted, not always sincere, not complete in its knowledge of how much and how deeply we have offended God. We do not confess all of our sins; we confess half-heartedly or even begrudgingly. We do not full turn away from sin unto God; we half-turn, and then we fall right back into worshipping idols. Jesus had to be perfect even in this respect *for us*—again, not in repenting from his own sin but ours. Two other places in Scripture lead me to thinking this way:

a. Lev 16:20-22, “And when he [Aaron] has made an end of atoning for the Holy Place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and **confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their transgressions, all their sins.** And he shall put them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness by the hand of a man who is in readiness. The goat shall bear all their iniquities on itself to a remote area, and he shall let the goat go free in the wilderness.” Here, Aaron acting as high priest actually confesses the sins of the people (not just his own sins) *on their behalf*, laying them, so to speak, on the goat. Jesus, as our great high priest, does the same thing for us.

b. Matt 3, the baptism of Jesus. John is in the wilderness baptizing people “with water for repentance” (v11). The people were coming to him, “and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins” (v6). John’s baptism was a baptism for the repentance of sins. We can understand why he was confused when Jesus came to be baptized by him, since Jesus had no sin to confess! But Jesus said, “Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness” (v15). In his baptism, Jesus identified himself with sinful people even though he himself had no sin. God’s people are unrighteous even in their repentance of sin. Jesus had to live as the perfectly righteous Israelite, and this included “repenting” of sin perfectly.