

CHAPTER 3

PSALM 69

3.1 Introduction

The second promising candidate for the study of imprecatory psalms is Psalm 69. In the research history, this psalm has frequently been classified by scholars as an imprecatory psalm (see section 1.5.2).

Psalm 69 is a lament of an individual who prays for deliverance from his personal enemies. His sufferings had brought him to the point of death. The suppliant's loyalty to God and pious practices brought further insult, reproach and rejection by the whole community. The suppliant is confident that the God whom he serves so loyally will come to the fore and deliver him from misery and bring retribution upon his enemies.

This chapter is organised in the same way as Chapter 2 (on Psalm 35).

3.2 Text and Translation¹⁵

		לְמַנְצַח עַל־שׁוֹשָׁנִים לְדָוִד:	1 ¹⁶		To the chief musician, according to the lilies, of David.
17	A	הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי אֱלֹהִים	2	a	Deliver me, God!
		כִּי בָאוּ מַיִם עַד־נַפְשִׁי:		b	For the waters have come up to [my] throat.
		טָבַעְתִּי בֵּינֵן מְצוּלָה	3	a	I have sunk into a deep swamp,
		וְאֵין מְעֻמָּד		b	and there is no foothold.
		בָּאֲתִי בְּמַעְמְקֵי־מַיִם		c	I have come into the deep waters,
		וְשִׁבְלֹת שֶׁטְפָתַי:		d	and the flood overflows me.

¹⁵ This is my own translation. All quotations from Psalm 69 in this study are taken from this translation unless stated otherwise.

¹⁶ When citing the Psalms and other scriptural passages, the numbering and versification of the BHS text is used throughout the present study, rather than the numbering and versification of the LXX, Vulgate, or modern translations.

¹⁷ This subdivision of Psalm 69 into **stanzas** (Roman numerals) and **strophes** (uppercase letters) is discussed in 3.4.

		וְנִעַמְתִּי בְקָרְאִי	4	a	I am weary from calling out;
		נֶחֱרַר גְּרוֹנִי		b	my throat is parched;
		כָּלוּ עֵינָי		c	my eyes are failing
		מִיַּחַל לֵאלֹהֵי:		d	from waiting for my God.
	B	רַבּוֹ מִשְׁעָרוֹת רֹאשִׁי	5	a	More than the hairs of my head
		שֹׂנְאֵי חֵנָם		b	are those who hate me without cause.
		עֲצָמוֹ מִצְמִיתִי		c	Mighty are those destroying me,
		אִיבֵי שֶׁקֶר		d	my enemies are deceitful.
		אֲשֶׁר לֹא־גָזַלְתִּי		e	What I did not steal
		אִזְ אָשִׁיב:		f	I should now restore!
II	C	אֱלֹהִים אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ לְאוֹלָתִי	6	a	God, you know my folly.
		וְאֲשֵׁמוֹתַי מִמֶּךָ לֹא־נִכְחָדוּ:		b	Yes, my deeds are not hidden from you.
		אֶל־יִבְשׁוּ בִי קוֹנֵיךְ אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת	7	a	Let those not be ashamed because of me who wait for you, Lord, YHWH of Hosts.
		אֶל־יִפְלֹמּוּ בִי מִבְּקֹשֶׁיךָ אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל:		b	Let those not be disgraced because of me, who seek you, God of Israel.
	D	כִּי־עָלִידְךָ נִשְׂאָתִי חֲרָפָה	8	a	It is for your sake that I endure reproach,
		כִּסְתָהּ כְּלִמָּה פָנָי:		b	disgrace covers my face.
		מוֹזֵר הָיִיתִי לְאָחָי	9	a	I am estranged from my brothers
		וְנֹכְרִי לְבְנֵי אִמִּי:		b	and a stranger to my mother's sons.
		כִּי־קִנְאָתְךָ בֵּיתְךָ אֶכְלָתָנִי	10	a	For zeal for your house has consumed me,
		וְחֲרָפוֹת חוֹרְפֶיךָ נָפְלוּ עָלַי:		b	and the reproaches of those who reproach you fall on me.

		וְאִבְכָה בְצוּם נַפְשִׁי	11	a	When I wept in my soul with fasting,
		וַתְּהִי לְחֶרְפוֹתַי לִי:		b	it became reproach for me;
		וַאֲתָנָה לְבוּשֵׁי שָׂק	12	a	when I made sackcloth my clothing,
		וַאֲהִי לָהֶם לְמִשְׁלַל:		b	I became a byword to them.
		יְשִׁיחוּ בִי יוֹשְׁבֵי שַׁעַר	13	a	They talk disparagingly about me, those who sit in the gate;
		וְנִגְיִנוֹת שׁוֹתֵי שֵׁכָר:		b	and I am a song of those who drink liquor.
		וְאֲנִי תַפְלִיתִּיךָ יְהוָה	14	a	As for me, my prayer is before you, YHWH,
		עַת רְצוֹן		b	at the time of favour.
III	E	אֱלֹהִים בְּרֶב־חַסְדֶּךָ עֲנֵנִי בְאֵמֶת יִשְׁעֶךָ:		c	God, in the abundance of your loving-kindness; answer me, in your saving truth.
		הַצִּילֵנִי מִטֵּיט	15	a	Rescue me from the mire
		וְאַל־אֶטְבָּעָה		b	and do not let me sink;
		אֲנַצְלָה מִשֹּׂנְאָי וּמִמַּעַמְקֵי־מַיִם:		c	let me be rescued from those who hate me, and from the deep waters.
		אַל־תִּשְׁטַפְנֵי שְׂבַלַת מַיִם	16	a	Let not the flood waters overflow me,
		וְאַל־תִּבְלַעַנִי מְצוּלָה		b	and let not the deep swallow me up,
		וְאַל־תִּאָּטַר־עָלַי בְּאֵר פִּיהָ:		c	and let not the pit close her mouth over me.
	F	עֲנֵנִי יְהוָה	17	a	Answer me, YHWH,
		כִּי־טוֹב חַסְדֶּךָ		b	for your loving-kindness is good;
		כְּרֹב רַחֲמֶיךָ		c	according to the abundance of your compassion,
		פָּנֵה אֵלַי:		d	turn to me.
		וְאַל־תִּסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ מֵעַבְדְּךָ	18	a	And do not hide your face from your servant.
		כִּי־צָר־לִי		b	For I am in distress.

		מהר ענני:		c	Answer me quickly!
		קרבה אל־נפשי גאלה	19	a	Come near to my soul and redeem it!
		למען איבי פדני:		b	Ransom me because of my enemies.
IV	G	אתה ידעת חרפתי ובשתי וכלמתי	20	a	You know my reproach, and my shame and my disgrace.
		נגדך כל־צורקי:		b	All my enemies are before you.
		חרפה שברה לבי ואנושה	21	a	Reproach has broken my heart so that I became sick.
		ואקנה לנוד ואין		b	I looked for sympathy, but there was none.
		ולמנחמים ולא מצאתי:		c	And comforters, but I found none.
		ויתנו בכרותי ראש	22	a	They put gall in my food,
		ולצמאי ישקוני חמץ:		b	and for my thirst, they gave me vinegar to drink.
	H	יהי־שלחנם לפניהם לפח	23	a	Let their table before them become a trap,
		ולשלומים למוקש:		b	and their peace offerings be a snare.
		תחשכנה עיניהם מראות	24	a	Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see,
		ומתניהם תמיד המער:		b	and make their loins shake continually.
		שפך־עליהם זעמד	25	a	Pour out your wrath on them,
		וחרון אפך ושיגם:		b	and let your burning anger overtake them.
		תהי־טירתם נשמה	26	a	Let their encampment be desolate;
		באהליהם אליהו ישב:		b	let there be no inhabitant in their tents.
		כי־אתה אשר־הפית רדפו	27	a	For, the one whom you have smitten, they have persecuted.
		ואל־מכאוב חלליך		b	And the pain of your wounded ones,

		יִסְפְּרוּ:			they recount.
		תְּנֶה-עוֹן עַל-עוֹנָם	28	a	Add iniquity to their iniquity,
		וְאַל-יָבֹאוּ בְצִדְקַתְּךָ:		b	and may they not enter into your righteousness.
		יִמְחוּ מִסֵּפֶר חַיִּים	29	a	Let them be erased from the book of life.
		וְעִם צְדִיקִים אַל-יִכְתְּבוּ:		b	And with the righteous let them not be recorded.
		וְאֲנִי עָנִי וְכוֹאֵב	30	a	But I am afflicted and in pain;
		יְשׁוּעַתְּךָ אֱלֹהִים תִּשְׁגַּבֵּנִי:		b	let your deliverance, God, set me on high.
V	I	אֶהְלֵלָה שֵׁם-אֱלֹהִים בְּשִׁיר	31	a	I will praise the name of God with a song,
		וְאֶגְדְּלֵנוּ בְּתוֹרָה:		b	and I will magnify him with thanksgiving
		וְחֵיטֵב לִיהוָה מִשׁוֹר פָּר מִקָּרְן מִפְּרִיס:	32	a	and it will please YHWH more than an ox; a young bull with horns [and] hoofs.
		רְאוּ עָנָוִים וְשִׂמְחוּ	33	a	The afflicted have seen and are glad.
		דַּרְשֵׁי אֱלֹהִים וַיְחִי לְבַבְכֶם:		b	You who seek God, let your heart live.
		כִּי-שָׁמַע אֶל-אֲבִיוֹנִים יְהוָה	34	a	For YHWH hears the needy,
		וְאֵת-אֲסִירָיו לֹא בִזָּה:		b	and he does not despise his captive people.
	J	יְהַלְלוּהוּ שָׁמַיִם וָאָרֶץ יַמִּים וְכָל-רֹמֵשׁ בָּם:	35	a	Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them.
		כִּי אֱלֹהִים יוֹשִׁיעַ צִיּוֹן	36	a	For God will deliver Zion,
		וַיְבַנֶּה עָרֵי יְהוּדָה		b	and he will rebuild the cities of Judah
		וַיָּשְׁבוּ שָׁם וַיִּרְשׁוּהָ:		c	and they will live there and possess it;
		וְזֶרַע עֲבָדָיו יִנְחַלֶּיהָ	37	a	and the offspring of his servants will inherit it;
		וְאֵהֲבֵי שְׁמוֹ יִשְׁכְּנוּ-בָּהּ:		b	and those who love his name will live in it.

3.3 Text Critical and Translation Notes

Verse 2b. עַד־נַפְשׁ - “up to my throat”

The 1st person singular suffix should be added to the noun נַפְשׁ according to the LXX. A number of translations have followed the approach of the LXX: for example, the NIV translates 2b as “for the waters have come up to *my* neck,” the NJB has the phrase as “for the waters have closed in on *my* very being” and the NASB has “for the waters have threatened *my* life.” Some scholars (e.g. Tate, 1990:186, 188) have followed the approach of the LXX and have argued that the Masoretic Text lacks the suffix, which is found in LXX, so they translate verse 2b as “the water is already up to *my* neck.” One may also argue that it does not really make any difference in the context of Psalm 69 and if one takes into account that it is poetic language, “neck” will be understood by the average reader as “my neck.”

Some scholars (e.g. Kissane, 1953:304; Anderson, 1972a:500; VanGemeren, 1991:455) and a number of translations (e.g. NIV, ESV, NAB, NKJV, NLT, NRSV, RSV) agree that the rendering “neck” or “throat” (see Jonah 2:5) is an appropriate translation of the noun נַפְשׁ in verse 2b. The expression עַד־נַפְשׁ is to be taken figuratively: the waters threatened his very existence (Anderson, 1972a:500). Westermann (1997:744) summarises the meanings and usages of נַפְשׁ as follows:

- 1) concrete meanings: a) breath, b) throat/gullet
- 2) longing/desire/craving
- 3) soul
- 4) life
- 5) living being/person
- 6) corpse

Westermann (1997:745) and Waltke (1980:588) argue that in Psalm 69:2 and Jonah 2:6 the noun נַפְשׁ means “throat, gullet.” In both passages, the one threatened with death complains that the waters have reached “up to my throat” (Westermann, 2003:745). Furthermore, as Groenewald (2003:41) observes, the preposition עַד in 2b functions as an adverb of the place or position where the water had already risen. In light of the above discussion and literal context of Psalm 69, the present translation of נַפְשׁ in 2b is “[my] throat,” indicating that the suppliant was threatened by death. The waters had risen up to the suppliant’s throat and he was faced with the danger of drowning (2a).

Verse 5c. מְצַמִּיתִי - “those who would destroy me”

The translation of מְצַמִּיתִי is problematic. Brown *et al* (1979:856) and Hartley (1980b:770-771) suggest that מְצַמִּיתִי is the *hiphil* participle of the root צָמַת (“to put an end or to exterminate”). The Syriac has מְעַצְמוֹתִי (“than my bones”) instead of מְצַמִּיתִי. The NEB and Dahood (1968:157) prefer to amend מְצַמִּיתִי (“those who would destroy me”) to מְצַמִּיתִי (“than the locks of hair”) which would be parallel to רַבּוּ מִשְׁעָרוֹת (“more than my hairs”) in 5a. It is best to remain with an interpretation that is very close to the Masoretic Text, therefore the present translation follows the suggestion given by Brown *et al* (1979:856) and Hartley (1980b:770-771) and does not follow the reading of the Syriac and emendation suggested by the Dahood and the NEB. Most of the translations consulted in this study (e.g. NJB, NIV, NASB, KJV, BBE, ESV, JPS, NKJV, RSV and NRSV) follow this approach.

Verse 7a. אֲדֹנָי “Lord”

The Hebrew manuscript(s) that the Targum of Psalms (*TgPss*) and the LXX follow do not have the word אֲדֹנָי. The NJB follows a similar approach, omitting the word אֲדֹנָי and translating אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה זְבָאוֹת as *Yahweh Sabaoth*. This translation stays with the Masoretic Text and does not omit the word אֲדֹנָי.

Verse 11a. וְאִבְכֵּה בְצוֹם נַפְשִׁי “when I wept in my soul with fasting.”

The Masoretic Text of 11a is וְאִבְכֵּה בְצוֹם נַפְשִׁי (“I wept with fasting my soul”) which is an unusual construction. The exact translation of וְאִבְכֵּה בְצוֹם נַפְשִׁי (verse 11a) is uncertain. Brown *et al* (1979:113) argue that וְאִבְכֵּה is derived from the root בָּכָה (“to weep”). Stolz (1997a:237) argues that the noun צוֹם is parallel to the root בָּכָה (“to weep”) and both relate to lamenting. The LXX and the Syriac read וְאִדְכָּה or וְאִעֲנָה instead of the Masoretic Text וְאִבְכֵּה. The LXX translates וְאִבְכֵּה as καὶ ἐκύμασα (“and I bent or bowed down”) and the Syriac has the equivalent of *humiliavi* (“I humbled”). The TEV and RSV follow the Syriac’s approach: the TEV translates 11a as “I humble myself by fasting” and the RSV “When I humbled my soul with fasting.” Dahood (1968:158) proposes to re-vocalise the Masoretic Text verb וְאִבְכֵּה to וְאִבְכָּה from נָבַךְ which is seen as a dialectal variant of נָפַךְ, “pour/ gush forth” and he therefore translates 11a as “so I poured out my soul while fasting.” The NIV translates 11a as “When I

wept and fasted”; the TOB has “I have wept and fasted.” The present translation stays with the Masoretic Text “I wept” rather than the LXX, Syriac and Dahood’s interpretations and translates 11a as “when I wept in my soul with fasting.”

Verse 21a. וְאֲנוּשָׁה “and I am sick”

The phrase וְאֲנוּשָׁה in 21a is of uncertain form and meaning. Brown *et al* (1979:633), Holladay (1988:232) and Swanson (1997) argue that וְאֲנוּשָׁה is derived from the root נוּשׁ (“to be sick”) and they suggest that the psalmist was plagued with a kind of sickness. The NASB and JPS follow this approach. They translate וְאֲנוּשָׁה as “and I am sick.” The LXX translates אֲנוּשָׁה as *αλαλιπωρίαν* (“hardship/ misery”) which may indicate a *qal* feminine participle from אָנַשׁ (“to be sick”) (cf. Jer 15:18; Mic 1:9) and which suggests that אֲנוּשָׁה could be read as such. Dahood (1968:161-162) argues for the noun form, אָנוּשׁ, which is derived from אֲנוּשָׁה. Therefore, he translates אֲנוּשָׁה as “disease” but this would necessitate too many changes in the colon. Some scholars (e.g. Anderson, 1972a:505; Goldingay, 2007b:348) suggest that וְאֲנוּשָׁה is a *hapax legomenon* in the Old Testament and is a cognate with אָנַשׁ (“to be weak, sick”). The psalmist could have been in despair due to the insults from his enemies (cf. Jer 15:18) (see McCann, 1996:953). A number of translations (e.g. RSV, TEV, BBE, NIV, ESV and NJV) follow this interpretation. They translate וְאֲנוּשָׁה as “and I am in despair.” NIV translates וְאֲנוּשָׁה as “helpless.” This present translation follows the approach of Brown *et al* (1979:633) and Swanson (1997) and translates the phrase וְאֲנוּשָׁה as “and I am sick.”

Verse 23b. וְלִשְׁלוֹמִים “and their peace offerings”

The translation of וְלִשְׁלוֹמִים in 23b is uncertain. The LXX and other Greek translations (Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion & Hieronymous) translate וְלִשְׁלוֹמִים as *καὶ εἰς ἀνταπόδοσιν* (“and for their recompense”) which suggests a Hebrew text that corresponds to the Vulgate rather than the Masoretic Text. Verses 26 and 27 can be used to support both the LXX and Vulgate translation of verse 23 because the suppliant asks God to punish his enemies because they persecuted the suppliant (verses 26-27). The NIV follows the interpretation of the LXX. It translates וְלִשְׁלוֹמִים as “may it become retribution.” The Targum of Psalms (*TgPss*) has וְשִׁלְמֵיהֶם (“and their peace offerings”) instead of the Masoretic Text וְלִשְׁלוֹמִים. RSV follows the

approach of the Targum of Psalms. It translates וְלִשְׁלוֹמֵי as “let their sacrificial feasts.” Dahood (1968:162) takes שְׁלוֹם as an ordinary passive participle, meaning “ally or companion.” The plural of שְׁלוֹם (shalom, “peace”) is also used in Ps 55:20 of one’s “friends.” The NEB follows the interpretation of Dahood by translating the phrase וְלִשְׁלוֹמֵי as “group of friends.” Calvin (1979:66) assumes the omission of the relative and understands שְׁלוֹמֵי in the sense of “welfare, prosperity” when he translates וְלִשְׁלוֹמֵי as “and their prosperity [or things for peace] for a net.” The KJV follows Calvin’s approach by translating וְלִשְׁלוֹמֵי as “and that which should have been for their welfare.” The context of verse 23a makes the translation “their peace offerings” more likely because the noun שֻׁלְחָן (“table”) probably refers to the sacrificial meals in the temple, where people were supposedly worshipping YHWH (Kraus, 1989:63) and was also the place where the enemies plotted evil against the psalmist. Therefore, this present translation translates וְלִשְׁלוֹמֵי as “and their peace offerings.” The Targum of Psalms (*TgPss*) and RSV follow a similar approach, translating וְלִשְׁלוֹמֵי as “their sacrificial feasts.”

3.4 The Structure of Psalm 69

Structurally, Psalm 69 consists of petitions and complaints. Goldingay (2007b:338) says the psalm is “a psalm of protest and plea.” In a similar vein, Mays (1994:229) observes that verses 1-29 of the psalm are composed of alternating petitions (verses 2a, 7, 14-19, 22-28) and descriptions of trouble (verses 2b-6, 8-13, 20-22, 27). The petitions and complaints in Psalm 69 are summarized below:

Petition (verse 2a)	Complaint (verses 2b-5)
Petition (verses 6-7)	Complaint (verses 8-14b)
Petition (verses 14c-19)	Complaint (verses 20-22)
Petition (verses 23-30)	
Confidence or trust (verses 31-37)	

From the summary above, the first three parts (verses 2a-5f; verses 6-14b and verses 14c-22b) of the psalm alternate between petition and complaint. The fourth part (verses 23-30) comprises of the psalmist’s petition for his enemies to be punished (imprecations). Finally, the psalmist expresses his confidence that God will deliver him in the last section of the psalm (31-

37). Therefore, Psalm 69 may be subdivided into five stanzas: verses 2-5, verses 6-14b, verses 14c-19, verses 23-30 and verses 31-37. This five-fold division of the psalm is supported by a number of scholars (e.g. Allen, 1986:586; Groenewald, 2003:39).

The five stanzas of Psalm 69 may be subdivided into the following strophes (see Groenewald, 2003:39):

Stanza I (2a-5f) Invocation and Complaint I

Strophe A (2a-4d): Metaphoric description of a deadly threat

Strophe B (5a-5f): Attributes of the psalmist's enemies

Stanza II (6-14a) Confession, Petition and Complaint II

Strophe C (6a-7b): Confession and prayer that folly may not harm his fellow Israelites

Strophe D (8a-14b): Disgrace and reproach as a result of his devotion to God

Stanza III (14c-19b) Petition I

Strophe E (14c-16c): Petition for urgent deliverance in light of the water imagery

Strophe F (17a-19b): Petition for urgent deliverance from enemies

Stanza IV (20a-30b) Renewed Complaint and Petition II

Strophe G (20a-22b): Reiteration of the psalmist's distress and consequences

Strophe H (23a-30b): Imprecations and final appeal for deliverance

Stanza V (31a-37b) Praise and Confidence

Strophe I (31a-34b): Vow to praise God and justification

Strophe J (35a-37a): Appeal for cosmic praise and justification

The above structure of Psalm 69 is discussed in detail in the following analysis.

3.5 Intra-textual Analysis of Psalm 69

3.5.1 Stanza I (verses 2a-5f): Petition & Complaint I

Stanza I (verses 2-5) consists of two strophes: *A* (verses 2a-4d) and *B* (verses 5a-5f). Strophe *A* consists of an invocation to God and an urgent petition for deliverance (2a) which

then flows into a lengthy complaint. The waters are rising and the suppliant is trapped in a deep swamp, with no foothold (2b-3d). He is weary of calling his God, his throat is burning and his eyes are failing (4a-d). In Strophe *B* (verses 5a-5f), the suppliant's physical situation is then ascribed to human enemies who falsely accused him of thievery (5a-f).

3.5.1.1 Strophe A (verses 2a-4d)

Strophe *A* (verses 2a-4d) has five bicola.

In the **first bicolon (verse 2)**, **2a** begins with the imperative הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי (“deliver me”) which is directed to the vocative אֱלֹהִים (“God”). הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי is a frequent cry for help in the psalms of lamentation (see Ps 3:8; 6:5; 7:2; 22:22; 31:7; 54:3; 59:3; 109:26; 119:94, 146; Jer 17:14). The suppliant is the object of God's deliverance. Therefore, 2a is an urgent petition for deliverance in which the suppliant wants God to deliver him from his predicament.

2b is syndetically connected to 2a by means of the conjunction כִּי. The conjunction כִּי gives the reason why the suppliant is in dire need to be delivered (verses 2b-5f). The conjunction כִּי is followed by the verb באוּ (“come”) which describes the movement of the rising waters (מַיִם) which are reaching the suppliant's throat (נֶפֶשׁ). The verb באוּ is followed by the noun מַיִם (waters), which functions as the subject of the colon. Finally, the noun מַיִם (waters) is followed by עַד־נֶפֶשׁ (“up to my throat”) which as an adverb of place or position, indicates to where the water has already risen (see Groenewald, 2003:41). Therefore, in 2b, the psalmist is on the verge of death and he hyperbolically makes use of the image of overwhelming waters which have reached his throat and threaten to drown him.

The image of overwhelming waters rising up to the suppliant's throat in 2b is elaborated in detail in verses 3-4. In verses 3-4, the psalmist uses an exaggerated form of imagery to portray his distress in vivid pictorial language.

In the **second bicolon (verse 3ab)**, **3a** begins with the verb טָבַעְתִּי (“I have sunk”) which refers to the activity of the suppliant. The verb טָבַעְתִּי is followed by בֵּינֵן מְצוּלָה (“into a deep swamp”). בֵּינֵן מְצוּלָה means deep, depths or abyss (see Grisanti, 1997a:1071). Therefore in 3a, the suppliant has sunk into the deep swamp.

3b (וְאֵין מְעַמָּד) is a circumstantial clause which gives the description of the “deep swamp” (3a): there is no foothold or firm ground (וְאֵין מְעַמָּד) so that the suppliant would

continue to sink deeper and deeper. **וְאֵין מְעַמֵּד** is a *hapax legomenon* (see Holladay, 1988:207; Martens, 1997:433).

Therefore in 3ab, the suppliant is in a dangerous situation -- he has sunk into the deep swamp and there is no foothold.

In the **third bicolon (verse 3cd)**, 3c begins with the verb **בָּאתִי** (“I have come”), which conveys the idea that the suppliant has reached the deep waters. The verb **בָּאתִי** is followed by **בְּמַעְמַקֵּי מַיִם** (“into deep waters”). The phrase **בְּמַעְמַקֵּי מַיִם** may refer to the depths of the sea, but also carries the non-literal sense of being overwhelmed by disaster or trouble (Alexander, 1997:439; Allen, 1980a:679). Therefore in 3c, the suppliant is in deep waters or is overwhelmed by disaster. 3d describes what the deep waters in 3c do to the suppliant.

3d is syndetically joined to 3c by means of the conjunction **וְ**. 3d commences with the noun **שִׁבְלֶת** (“flood”). The noun **שִׁבְלֶת** is followed by the verb **שִׁטְפָתַנִּי** which refers to a flooding downpour, overflowing torrent or flooding of water (see Grisanti & Martens, 1997:96). The verb **שִׁטְפָתַנִּי** conveys the idea that the suppliant has been washed away by the flooding waters. Therefore, the suppliant is in a life-threatening situation. He has come into deep waters and has been washed over by the flood.

In 3a-3d, the psalmist compares his difficult and dangerous situation to that of someone on the verge of drowning. He therefore uses the images of sinking *into deep swamp, no foothold, coming into deep waters and the flood* to portray the extreme danger he is in (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:594). The picture suggested by the expressions “and a flood overflows me...I have come into deep waters” is derived either from an ocean or a flooded and swiftly-moving river (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:594; Anderson, 1972a:500).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, 3a and 3c are parallel and their extensions, 3b and 3d, are also parallel. 3b and 3d both indicate life threatening situations.

In the **fourth bicolon (verse 4ab)**, 4a commences with **יָנַעְתִּי** (“I am weary”) which is the result or effect of the suppliant’s calling out to God. Therefore in 4a, the suppliant is weary from calling out for help.

4b further describes the result of the suppliant’s calling out – this affected his throat. The verb **נָחַר** shows that the suppliant’s throat (**גְּרוֹנִי**) is parched, dry, or burning, due to a lack of moisture in the mouth and excessive weeping (Swanson, 1997; Coppes, 1980a:326-327).

Therefore in 4b, the suppliant's throat is parched due to excessive weeping and calling out for help.

In the **fifth bicolon (verse 4cd)**, **4c** (כָּלוּ עֵינַי) describes the effect of the suppliant's waiting for and crying for God on his eyes. The verb כָּלוּ indicates that the eyes of the suppliant were failing (Oswalt, 1980d:439). The verbal expression כָּלוּ עֵינַי also denotes that the psalmist's eyes were exhausted by weeping and strained by looking towards God for relief (Brown *et al*, 1979:477).

4d gives the reason for the three results or effects in 4abc of the suppliant's waiting for his God (מִיָּחַל לֵאלֹהֵי). The suppliant's waiting and crying have caused weariness, a parched throat and failing eyes.

To sum up verse 4, the suppliant's crying and waiting for his God leads to mental and physical exhaustion from the seemingly endless struggle to stay alive and afloat. His throat is parched, dry, and burning and his eyes have lost the ability to focus. He has been staring intently, looking expectantly for God to rescue him, but he sees nothing and is beginning to sink (see Anderson, 1972a:500).

In short, Strophe A (verses 2a-4d) is an urgent petition for deliverance. The psalmist is on the verge of death. He hyperbolically makes use of the image of overwhelming waters which have reached his throat. He has no foothold and he is sinking into the deep flood. He has come into deep waters and a flood. The psalmist is in a very difficult situation, he is losing a sense of destiny – a reason for living. Only later in the psalm are there hints about the exact nature of his situation. The psalmist prays ceaselessly to God for help, but there is no response. He is mentally and physically weary.

3.5.1.2 Strophe B (verses 5a-5f)

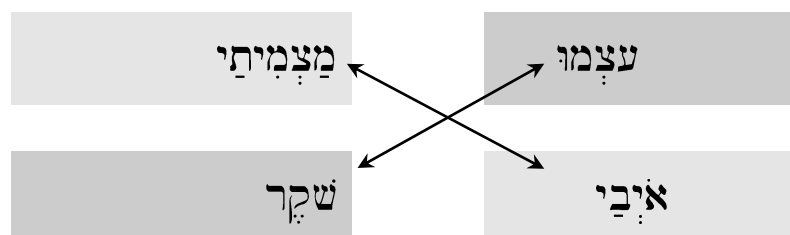
Strophe B (verses 5a-5f) consists of three bicola. In this strophe, the psalmist moves out of the metaphorical imagery of drowning (2b-4d) to describe the real circumstances of the suffering he is experiencing (5a-5f). The overwhelming waters which threaten the life of the suppliant are his enemies.

In the **first bicolon (verse 5ab)**, 5a consists of the expression רבו משערות ראשי (“more than the hairs of my head”) which implies that the suppliant's enemies, mentioned in the subsequent colon (5b), are numerous.

5b is a participial phrase that describes the enemies' conduct towards the suppliant. The participial phrase שְׂנְאֵי הַנֶּחַם (“those who hate me without cause”) indicates that the enemies hated the suppliant for no cause / undeservedly. The phrase שְׂנְאֵי הַנֶּחַם corresponds to Psalm 35:19. It is alluded to in John 15:25 where it is applied to the enemies of Jesus.

In the **second bicolon (verse 5cd)**, 5c commences with the verb עֲצָמוּ (“they are mighty”) which means “they are many” (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:595). The verb עֲצָמוּ describes the psalmist's enemies. The verbal expression עֲצָמוּ (“they are mighty/many”) (5c) is synonymous with רבו משערות ראשי (“more than the hairs of my head”) (5a). The verb עֲצָמוּ is followed by מְצַמֵּיתִי (“those who are destroying me”) which shows that the enemies are (in the act of) destroying the psalmist.

5d further describes the moral characteristics of the enemies (or perpetrators). The participial phrase אֵיבֵי שֶׁקֶר (“my enemies are deceitful”) shows that the enemies dealt with the suppliant fraudulently and wrongfully (Brown *et al*, 1979:1055). There is a synonymous parallelism between 5ab and 5cd. 5b and 5d say virtually the same thing, namely that the haters/enemies are acting irrationally and deceitfully. There is also a chiasm in 5cd.



The chiasm in 5cd highlights or emphasizes the point that the psalmist's enemies are mighty, deceitful and are in the act of destroying the suppliant.

The participial phrase אֵיבֵי שֶׁקֶר (5d) is further elaborated in detail in the **third bicolon (verse 5ef)**. The bicolon (verse 5ef) shows how the enemies are dealing with the suppliant fraudulently and wrongfully. The phrase אֲשֶׁר לֹא-גָזַלְתִּי אֶזְ אֲשִׁיב (“what I did not steal I should now restore”) shows that the enemies are falsely accusing the psalmist of theft and they expect him to return what he did not steal. Therefore, the deceitful character of the psalmist's enemies (5d) is seen when they falsely accuse the psalmist of thievery and when they expect him to

restore what he did not steal (5ef). There are two views with regards to the meaning of אֲשֶׁר לֹא־גָזַלְתִּי אֶזְאָשִׁיב (“what I did not steal, I should now restore”) (verse 5ef).

- Some (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 1910:399; Williams, 1986:466) regard this as a proverbial expression of “injured innocence” based on Lev 6:5 where the thief had to return what he had stolen. The idea is expressed as a concessive: “*Though I have stolen nothing [I am innocent], I still must restore it [so is the demand of my enemies]*” (verse 5ef).
- Others (e.g. Terrien, 2003:498) view the sentence as a rhetorical question. The RSV, NEB and NJB follow this interpretation – the RSV translates 5ef “What I did not steal must I now restore?”; the NJB “Must I give back what I have never stolen?”; and the NEB “How can I give back what I have not stolen?” This view implies that the enemies falsely accused the psalmist of theft and they tried to force him to return what he did not steal and the psalmist responds by saying “How can I give back what I have not stolen?”

The view put forward by Kirkpatrick and Williams seems more plausible than the latter. The suppliant is somehow sarcastic – and that is hard to translate. It is clear from the context that the enemies’ attack is fraudulent and wrongful – they falsely accuse the suppliant of thievery and expect him to return what he did not steal. According to Leviticus 6:5, those guilty of thievery were required to restore what they had stolen or to make restitution. Restitution was common in the Ancient Near East culture. In the Code of the Hammurabi, the person guilty of robbery was put to death, while those guilty of thievery had to make restitution which could be as high as thirty-fold. If the thief had nothing with which to pay, he was put to death (Martin, 1958:30).

In summary, Strophe *B* (verse 5a-f) explicitly shows that the imagery of the flood in verses 2-4 corresponds to the numerous enemies of the suppliant. The enemies hate the suppliant without cause. They have no basis for their attack and also want to destroy or kill him. They have made false accusations and charges against the suppliant. They also accuse him of thievery and expect him to restore what he did not steal.

3.5.2 Stanza II (verses 6a-14b): Confession, Petition & Complaint II

Stanza II (verses 6a-14b) consists of two strophes, *C* (verses 6a-7b) and *D* (verses 8a-14b). In Strophe *C*, the psalmist confesses his folly to God (vs 6) and is aware that what is happening to him could affect others, so he asks God to keep him from bringing shame and

dishonour on his fellow Israelites who are devoted to God (vs 7). In Strophe *D*, the psalmist protests that it is because of his devotion to God and his house (i.e. temple) that he has been insulted (vss 8-14a).

3.5.2.1 Strophe C (verses 6a-7b)

Strophe C (verses 6a-7b) consists of two bicola.

In the **first bicolon (verse 6)**, **6a** commences with the invocation and vocative אֱלֹהִים (“God”). Goldingay (2007b:342) views אֱלֹהִים “as an inclusion around verses 2[1]-5.” He argues that “verses 2[1]-5 focus on the suffering of the suppliant, what the enemies were doing to the suppliant and verse 6 focuses on God’s involvement and the implication here is that God knows exactly what is going on, knows that the suppliant is not characterised by stupidity or guilty deeds and is therefore complicit with the enemies’ unwarranted attacks.” As Groenewald (2003:50-51) observes, the appellative אֱלֹהִים indicates the beginning of a new stanza and strophe. The vocative אֱלֹהִים (6a) is followed by אַתָּה (“you”) which highlights the vocative and implies the strophic demarcation (see Groenewald, 2003:51). The pronoun אַתָּה is followed by the verb יָדַעְתָּ (“you know”) which refers to the activity of אֱלֹהִים. The verb יָדַעְתָּ is followed by אֲנִי לִפְתִּי (“my folly”) which refers to the suppliant’s folly.

6a and 6b are joined together by means of a syndetic construction, namely, the conjunction וְ which may be interpreted in an affirmative sense: “Yes, my deeds are not hidden from you.” **6b** consists of אֲשַׁמוּתִי מִמֶּךָ לֹא־נִכְחָדוּ (“my guilty deeds are not hidden from you”) which shows that the guilty deeds of the suppliant are not hidden from God.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in verses 6a and 6b. However, the elements in these two cola are in reverse order, so that it constitutes a chiasm. The expression “you know my folly” (אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ לְאִנְלִיתִי) in 6a is similar in meaning to “my guilty deeds are not hidden from you” (אֲשַׁמוּתִי מִמֶּךָ לֹא־נִכְחָדוּ) in 6b. “You” (אַתָּה) in 6a corresponds to “from you” (מִמֶּךָ) in 6b. The positive *qal* verb “know” (יָדַעְתָּ) corresponds with the negated *niphal* verb “are not hidden” (לֹא־נִכְחָדוּ). “My folly” (לְאִנְלִיתִי) corresponds to “my guilty deeds” (אֲשַׁמוּתִי).

To sum up verse 6, the psalmist acknowledges that his folly and guilty deeds are not hidden from YHWH. The exact nature of the psalmist’s sin or offense is not clarified here in the text. Calvin (1965:30) argues that the psalmist’s confession of his sins is hypothetical or ironic.

The psalmist presents himself to God and he asks him to defend his cause because his integrity is known to him. Anderson (1972a:501) would argue that the psalmist's sins could have been sins of inadvertence and ignorance. Bratcher and Reyburn (1991:595) argue that the "folly" the psalmist confesses is his disregard of God's laws (cf. Ps 38:5b) because according to the Hebrew Scriptures, foolishness is a denial of God's rule in human affairs. The psalmist's confession does not suggest that his enemies' charge (vs 5) is true. By confessing his sins, the psalmist acknowledges that he is not perfect, he is a sinner and God knows about his sin and his enemies do not. In other words, the psalmist is conscious of the fact that God is the sole judge and therefore his enemies do not have a standing when they want to punish him for alleged wrongdoings. God knows him more deeply than he knows himself.

In the **second bicolon (verse 7)**, **7a** commences with אֶל־יִבְשׁוּ בִי (‘‘let those not be put to shame because of me’’) which functions like a negative jussive and is in some sense a positive wish expressed towards the suppliant's fellow Israelites who are devoted to YHWH. This expression אֶל־יִבְשׁוּ בִי is directed to the vocative אֲדֹנָי יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת (‘‘Lord, YHWH of Hosts’’). יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת (‘‘YHWH of Hosts’’) is the one who would not allow his followers to be put to shame because of the suppliant. The expression אֶל־יִבְשׁוּ בִי is followed by קִוִּיָּךְ (‘‘who wait for you’’) which refers to the Israelites who were devoted to YHWH, who endured patiently in confident hope that God would decisively act for the salvation of his people (Hartley, 1980e:791). God himself is the object of their hope (Schibler, 1997:893) The participle קִוִּיָּךְ is followed by צְבָאוֹת יְהוִה אֲדֹנָי. The word אֲדֹנָי in this context refers to YHWH. The meaning of יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת is much debated, but it is usually translated (‘‘YHWH of Hosts’’) (Fretheim, 1997a:1297). There are several suggestions to the meaning of יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת:

- It could be an abbreviated form of ‘‘YHWH, the God of Hosts’’ (cf. 2 Sam 5:10; 1 Kgs. 19:10, 14; Ps 89:8[9]; Amos 5:14, 15, 16, 6:8 etc.) but it is usually thought that the longer form was a later interpretation of the short version.
- The term צְבָא is also used of the armies of Israel (cf. Exod 6:26; 7:4; 12:41) and in Numbers 10:14, 18, 22 and 25 it refers to the tribes as a whole (Longman, 1997b:734)
- The phrase יְהוִה צְבָאוֹת could also be applied to the heavenly hosts or bodies or the armies of angels and other spiritual beings (cf. 1 Kgs 22:19; Job 38:7; Ps 103:19-21) (Fretheim, 1997a:1297).

It is also possible that the term could have had more than one interpretation (Anderson, 1972a:205-206). Groenewald (2003:57) argues that the phrase **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת**, indicates that YHWH is the heavenly king who is able to deliver the psalmist in the midst of his adversaries (5a-f).

7b begins with **אֶל־יִכְלְמוּ בִי** (“let those not be disgraced because of me”) which has a jussive function. **אֶל־יִכְלְמוּ בִי** is in some sense a positive wish expressed towards the suppliant’s fellow followers of YHWH and is directed to the vocative **אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** (“God of Israel”). The God of Israel (**אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל**) is the one who would not allow his followers to be disgraced because of the suppliant. The expression **אֶל־יִכְלְמוּ בִי** is followed by **מִבְּקֹשֶׁיךָ** (“who seek you”) which refers to the devout followers of YHWH who had God as the object of their seeking (Wagner, 1975:239; Chhetri, 1997:723).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 7a and 7b. The predicate **אֶל־יִבְשׁוּ בִי** (“let those not be put to shame because of me”) in 7a is similar in meaning to **אֶל־יִכְלְמוּ בִי** (“let those not be ashamed because of me”) in 7b. The *qal* participle **קֹוֶיךָ** (“who wait for you”) in 7a corresponds with **מִבְּקֹשֶׁיךָ** (“who seek you”) in 7b. The expression **אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** (“Lord, YHWH of Hosts”) in 7a corresponds with **אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** (“God of Israel”) in 7b.

To summarize verse 7, the psalmist is aware that what was happening to him affected others, so he prays that God would keep him from bringing shame and dishonour on his fellow Israelites who are devoted to God (vs 7). The point is that if the suppliant is not vindicated, not helped by God, then his fellow Israelites who believe in YHWH as he does, would be disappointed and disillusioned, sharing his shame and disgrace (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:596). Therefore, the fellow Israelites’ destiny is tied to the psalmist’s. Thus they wait (**קוֹה**) for YHWH (7a) as the psalmist waited (**יחל**) for YHWH in 4d (Goldingay, 2007b:342). The phrase “who wait for you” (**קֹוֶיךָ**) expresses an attitude of hope, expectation and confidence in God. The suppliant does not contemplate personal revenge but appeals to the mighty God known as **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת / אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל** who is able to deliver the psalmist in the midst of his adversaries.

In a nutshell, the psalmist in Strophe C (verses 6-7) acknowledges that he is not perfect; he is a sinner and God knows about his sin and his enemies do not. He asks God to try him and search his motives (as in Ps 139). The psalmist is also conscious of the fact that what is

happening to him could affect others, so he prays that God would keep him from bringing shame and dishonour on his fellow Israelites who are devoted to God. The suppliant does not contemplate personal revenge but appeals to the heavenly king, **יְהוָה / יִשְׂרָאֵל / צְבָאוֹת** who is able to deliver the psalmist in the midst of his adversaries.

3.5.2.2 Strophe D (verses 8a-14b)

Strophe D (verses 8a-14b) consists of seven bicola.

In the **first bicolon (verse 8)**, **8a** begins with the conjunction **כִּי** which is emphatic and can mean “indeed” (see Brown *et al*, 1979:472). The conjunction **כִּי** (“it is for”) is followed by **עָלֶיךָ נִשְׂאֲתִי חֲרָפָה** (“your sake that I endure reproach”) which shows that it is because of the suppliant’s devotion to God that he is insulted since the noun **חֲרָפָה** means “reproach or scorn” (Brown *et al*, 1979:856; Holladay, 1988:117).

The introductory phrase **כִּי-עָלֶיךָ** (“for your sake”) in 8a also applies to 8b. **8b** commences with **כִּסְתָהּ** (“it covers”) which refers to the suppliant’s disgrace. The verb **כִּסְתָהּ** is followed by the noun **כְּלָמָה** which means “humiliation, disgrace” (see Nel, 1997:659). The noun **כְּלָמָה** is followed by **פָּנָי** (“my face”) which refers to the suppliant’s face.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-AMPLIFICATION in verse 8. 8b describes the same idea as in 8a, but from an intensive and dramatic angle (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:597). The expression **נִשְׂאֲתִי חֲרָפָה** (“I endure reproach”) in 8a is synonymous with **כִּסְתָהּ כְּלָמָה פָּנָי** (“shame covers my face”) in 8b but 8b seems to intensify or amplify 8a – not only does the suppliant endure because of YHWH, he is even covered with disgrace on his face. This metaphor in 8b means that the suppliant feels the heat of shame on his face (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:597) or he hid his own face from public view or the psalmist’s angry enemies could have spat on his face as an indication of public disgrace and rejection (cf. Num 12:14; Deut 25:9; Job 20:15; 30:10, Matt 26:27) (see Wilson, 2002:952).

To sum up verse 8, the suppliant’s allegiance to God is the direct reason for his shame (verses 10, 11, and 12 explain this point further). The shame or scorn the psalmist experienced resulted from his commitment to God rather than personal failing.

In the **second bicolon (verse 9)**, **9a** begins with the *Hophal* participle **מוֹזֵר** which means “a stranger” (Swanson, 1997). Swanson also indicates that this *Hophal* participle (**מוֹזֵר**) is a

hapax legomenon. The participle מוֹזֵר is followed by הָיִיתִי לְאָחֵי (“I am from my brothers”) which shows that the suppliant had become a stranger to his brothers. These brothers may be his blood brothers or his fellow Israelites.

9b is syndetically linked to 9a by means of the conjunction ו. 9b commences with the adjective נִכְרִי (“a stranger”) which functions as a noun (Swanson, 1997) and refers to the suppliant. The adjective נִכְרִי is followed by לְבְנֵי אִמִּי (“to my mother’s sons”) which refers to the suppliant’s blood brothers.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism. This synonymous parallelism may be of the type BASE-AMPLIFICATION if 9a refers to brothers in a general sense, namely Israelites. 9b then describes the same idea as in 9a, but from an intensive and dramatic angle (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:597). The expression מוֹזֵר הָיִיתִי לְאָחֵי (“I am a stranger to my brothers”) in 9a is synonymous with נִכְרִי לְבְנֵי אִמִּי (“a stranger to my mother’s sons”) in 9b, but 9b seems to intensify or amplify 9a – not only did the suppliant become a stranger to his fellow Israelites, he had even become a stranger to his blood brothers, his own family. There is also a SYNONYMOUS PARALLELISM, BASE-RESULT relation between verse 8 and 9. Verse 9 gives the result of 8. The suppliant’s reproach from his enemies brought about alienation from his fellow Israelites and even his family.

To sum up verse 9, the psalmist’s shame (verse 8) seems to have affected the attitude of his family. He experienced rejection and he was being treated like a complete stranger by his own family. His family disowned him as if he had committed a terrible crime. Lang (1986:425) echoes this interpretation when he says that “when נִכְרִי (“stranger”) is used in connection with the family (or family members), נִכְרִי means *unfamilial* – that is someone standing outside the family, which implies that he has no emotional, social or other ties to the family anymore.” The psalmist’s experience of rejection by his family is similar to Jeremiah’s experience in Jeremiah 12:6, where the suppliant’s kinfolk and his family members dealt treacherously with him.

In the **third bicolon (verse 10)**, 10a commences with the conjunction כִּי (“for”) which in this context may be emphatic and can mean “indeed”, but may also give a reason for a foregoing result. This conjunction explains how the suppliant’s zeal for God’s house is the direct reason for his shame, mentioned in 8a. The conjunction כִּי is followed by קִנְיַת בֵּיתְךָ (“zeal for your house”). The word קִנְיָה “is used to denote a passionate, consuming ‘zeal’ focused on God that results in doing his will and the maintaining of his honour in the face of ungodly acts of men

and nations” (Coppes, 1980d:803). The expression *בֵּיתְךָ* (“your house”) refers to YHWH’s house – the temple (Wilson, 1997:655). The phrase *קִנְאַת בֵּיתְךָ* may indicate that the suppliant is consumed by an ardour to exalt God by maintaining purity of worship at the temple (Coppes, 1980d:803). The phrase *קִנְאַת בֵּיתְךָ* is followed by *אֶכְלֵתֵנִי* (“has consumed me”). The suppliant’s zeal for the temple is the subject of this consuming. Verse 10a shows that the psalmist cares deeply for the temple in Jerusalem and this has created trouble for him. It is not clear from the text in which way the psalmist cares deeply for the temple. Therefore a number of suggestions have been given by scholars:

- Some scholars (e.g. Schmidt, 1934:133; Klopfenstein, 1964:69) suggest that the psalmist was like the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, who had a deep commitment to the rebuilding of the temple in the post-exilic era. The psalmist could have felt that the temple was being scorned or misused and since it was the dwelling of YHWH, any insult directed to the temple was an offence to God and the psalmist could have felt as though the offences were directed against him personally.
- Anderson (1972a:502) suggests that the psalmist could have been eager to see certain reforms introduced in the temple. Verse 10a is also quoted in John 2:17 with reference to the cleansing of the temple by Jesus. The psalmist’s unswerving devotion to God’s house was the cause of his ruin. The psalmist is insulted because he has borne God’s rejection as his own (10b).
- Goldingay (2007b:344) observes that the word “reproach” from 8a is picked up in 10b, so he argues that the psalmist probably saw people’s worship as a reproach to God. He told the people that they had compromised their worship by worshipping YHWH in the company of other deities. The people do not see their sin so they have attacked the psalmist for telling them that they were actually rejecting YHWH by their actions.

Whichever view is in perspective here, it is clear from verse 10a that the suppliant is zealous for the temple. He has a deep longing for the temple and this has brought about reproach (10b). The longing for the temple (10a) is paralleled by the enemies’ reproach of YHWH so that one can assume that the longing for the temple is actually a longing for YHWH himself. He becomes the object of mockery and insult by God’s enemies. He is rejected because he has borne YHWH’s rejection as his own.

To sum up verse 10a, the suppliant’s deep love for the temple is the reason for the reproach by the enemies.

10b is syndetically linked to 10a by means of the conjunction ו. 10b begins with the noun חֲרָפוֹת (“reproaches”) which is followed by חוֹרְפוֹיךָ (“of those who reproach you”). There is a word-play here because the stem חרף is used as a noun חֲרָפוֹת (“reproaches”) and as a participle חוֹרְפוֹיךָ (“of those who reproach you”). The participle חוֹרְפוֹיךָ is followed by the verb נִפְלוּ עָלַי (“fall on me”) which shows that the reproaches are still falling on the suppliant.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT between 10a and 10b. It is because of the suppliant’s loyalty and love for YHWH that he is consumed by a zeal for the temple (10a) and burdened by the reproaches of those who reproach God (10b).

There is also a synonymous parallelism, GENERAL-SPECIFIC relation between verse 8 and 10. In verse 8, the suppliant’s allegiance to God is the reason for his shame and verse 10 specifies how the suppliant’s allegiance to God became the reason for his shame – his zeal for the temple brought about reproach and shame.

The **fourth bicolon (verse 11)** is syndetically linked to the third bicolon (verse 10). **11a** commences with the *waw* consecutive imperfect verb וְאִבְכָּה (“when I wept”) which refers to the suppliant’s activity, whether this activity is in the past (“wept”) as reaction to the deeds of the enemies, or in the present (“weeps”) as a recurring activity. The verb אִבְכָּה is followed by נַפְשִׁי בְצוּם (“in my soul with fasting”). The noun נַפְשִׁי (“my soul”) refers to the suppliant’s self, his inner being. The NJB and TEV support this interpretation, translating נַפְשִׁי as “myself.” “Wept with fasting” may be rendered in English as “wept and fasted.” These actions are directed to YHWH, who is able to turn around the situation.

11b is syndetically connected to 11a. 11b begins with the *waw* consecutive imperfect verb וְנִתְהִי (“it became”) which refers to the suppliant’s weeping and fasting in his soul in 11a. The verb נִתְהִי is followed by לְחֲרָפוֹתַי לִי (“[became] a reproach to me”) which indicates that the suppliant was the object of reproach. With regards to 11b, the Syriac has “I became a reproach to them” which essentially means the same: the suppliant’s conduct was despised and so himself.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is probably a synthetic parallelism, BASE-SEQUENTIAL time between 11a and 11b. The events in 11a and 11b occur in a chronological sequence. The psalmist weeps and fasts (11a) before YHWH, possibly to rectify the situation but his piety brings further rejection – he is insulted (11b).

The **fifth bicolon (verse 12)** is syndetically linked to the fourth bicolon (verse 11). **12a** commences with the *waw* consecutive imperfect verb אָתַנְהָ (‘‘I made’’) which refers to the suppliant’s activity. The verb אָתַנְהָ is followed by לְבוּשֵׁי שָׂקֶה (‘‘sackcloth my clothing’’). Wearing sackcloth was a sign of grief and mourning in a time of personal tragedy. The practice of wearing sackcloth and fasting was also a ritual process of mourning and seeking mercy from the Lord (Carpenter & Grisanti, 1997b:1270). In 12a, the suppliant wore sackcloth as a sign of deep grief and distress over certain matters unknown to us. It may be that he wanted to rectify the situation by personal soul-searching (which parallels 11a); his distress may be about matters that were affecting the temple and its services; or else he was mourning on behalf of his people, who did not confess their sins (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:599).

12b begins with the *waw* consecutive imperfect verb אָהִי (‘‘I became’’) which refers to the suppliant. The verb אָהִי is followed by לְמַשָּׁל לָהֶם (‘‘a byword to them’’) (Brown *et al* (1979:605). The word ‘‘byword’’ indicates that the suppliant was mocked for his earnest devotion to YHWH; he encountered harsh taunting from his enemies (see Hartley, 1997:280). The NJB and TEV follow this approach; the NJB translates לְמַשָּׁל לָהֶם as ‘‘their laughing-stock’’ and the TEV as ‘‘they laugh at me.’’

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in verse 11 and verse 12. Verse 12 is synonymous to verse 11. Verse 12 restates the idea that the suppliant grieved in verse 11. Fasting, weeping and putting on sackcloth were signs of grief and repentance (see Ps 30:11). To sum up 12b, the psalmist’s acts of penitence brought further reproach - he became a laughing-stock to the people.

In the **sixth bicolon (verse 13)**, **13a** commences with יְשִׁיחוּ בִּי (‘‘they talk disparagingly about me’’) (Cohen, 1980b:876) which shows that the suppliant is the object of mockery and ridicule. The phrase יְשִׁיחוּ בִּי is followed by the participial phrase יְשִׁבֵי שַׁעַר (‘‘those who sit in the gate’’) which indicates locality. The city gate was the site for public administration of justice and community affairs (cf. Gen 23:10; Ruth 4:1; 1 Kgs 22:10; Est 2:19, 21; 5:13; 6:10; Jer 38:7). The elders who sat at the city gate were responsible for governance and guidance (Wilson, 2002:953).

13b is syndetically linked to 13a by the conjunction וְ. 13b consists of the participial clause נִגְיָנוֹת שׁוֹתֵי שֵׁכָר (‘‘I am a song of those who drink liquor’’) which shows that the suppliant had become ‘‘the talk of the town’’; even the drunkards composed songs about him (see Bratcher &

Reyburn, 1991:599). The noun נְגִינֹת is used to designate taunt songs, which means that the suppliant was also a laughing stock among the drunkards (O'Connell, 1997a:22; Brown *et al*, 1979:618).

Therefore, in the sixth bicolon (verse 13), the psalmist's zealous grief for the temple (10a) backfires on the psalmist, in spite of his fasting, praying and grieving (11-12). The latter rather become a topic of gossip among people sitting about talking at the city gate and a fodder for mocking drinking songs. The psalmist is ridiculed and mocked by all the classes of society - from the drunkards to the elders. The suppliant's fellow Israelites could have inferred from the signs of penitence that he was seeking forgiveness for personal sin or certain matters (unknown to us).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, the idea that the suppliant had become an object of scorn or reproach is restated or repeated in in verse 11ab, 12ab and 13ab.

The **seventh bicolon (verse 14ab)** is syndetically attached to the sixth bicolon (verse 13) through the conjunction ו. **14a** commences with אֲנִי ("as for me") which refers to the suppliant. The pronoun אֲנִי is followed by תְּפִלַּתִּי לְךָ יְהוָה ("my prayer is before you, YHWH") which shows that the suppliant prayed to YHWH. The fact that YHWH is addressed (as vocative) and that ו is used (probably in an adversive sense) with אֲנִי indicates that the suppliant turns his attention away from the incomprehensible actions of the enemies to YHWH. In 14a, the suppliant once again turns to God.

14b specifies the time when the prayer in 14a was made. 14b consists of the time phrase עֵת רַצוֹן ("at the time of favour"). The meaning of the phrase "time of favour" (עֵת רַצוֹן) is debatable, so among scholars there are various opinions with regards to the meaning of the phrase.

- Some scholars (e.g. Kraus, 1989:62-63; Broyles, 1999:287-288; Eaton, 2003:255) suggest that the expression might refer to the hour of morning which was often considered as the time of divine answer and help (cf. Ps 5:3; 46:5; 143:8; cf. 32:6) and to the time of the morning sacrifice in particular (Num 28:1-8).
- Other scholars (e.g. Goldingay, 2007b:345; Anderson, 1972a:503; Weiser, 1962:494-5; Briggs & Briggs, 1907:116) would argue that the "time of favour" is only known to YHWH and is the time when God accepts a plea (cf. Isa 58:5) or the moment when God acts in deliverance (cf. Isa 49:8; 61:2).

- Fretheim (1997b:1186) & VanGemenen (1991:458) see the phrase “time of favour” “as a technical phrase for God’s restorative graces: full forgiveness, deliverance, and restoration to the full benefits of God’s relationship with his people (cf. Isa 49:8; 58:5; 61:2).”

In light of the context of Ps 69, the third view seems more plausible than the first two views. The phrase “time of favour” seems to refer to divine acceptance and favour, when God reaches out to his people in mercy, grace and compassion. In the context of verse 14, the phrase *עֵת רַצוֹן* indicates that the suppliant turns to YHWH to testify to a time of favour." Verse 14cd supports this interpretation; the suppliant acknowledges God’s abundant loving kindness and his saving truth. Therefore, in the seventh bicolon (verse 14ab), after experiencing communal shame and ridicule (verses 10-13), the psalmist returns to YHWH in prayer. In the foreground the psalmist is still or again praying to God, whereas in the background the mockers and drunkards are singing their songs of mockery and revelry. The suppliant’s prayer in 14ab serves as the introduction to the petition reflected in Stanza III.

To sum up Strophe *D* (verses 8-14b), the psalmist’s deep care for the temple in Jerusalem (and by implication his love for YHWH) creates trouble for him. The psalmist probably sees improper worship at the temple and is aware of his own shortcomings. He grieves over the situation (unknown to us) by weeping, fasting and wearing sackcloth and this backfires – the whole community makes him a laughing stock. They probably infer from the signs of penitence that the suppliant needs to seek for forgiveness for some grave personal sin. After experiencing communal shame and ridicule, the psalmist returns to God in prayer and he acknowledges an era when God acts in deliverance and restoration of his people.

3.5.3 Stanza III (verses 14c-19b): Petition I

In Stanza III (verses 14c-19b), the psalmist makes an urgent petition for deliverance (verses 14c-19b). In this stanza (verses 14c-19b), the following words are repeated: *עֲנֵנִי* (14d, 17a and 18c); *כָּרַב* and *כָּרַב* (14c and 17c); *חֲסִדֶּיךָ* (14c and 17b). The psalmist’s need for urgent deliverance is seen by the frequent use of imperatives: *עֲנֵנִי* (14d, 17a and 18c); *הַצִּילֵנִי* (15a); *פִּינֵה* (17c); *קַרְבָּה* and *גֹּאֲלָהּ* (19a). The psalmist’s appeal for deliverance is based on God’s moral attributes – his loving-kindness (14c; 17b) and compassion (17c).

In his petition for deliverance, the psalmist again uses the image of overwhelming waters to portray his affliction. Verses 15-16 partially re-enacts the events of Stanza I (2a-5f) but there is a shift of emphasis. In Stanza I (verses 2-5), the object of the psalmist's complaint and distress was his enemies – who were portrayed as the overwhelming waters which threatened his life. In Stanza III (verses 14c-19b), the enemies are only mentioned twice (15c and 19a) and are still a factor to the psalmist. In contrast, God is the subject that comes to the fore and he is called to act on behalf of the psalmist (see Groenewald, 2003:75).

Stanza III (verses 14c-19b) consists of the two strophes, *E* (14c-16c) and *F* (17a-22b). In Strophe *E* (verses 14c-16c), the psalmist makes an urgent petition for deliverance in light of the imagery of overwhelming waters. In Strophe *F* (verses 17b-22b), the psalmist makes an urgent petition for deliverance; he wants God to rescue him from his enemies.

3.5.3.1 Strophe E (verses 14c-16c)

Strophe *E* (verses 14c-16c) consists of a single colon and two tricola.

Like 6a, **the single colon (verse 14c)** commences with the vocative and invocation **אלהים**. The vocative marks the beginning of a new section, a new stanza and strophe (Gerstenberger, 2001:48; McCann, 1996:952; Groenewald, 2003:75-76). The vocative **אלהים** is followed by **בְּרַב־חַסְדֶּךָ** (“in the abundance of your loving-kindness”) which refers to God's abundant loving-kindness. The imperative **עֲנֵנִי** (“answer me”) is directed to **אלהים**¹⁸. The imperative **עֲנֵנִי** is followed by **בְּאֵמֶת יְשׁוּעֶךָ** (“in your saving truth”) which refers to God's saving truth. Both phrases, **בְּרַב־חַסְדֶּךָ** and **בְּאֵמֶת יְשׁוּעֶךָ**, are the grounds or basis for the suppliant's petition since the preposition **בְּ** in both phrases can mean “according to or on the basis of” (see Holladay, 1988:32). Therefore in 14c, the psalmist asks God to deliver him and his request for deliverance is based on God's abundant loving-kindness and saving truth. Often in the Old Testament Scriptures, the “loving-kindness” of God is paired with his “faithfulness or truthfulness” (Exod 34:6-7; Pss 25:10; 40:10-11; Lam 3:22-23) and is associated with mercy (vs 16 cf. Exod 34:6; Pss 86:15; 103:4) (see McCann, 1996:952). This colon is a GENERAL cry for help, followed by specific petitions for help in the two subsequent tricola.

¹⁸ A similar construction is seen in 2a, where the vocative **אלהים** is addressed by the imperative **הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי אֱלֹהִים** (“deliver me, God”).

In the **first tricolon (verse 15)**, **15a** begins with the imperative הַצִּילֵנִי (“rescue me”) which is directed to אֱלֹהִים. The imperative הַצִּילֵנִי shows that the suppliant is the object of God’s deliverance. The imperative הַצִּילֵנִי is followed by מִטֵּיט (“from mire”). The noun טֵיט means “mire, mud, clay” (Brown *et al*, 1979:376). In this verse, the figure of one sinking into “mire” “is used to depict the instability, loneliness, distress, and helplessness of one in distress” (Alexander, 1980:347). The word טֵיט (“mire”) is used here as a general back reference to the waters, deep swamp, deep waters and flood, used in verses 2 and 3 as a metaphor for the enemies and their oppression. The suppliant wants God to deliver him from this mire or distress.

15b is syndetically joined to 15a by means of the conjunction וְ. 15b commences with אַל which is attached to אֲטַבְעָה (“let me sink”). The word אַל negates the cohortative verb אֲטַבְעָה. The verb אֲטַבְעָה, being in the 1st person singular, refers to the suppliant who is facing doom as a result of the mire (2b-3b).

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 15a and 15b. As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, the idea in 15a is the same as in 15b – in both cola the psalmist asks God to rescue him from the mire: 15a is expressed in the positive – “rescue me from the mire” and 15b is expressed in the negative – “and do not let me sink.” However, the effect is that of intensifying the concept of an intense desire for deliverance. To sum up 15ab, the suppliant asks God to rescue him from the mire so that he does not sink.

15c commences with אֲנַצֵּלָה (“let me be rescued”) which serves as an indirect petition and underscores the suppliant’s need of deliverance. The cohortative אֲנַצֵּלָה is followed by מִשֹּׂנְאָי (“from those who hate me”) which confirms that the suppliant was the object of the enemies’ hatred and that the imagery of water, mire and flood is re-introduced in this strophe. The phrase מִשֹּׂנְאָי is connected to וּמִמַּעַמְקֵי-מַיִם (“and from deep waters”) by means of the conjunction *waw*, which serves as a confirmation that the enemies are in fact compared to deep waters.

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-AMPLIFICATION between 15ab and 15c. The idea in 15ab is amplified in 15c. The danger that is referred to as mire in 15ab is identified as the suppliant’s enemies who hated him. The phrase “deep waters” seems not to be a second threat but it expounds מִשֹּׂנְאָי (“from those who hate me”). The suppliant’s enemies are the deep waters. The NJB and TEV follow this approach and place a comma between “from those who hate me” and “from the deep waters” thus showing that the suppliant’s enemies are indeed the deep waters. The NJB has the second half of 15c as “so I shall be saved from those who hate me, from the watery depths.” The TEV has “keep me safe from my enemies, safe from the deep

water.” Therefore in 15c, the psalmist wants God to deliver him from his enemies – those who hate him, the deep waters.

In the **second tricolon (verse 16)**, 16a commences with אֵל which negates the verb תִּשְׁטַפְנִי (“let it overflow me”). The verb תִּשְׁטַפְנִי refers to the activity of the “flood waters” (שִׁבְלַת מַיִם). Both תִּשְׁטַפְנִי and שִׁבְלַת מַיִם echo the earlier part of the psalm and the meanings of these terms have already been discussed in the previous section.

16b is syndetically linked to 16a by means of the conjunction ו. 16b begins with אֵל which negates the verb תִּבְלַעְנִי (“let it swallow me up”). The verb תִּבְלַעְנִי refers to the activity of “deep” (מִצּוּלָה). The suppliant is object of the swallowing deep waters, which are personified, being able to swallow. The מִצּוּלָה term echoes the earlier part of the psalm and the meaning of this term has already been discussed in the previous section.

16c is syndetically linked to 16b by means of the conjunction ו. 16c commences with אֵל which negates תִּאָּטֵר עָלַי (“let it close over me”). The verb תִּאָּטֵר (“let it close”) has a jussive function and refers to the activity of the pit (בְּאֵר). The verb תִּאָּטֵר is a *hapax legomenon* (Swanson, 1997). The prepositional phrase עָלַי (“over me”) portrays the suppliant as the victim of the closing pit. The prepositional phrase עָלַי is followed by the noun בְּאֵר (“pit”), the subject of the colon which is personified as an entity that can devour someone. According to Goldingay (2007b:346), being drowned by the deep means being swallowed by the earth, the grave, by Sheol (Ps 106:17; Exod 15:12; Num 16:30, 32, 34). The noun pit (בְּאֵר) seems to be a synonym of the grave or Sheol (cf. Ps 55:23 [24]). The pit or Sheol or death is often personified as a monster with an unquenchable appetite (Prov 30:15f; Isa 5:14) so that ‘its mouth’ literally signified the opening of a pit (Anderson, 1972a:504). Swanson (1997) and Lewis (1980b:87) also say that the phrase “the pit closes its mouth” is “a figurative extension for death or destruction (Ps 69:16).”

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 16a-c. The images of being washed by the flood waters (16a), of being swallowed by the deep (16b) and of the pit closing its mouth on the suppliant symbolise death, Sheol, destruction and chaos (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:600). Therefore in verse 16, the suppliant asks God to rescue his life from death and destruction.

In summary, the psalmist in Strophe *E* (verses 14c-16c) asks God for urgent deliverance. The psalmist’s appeal for deliverance is based on God’s loving-kindness and saving truth. In

his initial petition for deliverance, the psalmist used the image of overwhelming waters as in 2a-5f to portray his afflictions. The psalmist's plea is that each image of threat elaborated in verses 2a-5f be countered with evidence of God's saving grace. God is the subject that comes to the fore and in Strophe *E* he is called to act on behalf of the psalmist. The psalmist desires to be rescued "from the mire" (15a, מִטִּיט cf. 3a, יוֹן)¹⁹ and not to "sink" (15b, אֶטְבָּעָה cf. 3a, טַבְּעָתִי), and he pleads to be delivered from "those who hate me" (15c, מִשֹּׂנְאָי cf. 5b, שֹּׂנְאָי), who are also identified with the "deep waters" (15d, מַעַמְקֵי־מַיִם cf. 3c, מַעַמְקֵי־מַיִם) as well as the "flood waters" (16a, תִּשְׁטַפְּנִי cf. 3d, שְׁטַפְּתָנִי) and "depths" (16b, מְצוּלָה cf. 3a, מְצוּלָה) that threaten to "engulf" (16a, שְׁבַלְתָּ מַיִם cf. 3d, שְׁבַלְתָּ). The deadly threat of the psalmist's attackers is carried one step further by the reference to the "pit" in 16c (see Wilson, 2002:954). The "mire, deep waters, flood waters, deep, and pit" in verses 15-16 represent death and destruction. Because the psalmist is in a life-threatening situation he urgently calls upon God to rescue his life from death and destruction.

3.5.3.2 Strophe F (verses 17a-19b)

Strophe *F* (verses 17a-19b) consists of three bicola (verses 17 & 19) and a tricolon (verse 18).

In the **first bicolon (verse 17ab)**, 17a opens with the imperative עֲנֵנִי ("answer me") which is directed to YHWH. The suppliant is the recipient of YHWH's answer. God's answer (עֲנָה) refers to God's saving acts or deliverance (Beck, 1997:447). The imperative עֲנֵנִי is followed by יְהוָה ("YHWH") which functions as a vocative. YHWH is the one who is to answer the psalmist.

17b is syndetically linked to 17a through the conjunction כִּי ("for"). The conjunction כִּי ("for") gives the grounds (reason) (Cotterell & Turner, 1989:212) why YHWH is to answer the suppliant; the basis upon which the suppliant dares to solicit an answer. The conjunction כִּי is attached to the adjective טוֹב ("good") which describes the nature of YHWH's loving-kindness (חַסְדּוֹ). In this context, the conjunction כִּי may also indicate reason or motivation (see Van der Merwe *et al*, 1997).

In the **second bicolon (verse 17cd)**, 17c commences with the phrase כָּרַב רַחֲמֶיךָ ("according to the abundance of your compassion") which refers to the abundance of YHWH's

¹⁹ While the two words are different, the concepts are the same; these two distinct words are also united in Ps 40:2, where the psalmist celebrates a similar deliverance when God lifted him up "out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire" (see Wilson, 2002:954).

compassion. 17c coheres directly with 17d in inverted order (see the diagram below). 17c gives the grounds or motivation for YHWH to turn to the suppliant.

17d consists of the imperative פָּנֵה אֵלַי (“turn to me”) which is directed to YHWH. The verb פָּנֵה is also used in reference to God’s saving acts. It is often used with an appeal for God to show mercy or to deliver his people (see Thompson & Martens, 1997:637). The imperative פָּנֵה is followed by אֵלַי (“to me”) which shows that the suppliant is the object of YHWH’s looking or deliverance.

Therefore in verse 17, the psalmist pleads with God, who so far has not answered his prayer (17a). He again appeals to God’s loving-kindness which is good (טוֹב) (17b). God’s loving-kindness which is good, expresses itself in compassion. When the psalmist’s plea is not answered, this implies that YHWH is looking the other way (17d) and when the answer comes, YHWH’s face is on the psalmist (see Goldingay, 2007b:347). There is an extended parallelism – the *inverted pattern* (abb’ a’) in verse 17. This constitutes a chiasm.

a	17a	Answer me, YHWH (plea corresponding to 17d)
	b	for your loving-kindness is good (ground for plea 17a, in conjunction with 17d)
	b'	according to the abundance of your compassion (ground for plea in 17d, in conjunction with 17a)
a'	17d	turn to me (plea corresponding to 17a)

The above inverted structure reflects the fact that YHWH’s answer to the suppliant is based on his good loving-kindness, which expresses itself through compassion. When an answer comes, YHWH’s face will be on the psalmist. The change in direction also seems to provide a picture of the turning of YHWH’s face.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, 17cd says the same as 17ab. 17ab has the pattern: plea (17a) + grounds (17b). 17cd has the pattern: grounds (17c) + plea (17d).

In the tricollic verse (verse 18), 18a is syndetically linked to verse 17 through the conjunction ׀. **18a** consists of the negative wish: וְאַל־תִּסְתֵּר פְּנֵיךָ מֵעַבְדֶּךָ (“and do not hide your face from your servant”) which reinforces what was said in verse 17 and is directed to YHWH. There is a direct play on words between פָּנֵה in 17d and פְּנֵיךָ in 18a. The negative wish consists of the vetitive or the negated jussive אַל־תִּסְתֵּר (“do not hide”) and the phrase פְּנֵיךָ מֵעַבְדֶּךָ (“your face from your servant”) which implies that the suppliant wants YHWH to deliver him from his distress (cf. verse 18b). YHWH’s gracious look means mercy and care for his people so that

they do not fall victim to ruin (Van der Woude, 1997:1006). The suppliant refers to himself as the servant of YHWH. The term עֶבֶד designates a humble self-designation of the righteous and points to the existing covenant relationship with YHWH (Anderson, 1972a:505). The Hebrews also used the term עֶבֶד in polite address to superiors (see Brown *et al*, 1979:714).

18b is syndetically linked to 18a through the conjunction כִּי (“for”) which carries the text forward and draws attention to the plight of the suppliant. 18b introduces the object (me/I) which functions in 18bc. The conjunction כִּי is attached to צָרָלִי (“I am in distress”) which describes the uncomfortable situation of the suppliant.

18c consists of the double imperative מַהֵר עֲנֵנִי (“answer me quickly”) which is directed to YHWH. The two imperatives מַהֵר עֲנֵנִי are thus synonymous expressions meaning “hasten, answer me” (*hendiadys*) which stress the urgency of the suppliant’s petition for help.

There is also an extended parallelism in verses 17 and 18, also representing a chiasm:

a	Answer me, YHWH, (<i>general call for help</i>)
b	for your loving-kindness is good; (<i>positive motivation/grounds</i>)
b	according to the abundance of your compassion, (<i>positive motivation/grounds</i>)
c	turn to me. (<i>positive plea</i>)
c'	And do not hide your face from your servant, (<i>negative plea</i>)
b'	for I am in distress. (<i>negative motivation/grounds</i>)
a	Answer me quickly! (<i>general call for help</i>)

The plea “do not hide your face” (אַל־תַּסְתֵּר פָּנֶיךָ) in 18a is synonymous with “turn to me” (אֲלֵי) (פִּינָה) in 17c. When YHWH’s face turns that means action: God sees and acts. When YHWH’s face hides that means nothing happens: God does not see and he does not act (see Goldingay, 2007b:347). 18b gives the motivation why YHWH should turn his face and see him – the psalmist is in distress (צָרָר). 18b is parallel to 17bc, because God’s loving-kindness and compassion could be shown to the suppliant who is in distress. 18c is parallel to 17a and repeats the general call for help “answer me” (עֲנֵנִי) in 17a. However, the general call for help “answer me” (עֲנֵנִי) is modified with the adverb “quickly” (מַהֵר) in 18c which stresses the urgency of the psalmist’s appeal for help. Therefore in verse 18, the psalmist makes an urgent plea for help. He wants YHWH to see him and to quickly deliver him because he is in distress. The psalmist’s general call or plea for deliverance is based on the conviction that he, God’s servant, has been faithful to God and followed his will, and should therefore be given help and protection

from his enemies. Anderson (1972a:505) echoes the same idea when he comments, “God’s honour would be called in question if his faithful servant were abandoned to the godless.”

In the last **bicollic verse (verse 19)**, 19a commences with the imperative קָרְבָּה (“come near”) which is directed to YHWH. The imperative קָרְבָּה is followed by אֶל-נַפְשִׁי (“to my soul”). The prepositional phrase אֶל-נַפְשִׁי refers to the suppliant. The prepositional phrase אֶל-נַפְשִׁי is followed by the imperative גְּאֹלָה (“redeem it”) which is also directed to YHWH. The object of the imperative גְּאֹלָה is the suppliant’s נַפֶּשׁ (feminine), meaning in this context the suppliant himself²⁰. The verb גָּאֵל in 19a means “to deliver or rescue” an individual from his enemies or death (see Brown *et al*, 1979:145; Hubbard, 1997a:793).

19b begins with לְמַעַן אֵיבֵי (“because of my enemies”) which gives grounds for the plea פְּדֹנֵי (“ransom me”). The participle אֵיבֵי (“my enemies”) refers to the enemies of the suppliant. The participle אֵיבֵי is followed by פְּדֹנֵי (“ransom me”) which is directed to YHWH. The suppliant is the object of the imperative פְּדֹנֵי. The verb פָּדָה in 19b means to rescue an individual from the false accusations made by the enemies (see Hubbard, 1997b:579).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 19a-19b. The psalmist’s request to be redeemed in 19a is restated in 19b. קָרַב and גָּאֵל (“come and redeem”) in 19a is a synonym of פָּדָה (“ransom”) in 19b (see Anderson, 1972a:505). However, 19b expands by giving grounds for the plea (i.e. *because of my enemies*). In verse 19, the psalmist appeals with great intensity for YHWH to intervene and redeem him as implied by the use of a multiplicity of imperatives (e.g. קָרְבָּה, גְּאֹלָה and פְּדֹנֵי) (see Harman, 1998:246). The psalmist wants God to redeem his life from his enemies.

In short, the psalmist in Strophe *F* (verses 17-19) asks God for urgent deliverance. The psalmist’s appeal for deliverance is based on God’s loving-kindness and compassion. The psalmist’s enemies have threatened his life, so he makes an urgent petition for YHWH to intervene and deliver his life from his enemies. In so doing the suppliant turns to YHWH rather than entertaining notions or revenge.

²⁰ See discussion of verse 2b in 3.3 (Text and translation).

3.5.4 Stanza IV (verses 20a-30b): Petition II

Stanza IV (verses 20a-30b) consists of two strophes, *G* (verses 20a-22b) and *H* (verses 23a-30b). In strophe *G* (verses 20a-22b), the psalmist reiterates some of his main complaints which he has already brought up against his enemies. His enemies had brought shame and disgrace and this broke the psalmist's heart and made him sick. The psalmist expected sympathy and comfort from comforters, but his expectation was in vain. On the contrary, his fellow Israelites caused him more misery. Strophe *H* (verses 23a-30b) consists of a series of imprecations and a final appeal for deliverance. The psalmist calls upon God to punish his enemies. Structurally, Strophe *H* (verses 23a-30b) is roughly parallel to verses 8a-13b (the core of Strophe *D*), which described the psalmist's mistreatment. In this strophe, the psalmist is simply asking God to ensure that his enemies experience what they had inflicted on others (McCann, 1996:953).

3.5.4.1 Strophe G (verses 20a-22b)

Strophe *G* (verses 20a-22b) consists of two bicola (verses 20 & 22) and a tricolon (verse 21). This strophe reiterates some of the main complaints which the psalmist had already brought up against his enemies. There are semantic links between Strophe *G* (verses 20-22) and Stanza I (verses 6a-14b). Some of the words that appear in 6a-14a are also used in verses 20a-21a: “you know”, אַתָּה יָדַעְתָּ (6a, 20a); “reproach”, חַרְפָּה (8a, 10b, 11b, 20a, 20a); “shame”, בִּשְׁתִּי (7a, 20a) and “disgrace”, כְּלָמָה (7b, 8b and 20a).

In the **first bicolon (verse 20)**, **20a** starts with the emphatic 2nd person masculine singular pronoun אַתָּה (“you”) which refers to YHWH. The pronoun אַתָּה is followed by יָדַעְתָּ (“know”) which refers to YHWH's activity. The verb יָדַעְתָּ is followed by חַרְפָּתִי וּבִשְׁתִּי וְכִלְמָתִי (“my reproach, and my shame and my disgrace”) which is probably a *hendiatris*, and refers to the suppliant's reproach, shame and disgrace. The nouns: חַרְפָּתִי (“my reproach”), בִּשְׁתִּי (“my shame”) and כְּלָמָתִי (“my disgrace”) are inclusive disjunctives, illustrating the same generic concept. In that sense these words are more or less synonymous.

20b consists of a nominal sentence נִגְדָה כָּל-צוּרָיִךְ (“all my enemies are before you”) which shows that YHWH knows of the suppliant enemies; they are not hidden from him. In this bicolon (verse 20), the psalmist reminds YHWH of the facts brought before him and that nothing is hidden from him but all the facts are before him (or literally “in front of him”).

In the **tricolon verse (verse 21)**, **21a** commences with **חִרְפָּה** (“reproach”) which functions as the subject of the colon. The noun **חִרְפָּה** is followed by **שָׁבְרָה** (“has broken”) which takes **לִבִּי** (“my heart”) as object. The combination **שָׁבַר** (“break”) + **לֵב** (“heart”) implies that the suppliant has been deeply offended and hurt by the insults or abuse that his enemies hurled at him (Hamilton, 1997d:39; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:601). The *waw* consecutive imperfect verb **אֲנוּשָׁה** (“I am sick”) is syndetically linked to **חִרְפָּה שָׁבְרָה לִבִּי** by the conjunction **וְ**. The verb **אֲנוּשָׁה** seems not to suggest physical sickness but derived sickness from all the stress and spiritual depression due to the harassment of the enemies. A number of translations follow this interpretation: the ESV, RSV and TEV translate **אֲנוּשָׁה** as “in despair;” the NKJV, “I am full of heaviness;” the NJB, “past cure;” the NIV, “has left me helpless;” The CEV, “I feel sick.” The use of **אֲנוּשָׁה** may indicate consecutive and even consequential meaning. The consequence of his heart being broken is despair or helplessness. 21a highlights the psalmist’s distress as well as the cause of his suffering and sickness.

The text critical notes on the phrase **חִרְפָּה שָׁבְרָה לִבִּי** (21a) also help to establish the meaning **וְאֲנוּשָׁה**. The Syriac reading is based on **רַפָּה** (“I am slack, feeble, discouraged”) instead of the Masoretic Text **חִרְפָּה** (“reproach, scorn”). The LXX is based on **שָׁבְרָה** (“I hope, wait”) instead of the Masoretic Text **שָׁבְרָה** (“reproach, scorn”). The LXX translates **שָׁבְרָה** as **προσεδούκασεν** (“as I wait for”). The Syriac reading reflects **שָׁבַר** (“crushing, depressing”) instead of the Masoretic Text **שָׁבְרָה** (“reproach, scorn”). Therefore, the Syriac and LXX seem to indicate that the suppliant was not physically sick but was discouraged or depressed due to the attack of his enemies.

21b is syndetically linked to 21a by means of the conjunction **וְ**. 21b begins with **אֶקְנֶה** (“I looked”) which describes the activity of the suppliant. The verb **אֶקְנֶה** is followed by **לְנוֹד** (“for sympathy”). The word **נוֹד** (infinitive used as noun) describes a shaking of the head from side to side as an expression of condolence, sympathy and grief (Anderson, 1972a:505; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:602; Goldingay, 2007b:348). The adverb **אֵין** (“there was none”) is syndetically linked to **וְאֶקְנֶה לְנוֹד** (“and I looked for sympathy”) by the conjunction **וְ** which is used here in an adversative sense (*but*). The semantic relation is that of Consession-Contra-expectation (*Although I looked for sympathy, there was none*). The adverb **אֵין** semantically constitutes a proposition or nominal sentence in its own right (*there be none*). The adverb **אֵין** shows that the suppliant did not find any sympathy.

21c is syndetically connected to 21b by the conjunction וְ. 21c commences with the participle מְנַחֲמִים (“comforters”) which refers to people who could encourage the psalmist or idiomatically the word refers to people who could make the psalmist’s heart strong (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:602). The same verb, נָחַם occurs in Job 2:11 and it designates what Job’s friends came to do though they were not successful. The verb אֶקְוֶה of 21b is taken as the predicate of 21c: [I looked also for] comforters. The phrase לֹא מִצָּאתִי (“I found none”) is syndetically linked to the previous phrase לְמִנְחָמִים by the conjunction וְ. The negative particle לֹא negates the verb מִצָּאתִי (“I found”) which shows that the suppliant looked for comforters but he did not find any.

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 21b and 21c. The idea that the psalmist looked for sympathy and there was none in 21b is essentially repeated in 21c.

To sum up verse 21, the enemies’ insults broke the psalmist’s heart and made him sick. He looked for human sympathy and comfort but he did not find any. There is a SYNTHETIC PARALLELISM, CAUSAL-CORRELATION between verses 20 and 21. The reproach, shame and disgrace the psalmist encounters from his enemies in verse 20 causes him to be broken-hearted and sick, without anybody who offers sympathy or comfort (verse 21).

The **second bicolon (verse 22)** is syndetically connected to verse 21 by the conjunction וְ. **22a** commences with יָתְנוּ (“they put”) which refers to the activity of the suppliant’s enemies. The verb is followed by בְּבָרוּתֵי רֶאֶשׁ (“gall in my food”) which shows that the enemy put gall in to the suppliant’s food. רֶאֶשׁ in this context means “poison, gall” (Taylor, 1997:1024; White, 1980:826).

22b is syndetically connected to 22a by the conjunction וְ. 22b begins with לְצִמָּאִי (“for my thirst”) which refers to the suppliant’s thirst. The phrase לְצִמָּאִי is followed by יִשְׁקוּנִי (“they gave me to drink”) which describes the activity of the enemies towards the suppliant. The suppliant is the receiver of the enemies’ drink. The verb יִשְׁקוּנִי is followed by חֲמִץ (“vinegar”) which refers to sour, undrinkable wine (Anderson, 1972a:506; Goldingay, 2007b:349). The words רֶאֶשׁ (“gall”) and חֲמִץ (“vinegar”) are probably not to be understood literally but metaphorically such that the psalmist was given gall for food and vinegar to quench his thirst.

It was customary to refresh those in great sorrow or grief with a meal, a “bread of comfort” (cf. Lam 4:10; 2 Sam 3:35; 12:17) (Kraus, 1989:63). On the contrary, in this bicolon (verse 22), the psalmist’s enemies were cruel. They acted without pity – they put gall in the suppliant’s food and they gave him vinegar to quench his thirst. Therefore, metaphorically, the psalmist’s

enemies made the situation worse rather than better. The extended parallelism – *the inverted pattern* (a b c c' a' b') in verse 22a and 22b seems to highlight the fact that the enemies made the situation worse for the psalmist by making his food and drink unpleasant, if not poisonous. Food and drink are highlighted by putting them in the centre of the inclusio:

a	they put (יָתְנוּ)
b	gall (רֵאשׁ)
c	in my food (בְּבִרְוֹתַי)
c'	and for my drink (לְצִמְאָי)
a'	they gave me to drink (יִשְׁקֶנּוּנִי)
b'	vinegar (חֲמִץ)

As Wilson (2002:955) notes, the New Testament writers quote these verses to emphasize the intense agony of abandonment and betrayal Jesus experienced on the cross. Spectators mocked him as he died and responded to his thirst with a sponge full of vinegar (cf. Matt 27:48; Luke 23:36; John 19:29).

To sum up Strophe G (verses 20a-22b), the psalmist reiterates some of his main complaints which he has already brought against his enemies and expands these in detail. His enemies have brought shame and disgrace on the suppliant and this has broken his heart – thus causing the suppliant to be discouraged and depressed. The psalmist expected sympathy and comfort from comforters, but on the contrary the enemies have caused him more misery. The deeds of the adversaries are an inversion of what is expected in times of grief. This prompts the suppliant to request from YHWH inversion of their situation in the subsequent plea (Strophe H).

3.5.4.2 Strophe H (verses 23a-30b)

Strophe H (verses 23a-30b) is a series of imprecations against the suppliant's enemies. In these imprecations the psalmist appeals to God to put things right, to execute justice, to rectify the injustices which he is suffering on his behalf (verses 8-13) as his servant (18a). In the series of imprecations, the suppliant asks YHWH to iron-out the discrepancies between the enemies' deeds and the psalmist's distress. The enemies should reap what they sow (see Groenewald, 2003:104-105). This strophe consists of eight bicola.

The **first bicolon (verse 23)** is a negative wish directed to YHWH and expressed towards the suppliant's enemies. **23a** starts with the jussive יְהִי ("let it be") which applies to both cola (23a and 23b). In 23a, this jussive refers to שְׁלֻחָנָם ("their table"), meaning the enemies' table. The noun שְׁלֻחָנָם is followed by לְפָנֵיהֶם ("before them") which indicates spatial positioning (Van der Merwe *et al.*, 1997). It probably refers to participation in feasts. The noun שְׁלֻחָן ("table") probably refers to the sacrificial meals in the temple, where people were supposedly worshipping YHWH (Kraus, 1989:63) but also the place where the enemies plotted evil against the psalmist. The psalmist's wish is for the enemies' celebrations and their plot to be the occasion of their ruin and downfall (see Goldingay, 2007b:349). The "table before them" is followed by לְ + פָח ("a trap") which indicate what outcome the suppliant wants for their feasts.

23b is syndetically linked to 23a by the conjunction וְ. 23b commences with לְשִׁלוֹמֵיהֶם ("their peace offerings") which functions as the subject of the predicate. Based on the context of 23a, שְׁלֻחָנָם in 23b may mean "peace offerings." The noun שְׁלֻחָנָם is followed by לְ + מִזְבֵּחַ ("a snare") which indicate what outcome the suppliant wants for their שְׁלֻחָנָם.

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 23a and 23b. The idea of an inversion by means of a trap in 23a is repeated in 23b. The psalmist prays for his enemies' sacrificial meals and peace-offerings to be a trap and snare. The "snare" (מִזְבֵּחַ) and "trap" (פָּח) were self-springing devices used to trap unsuspecting birds and are frequently used metaphorically for sudden entrapment of humans by their own deeds (Wilson, 2002:955). Therefore in verse 23, the psalmist prays for his enemies to fall victim to their own attempt on his life. They had put gall into the meal set on the suppliant's table (verse 22), so the psalmist wants God to punish his enemies as they eat their sacrificial meal. Feuer (1985:862) suggests that the psalmist's enemies would be ensnared in their wicked scheme when they would mix up their own meal with the suppliant's and eat the gall they had prepared for the psalmist.

The **second bicolon (verse 24)**, like the previous bicolon (verse 23), is a wish with a negative effect directed to YHWH and expressed towards the suppliant's enemies. **24a** commences with תְּחַשְׁכְּנָה ("let them be darkened") which refers to the enemies' eyes - עֵינֵיהֶם ("their eyes"). The noun עֵינֵיהֶם is followed by מִרְאֹת ("from seeing") which functions as a negative final clause, as is evident in translation: *so that not/lest*. As such it can also be seen as a separate proposition/clause/colon. The phrase מִרְאֹת consists of the negational preposition מִן which is attached to the *qal* infinitive construct form of the verb רָאָה. The phrase

מְרֵאוֹת reveals the purpose of the desired action: the suppliant wants God to darken his enemies' eyes "so that they cannot see." This recalls 4c, where the psalmist's eyes were failing (כָּלוּ עֵינָי) from waiting upon God. Since the enemies' hostility affected the eyes of the psalmist metaphorically, the psalmist wants God to punish his enemies with blindness. In verse 24a, the psalmist asks God to punish his enemies with blindness. Blindness is one of the curses that come upon those who do not obey God's commands (Deut 28:27). Darkness suggests confusion "with regard to what would otherwise be wisdom" (cf. Job 38:2) (see Goldingay, 2007:349). Furthermore, the enemies' blindness would prevent them from attacking the suppliant and this recalls Gen 19:11, where the two angels plagued the wicked men of Sodom with blindness so that they could not see the door.

24b is syndetically linked to 24a by the conjunction ו. 24b begins with מְתַנִּיחֵם ("their loins") which refers to the enemies' source of strength and vigour (cf. Deut 33:11; Job 40:16) (see Hamilton, 1980a:537; Brown *et al*, 1979: 608; Anderson, 1972a:507). "Loins" can also experience anguish (Isa 21:3; Nah 2:10) or shake in fear (Ezek 29:7). To damage one's loins is to "weaken or render helpless" (Hamilton, 1980a:537). The noun מְתַנִּיחֵם is followed by תְּמִיד הַמְעַד ("shake continually"). The *hiphil* imperative הַמְעַד means to make something shake (Brown *et al*, 1979: 588; Holladay, 1988:205; Van Pelt & Kaiser, 1997b:1011) and is directed to YHWH since it is in the masculine singular form. YHWH is the one who is to shake the suppliant's enemies' loins continually, so that all their strength is dilapidated. The enemies of the psalmist have already caused the psalmist to be weary in verse 4, so the psalmist prays for an inversion of roles. YHWH should debilitate the suppliant's enemies probably by means of some illness or disaster or fear (see Anderson, 1972a:507; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:603 and Goldingay, 2007b:350).

The **third bicolon (verse 25)**, like the previous bicola (verses 23-24), is a wish with a negative effect directed to YHWH. **25a** commences with the imperative שֶׁפַךְ ("pour out") which is directed to God. The imperative שֶׁפַךְ is attached to עֲלֵיהֶם ("on them"). The preposition עֲלֵיהֶם is followed by זַעֲמָךְ ("your wrath/ indignation") which refers to YHWH's wrath. In 25a, God is called upon to pour out his wrath on the suppliant's enemies.

The same request is also made in 25b. 25b is syndetically linked to 25a by the conjunction ו. **25b** begins with חֲרוֹן אַפֶּךָ ("your burning anger") which refers to YHWH's burning anger. The phrase חֲרוֹן אַפֶּךָ is followed by the verb יִשְׁיָגֵם ("let it overtake them") which refers to YHWH's

burning anger which is to overtake the suppliant's enemies. The psalmist anticipates an urgent divine retribution from God. He wants God's burning anger to overtake his enemies like the curses of the Covenant (Deut 28:15; 45) would pursue and overtake the disobedient. The nature of the calamities that may befall the enemies are not stated, but the suppliant desires his enemies to experience what it is like when God turns into your avenging enemy.

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 25a and 25b, but the linguistic elements of 25b are in reverse order, hence there is a chiasm. The idea that God's wrath should be poured on the suppliant's enemies in 25a is repeated or restated in 25b. The noun זַעַם ("wrath") in 25a is a synonym of חֲרוֹן ("burning anger") in 25b. In verse 25, the psalmist wants his enemies to be the objects of God's wrath and anger.

The **fourth bicolon (verse 26)**, like the preceding three bicola (verse 23-25), is a wish with a negative effect directed to YHWH.

26a begins with the jussive תְּהִי ("let it be") which refers to the enemies' encampment. The jussive תְּהִי ("let it be") is attached to טִירְתָּם which means "their encampment, habitation" (see Brown *et al*, 1979:377) and refers to the enemies' encampment. The noun טִירְתָּם ("their encampment") is followed by נִשְׁמָה ("desolate") which shows that the enemies' dwelling place should be deserted.

26b commences with בְּאֶהְלֵיהֶם ("in their tents") which refers to the tents of the enemies of the suppliant. The phrase בְּאֶהְלֵיהֶם is followed by אֶל־יְהִי יֹשֵׁב ("let there be no inhabitant") which refers to the inhabitants of the enemies' tents.

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 26a and 26b. The idea that the psalmist's enemies' homes should be desolate in 26a is restated in 26b. The noun טִירָה ("encampment") in 26a is a synonym of אֹהֶל ("tent") in 26b. The words "encampment" and "tents" remind us of Israel's nomadic dwelling places before they entered into the Promised Land. "Encampment" and "tents" are probably used as synonyms for "towns" and "homes" (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:603).

To sum up verse 26, the psalmist wants his enemies and their families to experience God's wrath, so that their cities and homes would be left completely empty with no inhabitants. To be without a home and even tents (used by nomads) is to be a restless wanderer, like Cain, who also experienced God's wrath (Gen 4:12, 14). In Acts 1:20, verse 26 is adapted to apply to Judas Iscariot.

In the **fifth bicolon (verse 27)**, **27a** begins with כִּי־אַתָּה (“for you”) which refers to YHWH. Bratcher and Reyburn (1991:604) say that the Hebrew text כִּי־אַתָּה “is a bit irregular at the beginning of the verse, but there seems to be no reason to emend.” The conjunction כִּי (“for”) probably gives the justification or rationale for the preceding as well as subsequent imprecations directed at the enemies of the suppliant or may even be used to emphasize or to shift attention away from the enemies to YHWH (i.e. כִּי is then used like a focus article). Again and again the suppliant turns to YHWH rather than wrestling with his adversaries. The pronoun אַתָּה (“you”) is followed by אֲשֶׁר־הִכִּיתָ (“whom you have smitten”). The implied object of the verb הִכִּיתָ (“have smitten”) may refer to one or more than one person (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:604). The ESV, KJV, NASB and NJB interpret the implied object as the suppliant. The relative clause אֲשֶׁר־הִכִּיתָ is followed by the verb רָדְפוּ (“they have persecuted”) which refers to the activity of enemies of the suppliant.

27b is syndetically linked to 27a through the conjunction וְ. 27b commences with חַלְלֵיךָ מִכְּאוֹב (“the pain of your wounded ones”) which may refer to those whom YHWH has wounded – that may also include the suppliant. The phrase אֶל־מִכְּאוֹב חַלְלֵיךָ is followed by the verb יִסְפְּרוּ (“they recount”) which refers to the activity of the enemies of the suppliant.

If the implied object of the relative clause in 27a is understood as singular, there is a discrepancy between 27a and 27b because the object of the latter is in the plural. The Targum on the Psalms and Syriac have חַלְלֵיךָ (“your wounded one”) instead of the Masoretic Text חַלְלֵיךָ (“your wounded ones”) which resolves the discrepancy. The RSV and NJB follow this approach. The TEV and NKJV translate the relative clause in 27a as plural to resolve the discrepancy. The TEV translates אֲשֶׁר־הִכִּיתָ (“those whom you have punished”) and the NKJV “the ones you have struck.”

Whatever the apparent discrepancy in number, there is a clear synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 27a and 27b. The idea in 27a that the psalmist’s enemies were not content with the sufferings of those (or, of the one) punished by God, but added their hostile acts, is restated in 27b. The phrase אֲשֶׁר־הִכִּיתָ אַתָּה in 27a is parallel to אֶל־מִכְּאוֹב חַלְלֵיךָ in 27b. The verb רָדְפוּ in 27a is parallel to יִסְפְּרוּ in 27b.

In this bicolon (verse 27), the suppliant is offering the justification for his imprecations directed at his enemies. The suppliant’s complaint is that his enemies are not satisfied with the sufferings of those (or, of the one) smitten by God, but have added to those sufferings by their

hostile acts. The enemies probably falsely accused the psalmist as they ridiculed his acts of grief and contrition in response to the chastisement of God (see verse 13).

The **sixth bicolon (verse 28)** is a plea with a negative effect directed to YHWH. In the bicolon (verse 28), **28a** commences with the imperative *תִּנְהַ עוֹן* (“Add iniquity”) which is directed towards God. The noun *עוֹן* (“iniquity”) is attached to the imperative *תִּנְהַ* (“add”). The noun *עוֹן* is followed by *עַל-עוֹנֵיהֶם* (“to their iniquity”) which means that instead of taking away their iniquities YHWH is to add iniquity upon their iniquity (Kirkpatrick, 1910:406) but not necessarily more than they deserve (Kissane, 1953:306; Anderson, 1972a:508).

28b is syndetically linked to 28a by means of the conjunction *וְ*. 28b commences with the vetitive *אַל-יבֹּאוּ* (“may they not enter”) which functions like a jussive. The enemies are included in the vetitive *אַל-יבֹּאוּ* as the subject of colon 28b. The vetitive *אַל-יבֹּאוּ* is then followed by *בְּצִדְקַתְךָ* (“into your righteousness”) which refers to YHWH’s manifestation of his covenant love and mercy in which he pardons sin and delivers his people from danger (Kirkpatrick, 1910:406). The suppliant wants his enemies not to be the beneficiaries of God’s mercy and deliverance (see Goldingay, 2007b:351-352).

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 28a and 28b. In both lines, the psalmist wants his enemies not to be the recipients of YHWH’s mercy, forgiveness and deliverance. Instead of taking away their iniquities by forgiveness, their iniquity is to accumulate one upon another until they are crushed by their sins (28a). In verse 28b, the suppliant’s enemies are not to be conferred with YHWH righteousness (i.e. YHWH’s mercy). All this “presumes that the wicked remain unrepentant in their wrongdoing” (Anderson, 1972a:508) and will not be the beneficiaries of YHWH’s deliverance. To summarize verse 28, the suppliant prays that YHWH would give his enemies their punishment corresponding to their sins and exclude them from his saving activity.

The **seventh bicolon (verse 29)** is a wish with a negative effect directed to YHWH. **29a** begins with *יִמְחָוּ* (“let them be erased”) which has a jussive function. The verb *יִמְחָוּ* refers to the psalmist’s enemies. The verb is followed by *מִסֵּפֶר חַיִּים* (“from the book of life”). The concept of the book of life was derived from the secular practice of keeping a list of citizens (cf. Ezra 2:2-62; Neh 7:5-64; Jer 22:30) and it was applied to the covenant community who enjoyed fellowship with God (Allen, 1997:446). It was God’s prerogative to maintain this list (Ps 87:6, cf. Exod 32:32-33; Dan 12:1) and he would bless the righteous, who honoured the covenant with

the gift of life, but he would delete the names of the wicked, whose lives were diametrically opposed to the covenant (cf. Ps 109:13) (Allen, 1997:446). The book of life was a register of the righteous. “[H]e whose name was written in it kept on receiving the gift of life and other blessings, but he whose name was blotted out of this book of life perished” (Anderson, 1972a:508). In 29a, the psalmist asks God to execute his justice by erasing his enemies from the book of life.

29b is syndetically linked to 29a by means of the conjunction ו . **29b** commences with עִם צְדִיקִים (“with the righteous”). The “righteous” (צְדִיקִים) are those who honour the covenant, those who obey God’s laws. The phrase עִם צְדִיקִים is followed by אַל־יִכְתָּבוּ (“let them not be recorded”) which has a jussive meaning. The verb אַל־יִכְתָּבוּ refers to the enemies.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 29a and 29b. The idea that the psalmist’s enemies’ should be erased from the book of life in 29a is repeated or restated by the negation of the opposite (i.e. litotes) of what has been said in 29a. The phrase יִמָּחוּ (“let them be erased”) in 29a corresponds with אַל־יִכְתָּבוּ (“let them not be recorded”) in 29b. The phrase $\text{מִסֵּפֶר הַחַיִּים}$ (“from the book of life”) in 29a is parallel to עִם צְדִיקִים (“with the righteous”) in 29b. There seems to be an extended parallelism – *the inverted pattern* (a b b’ a’) in verse 29, which constitutes a chiasm (see Goldingay, 2007b:352).

a	Let them be erased
B	from the book of life.
b'	And with the righteous
a'	let them be not recorded.

The purpose of the extended parallelism (a b b’ a’) is to highlight the point expressed in verse 28 that the psalmist’s enemies may not be beneficiaries of God’s deliverance. The suppliant asks God that they not be recorded in the book of life or be recorded with the righteous.

The **eighth bicolon (verse 30)** is syndetically linked to the previous bicolon (verse 29) by means of the conjunction ו . **30a** is a nominal sentence which is introduced by וְאֲנִי (“but I”). וְאֲנִי (“but I”) also occurs at the end of Stanza II, in verse 14ab. וְאֲנִי (“but I”) functions as a structural marker, shifting the focus back to the suppliant. It introduces the final cola of both Stanza II (verses 6a-14b) and Stanza IV (verses 20a-30b) (see Groenewald, 2003:130). וְאֲנִי (“but I”) is followed by the adjective עָנִי which means poor, weak, afflicted or humble (see Coppes, 1980c:683; Brown *et al*, 1979:776). The adjective עָנִי is followed by the participle כּוֹאֵב which

means “to be in pain” (Holladay, 1988:149). The participle **כּוֹאֵב** is parallel to the adjective **עָנִי** and describes the hopelessness and defencelessness of the psalmist (Mosis, 1998:9). There is an overlap in meaning between **עָנִי** and **כּוֹאֵב**, so that the combination is probably a *hendiadys*. That is why the NJB translates 30a with: “for myself, *wounded wretch* that I am.” There is a word-play in 30a: **אֲנִי עָנִי** (“I, I am afflicted”). The purpose of the word-play is either to emphasize the fact that the psalmist was being persecuted (**עָנִי**) by his enemies and was really in pain (**כּוֹאֵב**) or else it is to indicate that the psalmist (**אֲנִי**) is characterized by affliction/persecution (hence **עָנִי**).

30b is a request which is directed to God. The colon begins with the noun **יְשׁוּעָתְךָ** (“your deliverance”) followed by **אֱלֹהִים** (“God”) which shows that **יְשׁוּעָתְךָ** refers to God’s deliverance. The appellative **אֱלֹהִים** is followed by the verb **תִּשְׁנֹבְנֵנִי** (“set me on high”) which refers to God’s deliverance. The verb **תִּשְׁנֹבְנֵנִי** means “to set on high, to defend or protect” (Cohen, 1980a:871). The suppliant wants to be set on high by God’s deliverance. In this colon, **יְשׁוּעָה** (“deliverance”) is personified. To summarize verse 30, the psalmist is suffering and in pain so he makes a final petition for deliverance. He needs God’s deliverance to lift him from his dismal situation and put him in a secure place.

In a nutshell, as God’s servant, the psalmist in Strophe *H* (verses 23a-30b) calls upon God to punish his enemies severely as a way of rectifying their injustices. He wants God to make their sacrificial meal celebration the occasion of their ruin and downfall. He wants God to punish them with blindness and to deprive them of all their strength so that they cannot take action against him. He asks God to pour out his wrath and anger on them and to destroy them, together with their families so that their cities and homes would be desolate, with no inhabitants. The psalmist makes this imprecatory prayer because his enemies have persecuted and ridiculed him. The psalmist wants his enemies not to be the recipients of YHWH’s mercy and deliverance. He asks God to erase them from the book of life, from the register of the righteous, so that they do not partake in God’s gift of life and blessings. Finally, the psalmist makes his final petition for deliverance; he wants God to deliver him from his predicament and put him in a secure place. The final solution is not that the enemies will bear the brunt, but that God will set him free. The solution for his predicament is ultimately situated in his personal relation to God and his deliverance. That is also why this colon is followed by praise (Stanza V). The suppliant turns away from the perpetrators of injustice to God and his glory.

3.5.5 Stanza V (verses 31a-37b): Praise & Confidence

Stanza V (verses 31a-37b) consists of the two strophes *I* (verses 31a-34b) and *J* (35a-37b). Strophe *I* (verses 31-34) is a vow of individual praise and Strophe *J* (verses 35-37) calls upon the whole universe to join in praising God.

3.5.5.1 Strophe I (verses 31a-34b)

Strophe *I* (verses 31a-34b) consists of three bicola (verses 31, 33 and 34) and a single colon (verse 32).

The **first bicolon (verse 31)** is a vow to praise God. **31a** commences with the voluntative אֶהְלֵלָה (“I will praise” or “let me praise” or “I want to praise”) which expresses the desire of the psalmist to give praise. The verb אֶהְלֵלָה is followed by שֵׁם־אֱלֹהִים (“the name of God”) which refers to God himself because in the Old Testament, name “stands for the person as revealed by his character and actions” (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:56). The phrase בְּשִׁיר (“with a song”) indicates the way in which the suppliant will praise God - he will praise God with a song.

31b is linked to 31a syndetically by the conjunction ו . 31b commences with אֶמְדָּלֵנוּ (“I will magnify him”) which functions as a voluntative and expresses the suppliant’s intention to praise God. God is the object of the psalmist’s praise. The verb אֶמְדָּלֵנוּ is then followed by בְּתוֹדָה (“with thanksgiving”) which indicates the manner in which the suppliant will magnify God, that is by thanksgiving.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 31a and 31b. The idea that the psalmist will praise God in 31a is repeated or restated in 31b. The expression $\text{אֶהְלֵלָה שֵׁם־אֱלֹהִים}$ (“I will praise the name of God”) in 31a is synonymous with אֶמְדָּלֵנוּ (“I will magnify him”) in 31b. There is also an extended parallelism with the chiasmic pattern (a b c a’ c’) in verse 31 (see Goldingay, 2007b:353).

a	I will praise
b	the name of God
c	with a song
a`[& b']	And I will magnify [him]
c'	with thanksgiving.

In short, the psalmist in verse 31 vows to praise God with a song of thanksgiving.

The **single colon (verse 32)** is syndetically linked to the previous bicolon (verse 31) by the conjunction וַ and gives the psalmist's rationale for the vow of praise in verse 31. **32a** commences with תִּיטֵב ("it will please") which refers to the praise and thanksgiving in 31a-b. The verb תִּיטֵב is followed by לִיהוָה מִשׁוֹר פָּר מִקֶּרֶן מִפְּרִיִם ("YHWH more than an ox, a young bull with horns [and] hoofs"). The double participle מִקֶּרֶן מִפְּרִיִם ("with horns and hoofs") describes פָּר ("a young bull"). The phrase פָּר מִקֶּרֶן ("bull with horns") implies that the animal is fully grown and therefore more costly than a young bullock. The mention of the bull's hoofs suggests that the animal was a ritually clean animal, fit for sacrifice (cf. Lev 11:3-8; Deut 14:3-8). The "ox" (שׁוֹר) and "young bull" (פָּר) represent the animals that are offered in sacrifice (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:606). There is word-play between this colon (verse 32) and verse 31 – שׁוֹר ("ox") in 32a refers back to שִׁיר ("song") in 31a (see Anderson, 1972a:509; Groenewald, 2003:140). The purpose of the word-play is to contrast YHWH's response to a thanksgiving song (שִׁיר) and his response to sacrifices (שׁוֹר). YHWH is more pleased with a שִׁיר ("song") which expresses true gratitude, than with an שׁוֹר ("ox") which is a valuable sacrifice in itself, but does not necessarily represent an obedient spirit or a humble attitude to God. In other words, the sacrifice is to be subordinated to the meaning of sacrifice (Anderson, 1972a:509). There is a synonymous parallelism, GENERAL-SPECIFIC relation in verse 32, where the phrase "a young bull with horns [and] hoofs" specifies "ox" in the phrase "and it will please YHWH more than an ox." One may translate verse 32 as: "And it will please YHWH more than a head of cattle, namely a young bull with horns [and] hoofs" (cf. 1 Sam 15).

To sum up verse 32, YHWH is more pleased with thanksgiving than he is with the offering of animals.

In the **second and third bicola (verses 33-34)** the emphasis shifts from the individual suppliant, who is described as עֲנִי ("afflicted") in verse 30a, to the community which is described as עֲנָוִים ("the afflicted"). These verses (verses 33-34) are blessings or well-wishes for the afflicted and God seekers. These verses place the whole prayer into the congregation of worshippers who consider themselves miserable (Gerstenberger, 1988:51). The afflicted and those who seek God will be encouraged and rejuvenated in their faith and hope in the Lord.

In the **second bicolon (verse 33)**, **33a** commences with רָאוּ ("they have seen") which refers to the activity of the afflicted. The verb רָאוּ is followed by the adjective עֲנָוִים ("the afflicted") which functions as the subject of 33a. The adjective עֲנָוִים ("afflicted") is followed by

the verb *ישמחו* (“they are glad”) which describes the disposition of the afflicted. The verb *ישמחו* describes the consequence of seeing (when the afflicted see, they are glad). The ESV follows this approach and translates 33a as “when the humble see it they will be glad.”

33b begins with the phrase *דרשי אלהים* (“you who seek God”) which functions as vocative. The participial phrase *דרשי אלהים* is followed by *ויחי* (“and let it live”) which refers to the heart of those who seek God. The jussive *ויחי* is followed by *לבבכם* (“your heart”) which functions as the object of the jussive *ויחי*. The phrase “let your heart live” means “to encourage, to give hope” (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:606). The TEV translates *ויחי לבבכם* as “will be encouraged” and the NJB has “Let your courage revive.”

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned in 33a and 33b, there is a causal correlation parallelism, REASON-RESULT. Because they have seen it and are consequently glad, they have new hope/courage i.e. their hearts are lifted in spite of inequities.

This bicolon (verse 33) implies that the suppliant’s life is somehow exemplary to other people in a similar situation as his (McCann, 1996:953). The bicolon does not state what is seen (there is no object). They may perhaps see how YHWH acts according to the prayer (imprecations) – then see how God avenges and put things right – by delivering the suppliant. It may be that they see the suppliant’s life – how he left the injustices in God’s hands and engaged in positive thanksgiving (see Briggs & Briggs, 1907:120). Whichever aspect is in view here, the afflicted and those who seek God will share in the psalmist’s joy and be encouraged and their hope in the Lord will be rejuvenated (verse 33).

In the **third bicolon (verse 34)**, **34a** begins with a causal conjunction *כי* (“for”) which signifies a reason. This bicolon (verse 34) gives the reason or rationale why the afflicted and the faithful share in the psalmist’s joy and are encouraged in their faith. The conjunction *כי* (“for”) is followed by *שמע* (“he hears”) which describes YHWH’s attribute - he is the listener. The participle *שמע* is followed by *אל-אביונים* (“the needy”) which functions as the object of the participle *שמע* (“he hears”). The phrase *אל-אביונים* is followed by *יהוה* (“YHWH”) which functions as the subject of 34a. Therefore 34a emphasizes YHWH’s attribute of listening to the needy.

34b is syndetically linked to 34a by means of the conjunction *ו*. 34b commences with the phrase *את-אסיריו* (“his captive people”) which refers to YHWH’s people who have been captured. Many translations follow this interpretation: the NIV and NJB have “his captive

people,” the CEV has “his people in prison,” and the ESV has “his people who are prisoners.” The NEB and Dahood (1968:165) have “those bound to his service.” The noun אֲסִיר means bondman, prisoner, captive (Brown *et al*, 1979:64; Feinberg, 1980:62). The noun אֲסִירָיו (“his captives”) may be interpreted as either literal imprisonment or else as a figure of the bonds of suffering and oppression (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:606-7). The phrase אֶת־אֲסִירָיו (“his captive people”) is followed by לֹא בָזָה (“he does not despise”) which describes the activity of YHWH. The verb בָּזָה means “to ignore, neglect, forget” (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:606).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 34a and 34b, with positive–negative statement. The idea that YHWH takes notice of the needy and delivers them from their predicament in 34a is repeated or restated in 34b. The positive *qal* participle כִּי־שָׁמַע (“for he hears”) in 34a is parallel to the negative *qal* verb לֹא בָזָה (“not despise”). The noun אֶבְיוֹנִים (“the needy”) in 34a is parallel to the noun אֲסִירָיו (“his captive people”) in 34b. After all, captives are people in need of freedom and deliverance. YHWH does not neglect those who are suffering and in oppression. God is on their side (cf. Pss. 9:18; 12:5; 22:24; 35:10; 140:12). There is also an extended parallelism with the pattern (a b a' b') in 34a and 34b (see Goldingay, 2007b:498).

a	For YHWH hears
	b the needy
a'	And he does not despise
	b' the captives

The purpose of the extended parallelism is to highlight or emphasize that YHWH hears or does not neglect the needy but he delivers them from their plight. Therefore this bicolon (verse 34) gives the reason or rationale why the afflicted and the faithful should share in the psalmist's joy and be encouraged in their faith. The reason is that YHWH hears the needy and takes notice of the plight of the needy by delivering them from their troubles.

In short, the psalmist in Strophe 1 (verses 31-34) vows to praise God with a song of thanksgiving because YHWH is more pleased with thanksgiving than he is with an animal offering. The content and the initial *hallel* identify this strophe as a subgenre of praise within Psalm 69, which is an imprecation. The psalmist's act of thanksgiving in the temple or his deliverance by God will be a witness to God's faithful servants – those in a similar situation to his – so that they will be encouraged and rejuvenated in their faith in YHWH. This is the case

because YHWH hears the needy and he takes notice of the plight of the captives by delivering them from their troubles. YHWH does not neglect those who are suffering and in oppression.

3.5.5.2 Strophe J (verses 35-37)

In Strophe J (verses 35-37) the psalmist calls creation to join in praising God for his acts of deliverance (verse 35) and he gives justification for the call to praise (verses 36-37). This strophe can be subdivided into two sub-sections: verse 35 which consists of a single colon and verses 36-37 which consist of a bicolon (36a, 36b) and a tricolon (36c, 37a, 37b).

In the **single colon (verse 35)**, **35a** commences with יְהַלְלוּהוּ (“let them praise him”) which has a cohortative meaning. The root הלל which appears here in 35a, at the beginning of Strophe J (verses 35-37) also appears in 31a, where it is also positioned at the beginning of Strophe I (verses 31-34). The verb יְהַלְלוּהוּ is directed towards the “heavens and the earth, the seas and everything that moves in them.” The phrase וְכָל־רֹמֵשׁ בָּם means living creatures (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:56). In short, in this bicolon (verse 35) the psalmist calls upon creation to join in praising God for his acts.

In the **bicolonic verse (verse 36ab)**, **36a** begins with the conjunction כִּי which gives the reason for the universal praise. The conjunction כִּי is followed by אֱלֹהִים which functions as the subject of the colon (36a). This is followed by יוֹשִׁיעַ (“he will deliver”) which describes the activity of God together with צִיּוֹן (“Zion”) which functions as the object of יוֹשִׁיעַ (“he will deliver”). The name צִיּוֹן was applied to the hill (Mt Moriah) on which Solomon built the temple. By extension, the name was later applied to the temple, to the city of Jerusalem, and sometimes to the whole land of Israel (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:56). Therefore 36a is a general promise of deliverance – God will deliver the whole land of Israel.

In relation to 36a, **36b** specifies what delivering Zion in 36a entails. Verse 36b is syndetically linked to 36a by the conjunction וְ. 36b commences with יִבְנֶה (“he will rebuild”) which refers to the activity of God. The verb יִבְנֶה (“he will rebuild”) is followed by עָרֵי יְהוּדָה (“the cities of Judah”) which functions as the object of the colon. God is the indirect agent of the (re)building of the cities, but here he is depicted as the agent. Actually he will let the cities be rebuilt.

The reason for the universal praise in verse 35 is that God will restore Judah (verse 36).

In the tricollic verse (verse 36c, 37a & 37b), 36c is syndetically linked to 36b by the conjunction ׀. 36c consists of the expression יִשְׁבוּ שָׁם וַיִּרְשׁוּהָ (“they will live there and possess it”). There are two views with regards to the identity of the subject of 36c. The first view is that the subject is only revealed later in 37a as זֶרַע עֲבָדָיו (“the offspring of his servants”). The second view is that the undefined subject (“they”) may be translated as “the/his people” which is a reference to the Judeans since the psalmist only mention that the cities of Judah will be restored in 36b.

37a is syndetically linked to verse 36c by the conjunction ׀. 37a commences with זֶרַע עֲבָדָיו (“the offspring of his servants”) which functions as the subject of the colon. The phrase זֶרַע עֲבָדָיו is followed by the verb יִנְחֲלוּהָ (“will inherit it”) which describes the activity of זֶרַע עֲבָדָיו (“the offspring of his servants”). The object of the verb יִנְחֲלוּהָ is Zion (צִיּוֹן), which is a singular feminine, but conceptually it may include “the cities of Judah” in 36b. The phrase וְאֵהָבֵי שְׁמוֹ (“and those who love his name”) refers to those who love God.

37b is syndetically linked to verse 37a by the conjunction ׀. The phrase וְאֵהָבֵי שְׁמוֹ is the subject of יִשְׁכְּנוּ בָּהּ (“they will live in it”). The prepositional object בָּהּ (“in it”), attached to the verb יִשְׁכְּנוּ, functions like an adverb and indicates location and refers back to Zion (and by implication the cities of Judah). The phrase שֵׁם-אֱלֹהִים (“name of God”) in 31a (at the head of the first praise) and the noun שְׁמוֹ (“his name”) (at the end of the second praise) in 37b form an inclusion, which supports the demarcation of Stanza V (verses 30a-37b) (see Allen, 1986:591; McCann, 1996:954; Groenewald, 2003:166). The noun “servants” in 37a recalls the prophets’ promise about the restoration of Judah and Jerusalem (cf. Isa 54:17; 65:8-9, 13-15). The expression “offspring of his servants” in 37a refers to the descendents of those who worship YHWH. Those who love God’s name, who will live in the land, are the righteous. Loving God’s “name” denotes loving God himself because in the Old Testament, “name” stands for the person as revealed by his character and actions” (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:56).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned in verses 36-37, there is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT between verse 36a and 36b. The idea that God will restore the land of the Judeans is repeated in both cola. The tricollic verse (verse 36c-37b) specifies what delivering Zion and the cities of Judah in 36ab entails (GENERAL-SPECIFIC) or what the outcome, the consequence, of the restoration will be.

In summary, the psalmist in Strophe *J* (verses 35-37) or second *hallel* bursts into a doxology, and exhorts the whole universe to praise God for he will deliver Zion. This entails that the cities of Judah will be rebuilt and the children of God's people will repossess the land of Judah. This verse clearly points to a time when the Judeans were in exile under the dominion of the Babylonians. God would enable the Judeans to return back to the land of Judah and repossess their land once more (cf. Isa 49:8; 54:3; 57:13; Jer 30:3; 31:24). The descendants of God's people will live in the cities of Judah and possess the land of Judah. The servants of God, together with their offspring, will live in the cities of Judah and possess Zion.

3.5.6 Summary of intra-textual analysis

Psalm 69 commences with an urgent petition for deliverance (verse 2a). The psalmist makes use of the image of overwhelming waters which are threatening his life to indicate that he is on the verge of death (verses 2b-3d). The psalmist prays ceaselessly to God for help, but there is no response; he is weary both mentally and physically (verse 4). The imagery of overwhelming waters refers to enemies of the suppliant who have hated him without cause and have made false accusations and charges against him (verse 5). The psalmist is also conscious of the fact that what is happening to him could affect others, so he prays that God would keep him from bringing shame and dishonour on his fellow Israelites who are devoted to God (verses 6-7). The psalmist's deep care for the temple in Jerusalem (and by implication his love for YHWH) creates trouble for him (verses 8 & 10). He grieves over the situation at the temple (unknown to us) by weeping, fasting and wearing sackcloth and this backfires – the whole community makes him a laughing stock (verses 11-13). The psalmist returns to God in prayer and acknowledges an era when God acts in deliverance and restoration of his people (verse 14ab). The psalmist asks God for urgent deliverance because he is in a life-threatening situation (verses 14c-19b). His appeal for deliverance is based on YHWH's good loving-kindness, which expresses itself through compassion (verse 17bc). The suppliant is discouraged and depressed because his enemies have shamed and disgraced him (verse 21a). The psalmist expects sympathy and comfort from comforters, but on the contrary the enemies have caused him more misery (verses 21b-22b). The psalmist calls upon God to punish his enemies severely as a way of rectifying their injustices (verses 23-29). Finally, the psalmist makes his final petition for deliverance; he wants God to deliver him from his predicament and put him in a secure place (verse 30). The psalmist vows to praise God with a song of thanksgiving because YHWH is

more pleased with thanksgiving than he is with an animal offering (verses 31-32). The psalmist's act of thanksgiving or his deliverance by God will be a witness to God's faithful servants (verses 33-34). The psalm closes with an exhortation for the whole universe to praise God because he will deliver Zion which entails that the cities of Judah will be rebuilt and the children of God's people will repossess the land of Judah (verses 35-37).

3.6 Literary Genre, Historical and Life Setting of Psalm 69

3.6.1 *The genre of Psalm 69*

Many scholars (e.g. Leupold, 1959:501; Dahood, 1968:155; McCann, 1996:956; Anderson, 1972a:499; Gerstenberger, 2001:47; Davidson, 1998:217; Weiser, 1962:493; Eaton, 2003:254; VanGemeren, 1991:454; Tate, 1990:192) view Psalm 69 as an individual lament. Kraus views Psalm 69 as belonging to the category of "prayer songs" (1989:60).

On the basis of its structure (see section 3.4) and content (see section 3.5), Psalm 69 can be classified as an individual lament because the psalm has elements that characterise individual laments, in which the suppliant sets forth to God complaints about unfavourable situations and sufferings, along with strong petitions for divine action to relieve the distress.

Structurally, the first four stanzas of the psalm alternate between petition and complaint (verses 1-29; see section 3.3) and the last stanza is an expression of confidence on the psalmist's part that God will deliver him and it is at the same time a double song of praise, embedded in the lament (verses 30-37).

From the intra-textual analysis, it is clear that the suppliant prays about a situation in which he is desperately in need of help before sinking into the deep waters of the underworld. As in other individual laments (e.g. Ps 35), the enemies are making false accusations against the suppliant. They also want to put the suppliant to death (verse 5). The suppliant has confessed his sin and acknowledged that he is not perfect. The psalmist is also conscious of the fact that what is happening to him could affect others, so he prays that God would keep him from bringing shame and dishonour on his fellow Israelites who are devoted to God (verses 6-7). The suppliant's family (verse 9) and community (verse 13) have turned against him. The suppliant claims to be a faithful servant of God (verses 8, 18) and his piety (verses 11-12) and

zeal for the temple (vs 10) are rejected and become reproach (verses 11, 13). The suppliant asks God to deliver him and to punish his enemies (verses 14-15; 22-29). Although imprecation (verses 22-29) comprises only 8 verses out of a total of 37 verses, it occupies a very central place in the psalm, so that this lament can also be called an imprecatory psalm. In response to God's deliverance, the suppliant vows to praise God and proclaim his greatness.

3.6.2 Historical and Life Setting of Psalm 69

The circumstances that gave rise to the complaint are unclear; therefore various suggestions have been given by scholars:

- Some scholars (e.g. Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:593; Anderson, 1972a:499; Kraus, 1988:60) suggest that the suppliant was afflicted by illness or sickness. The statements in verses 21, 27 and 30 clearly indicate that the suppliant was suffering from a severe sickness and was near death (verses 3-4; 15-18). The suppliant was also persecuted by enemies (verses 5, 27) and abandoned by his family and community (verses 9; 10-13).
- Others (e.g. Tate, 1990:194) would argue that the language in the psalm does not necessarily indicate a specific condition. The metaphors in Psalm 69 are designed to express a whole range of pain, suffering and the machinations of enemies without being specific about any situation.

The intra-textual analysis supports the second view. The psalmist is not physically sick but he is discouraged and depressed by the insults of the enemies (see the discussion on verse 21). The water metaphor in Psalm 69 shows that the psalmist was near death but the text does not give the specific situation of the suppliant. The other metaphors (e.g. the enemies putting gall in the psalmist's food) express a whole range of pain, suffering and misery without being specific about any situation.

Therefore, with regards to the historical setting of the psalm, the exact context of Psalm 69 is very illusive. As Weiser (1962:493) observes: "[I]t is not concrete enough for us to grasp clearly the worshipper's historical situation and personal circumstances." Verses 36-37 seem to presuppose an exilic or post-exilic situation after the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BC. However, verse 10 may be understood as an indication that the temple of the pre-exilic period was still in existence. On the other hand, verse 10 may be read as referring to one who is

zealous to rebuild the temple (e.g. Haggai and Zechariah) after 539 BC. (Tate, 1990:192). Kraus argues that the petitioner of Psalm 69 belonged to the group that was enthusiastic about the rebuilding the temple (1988:60-61). Some scholars (e.g. Anderson, 1972a:502) interpret the expression “your house” in verse 10 as not referring to the temple but to the “household of faith.”

If the historical setting of the psalm is difficult to establish, that does not make it easier to establish the “life setting” of the psalm. Various proposals have been given by scholars and these proposals depend upon the theoretical reconstruction of Israel’s worship (Tate, 1990:195).

- Johnson (1979:386-394) thinks in terms of a cultic prophet in the temple in Jerusalem who speaks possibly for his own case, but more likely for a king, who has suffered defeat in battle, despite his trust in God and his zeal for the temple. Eaton (2003:254) also associates the suppliant of Psalm 69 with a king. The king prays and trusts in God that he would bring about the deliverance of the holy city and provinces as an event of importance for the entire world. Davidson (1998:217) does not share the same opinion with Eaton, but argues that the experience described in Psalm 69 is not peculiar to the king and instead finds its counterpart in the experience of Jeremiah and anyone going through a similar situation or experience as the psalmist.
- Seybold (1973:133-137) proposes a tradition-history of Psalm 69 in three stages. First, verses 2-30 formed the prayer for a sick person, who is being persecuted by his enemies. This first stage was probably intended for recital away from the temple setting. The second stage, verses 2-33, formed a prayer of praise for a healed person who would go to the temple for the appropriate ceremonies, including a public report of the illness and the healing. The third stage, verses 2-37, utilizes the earlier psalm as a testimony to the willingness of God to hear and deliver and relates this to the wider concern for Zion.
- Gerstenberger (2001:52) suggests that Psalm 69 could have sprouted from a small-group ritual. The mentioning of the temple, Zion or Jerusalem in Psalm 69 does not necessarily make the suppliants exclusively of a central temple community.

- Weiser (1963:493) argues that Psalm 69 was probably recited in public worship in the presence of a congregation because of the use of phrases such as “the humble” and “you who seek God” which allude to a congregation.
- Tate (1990:195-196) sees Psalm 69 as a prayer that expresses great distress by a pious and a faithful person in the post-exilic period and he argues that the psalm was probably used in multiple contexts. Tate observes that the original forms of Psalms 22, 69 and 102 were probably designed as prayers for the use of kings. On the other hand, the post-exilic versions of the psalms were probably influenced by the servant concepts in Isaiah 40-55 and may also have been modelled after Jeremiah and perhaps even emerged from his disciples. Craigie (1983:197-198) argues that Psalm 22 is based on a liturgy, in which the worshippers moved from lament to prayer and on to praise and thanksgiving. Tate (1990:195) says if Craigie is correct, then the same understanding works well for Psalm 69. Craigie (1983:197-198) suggests that Psalm 22 was used for severely sick persons who were threatened by death and who participated in the liturgy as part of the congregation of worshippers hoping for favourable results. Tate (1990:195) argues that Psalm 69 could have been used in a similar manner to Psalm 22. However, too much emphasis should not be placed on the sickness in Psalm 69 because the metaphors in the text are general enough to cover any great physical and spiritual distress. Tate (1990:196) also observes that Psalms 22 and 69 have similar language and argues that the psalms were probably used during services of fasting and penitence in exilic and post-exilic Israelite communities.
- Mays (1994:231-232) argues that Psalm 69 has features that sketch a “liturgical-theological profile” of the identity of the psalmist. According to Mays, the identifying features are:
 1. The psalmist identifies himself or herself as God’s “servant” (verse 18; cf. verse 37) and one of the “lowly” (verse 30; cf. verse 33).
 2. The psalmist views her or his suffering as deriving from God, perhaps for this reason the suffering is mentioned in verse 6.
 3. The psalmist waits in the midst of her or his suffering for God’s saving action (verses 2, 4, 14d, 30).
 4. The psalmist waits with humble but fervent devotion to God and to God’s house (verses 10-12).

5. The psalmist is insulted, derided and alienated because of this fervent waiting (verses 9, 11-12, 20-22).
6. The psalmist bears reproach that is actually directed to God (verses 8, 10).
7. The psalmist is a representative figure, both in the condition of affliction and in being saved by God (verses 30, 33-34).

In conclusion, it is best to concur with Mays (1994:232) who further argues that while this profile discourages identification with any one particular historical person, it clearly calls to mind several persons or groups: Jeremiah (see 11:18-20; 15:15-18; 17:14), the lamenting voice in Lamentations 3, the afflicted community of Psalm 44 (cf. see vss 22, 24), the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53 and Job. Although precision and certainty are impossible, it is likely that all of these texts have been informed and shaped in one way or another by the exile experience. Mays (1994:232) concludes by saying that “out of the anguish of the exile and its aftermath an understanding of affliction that goes beyond punishment and fits into the saving purpose of the LORD begins to emerge. Psalm 69 is one piece of the pattern.”

If the historical setting of this Psalm is the exile, then the enemies could have been those of the Judean exiles who were opposed to the restoration movement and who did not share the enthusiasm and zeal of the psalmist and his faith community, but rather despised this restoration movement. Such a life setting may indicate that the imprecations in Psalm 69 are not merely personal vengeance of the psalmist.

3.7 Canonical Context of Psalm 69

Psalm 69 belongs to the second book of Psalms (Psalms 42-72). This book of the Psalter can be subdivided into the following divisions (see Wilson, 2002:83-84):

Psalms 42-44:	Communal longing for restoration
Psalms 45-49:	God as King and Hope for the future
Psalms 50-53:	Call to repentance and confession
Psalms 54-59:	Communal plea for restoration
Psalms 60:	The Agony of rejection
Psalms 61-68:	Reliance and universal restoration
Psalms 69-71:	Deliverance and Praise
Psalms 72:	The King's Son rules the world

From the above subdivision, it is clear that Psalm 69 can be read together with the psalms in the seventh subdivision of Book 2, Psalms 69-71. Psalm 69 introduces a new psalm grouping (Psalms 69-71) that returns to earlier themes of lament and pleas for deliverance from mocking and threatening enemies (see Wilson, 2002:949). Psalms 69 and 70 have the heading “Psalm of David” in their superscriptions. Psalms 71 and 72 seem to be part of the Davidic collection even though their headings do not specifically mention his name (see Farmer, 1998:825). McCann (1996:955) argues that Psalms 70 and 71 were originally meant to be one psalm and the literary links between the two psalms seem to support the possibility that they were originally one psalm or at least they are to be read as companions (cf. 70:2b, 6b with 71:12b; 70:3 with 71:10, 13; 70:2a with 71:2; 70:5c with 71:19c). The significant patterns, topic or themes in Psalms 69-71 may indicate that the canonical context does shed light on Psalm 69.

Psalms 69-71 are inter-related through many common words, phrases and themes. Psalms 69-71 share common vocabulary:

Common vocabulary shared by Psalms 69 and 70

אלהים	God	69:2, 4, 6, 7, 14, 30, 31, 33, 36	70:2, 6
נצל	to deliver	69:15a, 15c	70:2
יהוה	YHWH	69:6, 14, 17, 32, 34	70:2, 6
בוש	to be ashamed	69:7	70:3
חפר	to be humiliated/reproach	69: 8, 10, 11, 21	70:3
בקש	to seek	69:7	70:3
נפש	my soul/life	69:2, 11	70:3
כלם	to be disgraced	69:7	70:3
בשׂת	shame	69:7, 20	70:4
מִבְּקֶשֶׁי	who seek you	69:7	70:5
גדל	to magnify	69:31	70:5
אהבי	those who love	69:37	70:5
יִשְׁעֶתֶד	your deliverance	69:30	70:5
וְאֲנִי עָנִי	but I am afflicted	69:30	70:6
אֲבִיּוֹן	needy	69:34	70:6

Common vocabulary shared by Psalms 69 and 71

יהוה	YHWH	69:6, 14, 17, 32, 34	71:1, 5, 16
אלהים	God	69:2, 4, 6, 7, 14, 30, 31, 33, 36	71:4, 11, 12, 18, 19, 22
אדני	Lord	69:7	71:5, 16
צדקתך	your righteousness	69:28	71:2, 15, 16, 10, 24
נצל	to deliver	69:15a, 15c	71:2, 11
הושיעני	deliver me	69:2	71:2, 3
תמיד	continually	69:24	71:3, 6, 14
כלה	failing/fails/consumed	69:4	71:9, 13
אויבי	my enemies	69:5, 19	71:10
נפש	my soul/life	69:2, 11	71:10, 13, 23
רדף	to pursue	69:27	71:11
בוש	to be ashamed	69:7	71:1, 13, 24
חרפה	reproach	69: 8, 10, 11, 21	71:13
כלמה	disgrace	69:8	70:13
בקש	who seek	69:7	71:13, 24
ואני	and I	69:14, 30	71:14, 22
יחל	wait/waiting	69:4	71:14
ישועתך	your deliverance	69:30	71:15
ארץ	earth	69:35	71:20
אמת	truth	69:14	71:22
פדה	to ransom	69:19	71:23

Psalm 70 has thematic affinities with Psalm 69. Like Psalm 69, Psalm 70 is an individual lament (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:608). In both Psalm 69 and 70, the psalmist makes a very urgent plea for deliverance (69:2, 15, 17-19, 30; 70:2, 6). In both psalms, the enemies of the psalmist are portrayed as hostile people who want to destroy the psalmist's life. In Psalm 69, the enemies are portrayed as overwhelming waters which threaten the life of the psalmist (69:2-4; 15-16). The enemies have hated the psalmist for no reason and they want to kill him and they have made false accusations against him (69:5). They have accused him of thievery and forced him to restore what he did not steal (69:5). The enemies also put gall in the psalmist's food and they gave him vinegar to quench his thirst (69:22). In Psalm 70, the enemies are after the psalmist's life and they delight in the psalmist's hurt or misery (70:3-4). In both psalms, the psalmist prays for the total defeat and humiliation of the enemies (69:23-29; 70:3-4). In Psalm 69, the psalmist is aware of the fact that he is not perfect; he is a sinner and what is happening

to him could affect others so he prays that God would keep him from bringing shame and dishonour on the followers of YHWH (69:6-7). The psalmist wants his deliverance by YHWH to be a witness to YHWH followers in a similar situation to his so that they are encouraged and rejuvenated in their faith in YHWH (69:33-34). In Psalm 70, the psalmist also wants the followers of YHWH to rejoice and magnify YHWH (70:5). In both Psalm 69 and 70, the psalmist is afflicted (69:30; 70:6). The psalmist identifies himself/herself with the “the needy” (69:34; 70:6). The theme of “YHWH’s deliverance” is also seen in both psalms (69:2, 14cd, 30, 36; 70:5). The response of the psalmist to his deliverance in both psalms is praise and magnification of YHWH (69:31-32; 70:5).

Psalm 71 shares a number of themes with Psalm 69. Like Psalm 69, Psalm 71 is an individual lament (see McCann, 1996:958; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:610). Like Psalm 69, Psalm 71 begins with a prayer for help and deliverance (71:1-6 cf. 69:2, 15, 17-19, 30; 70:2, 6). In both psalms, the enemies of the psalmist are portrayed as hostile people who want to destroy the psalmist’s life (69: 2-4, 5, 15-16, 22; 71: 4, 10, 24). In Psalm 71, the psalmist asks God to rescue him from the power and dominion of his enemies (verse 4). The psalmist’s enemies are described as wicked, unjust and ruthless (verse 4). These enemies have spoken against the suppliant and were plotting evil against the psalmist (verse 10, 24). The psalmist’s enemies in Psalm 69 are also wicked and ruthless men, who have falsely accused the psalmist of thievery and have forced him to restore what he did not steal (69:5). When the psalmist was broken-hearted, sick and in need of sympathy and comfort (69:21), the enemies were ruthless and cruel and put gall in his food and gave him vinegar to quench his thirst (69:22).

In Psalm 69, the psalmist is aware of the fact that what is happening to him could affect others so he prays that God would keep him from bringing shame and dishonour on the followers of YHWH (69:6-7). The psalmist wants his deliverance by YHWH to be a witness to YHWH followers in a similar situation to his so that they are encouraged and rejuvenated in their faith in YHWH (69:33-34). Similarly in Psalm 71, the psalmist points out that he is a marvel to many because of YHWH’s protection on his life (verse 7).

In both Psalm 69 and 71, YHWH’s deliverance of the psalmist is based on his moral attributes. In Psalm 69, YHWH’s answer to the psalmist (i.e. deliverance) is based on his good loving-kindness which expresses itself through compassion (verse 17). Similarly in Psalm 71, the psalmist’s plea for deliverance is based on YHWH’s righteousness (verse 2).

In Psalm 69, the psalmist waits (יחל) amid suffering for YHWH's deliverance (verses 2, 4, 14d and 30). Similarly in Psalm 71, the psalmist vows to wait (יחל) continually for YHWH's deliverance and praise him more and more (verse 14). The theme of "YHWH's deliverance" is also seen in both psalms (69:2, 14cd, 30, 36; 71:15).

In both Psalm 69 and 71, the psalmist vows to give praise to YHWH and testify about his goodness if YHWH delivers him from his distress (69:31-34; 71:15-17, 22-24). In Psalm 71, the psalmist vows to testify with his mouth about YHWH's righteousness and deliverance all day long. The psalmist will testify about the mighty deeds of YHWH (verses 15-17). The psalmist also vows to sing praises to YHWH with musical instruments such as the harp and the lyre.

In Psalm 69, the suppliant's face is covered with shame, disgrace and reproach because of his commitment to God rather than personal failing (verses 8, 10-12). Therefore, the psalmist calls upon YHWH to punish his enemies severely (verses 23-30). Whereas in Psalm 71, the psalmist prays for his adversaries to be ashamed and consumed; to be covered with reproach and disgrace (verses 13 and 24).

Therefore, Psalms 69-71 have significant philological and thematic links. The inter-textual analysis of Psalm 69 confirms a number of themes. The most common theme of Psalms 69-71 is that of deliverance: YHWH is the psalmist's deliverer and refuge. YHWH alone is the one who comes to the fore and brings deliverance to the psalmist. He rescues the afflicted and the needy from their adversaries, the wicked. YHWH redeems his people by punishing the wicked and bringing shame and disgrace to them. Psalm 69 admonishes the followers of YHWH to call on YHWH whenever they are persecuted by their enemies because YHWH will come to their aid. The psalm admonishes the followers of YHWH to be zealous for the true worship of YHWH. The psalm also teaches that God's judgment is very severe on those who insult his servants who are consumed with his zeal for the pure worship of YHWH.

3.8 Imprecatory Implications in Psalm 69

In Psalm 69, the psalmist also prays for an inversion of roles – he simply asks God to ensure that his enemies experience what they have inflicted on others. The suppliant's plea for an inversion is an assertion of YHWH's righteousness.

- The enemies were cruel to the psalmist when he was discouraged and needed comfort and encouragement (verse 21). Instead of refreshing him with a good meal, they acted without pity –they put gall in the psalmist’s food and gave him vinegar to quench his thirst (verse 22). In other words the enemies metaphorically made the situation worse rather than better. The psalmist prays for his enemies’ sacrificial meals and peace-offerings to be a trap and a snare (verse 23). They had put gall into the meal set for the suppliant, so the psalmist wants God to punish the enemies as they eat their sacrificial meal so that they would be ensnared in their wicked scheme - so that they would end up mixing their meal with the psalmist’s and eat the gall they had prepared for the suppliant (verse 23).
- In verse 4, the psalmist’s eyes were failing from waiting upon God. Since the enemies’ hostility had affected the eyes of the psalmist metaphorically, the psalmist asks God to punish his enemies with blindness (verse 24).
- In verse 4, the psalmist is weary mentally and physically because he has been calling out ceaselessly to God for help and there is no response. It is obvious that the enemies’ hostility has caused the psalmist to be weary in verse 4, so the psalmist prays for an inversion of roles. He asks God to shake his enemies’ loins continually, so that all their strength is dilapidated (i.e. they become weary) (verse 24b).
- Since the enemies were not merciful to those who were smitten by God (this includes the psalmist) but instead added to their sufferings (or salt to injury) by their hostile acts (verse 27 cf. verses 11-13; 21-22), the suppliant asks God to add iniquity upon the enemies’ iniquity so that they would not be beneficiaries of his mercy and deliverance (verse 28).

It is interesting to note that the pronoun אַתָּה (“you”) in verses 6, 20, and 27 refers to YHWH. The use of the pronoun אַתָּה in verses 6, 20 and 27 emphasizes or shows a shift of attention away from the enemies to YHWH. Again and again the suppliant turns to God rather than wrestling with his adversaries. For example, the enemies hated the suppliant without cause and made false accusations against him (verses 2-4). In response to the enemies’ hostile behaviour the suppliant does not retaliate nor does he have a vindictive spirit against his enemies. Instead he shifts his focus to God; he presents himself to God and he acknowledges that God knows about his sin. God knows him more deeply than he knows himself (verse 6).

When the psalmist’s enemies have threatened his life he makes an urgent petition for YHWH to intervene and deliver his life from them (see verses 2-4, 14c-19b, 30ab). In so doing the suppliant turns to YHWH rather than entertaining notions of revenge.

In verse 7, the suppliant is identified with those “who wait on YHWH” – these were the followers of YHWH who expressed an attitude of hope, expectation and confidence in God. The suppliant does not contemplate personal revenge but appeals to the heavenly king, יהוה צבאות, who is able to deliver the psalmist in the midst of his adversaries.

The psalmist’s zealous grief for the temple (10a) backfires on the psalmist, in spite of his fasting, praying and grieving (11-12). The latter rather become a topic of gossip among people sitting about talking at the city gate and a fodder for mocking drinking songs. The psalmist is ridiculed and mocked by all the classes of society - from the drunkards to the elders. The psalmist does not retaliate against his enemies nor does he have a vindictive spirit but he turns his attention away from the incomprehensible actions of the enemies to YHWH. He turns to God in prayer and he acknowledges an era when God acts in deliverance and restoration of his people (verse 14).

When the psalmist prays imprecations (verses 23-29), the issue is not personal revenge but God’s justice or righteousness. The psalmist wants God to set things right. He wants God to execute his justice because he has been falsely accused (see verse 5). The psalmist is aware of the fact that God is loving, faithful and compassionate. He provides justice to the needy, afflicted and oppressed (verse 34). The psalmist was being afflicted and was in pain (verse 30). Instead of exercising compassion, his opponents responded with persecution and attack (verse 27, cf. 22).

The psalmist also calls down serious imprecations on his enemies asking that God would bring total destruction of his enemies because the psalmist is the servant of God (verse 18) and has God on his side. This explains why the suppliant has a deep care for the temple (verse 8, 10). The psalmist is rejected because he bears God’s rejection as his own. In other words, God is indirectly the reason for the psalmist’s shame and ridicules (verses 8-13). The psalmist’s general call or plea for deliverance is based on the conviction that he, God’s servant, has been faithful to God and followed his will, and should therefore be given help and protection from his enemies. God’s honour would be at stake if his faithful servant were abandoned to the godless. That is the reason why the psalmist prays imprecations against his enemies. The psalmist prays serious imprecations on his enemies (verses 23-29) because they attacked him, God’s servant (verses 18), which was an indirect attack on YHWH; they had added their wounds to God’s wounds. This explains why the psalmist wants his enemies to be caught up in their treachery

(verse 23), to be cursed with blindness (verse 24), to be objects of YHWH's divine wrath (verse 25), to be exterminated and to be erased from the book of life – which is the register of the righteous. Therefore, the psalmist does not have a vindictive spirit towards his enemies, in calling for God's judgment; the psalmist is calling for the vindication of God's name.

Imprecations do not have the last word in Psalm 69, but comfort for the afflicted does (verses 31-34). Personal wrongs and settling of scores are not as important as the community of believers who must live before YHWH. When God delivers the psalmist through punishing his enemies, the afflicted and those who seek God will be encouraged and rejuvenated in their faith and hope in the Lord (verses 31-34).

Although the psalmist calls down imprecations on his enemies, the final solution is not that the enemies will bear the brunt, but that God will set the psalmist free. God's solution for the psalmist's predicament is not the imprecation on the enemies but his personal relation to God and deliverance (verse 30). The psalmist turns away from his perpetrators of injustice to God and his glory (verses 31-32).

One may ask why mention is made of other afflicted persons (verses 31-34). Maybe the socio-historical setting of the psalm is one where the community of believers is under pressure and may even be captives. Verse 36 mentions the rebuilding of the cities of Judah, which may be indicative of an exile setting. This is significant for the interpretation and nature of the imprecations in this psalm. This thanksgiving also serves as reassurance to fellow-believers and puts the imprecations in a much broader context than a mere plea for vengeance.

The psalmist's prayer against the enemies (verses 23-29) is not a selfish, vengeful prayer. He does not have a vindictive spirit toward his enemies. The psalmist is not looking for his enemies' downfall for the sake of vengeance. Although the psalmist has prayed at great length about his attackers' downfall (verses 23-29), the object of the psalmist's praise and thanksgiving (verses 31-32) is not their demise but YHWH's deliverance and restoration (verses 30-37). The focus of this psalm is not on personal revenge, but on YHWH's deliverance. YHWH's deliverance of the psalmist is the main theme of the whole psalm. The canonical context of Psalm 69, Psalms 69-71 also confirms this as the main theme. YHWH redeems his people by punishing the wicked.

The message of Psalm 69 to the reader/listener is that sometimes in life we find ourselves in life-threatening situations. Like the psalmist we feel as though “the overwhelming waters have reached our throats.” In those times we should ask YHWH to deliver us from our predicament. YHWH delivers the afflicted and the needy from the wicked. He establishes justice by redeeming his people and punishing the wicked and bringing shame and disgrace on them. YHWH judges severely those who insult his servants who are consumed with his zeal. Psalm 69 also encourages the reader/listener to be zealous for the true worship of YHWH. The psalm also teaches us that hitting or striking people is always God’s prerogative, not ours and our response to people struck by God is prayer rather than retaliation (see Goldingay, 2007b:351).