

Praying the language of enmity in the Psalter: A study of Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 and 149

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ABSTRACT

Psalms using the language of enmity present a challenge for Christians who wish to use these psalms as prayer. This study investigates the language of enmity in Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 and 149 as Christian prayer and beyond the normal form category of lament or complaint of the individual. An argument is proposed to understand Book V of the Psalter as an integral unit, which editors have arranged to represent the post-exilic early restoration period. The study begins with an exegesis of each psalm and seeks to determine the perceived suffering of the psalmist(s) at the hands of enemies and the meaning of the responses to these adversaries. It then moves to a limited historical survey of how commentators through Church history have perceived the suffering and responses in these psalms which use language of enmity. This historical survey is used to correct or clarify the findings in the exegesis. In the third movement of this thesis, the results of the individual exegesis and historical survey of Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 and 149 are compared in order to elucidate the meaning of the language of enmity. The findings suggest that the language of enmity represents images of judgment on a recalcitrant adversary. The psalms are also investigated as prayers and as normative scripture. The use of the language of enmity in these psalms suggests a use of language that differs from normal use. In this regard the rhetorical device of synecdoche is most helpful in explaining how the texts function. The basis for the language of enmity seems to be the unchanging nature of moral evil. The study then investigates the psalms as canonical, normative prayer in order to move towards developing a theology of God's just dealing with people and his people in particular. In this regard the psalms are approached as prayer, regardless of the voice in which they were composed. It is suggested that the text as normative prayer allows the psalmist, God, and the pray-er to inhabit and celebrate the same sacred time and space. Of particular concern is how each psalm speaks to the issue of how God engages with moral evil and the question of what can be known about moral evil. The findings suggest that these psalms are an invaluable spiritual resource for the church and should remain unaltered in their use as Christian private and public prayer.

Key words: Language of enmity, prayer, Psalm 110, Psalm 119, Psalm 129, Psalm 137, Psalm 139, Psalm 149, theodicy, moral evil, synecdoche, imprecations, Book V.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASV	<i>American Standard Version</i>
BAGD	<i>A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature</i>
BCP	<i>Book of Common Prayer</i>
BDB	<i>The New Brown-Driver-Briggs-Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
ESV	<i>English Standard Version</i>
GES	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i>
GIND	<i>Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament</i>
HALOT	<i>Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
IBHS	<i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>
MT	<i>Masoretic Text</i>
NAB	<i>New American Bible</i>
NASB	<i>New American Standard Bible</i>
NEB	<i>New English Bible</i>
NIDOTTE	<i>New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>
NKJV	<i>New King James Version</i>
NETS	<i>A New English Translation of the Septuagint and Other Greek Translations Traditionally Included Under That Title</i>
NLT	<i>New Living Translation</i>
NRSV	<i>New Revised Standard Version</i>
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i>

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Problem Statement

In certain psalms language which consists of images/motifs of enmity and which calls on God to punish enemies or depicts God or people acting in a hostile way towards others presents a challenge for those who wish to use these psalms as prayer both in private use and in public worship in the Church. Perhaps the unique interplay between prayer, belief and action, expressed by the phrases *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, and *lex agendi*, is nowhere more pronounced than when one is praying these psalms.¹ If these psalms as prayer are to be appropriated by the Church in every age, then understanding how they can be used as prayer and inform the Church's theology of God's just dealing with humankind and, in particular, his people in the midst of unjust suffering, is challenging.

A general survey of the study of violence and vengeance in the Psalms shows that the approach of recent biblical scholars has been to study troubling texts through the form critical category of lament, mainly in the category of lament of the individual.² There have been some exceptions to this trend, for example, Alex Luc (1999) investigates expressions of enmity through the category of *prophetic judgment oracles* and Joel M. LeMon (2011) examines expressions of enmity through the mutually dependent relationship of prayer, belief and practice. At the beginning of the form critical enterprise, Gunkel (Gunkel & Begrich 1998) investigated the notion of "curse"³ independently of form category, which was consistent with his understanding of how psalms were composed of mixed genres. Weiser (1962:86) also considered the curse to "appear in different contexts and in different psalm types." Nevertheless, the main approach of recent scholarship remains to study these disturbing texts through the category of individual lament.

¹ For the relationship between ethics and the uniqueness of the psalms as prayer, cf. Wenham (2007:279-295). For a look at some "violent psalms" in relationship to the principle of *lex orandi*, *lex credendi*, and *lex agendi* cf. LeMon (2011:95-109).

² *Volksklagelieder* and *Klagelieder des Einzelnen* (Brongers, 1963); Laments as a category of Psalms of Disorientation (Walter Brueggemann, 1984); Individual and Communal Laments (Eric Zenger, 1996); Individual Laments (David Firth, 2005). Nancy de Claissé-Walford (2011:76, 86) adds Pss 94 and 129 to Zenger's list of imprecatory psalms, but only makes one minor reference to Ps 129 in her article.

³ According to Gunkel (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:231) "The goal of the curse is to cause pain, and to hamper and destroy life."

However, lament psalms and imprecatory psalms can provide only a partial understanding of what the psalms have to teach about the language of enmity used as prayer and its relationship to the concept of justice. First, images and motifs of enmity occur in psalms not typically assigned to this form category (Luc, 1999:395; LeMon, 2011:98). Psalm 149, for example, falls into the category of Hymn (Firth, 2005b:300) and accordingly implies that the execution of *vengeance* on the *nations* (Ps 149:7) is a matter to be celebrated in communal worship (Ps 149:7). Why should a psalm like Psalm 149, a Communal Hymn, be less problematic for those wishing to make sense of the psalms with language of enmity as prayer? Second, expressions with images or motifs of enmity are not the only response to the hostility of an adversary, as is the case in Ps 119:78. This verse suggests that wishing for shame on one's enemies and "meditating on statutes" can both be appropriate responses to adversity. If images and motifs of enmity can be examined in the larger context of other responses to distressing situations in the Psalms, then a more accurate picture may be obtained as to what they have to say about how these images function as prayer and how the psalmist(s) perceived justice.

Recently, some Old Testament scholars have tried to reclaim a normative function for the imprecatory psalms⁴ in the liturgical life of the Christian church (Brueggemann, 1984; Firth, 2005; Zenger, 1996; deClaissé-Walford, 2011; LeMon, 2011). The results reflect various understandings as to how the texts function as the Word of God and how these psalms are thus to be understood and used in Christian worship. None of these approaches, however, has as a basis for its proposal a satisfactory explanation of the imprecatory psalms both as normative, revelatory scripture and as functional for ongoing prayer. Unlike some narrative portions of scripture which portray acts such as war and violence without censure, and which allow the reader to develop a descriptive hermeneutic without consenting to the morality of those acts, praying psalms with language of enmity requires a particular assent to the message of these words on the part of the person who prays them. An understanding of the message of these psalms and how they function as prayer forms the basis for speaking about God's just dealing with people in the Psalms.

⁴ Imprecatory psalms are one type of psalms belonging to the larger category of psalms which contain motifs of enmity.

1.2 Central Theoretical Argument

I will argue, through an exegetical and historical investigation of the language of enmity in Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 and 149, beyond the limitation of the form critical category of lament of the individual and in the larger category of responses to perceived suffering at the hands of an enemy, that the language of enmity in these psalms is best understood as reflecting the true nature of moral evil and best described by the rhetoric of synecdoche. Further, the psalmist or psalmists were expressing a peculiar way of understanding victim, perpetrator and God. These psalms as prayers, when viewed from the perspective of the modern pray-er, form the basis for formulating a theology of God's just dealing with all people and in particular his people. It is hoped that this investigation can contribute to a clearer understanding of moral evil and the Church's participation in its eradication through prayer, as well as contribute to the larger theological understanding of the Psalms.

1.3 Methodology

This study will focus on the perceived suffering and responses to that suffering in Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139, and 149 of the BHS MT text. This suffering originates from an evil moral enemy and in this regard I will not investigate responses to suffering caused by natural evil.⁵ I will first exegete these psalm texts as independent integral units in their canonical context using commentaries from the nineteenth century to the present time. Then, I will investigate how these psalms have been used and understood by a selection of commentators throughout Church history and synthesize these findings with the first section. Next, I will compare the findings between these psalms to better understand how the language of enmity is functioning. Finally, I will integrate the findings in the first three sections of the thesis from the perspective of the Psalms as public and private Christian prayer in order to contribute towards a theology of God's just dealing with humankind and in particular his people.⁶

⁵ The mystery of God's involvement in some forms of moral evil will be discussed in Section 4.

⁶ Dorothea Erbele-Küster argues that a critical reading of the Psalms and reading the Psalms as prayer are not mutually exclusive (2001:51).

1.3.1 Determining the nature of the psalmist's perceived suffering and the meaning of the response

The exegesis or the critical reading of these psalm passages in their canonical context will follow what Waltke (Waltke & Houston, 2010:112) calls an accredited exegesis, that is, one which investigates the plain sense of the text while judiciously employing the grammatico-historical, form-critical, rhetorical-critical, cult-functional and canonical-Messianic approaches. Using these exegetical tools, I will seek to reconstruct the nature of the psalmist's⁷ perceived suffering at the hands of an enemy and determine the meaning of the responses given to these sufferings.

Such a task raises at least two questions. First, to what extent can these poetic texts portray a historical enemy and situation?⁸ On a literary level, the answer seems to lie in the capacity of biblical poetry to portray historical events according to the constraints of its genre and purpose. A comparison of the narrative and poetical accounts of Israel's encounter with Pharaoh at the Sea of Reeds in Exodus 14 and 15 serves as an example (Grisanti, 2004:172-177).

This type of direct historical reference may not always be present, but even as poetry, the approach taken here is that the psalms bear witness to divine-human relationships in specific contexts, including the text's generating history. By the generating context I am referring to the historical events which lie behind the text at the non-cultic level, although for those scholars who follow Sigmund Mowinckel, the generating context is solely the cult of Israel.⁹ Other scholars, such as Childs (1979:79), downplay the generating context because they believe it moors a text in the past, preventing its actualization in the present. However, it seems intuitive to

⁷ I use the singular psalmist, but in actuality it may be psalmists.

⁸ אֹיִב and רְשָׁעִים are the two main Hebrew words for the enemies in the Psalms. Van Rooy (2009:41-58) has provided a helpful overview of how scholars from the time of Franz Delitzsch to the present have understood the term *enemies* in the Psalter and specifically in the headings of the Psalms. Stephen Croft's (1987:11-48) study identifies the enemies in the Psalms based on a temple-cult setting as the text-generating context. Gerald Sheppard provides an overview of the enemies from a social-scientific perspective (1991:61-82).

⁹ "The Psalms should not be seen as autobiographical accounts of personal experience but liturgies composed for the use of certain categories of person in certain types of situation in the temple cult ... must be seen as confirming Mowinckel's view" (Croft 1987, p. 12). However, note: "Some non-cultic poems do appear to have been included in the Psalter; we would suggest Pss 1; 19B; 34; 37; 49; 78; 105; 106; 111; 112; 127" (Mowinckel, 1962b:111).

me that a morally evil adversary, who evokes a response with images of enmity, suggests some form of original historical setting.

Second, since at one point in their existence many of the psalms were clearly used in the cult of Israel, what is the relationship between the cultic setting and the historical references in the texts? Roy Melugin (1988:55) recognizes that the original referent does not exhaust a text's meaning, that is, a text's generating history does not necessarily lock the text into the past, inaccessible to the modern reader.¹⁰ Melugin (1988:55) gives as an example the promise of land, of which the original fulfillment is not exhausted, but can function once again as a promise for the return from exile in Babylon. Similarly, Jeremy D. Smoak (2008:35) has shown through using inner-biblical discourse on an ancient Israelite wartime curse that the imagery of the curse which was attached to ancient siege warfare resonated over two centuries, the eighth to sixth centuries B.C.E. The point is that historical indicators in the text do not necessarily need to be conceived of in terms of static reference with regards to the cultic *Sitz im Leben*. The text's original generating setting may be helpful in understanding later meaning, rather than preventing it.

In other words, a cult-historical method of interpretation alone, as defined by Mowinckel (1962a:23-41), cannot provide the basis for a complete understanding of the generating context of the psalms. Mowinckel (1962a:37) acknowledges historical allusions to real events behind some of the psalms:

In spite of a definite and fundamental cult-historical view we shall, in what follows, resist the one-sided exaggeration of this view which has cropped up in certain quarters lately, where it has even been suggested that all the psalms and all details in them allude to cult-mythical happenings and experiences, leaving no room for an historical background or for allusions in any of the psalms to historical events. This can be understood as a reaction against older interpretations which paid no heed to the cultic side.

Nevertheless, Mowinckel's (1962b:130) comments on Psalm 137 are indicative as to how he saw the relationship between the cult-composed documents and the events to which they allude. Psalm 137 has "sprung out of a genuine poetical ability to identify oneself with the former time of enslavement, with its bitter experiences,

¹⁰ Melugin states the contexts of theologically orientated exegesis as "(1) the text itself as a synchronic entity, (2) the generating contexts that the texts reflect, and (3) the context of the interpreter and the interpreter's community" (1988, 51). These correspond roughly to what I call (1) canonical exegesis, (2) historical-grammatical exegesis, and (3) liturgical exegesis.

burning longings and savage thirst for revenge ... Just so, he himself, the player of harp and composer of psalms in Zion, could imagine that he might have been sitting, if he had been one of them.” Mowinckel’s corporate identification of the congregation with the speaker in the cult and his focus on the creative aspect of the cult leave the questions of historiography unclear. Did the composer of Psalm 137 receive his material from oral tradition or was he privy to some other written source? The historical events are clearly subsumed to the “cultic personality.”¹¹

Another factor when considering the historical nature of the cult, as Kidner (1975a:27) has articulated it, “is the concept of actualization which is bound up with the cultic understanding of the Psalms.” Do the Psalms encourage a focus on the events in the context of being actualized in the cult? Or do they preserve a distinctness with the cultic acts in which they were recited in such a way that indicates they

...were not the means, *ex opera operato*, of annihilating time or of renewing the potency of the past: they were kept ‘that you may remember the day when you came out of ... Egypt’, and ‘remember that you were a slave in Egypt’ (Deut. 16:3, 12), and ‘that your generations may know that I made the people ... dwell in booths when I brought them out of ... Egypt’ (Lev. 23:43). This is the language of conscious, rational response, not mystical experience (Kidner, 1975a:29).

Kidner, in my opinion, correctly suggests that the recollection of the traditions and history of Israel’s dealings with Yahweh should form the actual basis for understanding cultic content. Even for post-cultic compositions of which Gunkel (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:13) suggested there were many, or of pre-cultic compositions of which Gerstenberger¹² believed provided the basis of the later cultic forms, the pious individuals who composed these psalms were not living in a cultural and religious vacuum. Weiser’s (1962) suggestion of the covenant renewal

¹¹ Mowinckel (1962a:42-46) developed a theory of “cultic personality” based on a cultural and historical understanding of the relationship between corporate Israel and the individual in society. It should also be noted that Mowinckel believed that the suffering in national psalms of lament, and laments (Royal) which are also national represent “real historical troubles, ... actual political conditions ... sometimes it may be a genuine case of illness” (Mowinckel, 1962a:246).

¹² “...they believe in a slow process of democratization of cult practices (Mowinckel, W I:78ff.). I argue that just the opposite occurred. Prayer rituals were used, long before any kind of kingdom existed, within and for the benefit of small groups. Only much later did developing tribal and state societies formalize their own ritual systems, more often than not on the basis of small-group ceremonies. In this view, royal ceremonialism is ultimately an adaptation of popular rites and prayers to the needs of the court” (Gerstenberger, 1988:19).

as the central act of Israel's cult helps to highlight Israel's own contribution to its cult. That is,

‘History and Law’ as the two foundation-pillars of the self-revelation of Yahweh determined the nature of the cult of the Covenant Festival just as it did that of the tradition of the Hexateuch, for which that cult had provided the setting in which it developed (Weiser, 1962:32).

In other words, the uniform “features of cultic tradition ... are strikingly parallel to the same basic elements which are to be found in the narrative and in the prophetic literature” (Weiser, 1962:25). Even if Weiser's proposal of the Covenant Renewal Festival to explain the cultic setting of some of the psalms is set aside, his proposal is helpful in that it suggests there is more involved in understanding the context of the psalms than the cultic setting as it came to be institutionalized during the time of temple worship. The historical and ethical basis for understanding the content of the psalms is related to the narrative of Israel's relationship with Yahweh. So it may be true to say that the forms of Israel's worship share similarities with the forms of worship of the other nations with which they coexisted. However, Israel's relationship with Yahweh provides the main historical and ethical setting for understanding the psalms.¹³ The documents, whether used in the cult or collected and edited into a “Book of David”, point back to this relationship with Yahweh as the basis for their understanding. It is hoped that through a broad range of investigative tools the perceived suffering of the psalmist and the meaning of the response will become clear.

1.3.2 Investigating expressions of enmity in the light of previous proposals

When I examine the use made of Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 and 149 in the Christian tradition,¹⁴ I will try to understand how Christian scholars throughout Church history have understood the perceived suffering and responses in these

¹³ The lack of clear explanation of ritual cautions against isolating the cult as the sole focus of meaning. Weiser noted that the absence of any preserved ritual for the Covenant Festival stands in contrast to the preserved ritual in the Babylonian New Year Festival and the Akitu Festival at Uruk. Weiser (1962:35) believed that in the OT cult ritual was probably passed on “by the priests by means of oral tradition, as is still evident from the history of the origin of the Targum.” Nevertheless, one is left wondering, if the psalms were meant to be defined solely as cultic documents, why there were no detailed instructions for their cultic use as found in these other coexisting festivals.

¹⁴ My own perspective is from a Protestant tradition. For an example of a liturgical investigation of the Psalms in the Roman Catholic tradition, cf. Braulik (2003:309-332).

psalms. The results will be compared with my exegetical work to help clarify and correct my own findings. I will not offer an analysis of the differing hermeneutical methods since my purpose is practical, although the differing hermeneutical methods will be recognized. Houston (Waltke & Houston, 2011:14) lists some of the difficulties in attempting a historical commentary. In general, some apply to the task at hand: 1) not all commentators completed work on all 150 psalms, and some parts may not have survived (e.g., Hilary's *Tractatus super Psalmum*; Theodore of Mopsuestia's extant psalms consist of Pss 1-81); 2) some commentators changed their views over the course of their lives; 3) some commentators are inconsistent in their methodology (e.g., this is especially true until the time of Constantine [c. 272-337] after which Augustine [c. 354-430] had a platform to spread his allegorical method to the *totius Christi*); 4) the definitions of what is literal, and/or historical, as well as what is prophecy, have changed; 5) there are different purposes in the writings (e.g., the emphasis of Theodoret of Cyrus [c. 396-460] was on the household, whereas Justin Martyr [c. 100-165] was interested in an apologetic use against Jewish opponents). Clearly all of these factors make asserting that any one commentator represents a particular period difficult and limit the selection of commentators. Scholars will be chosen from different historical periods on the bases of relevance, availability of materials and space limitations. The selection, therefore, will be based on availability and relevance to this study.

Besides the above challenges, perhaps some of the assumptions of this investigation also present a challenge to understanding and using these earlier commentators. As will be seen, many of the earlier commentators, especially of the Alexandrian school, did not seek to explain the violent images in the selected psalms from the same modern perspective that I bring to the text. Augustine, for example, believed that the meaning of imprecations was hidden and fulfilled in the future and did not reside in the sentiments of the psalmist (Luc, 1999:398). An assumption of my approach is that the sentiments of the psalmist are in and of themselves essential to the interpretation of the language of enmity. In this regard, I am to a certain degree following the Antiochene understanding of *theoria* (see below). Nevertheless, the questions that most pre-19th century interpreters bring to the text might be different in approach, but their interpretations are not necessarily different in substance from the present approach. There seems to be a convergence of understanding with some interpretations when looked at in the larger picture of God's rule through Christ (Ps

110). Therefore, although having a different focus, earlier commentators can provide further insight into the questions of my investigation.

I begin my investigation with the early stages of the post-exilic restoration period where relevant. As I argue below, the editor(s) seem to have intended Book V to be understood from the perspective of the early post-exilic restoration period. The post-exilic community's understanding of the images of enmity is important because it represents a canonical perspective (intra Book V) before the time of Christ. This view of the exilic/post-exilic setting (not necessarily editing) of the Psalms is not a modern perspective. For example, Theodore of Mopsuestia of the Antiochene school of exegesis connects the historical setting of certain psalms to the time of the Babylonian exile, even suggesting that some originated in the time of the Maccabees. Unfortunately, his extant psalms consist of only Psalms 1-81.¹⁵

The New Testament investigation is included in the historical survey, but in actuality the use of the psalms in the NT provides the true *skopos* by which the psalms can be understood as Christian scripture. The NT perspective is investigated separately as part of the historical survey in order that the plain meaning of each OT text in its immediate canonical context can be thoroughly examined.¹⁶ The connections between the Psalms and the NT will be based upon quoted references or allusions and verbal parallels given in the Greek New Testament (Aland, 1983). In addition, the links Augustine sees between Psalm 129 and the NT will be noted. Such a methodology is open to some criticism about its subjectivity, especially since none of the modern scholars who contributed to the Greek New Testament project noted any connections between the agricultural imagery in Psalm 129 and the NT. Augustine, however, perceptively did. All that can be said is that I have approached

¹⁵ Theodore believed that the psalms were the prophetic words of David, but saw the headings as later additions and so removed them. In their place he gave an introduction to each psalm which scholarship has shown to have been retained to a certain degree in the headings to the East Syriac translation of the Psalms (Van Rooy, 2013:218-219).

¹⁶ To a certain degree, this study would be aided by an investigation of the psalms in the context of other OT texts. However, where it has been relevant, e.g., Jeremiah, I have made mention in the exegesis. I am working from the assumption that these other texts would be supplementary to the findings in the NT and the Psalms themselves. The guiding hermeneutical principle for this work is that the texts of the OT can only be understood through their appropriation in the person and work of Jesus Christ (Lk 4:21; 24:44-45; Heb 1:2, etc.). This appropriation, however, differs from the allegorical Christ-centered approach of Augustine, which relies only on orthodox belief as a control for the range of possible interpretations.

the NT section as a non-specialist without a preconceived agenda and have let modern scholars suggest the connections.

In general, the Psalms account for two-thirds of all Old Testament quotations in the New Testament.¹⁷ The purpose here will not be to analyze the various theories of NT use of the OT or to enter into the debates (Did the Psalm maintain its OT perspective or was it used mainly as a proof-text? What type of exegetical method was being used—Peshet? Midrashic? What source was the NT writer quoting? etc.). Nevertheless many of these questions lie behind how scholars determine the meaning of the text in its NT context.

For an examination of the use of the Psalms in the history of the Church, Houston's division of Church interpretation into four "hinge" points can serve as a helpful framework: Pre-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers; Augustine and Medieval Monastic exegesis; Christian Hebraism and Scholasticism in the High to Late Middle Ages; and the Reformers (Waltke & Houston, 2011:37-79).¹⁸ These hinge points serve as a reminder that different principles of exegesis dominated different localities and periods in the history of the Church. My goal will be to determine a deeper understanding of the expressions of enmity, which it is hoped will act as a supplement and/or a corrective to my exegetical work.

Of particular diversity, and so worth further comment, are the writings of the early Church fathers. Generally the early Church fathers are categorized as the Apologists, the Antiochene school, the Alexandrian school, the Cappadocian fathers, and the Western Church commentators (see Gillingham, 2008:24-39). It would be overly simplistic to state that the Antiochene school followed a literal exegesis, whereas the Alexandrians followed a figural exegesis. In actuality there is some fluidity between

¹⁷ For a specific list of all the psalms quoted with correlating NT verses based on United Bible Society lists see Dalglish (1984:26-27).

¹⁸ Due to length restrictions and availability of resources this study will be limited and not quite as ambitious as needed to cover all of Houston's divisions. For Medieval Monastic exegesis I will use only Cassiodorus and for the Reformers I will use only Luther and Calvin. Luther's first lectures on the Psalms consist of Pss 1-126. According to Houston (Waltke & Houston, 2011:60-61) Luther met Christ in the Psalms by the time he had reached Psalm 51 and in 1515 his appraisal of this commentary was rather negative. He began a second commentary on the Psalms (*Operationes in Psalmos*) which was published in 1519-20, but stopped at Ps 22 as he was caught up in the crisis of his excommunication. Furthermore, I will not attempt to investigate scholars from the period of Christian Hebraism and Scholasticism in the High to Late Middle Ages.

the two schools, as will be evident in some of the discussion.¹⁹ For the Antiochenes, though, to say something else than what is intended in the text (or its *theoria*) was allegory, and allegory was an overthrow of the obvious sense of the text (Hidal, 1996:548). Another case in point is that the Alexandrian school did not deny a literal interpretation. In fact the Alexandrian school did not distinguish between *theoria*, *allegoria* and *anagoge*, a feature which was extended to the Cappadocian Fathers (Hidal, 1996:548). They merely subsumed the literal sense to the text's figural interpretation, as for example Origen did, in order to produce ideas which are appropriate to God (Heine, 2007:148).

Within each of the schools there are also differences between commentators, so Theodore was more interested in arguing against the Jews whereas Theodoret was interested in the Psalms as prayers in the household of faith (Gillingham, 2008:33). Another distinction between the commentators arises in terms of how they viewed the Psalms as prayer. Athanasius, Diodore of Tarsus, and John Chrysostom all saw the Psalms as the voice of the Christian. In contrast, Origen, Jerome, and Augustine identify various speakers in the Psalms, in particular Jesus Christ and his body the Church (Heine, 2007:146-174). The perspective towards the Psalms as prayer taken in this study is akin to the former group. The Psalms as the voice of the Christian will be discussed in Chapter Four.

In the historical survey I will discuss the commentators to a certain degree according to the same pattern of investigation in the exegesis. That is, I will seek to see what the commentators have to say about the suffering of the psalmist and then what they have to say about the response. At times, as is the case for Psalm 110, I will follow this pattern loosely and allow the commentators to speak for themselves. Again, this recognizes the different hermeneutical perspectives and concerns which the commentators bring to the text. I will for the most part follow a chronological order according to when the commentators lived. This structure rather than grouping according to major interpretive schools prevents lopsidedness when one school does not have many comments which pertain to my investigation, as is the case with the Alexandrian commentators on Psalm 149. Further, it allows Augustine as the

¹⁹ So John Chrysostom's overall reading of the OT is literal, but he occasionally takes the approach of the Alexandrian school, as is the case in Ps 7:12 and 13 (Heine, 2007:148-151). The same can be said of Diodore in his interpretation of Ps 30:1. Our discussion below will also evidence this flexibility on the part of some of the Antiochene commentators.

vanguard commentator on the Psalms to be investigated independently. Pertinent comments about the different schools will be made as necessary.

1.3.3 Prayer as the basis for the inclusion of non-lament psalms

In the third movement of this thesis, I will try to compare the findings to clarify how psalms which contain language of enmity can function as prayers in the life of faith and to make some proposals in explaining God's just dealing with humankind and in particular his people. Particular attention will be given to the Psalms as a genre of prayer.²⁰ Wallace suggests that the whole Psalter has been edited to draw participants in to making the Psalms their own prayers (Wallace, 2007:271). This genre of prayer is unique in OT scripture because of the powerful "commitment ... that the Psalms demand of their users" (Wenham, 2007:294). Indeed, the "authors and editors of the Psalter clearly recognized that ethics are linked inextricably to the forms and content of prayer" (LeMon, 2011:95).

Furthermore, the genre of prayer plays a central role in allowing the language of enmity to be investigated beyond the constraints of laments of the individual or community.²¹ Throughout its history, the Church has maintained the dual tradition of the Psalms as prayer and song to God and the use of the Psalms for the instruction and guidance of the faithful (Wallace 2005:3).²² This dual capacity is a unique feature of the Psalms and suggests that the pray-er's role should be central in any investigation. As Brueggemann (2011:3) has noted,

Thus the question of function is put as a hermeneutical issue. The question concerns both the use in ancient Israel, which admits of some scholarly analysis of the Psalms, and the contemporary religious use of the Psalms by practitioners of faith.

²⁰ Once again, my own perspective is from a Protestant tradition. For a liturgical investigation in the Roman Catholic tradition, which sees the Psalms functioning in a different manner, cf. Braulik (2003, 309-332).

²¹ Nasuti's (1999:52) insight that genre is defined as those elements a reader sees as common to certain texts applies here.

²² In Chapter Four I will return to Wallace's notion of the Psalms as prayer.

Of particular interest, then, is how the contemporary religious use of the Psalms as prayer pertains to the selection of psalms for this investigation.²³

Exegesis which focuses on the voice of the psalmist without regard to the voice of the modern worshipper tends to limit the number of psalms which are considered prayer. This is so because such a perspective sees prayer as implying “address to God in the vocative sense, as well as the use of pronouns and verbal forms in the second person plural, particularly the imperative” (Aejmelaeus, 1986:10). Some scholars also include in the definition of prayer the third person subjunctive (Gerstenberger, 1980:121). Outside of these linguistic markers, the speech of the psalmist is not considered conventional prayer.²⁴ Thus, for some, prayer is limited to only those psalms in which modern worshippers can identify their voices with the voice of the psalmist. The expressions of enmity in the second person vocative or jussive forms become a challenge to use, while phrases of enmity in a different form such as third person descriptive are considered troublesome but not as prayer.

However, the literary nature of the psalms cautions against a hermeneutic of function that limits the selection of psalms to that of similarity between ancient and modern voice. Those who participated in the cult were also the recipients and users of these literary documents. That is, the documents which they used were carefully composed literary units, a claim which is supported by many rhetorical and structural studies on the psalms.²⁵ Psalm 137, for example, has an intricate literary form and allusions which suggest that it was a prayer written to help focus the uncontrolled rage from military humiliation and to seek for true justice. The Psalms portray enmity and violence, not as *ad libitum* expressions of uncontrolled human feelings, but as carefully constructed literary documents which were at one particular stage used in the cult but now have been edited to become canonical literature.

²³ The language of enmity as normative prayer will be discussed in Chapter Four.

²⁴ I believe this is the implicit assumption guiding many studies which focus only on Individual and Communal Laments. There are exceptions where this has not been the case. Mowinckel (1962a:203) labelled Ps 149:7 as a “*prayer for revenge*.” LeMon (2011:98) likewise considers Ps 149:6-9 as prayer.

²⁵ See the review of psalm research by Howard (2005:31-33).

Since we have received the psalms as literary documents, as did those who used them in the pre-exilic cult and those who used them at the beginning of the post-exilic restoration, we would expect to find indications in their present literary structure which infer parameters for their use. Mays (1993:17) proposed that changes in the idea and use of genres opened the psalms to new uses different from what might be expected based on their original classification. For our purposes of examining the psalms as liturgical prayer documents it may be more helpful to talk about disassociating the voice of the psalmist from the voice of the worshipper. Mays used Psalm 30 to make his point, where a thanksgiving song for an individual was taken and then edited for group use as a psalm for the dedication of the temple.²⁶ This move is important because it suggests that the experience portrayed in the psalm does not necessarily need to be the immediate experience of the worshippers, but can function as a secondary one.²⁷

Embedded in the literary nature of some psalms, then, is an indication that the use of certain psalms as prayer is independent of the voice in which the psalm has come to the worshipping community. The psalms are no longer prayer only if the immediate voice of the *persona*, whether historical or hypothetical, is in the second person direct address or third person jussive. A liturgical reading of the psalms as prayer, which I am suggesting, is one in which all of the psalms can be offered as prayer directly to God, whether the voice is first, second or third person and whether it is addressed to God or to someone else.²⁸ In terms of exegesis, this means that investigation of expressions of animosity as prayer cannot be limited to laments of the individual or community. The words in the psalms which represent many voices

²⁶ It may not always be possible to indicate the extent of this editing. It may be that an individual lament or other type of psalm genre was used unchanged in the cultic setting. Such a use would have been part of the oral tradition that accompanied the psalms in their cultic use, but was never recorded. Such a use, then, would be similar to the appropriation of the psalms by modern worshippers.

²⁷ Weiser (1962:95) points to a comparison of Ps 102:18 with its superscript: "Stating the way in which the psalm was to be used shows that these superscripts were attached to the psalms subsequently."

²⁸ According to Wallace (2005:21), the voice of the psalmist can vary and be directed to different people. The psalmist addresses God directly in half of the psalms, but in another major grouping addresses "enemies," "the congregation," "the king," "the faithful" or "Israel." In a third major grouping, most of which are hymns of praise or thanksgiving, the psalmist speaks to parties other than God. Variety in voice can also be seen within psalms. The voice in Psalms 34 and 35 alternates between first and third person. We must consider this alternation as purposeful because of repeating patterns, for example, Erbele-Küster (2001:111-112) notes that in these psalms the righteous are always referred to in the third person.

become the prayers of those who use them, independent of the voice in which the psalms were first written.

1.3.4 The extent of Book V and its meaning for this investigation.

To limit the scope of this study, Book V will form the basis of an inter-textual reading as it is generally recognized as the last stabilized part of the canonical Psalms (Zenger, 1998:81). Indeed, this claim is supported by the Qumran Hypothesis,²⁹ which concludes that Books IV and V should be considered the last stabilized part of the Psalter (Flint, 1998:460-461). Further grounds for this selection result from Book V's distinctive hymn-like nature and theological profile (Zenger, 1998).

That Book V exists as a self-contained unit in the Psalms is not contested by scholarship and has been firmly established in tradition. However, the exact extent of Book V has not been agreed upon. Some scholars see the last five psalms as an ending to the Psalter as a whole. Patrick Miller (1998:105), for example, sees Psalms 146-150 acting as a coda to the whole Psalter. The problem is further complicated because the doxology which ends each of the first four books is missing from the end of Book V.

Wilson proposed that Psalm 145 was the last psalm of Book V. He saw Psalm 145:21 as providing a liturgical motivation for Psalms 146-150 which form the closing to the whole Psalter (1985:189). However, Wilson's (1993:78-79) argument that in Book V an *inclusio* is formed by the wisdom verses of 107:42, 43 and 145:19, 20 may not be as conclusive as first appears. Wisdom refrains involving Yahweh's punitive actions against the אֲשֶׁר־יָצַד also occur at Psalms 146:9 and 147:6. The wisdom refrain in Psalm 145, then, is not exclusive in its connection to 107. Another problem that weakens Wilson's argument is that it is hard to know what weight to give this wisdom element in determining the connection with Psalm 107. In terms of genre, Gunkel, Sabourin, Day, Bellinger, Gillingham and Lucas, as cited in the appendix of Firth and Johnston (2005:300), all assign Psalms 145-150 to the

²⁹ Whether one concurs or does not concur with the Qumran Hypothesis does not change the integrity of Book V as a distinct unit.

category of Hymn.³⁰ Wisdom psalms and psalms influenced by the wisdom tradition do not seem to carry the same weight of evidence. With the smaller wisdom units one must be even more skeptical as to whether any connection is coincidental or purposeful. Wilson's suggestions provide an inconclusive basis for ending Book V with Psalm 145.

Like Wilson, Zenger (1998:88-89) also sees the fifth Book of Psalms ending at Psalm 145. According to Zenger, Psalms 107 and 145 form an *inclusio* through several connections. Both psalms celebrate YHWH's universal greatness and goodness for the purpose of making it known *before the sons of mankind*³¹ (לְבָנֵי אָדָם), contain the same key words (יְשַׁע, נִפְלְאוֹת, חֶסֶד) and praise for the duration of *eternity* (לְעֹלָם). In addition, both contain a wisdom frame in their conclusions and Psalm 145 seems to extend the theme of salvation found in Psalm 107. Although Zenger's observations are astute, his proposal is open to the same type of subjective bias that was levied against Wilson's proposal. To what extent are the key connections based on clear observations of the purposeful work of an editor? Perhaps a better case can be made for extending the end of Book V past Psalm 145.

Koch is one of the few scholars who consider Psalms 146-150 to be part of Book V. First, Koch's (1995:255) division of Book V recognizes the parallelism between the Davidic Psalms 138-145 followed by the Hallelujah Psalms of 146-150 and the Davidic and Hallelujah Psalms (107) 108-118. Similar to Wilson's (2005:232) proposal, which sees Psalms 146-150 as a response to "Ps 145:21," Koch (1995:255) sees Psalms 146, 147 and 148 as answering Psalm 145:2, 21. Furthermore, for Koch (1995:256) the thematic connection of the *new song* (144:9) between the fifth Davidic Psalter and Psalm 149 of the Hallelujah hymns suggests a close association:

Er [Psalm 149] greift das "neue Lied" aus 144:9 auf und läßt die Kinder Zions über ihren König (vgl. Schon 145:1; 146:10) jauchzen, "Ruhmungen Gottes in ihrer Kehle und ein zweischneidiges Schwert in ihrer Hand" 149:6.

³⁰ Klaus Seybold categorizes Psalm 145 as both a Hymn and a Wisdom Psalm (Firth & Johnston: 300).

³¹ The meaning in modern English might be better captured by the gender-neutral phrase *before humankind*. When translations are given, I will stick to the Hebrew gender distinctions unless it is necessary to emphasize some aspect of meaning. This approach should help make the Hebrew text more transparent.

Moreover, Klaus's observation, "Sieht man von 145 ab, läuft die vorgegebene Davidsgruppe auf ein Kriegslied zu mit der Segnung des Gottes" (1995:225), also suggests a close association between the Davidic Psalms and the Hallelujah Psalms. Klaus's observations, although convincing, are also susceptible to the same challenges that were levied against Wilson and Zenger.

I propose that a structural *inclusio* exists between Ps 107 and Ps 149 and that Ps 149 is best considered the close of Book V with Ps 150 acting as a doxology. To begin with, although Ps 149 belongs to the final Hallelujah Psalms, it differs from Pss 146 to 148:

Each Psalm except Ps 149 contains a double theology of God as creator—or, more often, maintainer of the created order—and as patron of Israel in a covenant relationship; Ps 149 offers only the later perspective" (Allen, 2002: 76).

If Psalm 149 were to have a particular function in addition to its role as one of the final Hallelujah Psalms, we would expect this to be the case. Secondly, the thematic *inclusio* between Pss 107 and 149, which is developed on the basis of the historical people mentioned in these psalms, seems to provide a stronger link than speculating about word connections. The גְּאוּלֵי יְהוָה (107:2), the יִשְׂרָאֵלִים (107:42) and the חֲסִידָיו (149:9) are the same people, those who stand in a special relationship to the Covenantal God, Yahweh. What has changed between Pss 107 and 149, however, is their reversal in fortune. In Psalm 107 *the redeemed of the Lord* are depicted as encountering all types of distress, even being אֲסִירֵי עֲנִי וּבְרִזָּל (Ps 107:10), *prisoners of suffering in iron chains*. While in 149:8 it is the חֲסִידִים (Ps 149:5), *saints*, who לְאַסֵּר מִלְכֵיהֶם בְּזָקִים וְנִכְבְּדֵיהֶם בְּכַבְלֵי בְרִזָּל: (Ps 149:8), *bind their [nations] kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron*. The *saints* exact *vengeance* (נִקְמָה) (Ps 149:7) on the nations and their kings. This reversal in fortune provides a strong link through which to understand the context of Book V.

Similarly, Joseph Brennan (1980:26) suggests connections between Psalm 2 and Psalm 149 which form an *inclusio* and set off Psalm 1 as a prologue and Psalm 150 as an epilogue to the Psalter as a whole:

The *nations, peoples* and *kings* who seek to throw off Yahweh's authority in 2:1-2 become the object of his retribution in 149:7-9... The divine promise in 2:9 to break the rebels with a rod of *iron* is paralleled in 149:8 by the binding of

the princes with fetters of *iron*. Also worth noting is the similarity between the *bonds* and *cords* which the kings attempt to throw off in 2:3, and which are replaced in 149:8 by *chains* and *fetters* of iron. There is also a close similarity between the *princes* and *rulers* who are warned of Yahweh's wrath in 2:2,10 and the *nobles* who are the object of the divine judgment in 149:8.

This mention of the *saints* and the *nations* and the reversal in roles of fortune is substantial in recognizing the connection between Psalms 2, 107 and 149. Psalm 149, then, as the last concrete psalm of the Psalter, and not Psalm 145 or Psalm 150, forms the strongest structural *inclusio* with Psalm 107. Furthermore, the theme of this reversal in roles created by this *inclusio* presents a picture of justice being obtained for the people of God.

It is probably not coincidental that an *inclusio* also occurs within the concluding Hallelujah Psalms (146-149). As Allen (2002:77) has noted, Psalms 146 and 149 form a connection where,

The overall parallelism of present and future covenant perspectives is enhanced by an inclusion in the four hymns. In 146:7 Yahweh even now “carries out justice (עֲשֵׂה מִשְׁפָּט) for the oppressed” and in 149:9 the divine intent is “to carry out justice” (לַעֲשׂוֹת מִשְׁפָּט) against Israel’s foreign rulers.

These paralleling *inclusios* which center on the theme of justice within Book V and within these concluding Hallelujah Psalms cannot be dismissed as coincidental.³²

The usefulness of this *inclusio* in determining editorial intent goes beyond assuming connections based on individual or phrasal word links (so Zenger and Miller’s basis for the *inclusio* between Psalms 107 and 145) which may or may not be coincidental. We can take this connection of these historical themes one step further. The fact that they are the first and last Psalms of Book V might suggest that the editor is reinforcing a Book-wide perspective through the technique of *inclusio*. If *inclusio* can emphasize closure we can surmise that in using it to close the Psalter the editor places his perspective as the overarching editorial perspective of Book V. The people are those who have been restored in Psalm 107 and are now the ones who

³² It should be noted that Bernard Grosse (1994:259), like Brennan, sees Ps 149 as clearly forming an *inclusio* with Ps 2: “Par ailleurs l’inclusion du Psautier entre les Ps. ii et cxlix apparait clairement si l’on compare Ps. ii 1-3 et Ps. cxlix 7-8.” According to Grosse (1994 :259) the expression of vengeance against the nations plays an important role in the redaction of the Psalter and in particular Isaiah: “L’expression de la vengeance du Seigneur contre les nations joue un rôle rédactionnel très important dans la redaction des livres prophetiques, particulièrement le livre d’Isaie.”

will exact revenge (נִקְמָה) on the kings and nations who have bound them. The historical setting established by the editor, which is the historical point of view of the returnees, is therefore meant to reflect a time at the beginning of restoration, but which is not yet complete. What is of concern at this point is the editor's perspective as the Psalms were arranged or incorporated into the canon of scripture.

It is not an uncommon view for modern OT scholars to assume the final literary setting of Book V as occurring during this time period.³³ Goulder (1998:17) thinks "Book V as a whole belongs after the exile." Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:2) sees Book V as representing a perspective of "the end of the exile and the beginning/already begun restoration of Zion/Israel." Wilson (2005:235) believes that the "final form of the Psalter reflects the period of the exile."³⁴ Mitchell (1997:532) suggests the Psalms were "fashioned in a single redaction, under the hand of an all-controlling redactor, in the early post-exilic period." Consistent with this view, he locates Book IV as reflecting the time of the exile. Mitchell's (1997:539) explanation of the dearth of references to the king of Israel in Book IV is the "reason why Book IV does not refer to the king of Israel. Exiled Israel is kingless (Hos. iii 4; Ezek. xxi 25-27; Zech. xiii 7)." His understanding of Book IV being linked to the exile is consistent with the dearth of superscripts, especially Davidic superscripts, in Book IV. The editor was reflecting in Book IV the history of the exile not only explicitly (Pss 103-106), but implicitly in the superscripts as well.

Further, the editor chose pre-existing psalms and purposefully incorporated them into the book of Psalms based on the needs of the worshipping community at a particular time and under specific historical circumstances. For example, Burnett (2007:113) has shown that the Elohist Psalter (Pss 42-83) has been arranged to reflect a plea "to the divine for the reestablishment of David and Zion." The implications are that this arrangement reflects a period of exilic (Ezekiel) or post-exilic (Haggai and Zachariah) concern.

However, the editing of Book V does not necessarily have to reflect the historical period of the editor (i.e., for Wilson first century C.E., for Goulder and Mitchell

³³ Nor was it uncommon for those of the Antiochene School (see Van Rooy, 2009a).

³⁴ Wilson's position highlights the tension that exists between the editor's point of view and the point of view which the editor wishes to project in the editing of the Psalms.

before the translation of the LXX), but it does lend credibility to the idea that the editor would reflect a specific historical setting in the structural editing of Book V, the history of the beginning but not completed restoration. Since the exile appears to be one of the main defining events in their own theological understanding for the people of God before the time of Christ, as is evident by the amount of canonical literature centered around the exile and restoration, it should not be considered novel that this would be a central perspective of an editor. The canonical setting of the Psalter then accords with what the editor appears to have established through the use of structural and thematic *inclusio* in Book V.

The implication for this study is that if we can understand the perspective of the restoration community in their interpretation of the psalm, we can determine a pre-Christian interpretation. Although this is speculative and so is regulated by the historical survey of the psalms investigated, how this community interpreted the language of enmity in some of these psalms can allow insight into the true meaning behind the use of this language and contribute to better developed parameters in order to understand it.³⁵ That is, if their interpretation evidences a “sacred”³⁶ understanding of the use of this language of enmity, we will be on surer ground to interpret it as such. In other words, we can distill spiritual insights which arise in a particular historical frame of reference but are not bound to that historical frame of reference.

1.3.5 Criteria for the selection of psalms from some other studies

Before I begin the exegesis of selected psalms, it will also be helpful to examine several other works which investigate, from some particular perspective, motifs of enmity in the Psalms. Although the purpose of each of the studies differs, it will be helpful to look at the criteria employed for the selection of psalms in each work. The first scholar, David Firth (2005:3) has attempted to address the issue of violence

³⁵ This historical perspective which reflects the desire for restoration is not the only perspective for viewing the psalms. The editor has left other indicators in place to aid the worshipper in the use of the psalms. Seeing and praying the psalms through the eyes of David, according to a Davidic reading suggested by the *inclusio* in Book V (Pss 108-110 and 138-145) may be another purposeful way the editor intended the psalms to be understood.

³⁶ The term “sacred” is discussed in Chapter Four.

theologically by determining how the content in lament psalms of the individual offers a response to violence.³⁷ He approaches the question by exegeting individual lament psalms using a synchronic and canonical approach (Firth, 2005:7), which gives the texts a new function, namely as texts of prayer for those who suffer from violence (Frith, 2005:3). He selects individual lament psalms based on “those psalms that contain at least two non-parallel verbal terms depicting violence” (Firth, 2005:11) within the categories of physical, psychological and structural violence. Studying responses to violence through the category of individual lament limits his investigation by reducing the range of psalm texts which can be investigated, something which Firth (2005:15) acknowledges:

Although one also finds references to violence in other *Gattungen*, such as individual thanksgivings [for example, Psalm 92], these psalms do not record a response to violence, and their place as prayers of the individual are open to question. They therefore are not treated in this study.

A further criticism of Firth’s study is that the exact nature of the violence is not always explicitly stated, but implied, and so limiting the study to psalms with specific verbs may limit any study as well.

Zenger (1996:26) has tried to make sense of the psalms of divine wrath for the modern Christian. The basis for his selection of seven imprecatory psalms is that they provide multiple perspectives on speaking of the God of vengeance and violence in the book of Psalms. These texts are “difficult, awkward, and resistant texts” (1996:25) to those who read them. They have been dropped from the Roman Catholic liturgy (Pss 58, 83, 109) or ecclesiastical censorship has dropped verses (Pss 137, 139). However, Zenger also includes two psalms which provide Israel’s statement and refinement of the problem of violence (Pss 12, 24). His choice of psalms is limited, like Firth’s, in that Zenger stays within the category of individual and communal lament,³⁸ although his choices are essentially guided by what psalms contain the most offensive language to modern readers. His ultimate goal behind his selection, however, is to remove misunderstandings for the modern user of the psalms and to “make them comprehensible as *authentic prayers* of Biblical people” (Zenger, 1996:63). Perhaps Zenger’s strength of selection is that his discussion of

³⁷ In the category of false accusation, Pss 7, 17, 109, 139; in the category of prayers of protection, Pss 3, 27, 35, 55, 56, 64, 143; in the category of psalms of sickness, Pss 38, 69 (Firth, 2005:ix-xi).

³⁸ It is clear that Zenger does not see Ps 139 as a Hymn (1996:30-31).

Psalms 12 and 44 shows how the problem of God's wrath in the psalms, which repulses the modern Christian, must have a larger context to be properly understood.

Another approach to explain the troublesome expressions of enmity in the Psalms is Alex Luc's proposal. He suggests interpreting the troubling imprecatory psalms as *prophetic judgement speeches* which are "futuristic statements concerning the destiny of the wicked, whether stated in form of a divine oracle or from the psalmist's confident perspective" (Luc, 1999:401, 402), for example, "his enemies I [God] will clothe with disgrace" (Ps 132:18). According to Luc, there are at least 27 psalms that contain this type of judgment prediction. Luc's proposal is not without its drawbacks. If it were to be accepted it would only displace the ethical issues of these texts to the future at the expense of the historical setting in which they arose and the present setting in which they are used. However, his recognition that the proper interpretation of the imprecatory psalms must go beyond their form-critical structure and cultic use is helpful.

1.3.6 Selection of psalms to be studied

Therefore, in view of what this investigation hopes to achieve, I will proceed in the following manner. I will exegete psalm texts as complete integral units in themselves. Psalms may be a combination of mixed genres as Gunkel (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:306-318) described, but I will assume that their canonical meaning comes from the meaning of the text as a whole. Using the methodology outlined above and in light of the investigations mentioned, I will use the following criteria for the investigation of psalms in Book V in this study. I will investigate categories outside of individual lament and only include other form categories (110 Royal; 119 Mixed Genre; 129, 137 Communal Laments; 139 Royal Petition, and 149 Hymn).³⁹ The psalms I will investigate in Book V cover all the categories of violence which Luc proposes (physical infliction, shame, death, suffering of family members, and unspecified retributive violence), as well as two psalms in Zenger's investigation (Pss 137 and 139) which have been censured in the Liturgy of the Hours, and one

³⁹ The classification of these psalm types will be discussed in the individual exegesis. Ps 119 can possibly be considered an individual lament, but it contains no language of enmity. Firth considers Ps 139 to be a lament of the individual (Firth, 2005:43-50).

psalm which Firth classifies as a lament of the individual and reflects the psychological violence of false accusation. I will investigate Ps 149, which none of the three include in their studies. Ps 119 and Ps 149 will especially be useful because they offer responses to adversaries which are unexpected.

In short, I will investigate the language of enmity in Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 and 149. I will use the NRSV translation as a basis for investigating the psalms, noting any differences from my own translations based on the BHS MT, which are pertinent to my investigation. The focus of this study is on the response to situations of distress caused by an enemy in the category of moral evil. It is hoped, however, that although this approach is not exhaustive, this cross-section of psalms examined will allow enough of a diverse perspective to determine what the psalmist's responses to perceived suffering at the hands of an enemy have to say about the use of this language of enmity in prayer and God's just dealing with humankind and in particular his people.

Imprecation	Content of imprecation/Prophetic Judgment Speech (Luc)	Firth Individual Laments	Zenger	My Selection
110:5-6 (P.J. speech)	Shame, Death			Royal Psalm
110:12	Shame			
119:78	Shame			Mixed genre
129:5-8	Shame, Death			Communal lament
137:7-9	Physical infliction Family members suffer Retributive punishment		Censured in the Roman Catholic Liturgy	Communal Lament
139:19-22	Death	Psychological violence of false accusation of a capital crime	Censured in the Roman Catholic Liturgy. Restoration of the order of justice (p. 49)	Communal Lament
149				Hymn

Table 1 A comparison of relevant psalms in Book V investigated by Luc (1999:410), imprecations and the dominant elements; Firth (2005:5-6), categories of violence; Zenger (1995), psalms of divine wrath; and psalms to be investigated in this study.

2.0 A STUDY OF PSALMS 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 AND 149

2.1 Exegesis of Psalm 110

1. <Of David, a Psalm>⁴⁰

An oracle⁴¹ of the LORD to my lord,

“⁴²‘Sit at my right hand

until I put your enemies as your footstool.’

2. The LORD sends out from Zion your mighty scepter.

‘Rule in the midst of your foes.’

3. Your people will offer themselves willingly⁴³ on the day of your battle.

Arrayed in holy splendor,⁴⁴ from the womb of the dawn

is the dew of your youth.⁴⁵

4. The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind.

‘You are a priest forever

⁴⁰ The NRSV is used as a base translation. However, lines are divided according to the accentuation in the BHS MT.

⁴¹ NRSV *says*.

⁴² NRSV marks off with quotation marks “Sit...footstool,” which limits the prophetic utterance to the end of verse 1. The grounds for this are prosopological—the apparent change of voice from 1st person to 3rd person in v 2. However, as both Waltke (Waltke & Houston, 2011:499) and Hilber (2003:359) have noted, in the OT prosopological change can indicate change in perspective rather than change in the nature of the speech, as is the case in Isa 3:1-4, Hos 5:1-7, Amos 3:1-7, Mic 1:3-7. Hilber (2003:359) also notes that short Assyrian oracles can display a rapid shift in voice, although “the entire speech was conceived as the word of the divinity.”

⁴³ I am choosing to follow the MT in v. 3, although semantically and syntactically the verse has been the subject of many revisions. The LXX has μετὰ σοῦ ἡ ἀρχὴ which is retroverted to תְּבִינִי בְּיָמֶיךָ and can be translated into English as *with you is nobility*. This translation has the advantage of maintaining consistency within the context of the psalm (so Kissane, 1954:192). With the resonating between Yahweh and his throne partner in the rest of the psalm, the mention of *your people* here seems out of place. However, if the LXX’s translation of the last word in the verse תְּבִינִי is rejected (see below) the MT text provides a consistency within the verse (*Your people ... your youth*, i.e., *young men*).

⁴⁴ *Arrayed in holy garments* can be accepted over some MSS, the Targum, Symmachus, Jerome and the NRSV’s translation, which has בְּהַרְרֵי in *the holy mountains*. Kissane (1954:192) argues that accepting the MT would place the Messiah under the Aaronic priesthood. However, if one follows the accenting in the MT, *arrayed in holy garments* describes the youthful warriors who rally to this throne-partner of Yahweh. Furthermore, the reference to Melchizedek places the psalm in a pre-Aaronic time frame before the concept of priesthood was limited to the tribe of Levi.

⁴⁵ The LXX reads תְּבִינִי translated *I have begotten you*, which as Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:142) notes becomes problematic if preceded by the words לְךָ טָל as are found in the MT but not in the LXX. Since these two terms add complexity to the text, they most likely were not added at a later time and should be kept.

according to the order of Melchizedek.’

5. The *Lord* is at your right hand;

he will shatter kings on the day of his wrath.

6. He will execute judgment on the nations; he will heap up corpses.⁴⁶

He will shatter the heads⁴⁷ over the wide earth

7. He will drink from the stream by the path;

Therefore, he will lift up his head.”

2.1.1 Statement of investigation

Psalm 110 is of special interest to this study because it falls outside of the category of individual lament, being categorized by most modern scholars as a Royal Psalm.⁴⁸

On a linguistic level the psalm presents many semantic and syntactical challenges.

On a theological level, the psalm becomes problematic once the specific imagery of hostile acts of war is taken over as the basis of prayer. Yahweh is portrayed as

violently judging the nations through the means of his throne partner who is both David’s *lord* (אֲדֹנָי)⁴⁹ and Melchizedekian Priest. Yahweh’s throne partner *heaps up*

(מִלְאָ) *corpses* (גִּוְיוֹת) and *shatters* (צָרַח) the *heads* (רִאשׁוֹ) over *the wide earth* (עַל-

אֶרֶץ רַבָּה).⁵⁰ Despite these images, Psalm 110 is the most frequently quoted and alluded to OT text in the NT.⁵¹ Furthermore, the *lord* who is addressed in the text

⁴⁶ NRSV *filling them with corpses*. The English verb *heap up* eliminates the need for a double object and so reflects the MT. Proposals which conflate Symmachus, Aquila (φαρανγγεζ, τὸν ἄρξ) and Jerome (*valles*) with the MT (גִּוְיוֹת), translated into English as *he will fill the valleys with corpses*, provide a more concrete image, but do not lessen the violence in the image.

⁴⁷ MT is singular; however the plural is attested to in some Medieval Hebrew manuscripts. For the singular רִאשׁוֹ used as plural see Ps 68:22.

⁴⁸ “Königslid” (Gunkel 1926:481).

⁴⁹ The term can refer to people or God in the MT of the Old Testament, although this pointing with the first common singular suffix was used by the Massorettes to indicate a non-divine use (BDB, 1979:10). On the other hand, the pointing of אֲדֹנָי which is found in v. 5 always refers to God (HOLL, 1997:4).

⁵⁰ Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:145) on the contrary suggests that whereas in Psalms 18 and 21 the king acts as warrior, here it is Yahweh who is the warrior. Scholars come to no consensus for who is the subject of these actions (see below). Nevertheless, whether Yahweh is the primary acting agent or acting through the king he both sanctions the military activity and ensures its success. The sole agency of Yahweh does not preclude the involvement of the Israelite army according to the Hebrew concept of holy war (Allen, 2002:115).

⁵¹ Houston (Waltke & Houston, 2010:484) suggests 25x; Guthrie (2007:943) suggests 22x.

has traditionally been understood as the Messiah⁵² whom Christians identify as Jesus. The notion of a warrior-God who sanctions violence in overcoming enemies becomes directly connected to Jesus, which confronts the Christian who wishes to understand what it means to pray these violent images. The goal of this section will be to determine the meaning of these expressions of hostility by determining the perceived suffering of the psalmist as it is portrayed in the text of Psalm 110. In section 2.2 these findings will be correlated with selected interpretations which have been understood by the Church throughout its history.

2.1.2 Structure, form and setting

The structure of Psalm 110 has generally been thought to reflect two distinct sections each beginning with an oracular introduction (vv. 1 and 4) followed by expansions (Allen 2002:113; Waltke & Houston, 2010:500-501). This position is well supported by reference to the same number of colas in both oracles and the same number of colas in both of their amplifications (2 and 8 respectively), stylistic use of Yahweh (vv. 1a and 4a) and Lord (vv. 1b and 5a) (cf. Allen, 2002:113). Further support of two distinct sections comes from the use of volitional verbs in vv. 1-3, (שָׁב, יִשְׁלַח, רִדָּה) and in vv. 4-7 the use of perfective (מָלָא, מָחַץ, נִשְׁבַּע) and non-perfective verbs (יָרִים, יִשְׁתַּה, יִדְרֶן). The use of three of each type of verb should probably not be considered coincidental.

However, suggesting that the psalm has two parallel units or strophes can act to downplay the importance of any dominant element. On closer examination it may be possible to suggest a central emphasis in the psalm. Auffret (1982:83-88) proposed a double concentric structure of Psalm 110, one of which centered on 4aα, the oath formula. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:146) also makes the comment: “Without v. 4 there would be a coherent textual and historical continuum.” Further evidence for the importance of the oath formula comes from reconstructing what the hypothetical prophetic oracle may have looked like in its pre-liturgized form. That is, if the oracle formula and oath formula were separated from their expansions and

⁵² This appears to be true even for those scholars like Allen who do not hold to an original Messianic intent.

combined according to the principles observed when they occur together in the book of Jeremiah (see below), then the emphasis would fall on the content of the oath formula and serve to highlight v. 4, the Melchizedekian lineage of this person.

The structural location of Melchizedek at the center of the psalm is significant in this regard. Structurally, the placement of v. 4 in the middle of Psalm 110 parallels its placement in the middle of the narrative account of Abram's defeat of the Canaanite kings in Genesis 14, which strengthens the allusion. I suggest that in Genesis Abram's encounter with Melchizedek functions in one regard: to legitimate the claim that Abram has to wage war against the Canaanite kings. The covenant had not been ratified as of this time and so this is a pre-ratified legitimation of Abram's right to possess the land. But it should be noted that the psalm portrays the Messiah's right to rule beyond any right to rule according to pre-exilic boundary markers and includes the whole earth. In the Genesis text, Abram acknowledges Melchizedek's sovereign right by paying tithes (Von Rad, 1972:180). We may conclude that the legitimacy of Abram's military conquest is then sanctioned by Melchizedek's blessing.⁵³ Such an idea of legitimacy is then appropriated through the Messiah on whom this priestly title is conferred by Yahweh.

The traditional Christian interpretation of this psalm until the early nineteenth century categorized it as a messianic prophecy. Houston (Houston & Waltke, 2010:74-75) notes that Delitzsch (1830-90) was one of the last German scholars to interpret Psalm 110 in a conservative orthodox way as a prophetic and messianic psalm. J.M. Neal (1818-1866) and Bishop Perowne (1823-1904) were his English counterparts. Kraus (1989:353) suggests that form-critical research has contributed to the rejection of traditional messianic interpretations in Psalm 110. Yet, according to Gunkel (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:103), classification of Royal Psalms, unlike other psalm types, is based on "their different causes." In the case of Psalm 110 the different cause seems to be tied into understanding the implications of the phrase

⁵³ The function of such an allusion in Ps 110 would work on an argumentative justification, but not necessarily as a theological basis acknowledging any form of Canaanite pantheon, just as, for instance, the statement in Ps 136: הַיְהוָה לְאֱלֹהֵי הָאֱלֹהִים, *Give thanks to the God of gods*, would not be a concession for any Israelite to the existence of other gods. This idea of divine mandate was common in the ancient world, for example, it was believed that "Cyrus received his rule from the hands of the Babylonian gods" (Herrmann, 1981:295).

הַיְהוָה יִצְאֶנּוּ.⁵⁴ So caution must be exercised in making any assumptions based on what can be understood from the general knowledge of Royal Psalms. Some modern scholars (Kidner, 1975b:427; Kissane, 1954a:106) follow the New Testament witness to David as the author and speaker in this psalm and categorize it as a messianic prophecy. However, the general tendency can be seen in Allen’s (2002:113) statement that restricting the psalm to an original messianic intent “hardly accords with the pattern of historical and theological development discernible in royal psalms in general and with the ancient cultural and historical royal references within Ps 110.” Waltke (Houston & Waltke, 2010:502) is correct in noting that academics who deny Davidic authorship reach no consensus about the date of Psalm 110.

Comparison with similar prophetic oracles in Jeremiah shows that the psalm-form is a liturgical modification of the pure prophetic form. The phrase הַיְהוָה יִצְאֶנּוּ occurs 167 out of 267 times in Jeremiah.⁵⁵ According to Rendtorff (1954:28), in Jeremiah when the phrase stands alone it functions as a conclusion to divine speech. However, when it is placed with another speech formula, such as an oath formula וַיִּשְׁבַּע, it is displaced from this concluding function and stands in an introductory position. This later situation is the one we find, albeit in a modified form, in Psalm 110. When it occurs, for example, in Jeremiah 22:5 and 49:13 (also found outside of Jeremiah, e.g., Gen 22:16) with the term וַיִּשְׁבַּע the phrase הַיְהוָה יִצְאֶנּוּ succeeds the וַיִּשְׁבַּע formula without intervening words. In this function it still introduces divine speech, but in a secondary manner serves to highlight the distinct function of the oath formula. In

⁵⁴ Psalm 110, as an הַיְהוָה יִצְאֶנּוּ *oracle of Yahweh* has no other comparable psalm. In the Psalms, the term יִצְאֶנּוּ occurs only here and in Ps 36:1, where עֲוֹנוֹתַי (transgression) is personified. The TNIV translates Ps 36:1 as “I have a message from God in my heart” which captures the divine implied subject of the oracle. Waltke (Waltke & Houston, 2010:502) notes that the term יִצְאֶנּוּ occurs 375x in the OT and is used exclusively of divine speech. Gerstenberger (2001:266 f.) contests whether Pro 30:1, 2 Sam 23:1 and Ps 36:2 represent divine speech. However, see Waltke (Waltke & Houston 2010:502) for arguments to suggest that even in these cases the יִצְאֶנּוּ can be understood as divine speech. For example, the term, יִצְאֶנּוּ is used of David in 2 Sam 23:1 where it is clear that David is speaking through *the Spirit of the Lord* (2 Sam 23:2). According to Bible Works 9, יִצְאֶנּוּ only occurs approximately 20 out of 377 times in non-prophetic books (Gen 22:16, Num 14:28, 24:3 (2x), 24:4, 24:15 (2x), 24:16; I Sam 2:30(2x) 2 Sam 23:1 (2x); 2 Kgs 9:26 (2x), 19:33, 22:19; 2 Ch 34:27; Ps 36:2, 110:1, Pro 30:1.

⁵⁵ See Holladay (2002:245-261) for an example of how some scholars approach the issue of the literary dependence between the Psalms and Jeremiah. The very nature of this debate itself suggests that understanding the function of a particular form in one book can illuminate its use in the other.

Psalm 110 the oracle formula יהוה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ in v. 1 is parallel to the oath formula וְשָׁבַע in v. 4. Possibly, the altered placement of the terms in Ps 110 and the expansion of the oracle before the oath formula may be due to the liturgical shaping of the psalm. The evidence for this modification of a pure prophetic oracle to a liturgical form is supported by comparison of Ps 110 with Assyrian enthronement oracles (see Hilber, 2003:353-366 and 2005:76-88).

It is hard to know for certain to what extent David is responsible for the final form of the psalm.⁵⁶ As Delitzsch (1975c:187) points out, David had known of egregious sin in the midst of his military campaign against Ammon. Such a crisis could have been the impetus for his prophetic oracle which was later reshaped into a liturgical psalm.⁵⁷ Perowne (1966:299) suggests that it was composed to accompany the bringing in of the Ark, the doing of which saw David acting both as king and priest. Regardless as to its provenance, the poem's close structural affinity to Assyrian royal prophecies (Hilber, 2005:76-80) suggests that it functioned as part of royal prophecy in Israel's coronation ritual. Weiser (1962:693) suggests that it was probably used at the "festival of the king's enthronement" and reflects a courtly style which was "composed at a time when under the kings of Judah national enthusiasm was still a national and unbroken force." According to Mowinckel (1962a:48) "the kings must be real Judean or Israelite kings in these psalms." Allen (2002:113) tentatively suggests "the psalm was composed to celebrate David's earlier conquest of Jerusalem." The ideal of a co-regent with Yahweh, expressed in the term לְאֵלֵינוּ *lord* (v. 1) became the benchmark by which Israelite Kings were to measure up.

2.1.3 Perceived suffering of the psalmist

⁵⁶ Furthermore, if David were carried away in a state of uttering prophecy as Perowne (1966:288-289) noted, we cannot be sure as to how he perceived the exact meaning of אֱלֹהֵינוּ. The inherent semantic range of the term אֱלֹהֵינוּ always involves deference to the one who is addressed.

⁵⁷ The details of this ceremony would be open to speculation and are not necessarily important to our understanding of the meaning of Ps 110. For a review of possible suggestions of the King's role prior to the exile in such a ceremony see Shirley Lucas' (2011:66-93) chapter entitled *Kingship in the Hebrew Scriptures: The Psalms*.

When we talk about the perceived suffering of the psalmist in this instance we mean the suffering of the *lord*⁵⁸ or Messiah of this psalm. In the first part of the psalm (vv. 2-3) it seems fairly clear that the *lord* is the subject of the actions. However, regarding vv. 5-7 scholars are divided as to who the subject of the actions is. The closest antecedent to the subject of verse 6 is the *יְהוָה*, *Lord* of verse 5, and in v. 7 difficulties arise in assigning to the *Lord* the anthropomorphic language of drinking from a stream. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:151) on a linguistic basis believes there is no indication in the sequence of clauses (vv. 5-7) to infer a change of subject. So the *יְהוָה*, *Lord*, is the acting subject in the campaign against the enemies. Kissane (1954:194) by interpreting *עַל* as a conjunction (*because*) in v. 5 instead of as the preposition *at* insists that it is the *lord* who is the acting subject of all three verses. Waltke (Waltke & Houston, 2010:509) keeps the subject of v. 5 as the *Lord*, but on the basis of semantic pertinence believes the subject of vv. 6-7 to be the *lord*.⁵⁹ The structure of the psalm may lend support to Waltke’s position. If we remove the kernel of the oracle, we find that the psalm contains parallel ideas.

v 1aβ	<i>יְהוָה</i> (<i>lord</i>) is seated at the right hand of <i>יְהוָה</i>	v 5a	<i>יְהוָה</i> (i.e., Yahweh) is at the right hand of this “ <i>lord</i> -priest”
v 1b	Subjugation of enemies by Yahweh	v 5b	Subjugation of <i>kings</i> by Yahweh
v 2a	Symbol of might from Zion <i>מִטְהַעֲזָרָה</i> (the <i>lord</i> ’s mighty scepter)	v 6a	Judgment of <i>nations</i> <i>יִשְׁפֹּט</i> (He will judge)
v 2b	Subjugation of enemies	v 6b	Subjugation of <i>heads</i>
v 3	Exaltation of the speaker’s <i>lord</i>	v 7	Symbolic exaltation of the subject, <i>He will lift up his head</i>

Table 2. Identification of the subject of vv. 5-7 based on the structure of Psalm 110.

⁵⁸ The use of the term *lord* corresponds to the Masoretic pointing of *יְהוָה*, whereas the term *Lord* corresponds to the Masoretic pointing of *יְהוָה*.

⁵⁹ Kirkpatrick (1921:669) suggests that in v. 6 the subject is the *Lord* because of the use of the term *יִשְׁפֹּט* *he will judge*. This term is used of Yahweh in Pss 7:8, 9:8, and 76:9. However, if the *lord* is the throne partner of Yahweh, the collation of the verb *judge* with the *lord* as subject should not be considered unusual.

The parallel ideas in the table suggest that the subject of vv. 6 and 7 can be regarded as the *lord* of the first half of the psalm and not the *Lord*. The *lord* then is the object of the foe's hostility and engaged in a campaign against them.

If we assumed that originally David had been "prophesying" it would be difficult to determine the exact meaning he had for the terms for enemies אֹיְבֵי (vv. 1bα and 2aβ), מְלֻכִּים (v. 5), גּוֹיִם (v. 6) and רֹאשׁ (v. 6). From a form critical perspective, according to the inner logic of the psalm, the אֹיְבֵי of v. 1 are the גּוֹיִם of v. 6 (Croft, 1987:36). Thus the general term for *foes* is given a more specific designation in vv. 5-7 as the *kings*, *nations* and *heads*. The setting is a battle sequence. To begin with, the *lord* is enthroned at the right hand of Yahweh. The *foes* surround the *lord* and hence *Zion* on every side. *Zion* is the place where Yahweh resides with his throne partner. The enemies' attack on *Zion* reveals their complete antagonism to the rule of Yahweh and his throne partner. As in Psalm 2 the *foes* are positioned as the instigators. The *mighty scepter* (מַטְעָה עֲזָרָה, v. 2) is a symbol of the Messiah's right to rule, to fulfill Israel's covenant mandate to subdue enemies and bless respectful nations (Waltke & Houston, 2010:505). At other times it is a symbol of Yahweh's justice (Ps 45:6; Isa 10:5). In contrast it can be inferred that the enemies are unjust in their cause. The reference to the *mighty scepter* coming forth from *Zion* may indicate hostility against the Messiah in a manner similar to Psalm 2 (a Royal Psalm) where the nations plot and conspire against the king whom Yahweh installs on *Zion*.

The subduing of the enemies, symbolized by placing the enemies as *your footstool*, shows the determination of the enemies. Such behaviour is only used to humiliate those who have been conquered. The battle sequence continues as the *lord* who was enthroned at the right hand of Yahweh now finds Yahweh standing at his right hand helping him in battle. The term אַף (v. 5) is used in Psalm 2:5 to indicate God's wrath directed against his enemies to quell wilful resistance (Allen, 2002:118). Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:150) notes that the notion of God's wrath is not only an emotional category but a philosophical category directed towards kings and rulers who flout the universal order. Perhaps Zenger goes too far in his emphasis on God's wrath as a philosophical category. However, his suggestion is important in understanding the relationship between the moral world order God has created and

God's wrath. We can infer that the term must carry the same range of meaning for the co-regent.

The picture of the enemy is that of a purposeful resistance to what the Messiah enthroned on Zion symbolizes. On the basis of Ps 2:1-2 and Eph 6:10-20, Waltke (Waltke & Houston, 2010:510) suggests that the rulers are empowered by demonic forces. The term יָדִין (v. 6) means to give right and just verdicts in contrast to the term שָׁפַת , which carries the notion of righting wrongs (Waltke & Houston, 2010:511). The implication of this is that the cause of the *nations, kings and heads* is unjust, just as was their conspiracy recorded in Psalm 2. The aftermath of the intense battle is that corpses are heaped up. The inference is that the enemies have been in active opposition to the Messiah meeting him on the field of battle in intense warfare. Thus, the picture given in the psalm indicates that the enemy is antagonistic to all that *Zion* and hence the rule of God stands for. There is no middle ground. The images are strong and decisive. The enemies appear as conquered unjust aggressors in the military action.

2.1.4 Meaning of the response

The focus of Psalm 110 is on the utter defeat of the enemies by means of *Yahweh's* throne partner, which results in his world-wide universal rule. Although the battle begins with $\text{בְּאֵי$ surrounding *Zion* ($\text{יְצִיָּה$, v. 2), it moves to the subjugation of the *heads* (שָׂרָא) over *the wide earth* (אֶרֶץ רְבִבָה , v. 6). The aggression of the enemies is firmly responded to, as is seen in the symbols (*enthronement, footstool, mighty scepter, wrath*) justifying the right of the Messiah to utterly defeat them in battle. As mentioned above, justification for the Messiah's military action also comes from the allusion in v. 4 to his priestly endowment by *Yahweh according to the order of Melchizedek*. In the Genesis account Melchizedek blesses Abram before God ratifies his covenant with Abram, as mentioned in 13:14-17, and before the limitations on priesthood imposed by the Aaronic order.⁶⁰ The allusion creates a chronological

⁶⁰ Gillingham's (1998:228) suggestion that the eschatological focus in Psalm 110 functions by reflecting on the past Davidic dynasty in order to "uphold the legitimacy of the Temple, and with that, the worship of God there" does not take into account the different focus to which the reference to

frame of reference which moves the reader from a pre-covenantal time frame to *Yahweh's* throne partner's reign over the whole earth, supported by a nation of priests who are symbolized by their apparel, *arrayed in holy splendor* בְּהַדְרֵי־קִדְשׁ.

Whether the text was originally understood as eschatological cannot be proved.⁶¹ In Psalm 110 neither the demarcation of the land according to boundaries, nor the ingathering of Israel, nor the universal peace portrayed in the ingathering of the nations is of primary focus.⁶² Yet, removing the focus from pre-exilic land boundaries is of particular importance. The conflict now becomes centered on the defeat of the enemies, who are opposed to and seek to exterminate the rule of *Yahweh's* throne partner enthroned on Zion. Without concrete historical referents for these enemies, the older commentators may be understood for interpreting the singular רֹאשׁ (v. 6) symbolically as the “head” or “chief” adversary, namely Satan. Or, as Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:150) suggests, figures of a universal power of chaos which must be combatted and destroyed by *Yahweh* and his *lord*. The Messiah's defeat of the enemies establishes *Yahweh's* universal rule which is grounded in the Messiah's pursuit of justice.⁶³ The last verse of the Psalm captures the completeness of his success: עַל־כֵּן יָרִים רֹאשׁ, *therefore he shall lift up his head*. The complete earth falls subject to his rule.

2.1.5 Conclusion of exegesis

Melchizedek draws the reader. The reference to Melchizedek takes the reader outside of the historical frame of reference of the theocratic state established by David.

⁶¹ Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:149) comments: “It is rather doubtful that here, as throughout Psalm 110, a concrete historical situation is in view.” Gillingham (1998:224) opposes viewing this or any of the psalms eschatologically because there appears to be very little Messianic awareness in other pre-exilic material. Such a position *a priori* does not take into consideration the uniqueness of Ps 110.

⁶² According to Mitchell (1997:151-152), a tripartite eschatological schema is found in Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel and also in the structure of the Psalms. This schema consists of the ingathering of scattered Israel, the gathering of the nations against Jerusalem, and the ingathering of Israel and the nations to worship on Zion. I am working from the position that the psalms must have integrity as individual units because they are used as individual units. In this instance then Ps 110 by itself does not contain the full-fledged eschatological programme that Mitchell sees in the over-arching structure of the Psalms.

⁶³ Perhaps the mandate in v 2b, הָרָה, *rule*, also alludes to that given in Gen 1:26 and 1:28.

The hostile images of war are best understood in the context of the eschatological framework within the psalm. The nations are portrayed as actively and antagonistically engaged in battle against Yahweh and his throne partner, the *lord*. The imagery reflects the scope and underlying reality of the battle. The complete subjugation of the enemy is justified on the basis that the enemy has engaged willfully with the intention of not only throwing off Yahweh's rule but of destroying the place from which Yahweh rules, *Zion*. In the context of this eschatological profile the incorrigible and recalcitrant nature of the enemy is overcome according to Yahweh's right to establish his universal reign through his Messiah the *lord*.

2.2 A Select Historical Survey of the Interpretation of Psalm 110

2.2.1 Psalm 110 in the early post-exilic restoration

During the post-exilic restoration, Psalm 110 might have been used in a liturgical ceremony, possibly even at the time of the restoration of the temple. Since under Persian rule it could not have been used overtly in an actual royal coronation, it is most likely that it became symbolic, somewhat similar to how the crowning in Zechariah 6 must in some way have been considered symbolic.⁶⁴

How it was understood and used may be open to conjecture, but, based on biblical witness, it seems unlikely that the post-exilic community saw any of their leaders fulfilling the unified regal and priestly theme. Goulder (1998:145), working from a presupposition that the psalms in Book V were composed by Asaphites at the time of the return from exile, suggests that Joshua ben Jehozadak is the *lord* being referred to in Ps 110. His argument is based on Zechariah's account (3:8; 6:12) which mentions that Joshua is the יְהוֹשֻׁעַ . Two concerns arise in this identification. First, in the term's metaphorical use referring to a descendent of David (Ps 132:17; Jer 23:5, 33:15; Ezek 29:21) the name of David also occurs. However, David is not mentioned in the Zechariah passages.⁶⁵ Therefore there is incompleteness in the

⁶⁴ Hays (1968:81) insists that in Israel's use of foreign oracles against the nations, "Their function and importance were not dependent on the foreign powers' knowledge of or response to them." Nevertheless, any literal declaration of autonomous kingship, besides being impractical, would have had serious consequences for Israel's restoration (Neh 6:5-7).

⁶⁵ See also the argument against associating Joshua with the יְהוֹשֻׁעַ put forward by Collins (2005:77-80).

allusions in Zechariah (3:8 and 6:12) to Joshua being the **יְהוֹשֻׁעַ**. He was not of David's line and could not have been considered the literal heir of David. In the eyes of the restored community Joshua ben Jehozadak may have satisfied the priestly requirements of the psalm, but could not satisfy the community's royal requirements.

The other choice that the exiles may have had in mind was Zerubbabel (Zec 4:6), grandson of Jehoiakin. He is recorded as the one who is to lay the foundation and build the temple (Zec 4:9).⁶⁶ But he conspicuously disappears from the spotlight.⁶⁷ In the dispensation of the old temple it was the king's jurisprudence to be protector of the temple, but in the new political climate under the Persian kings, no exile could have conceived of Joshua as becoming the ruling king of Israel, which had been divided into Persian administrative units. Even at the time of Nehemiah (6:5-9) a kingly appointment was not in the minds of the leadership in Judah. So if the returnees considered Zerubbabel as the **יְהוֹשֻׁעַ**, it was most likely not literally. Furthermore, the prophets Zechariah and Haggai seem to divide the role of priest and political leader into two distinct spheres assigning the political to Zerubbabel and the priestly to Joshua.⁶⁸ To the contrary, the roles of king and priest are unified in Psalm 110.

Overall, the post-exilic community was not engaged in any form of conflict that would have literally matched the foes, images and events given in Psalm 110.⁶⁹ Although the post-exilic community was ruled by satraps of the Persian kings, Cyrus is not looked upon as an enemy, but an instrument of the Lord.⁷⁰ There is no

⁶⁶ Apparently contradicted by Ezra 5:16.

⁶⁷ Collins (2003:77-82) argues for associating the **יְהוֹשֻׁעַ** with Zerubbabel based on his role in rebuilding the temple. However, it is uncertain as to whether Zerubbabel is at the dedication of the temple. In the end, his disappearance from this portion of history precludes him from being the **יְהוֹשֻׁעַ** of David's line.

⁶⁸ A cursory reading of Zechariah 6:13 might suggest that in some way Joshua was to unite the two roles. However, such a reading is based on presuppositions about the connotative meaning associated with **יְהוֹשֻׁעַ** (see Collins 2003:77-80).

⁶⁹ Goulder assigns the context of the text to Nehemiah's time of restoration, when there was a threat of violence from the Persian governor, Sanballat, the Ammonites, Arabs and Ashdodites who sent groups to fight against Jerusalem. There was opposition from the Trans-Euphrates Satraps to the movement in Judah to re-establish the autonomy of Jerusalem, as seen for example in Tobai's attempt to prevent the building of the walls around Jerusalem. Yet, any correlation with the enemies and conflict portrayed in Ps 110 cannot be made on a literal level.

⁷⁰ Scholars might find the phrase in Isa 45:1 controversial, but there is no denying that Cyrus and his successors implemented a generous and tolerant policy towards subjected nations (Bright, 1981:362).

indication that any of the other Persian kings are considered enemies of the Israelites, and it is hard to think that the post-exilic community could have conceived Cyrus, Artaxerxes, or Darius as the “Kings” or “Head(s)” to be shattered.⁷¹ On the contrary, the Persian kings with their decentralized liberal governing policies are the safeguards against the local opposition to the building of the temple and the re-establishment of Jerusalem.⁷²

In his assessment of Peter Ackroyd’s⁷³ study of Hebrew thought in the sixth century, Kratz (2009:162) comments, “The handling of the exile is not therefore solely a problem of historical reconstruction; it is a matter of attempting to understand an attitude, or more properly a variety of attitudes, taken up towards historical fact.” How the members of the post-exilic community interpreted this psalm and so the images of enmity is open to speculation.⁷⁴ Perhaps as an insignificant community in the midst of world powers, the ruler in Psalm 110 became a symbol of future hope. The implication is that neither the enemies nor the ruler in Psalm 110 can be literally identified in the circumstances of the post-exilic community.

2.2.2 Psalm 110 in the NT

Of importance to this study is the quotation of Psalm 110:1, which is the most extensively quoted section of Psalm 110 in the NT.⁷⁵ This verse captures two of the three central themes in the psalm: that of the *lord* (v. 1) as Yahweh’s throne-partner and that of the violent defeat of the enemies which in its nascent form is expressed in the phrase *until I make your enemies a footstool*. Five partial or complete quotations of Ps 110:1 are given in the gospels and Acts (Mk 12:36; Mt 22:44; Lk

⁷¹ Although the biblical silence on Artaxerxes leaves open the question as to his perception by the community.

⁷² For a review of the different views on the style of Persian governance see Jigoulov (2009:138-151).

⁷³ One of Ackroyd’s (1968:13) main assumptions is that religious tradition had far greater weight on how the prophets understood the events than the impulses of the moment.

⁷⁴ Based on my analysis alone, it would be unfounded to say that the post-exilic community interpreted Ps 110 eschatologically, but since the text does not match the events surrounding the restoration as depicted in the biblical witnesses, it remains a possibility. Other studies such as Mitchell’s (1997) eschatological programme of the psalms might provide insight in this regard.

⁷⁵ The Greek New Testament (1983:898, 906) has Ps 110:1 quoted 8 times and alluded to or containing a verbal parallel 10 times.

20:42-43; Acts 2:34-35). The general thrust of these uses challenges the concept of Messiah which the Jewish leaders had. As Houston (Waltke & Houston, 2010: 484-485) notes, Jesus' claim in Mk 14:61-64 is pivotal to the ensuing death of Jesus by the Jewish leaders. But in Jesus' answer there is more than just a desire to correct assumptions about his nature. His session provides the very basis by which he claims the right to judge. As Watts (2007:222) notes, "if only the nature of Jesus' messianic identity were at stake, then the first strophe of 110:1 would have sufficed; however, the addition to make his enemies a footstool adds yet an even darker note. Jesus' enemies are God's enemies." Furthermore, Watts goes on to explain that Jesus' claims in Mark meet with hostility, which sees the OT citations shift towards threats of prophetic judgments against a resistant leadership (Mk 3:29, 4:12; 7:6, 10) and in a final transitioning pericope (Mk 8:17-18) directed at the similarly uncomprehending disciples (Watts, 2007:112).⁷⁶

Watt's observation that the text speaks of prophetic judgment is reinforced in the Matthean and Lukan accounts. In each of the accounts (including Mark), in the immediately following pericope Jesus issues a form of judgment (condemnation) on the teachers of the law (Mk 12:38-40 and Lk 20:45-46), or the teachers of the law and the Pharisees (Mt 23:1-39). In Acts, after the Holy Spirit has come, Peter's preaching of the session leads to the repentance of the crowd. The gospel accounts and Acts, then, relate Psalm 110 to judgment as it pertains to one's understanding of who Jesus is.

Hebrews contains five references to Ps 110:1 explaining Christ's role as both judge and priest.⁷⁷ The use of the session provides a picture of the subjugation of the enemies as having begun but yet awaiting consummation through the bringing together of Ps 8:4-6 and Ps 110:1 in Heb 2:8-9. The quotation from Ps 8 suggests the subjugation of enemies is accomplished, whereas that from Ps 110 suggests it is a

⁷⁶ Moyise (2010: ch. 1, par. 26) seems to downplay the theme of judgment of the second coming. He believes the quotation of Ps 110:1 in Mk 14:62 which is coupled to an allusion to Dan 7:13 "coming on the clouds of heaven" as most likely meaning to receive power and authority rather than to go anywhere. Further, he implies that the theme of suffering as means of triumph is indicated by vineyard workers killing the son and the ending in Mark which emphasizes suffering through quoting Ps 22. Although the theme of suffering is certainly central to how Jesus ushers in his Kingdom, Watts' contention is correct that the latter half of Ps 110:1 was included for a purpose. It seems possible that both views of triumph are in view.

⁷⁷ According to Guthrie (2007:923-924) Ps 110 serves as a key to the structural development of the book being quoted in 1:13 and alluded to in 1:3; 8:1; 10:12 and 12:22.

future event. In other words, the reality has been inaugurated, but its consummation will come at a time in the future (Guthrie, 2007:946).⁷⁸ Susan Docherty (2009:169) has noticed that the author of Hebrews' connection of Ps 110:1 with Ps 110:4 can be seen in Heb 1:3 where Jesus' purification of sins is hinted at prior to his ascension. Furthermore, the connection is warranted because the author of Hebrews quotes this same verse at Heb 5:6, 7:17, and 7:21 and bases his identification of Jesus as priest on it (Mason, 2008:18). So it is no surprise that this beginning but unconsummated rule (Ps 110:1) is joined together with Jesus' priesthood in Hebrews 10:12-10:14. Jesus' session as Melchizedekian priest provides the basis for mercy to be shown to those of the New Covenant as he waits for "his enemies to become a footstool at his feet." Finally, perhaps, there are echoes of the violent images from Ps 110 and their fulfillment in the final judgment from the apocalyptic NT images of judgment (e.g., Rev 17:14).⁷⁹

The NT writers in general see Christ's ascension as fulfilling the *lord's* ascension to the throne of Yahweh. The second part of the phrase *until I make your enemies a footstool* is seen as occurring but not as yet fulfilled. Thus, the NT portrays Ps 110 in an eschatological framework.⁸⁰ The notion of judgment portrayed in the gospels and Acts is directed towards those who have rejected Christ's claims about himself, whether the Jewish leaders or the general populace.⁸¹ The book of Hebrews further spells out Christ's role as judge and as mediator (Melchizedekian priest) of the new covenant more distinctly. Judgment has been averted on those who were once enemies of the *lord* by the once and for all sacrifice of Christ which is superior to those offered in the Aaronic priestly order. Therefore, the session with its notions of judgment in the NT is concerned with one's relationship to Christ's rule and its

⁷⁸ For an explanation of the anthropological interpretation of the bringing together of these two psalms and a critique of Guthrie's christological interpretation see Moyise (2012: 4.3).

⁷⁹ The violent images are generally associated with the concept of the Son of Man from the book of Daniel. However, Bloomberg (2007:84) in commenting about Matthew's account of the session suggests that Matthew draws out the concept of eschatological judgment through the Messianic connection with the theme of Son of Man, and that the future implementation of perfect justice throughout the universe, at the end of time, will occur through this priest and king.

⁸⁰ "Usage of this text [Ps 110:1] may reflect a polemical purpose to support the Christian view that the coming of the Messiah falls in two stages, over against the messianic expectations of Judaism, and to explain the resultant interim period in scriptural terms" (Allen, 2002:118).

⁸¹ Although preaching to Jews in Jerusalem, the universal scope to whom the text applies implied by the text itself is most likely indicated, as Moyise (2012: 1.2) notes, in the fact that Theophilus would have understood references to phrases in Acts such as "everyone who calls", "all families", and "restores all things" as references to gentiles like himself.

relevance is specifically directed to those who were or are enemies, in order that they repent and no longer remain enemies. The violent images in Ps 110 of judgment against recalcitrant enemies are developed primarily in the apocalyptic violent images given, for example, in the book of Revelation.

2.2.3 Psalm 110 in the Pre-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

Many of the early commentators understood Ps 110 with the focus of establishing the person of Christ as a coequal member of the Godhead. Hence some of the earliest writers known as the Apologists used Ps 110 to defend orthodox beliefs about the nature of Christ from heresy. In this context, however, there are some glimpses as to how these commentators understood Ps 110 as it pertained to the theme of judgment. So, for example, Clement (1989:15)⁸² identifies the enemies as all the wicked who oppose the will of God. In contrast, Justin Martyr (1989:178) understands the enemies as devils. He also sees the phrase “He shall send to Thee the rod of power out of Jerusalem” as referring to the word which the apostles who went out from Jerusalem preached everywhere. Nevertheless it is clear from the warning that he gives his opponents to whom he is writing that he sees the punishment for sinners as an eternal one by fire. Tertullian (1989:560-561) sees the event of putting Christ’s enemies under his feet as an eschatological event which will occur in the “day of the Lord.”

Origen, a younger contemporary of Tertullian, but of the Alexandrian school, gives a more detailed explanation. Origen, interested in the spiritual meaning of the text, allows leeway for dispute about the meaning of the subjection given in Ps 110:1. For Origen (1979:260), the subjugation which is talked of is a spiritual one which has happened to those who have become subjects of Christ. Jerome in his homily on Ps 110 (109) also uses prophetic allegory to interpret its meaning. Jerome (1964:271) clarifies the word scepter (v. 2) with Isa 2:3 to mean “instruction” and notes, “The psalmist did not say, kill your enemies ... [but] rule.” For Jerome, ruling over the enemies does not involve their violent death, but their conversion. He interprets the violent image in v. 6, *he will crush kings on the day of his wrath*, by linking the

⁸² Clement of Rome (fl. c. 92-101) was part of the group known as the Apologists, whereas Clement of Alexandria (c. 150-215) was of the Alexandrian school of interpretation.

kings to the devil through Luke 4:5, 6. The day of wrath is further defined by “on the day of conflict and strife” (Jerome, 1964:271). However, in contrast Jerome says that nations are judged. The violent image of *heaping up corpses* refers to unbelievers who have not believed the message of the apostles. The death, nevertheless, is an allegorical one where they “fall in the death of the desert of this world” (Jerome, 1964:276). Therefore for Jerome the explanation of judgment in Ps 110 is soteriological and has to deal with one’s ultimate relationship with Christ. Judgment is the withholding of God’s presence and the benefits therein.

In contrast to Jerome, Gregory of Nazianzus (1978b:311) of the Antiochene school sees the judgment as eschatological and since Christ has already brought about submission in Christians, the final judgment does not refer to the submission of Christians. Theodoret of Cyrus (2001:209), also of the Antiochene school, suggests that “the foes are in particular the devil, the demons ministering to him, and in addition to them also those resisting his divine teachings, Jews and pagans.” *Rule in the midst of your foes* is interpreted soteriologically, where the majority are converted and led like captives to the king in embracing service (Theodoret, 2001: 210). Nevertheless, Theodoret is clear in his interpretation of v. 6 that judgment on the recalcitrant enemy is not only eschatological, but also occurs in the present time:

Here he indicated more clearly the judgment, and the fact that on that day he will consign to manifold punishments those living a life of impiety. In the present life, of course, he often subjected them to many corrections, teaching the ignorant his peculiar force.

John Chrysostom was a contemporary of Augustine and although he was from the Antiochene school of exegesis, which was known for a more literal exegesis of the text, the tension that he had in balancing a spiritual and literal interpretation of the violent images can be seen in his interpretation of Ps 110:6. According to Stander (2012:120-121) Chrysostom interprets the violent images spiritually in the sense that the images represent Christ doing away with folly, but in another sense they could also refer to the fate of the Jews. Furthermore, the execution of harsh acts by God is qualified by his beneficent nature and so stands in contrast to people (Stander, 2012: 121-122). Chrysostom’s tension between a literal and spiritual interpretation of Ps 110:6 epitomizes the range of interpretations in the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.

2.2.4 Psalm 110 in Augustine

In terms of writing about the priesthood of Christ, Augustine (1972:749) suggests that the gospel is the arm of his strength that has gone out from Zion, whereas in *Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount: according to Matthew* (Augustine, 1979:14) he states that the image of the enemies under his feet is an image of eternal punishment. Augustine, therefore, allows for Christ's priestly function as intercessor and his kingly function of judge, thereby allowing for both functions in his interpretation of Christ's session.

Augustine's comments from his classic work *Enarrationes in Psalmos* provide more detail. There are at least two points to keep in mind in order to understand his interpretation of this psalm. First, Augustine was working from a version of text substantially different from the present-day MT. So in v. 3 instead of *Your people will offer themselves willingly* Augustine (2003:273) has *with you is the beginning*, and instead of *of the dawn is the dew of your youth* he has *before the morning star I begot you* (Augustine, 2003:278).⁸³ Secondly, Augustine interpreted the psalms in light of their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. So, for Augustine the LXX heading εἰς τὸ τέλος⁸⁴ *to the end*, which is found in 55 psalm headings, reinforces the idea that all the psalms find their intended meaning in Christ (Houston & Waltke, 2010: 212-213, 488). From this perspective proceed his allegorical interpretations.

As such Augustine interprets the images of enmity in a soteriological framework. This is not to say that he does not see God's judgment as a horrific event. When speaking of the eschatological judgment in Ps 110 (109), he refers to the wicked burning in eternal punishment (Augustine, 2003:272). But the present judgment is given as relating to one's relationship with Christ. He defines the enemies as the nations, kings and rulers given in Ps 2, and then relates the enemies to all people: "You, whoever you are, were once his enemy" (Augustine, 2003:270). Furthermore, the making of his enemies as a footstool at his feet "is being visibly fulfilled" now

⁸³ *Beginning* from the LXX ἡ ἀρχὴ and *before the morning star* from πρὸ ἑωσφόρου. See the exegesis for a discussion of the underlying Hebrew terms in the MT.

⁸⁴ תְּלֹמַד in the MT. Found in 55 psalm headings in the MT, but only three occur in Book V (Pss 109, 139, 140).

and will continue until the end of time (Augustine, 2003:270). Augustine's spiritual interpretation is seen in v. 6. The judgment of the nations is made to mean a destroying of what a person used to be (Augustine, 2003:283). *He will shatter the heads* for Augustine means that Christ exercises judgment by transforming proud people into humble people. For Augustine the significance of the violent images in Ps 110 lies in their spiritual portrayal of the conversion of the enemies of Christ into followers of Christ.

2.2.5 Psalm 110 in the Reformers

2.2.5.1 Martin Luther

Martin Luther left a collection of eight sermons on Ps 110; they provide insight into how he understood the images of enmity. Central is Luther's understanding of Christ as fulfilling the prophecy in Ps 110 both as the King and as the Melchizedekian priest in a spiritual rather than temporal manner (Luther, 1956:306). The image of Christ's session shows that he is no longer an earthly ruler (Luther, 1956:233). Hence, the subjugation of all enemies is done in a secret way (Luther, 1956:242). Christ's government is one in which He controls the hearts of all men (Luther, 1956:241). Furthermore, Christ's kingdom must exist and remain here in a state of weakness and suffering (Luther, 1956:255).

The nature of the expansion of his kingdom has two aspects to it. The first is explained through a metaphorical interpretation of the sending out of the scepter (Ps 110:2) (Luther, 1956:269). For Luther the scepter is the preaching of the gospel or the "Word." And from Ps 45:6 Luther recognizes that justice is closely related to the preaching of this gospel (Luther, 1956:267). He explains the effect that Christ's Word will have: "It will be like a massive defeat in a huge battle, where the field is full of corpses" (Luther, 1956:342). Quoting 2 Cor 12:9, Luther suggests that the weakness of the kingdom is really a display of God's wisdom, authority and power (Luther, 1956:253). So, God's *modus operandi* is not just to overcome the enemies by force, but God's plan is to overcome his enemies by "foolishness and nothingness in order to disgrace them" (Luther, 1956:254). For Luther, then, the postponement of justice on evildoers is so that the kingdom of Christ which is an internal kingdom

can extend throughout the world (Luther, 1956:259). Christ does not bring to actualization his full reign here on earth because there are many others who are to come (Luther, 1956:260).

But the other aspect of the establishing of the lord's kingdom, the subduing of incalcitrant enemies, does occur. The enemies in Ps 110 are those who are spoken of in Ps 2, the nations that rage and the people that plot against the Lord and his anointed (Luther, 1956:249). This enmity and hatred of the Lord's *lord* is not of a natural or human kind but has its source from the devil (Luther, 1956:251). The enemies of Christ are not only the world and the devil but also "death" (1 Cor 15:25-26) (Luther, 1956:261).

For Luther the enemies are both external and internal, that is, those who claim to belong to the kingdom (Luther 1956:273). In Luther's time this amounted to all those in the Roman Church who abused the true gospel. As examples of external enemies, Luther believed that through Mohammed and the Turks, the devil had subverted and exterminated the gospel in Greece (Luther, 1956:325).⁸⁵ Yahweh himself subdues the enemies under the lord's feet by miracle alone without the assistance of Christians or physical power (Luther, 1956:255). But this is not to say that he does not operate through the affairs of the world. God can punish "one rogue by another" (Luther, 1956:274). God uses other enemies as he has used the Turks to devastate Greece and Asia Minor (Luther, 1956:257-258). That is, Luther sees v. 6 as having being fulfilled in the laying waste of Asia Minor, Egypt and Greece (Luther, 1956:343). Further historical examples of nations who have been recalcitrant as enemies to Christ and that have met with disaster are the Jewish people and Rome (Luther, 1956:256). However, Christ himself openly destroying the enemy will occur only at the final judgment (Luther, 1956:258).

Central to Luther's thinking, however, is the idea that the Kingdom is not to be ushered in by Christians with fist or with armed might (Luther, 1956:255). Violence by Christians in establishing the kingdom of God was not an option. Unlike Müntzer and other Anabaptists he did not believe that all the enemies of the church would be physically exterminated before the Last Day (Luther, 1956:264). Christians were not

⁸⁵ Greece means the Byzantine Empire.

to physically resist their enemies as was part of the thinking of the Anabaptists of Luther's time (Luther, 1956: 279).⁸⁶

In conclusion, for Luther, as with the NT witness, Christ was the fulfillment of the prophecy in Ps 110 as the unified king and priest. But this raised questions about the nature of the Kingdom of God which Luther answered through a spiritual interpretation.⁸⁷ The entire psalm is a prophecy concerning the spiritual Kingdom of Christ. Everything must be understood spiritually (Luther, 1956:347). Although Luther interpreted the *mighty scepter* in metaphorical language, Luther's historical examples show that he understood God as using violence and the means of war to punish those who opposed the *lord*. But until the last day, this would be both secret and mitigated because of the overriding concern of the expansion of the Kingdom of Christ which involves the making of disciples. The end for the enemies is to be cast into the abyss of hell to be eternally damned (Luther, 1956: 348).

2.2.5.2 John Calvin

Calvin's main pastoral concern in his exegesis of Ps 110 was to provide comfort and encouragement to those who, like himself, were caught up in the religious and political turmoil of the Reformation. Since Christ in Matthew 22:41-46 applies Ps 110 himself, Calvin does not feel the need to "apply to any other quarter for the corroboration of this statement" (Calvin, 1989:295).

Calvin sees that all people are opposed to God and must be brought to submission, but some of these God makes partakers in his glory while others remain forever in their lost estate and are the true enemies, the reprobate (Calvin, 1989:300). The sending out of the *mighty scepter* in v. 2 is the extension of Christ's Kingdom (Calvin, 1989:300). The effect of this extension is further explained by the connection between the "mighty scepter" in v. 2 and the "iron scepter" in Ps 2:9 and is meant to cause people not to provoke Christ's wrath with a rebellious spirit

⁸⁶ The exact words of Luther (1956:279) are "Christ does not start this quarrel and enmity and discord. He must endure it from his enemies. However, it is not the meaning of this verse [110:2] that we physically resist our enemies, which is part of the thinking of the Anabaptists and other rebels." It must be remembered that Müntzer was an Anabaptist (see Ps 149 in this thesis). A discussion on early Anabaptist views on pacifism and physical resistance are beyond the scope of this thesis.

⁸⁷ Luther uses spiritual and metaphorical interpretation. He uses allegory similar to Augustine to interpret v. 7. Once again the reader is referred to the comments about Luther's commentary on the Psalms given in the Introduction.

(Calvin, 1989:310). The spreading and prospering of Christ's rule is meant to provide comfort to Christians, even though the whole world might stand in opposition.

Calvin notes that Christ will execute vengeance through "the dreadful nature of that power which Christ possesses for the dispersion and destruction of his enemies" (Calvin, 1989:308). In contrast to Luther's and Augustine's allegorical understanding of v. 7, Calvin interprets v. 7 as a military metaphor depicting the rapid approach of the enemies' impending disaster. But the actual working out of that judgment here and now as opposed to its eschatological working out is not expanded upon by Calvin in his comments on Ps 110.⁸⁸ He does, however, answer the questions as to how this militaristic picture can coexist with the "meekness and mildness with which scriptures elsewhere inform us he shall be endued" (Calvin, 1989:309). In answering this question, he uses the metaphor of a shepherd who cares for the sheep but is fierce towards wolves and thieves (Calvin, 1989:310).

For Calvin there is a purpose in not eliminating all the enemies of Christ. The response of the Christian to the kingdom of Christ being encompassed by many enemies is to be kept in a state of constant warfare where they maintain patience and meekness (Calvin, 1989:301). The enemies act as a means to the end of a more sanctified elect. For Calvin the complete subjugation of the reprobate symbolized by them becoming Christ's footstool will not be accomplished before the last day. Until then the kingdom of Christ will be assailed by many enemies (Calvin, 1989:299).

2.2.6 Comparison with the exegetical findings of Psalm 110

The goal here will be to supplement the salient features of the exegesis with the historical survey. To begin with, almost all the approaches share the common

⁸⁸ This is not to say that in other passages in the Psalms Calvin does not comment on judgment. According to Herman Selderhuis (2007:157) Calvin depicts God as "a judge who inspires awe without striking terror." In Ps 119:52 God carries out judgments daily but these are hidden and not perceptible without God's help. Calvin understood civil authorities as playing a role in meting out God's judgment (Barth, 1995:210). The civil authorities reward the good and punish the bad (Barth, 1995:211). Furthermore, God commits to the state the execution of vengeance (Barth, 1995:211). Calvin believed that the state has the right to enforce the death penalty and wage war. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to investigate how Calvin understood God's judgment through forms of government. For Calvin, the ability to see God's judgment is closely linked with his view of revelation and its relationship to history (Barth, 1995:1-2).

perspective that all people are enemies of Christ at some point in their existence. The enemies are identified as the teachers of the law, but also the general populace (NT), the individual (Augustine), devils, demons, Jews and pagans (John Chrysostom); devils (Justin Martyr); all people (Calvin), originating from the devil and as nations (Luther). Calvin's plain approach to the interpretation of the text is helpful in clarifying the identification of the enemies into two distinct groups, those who become subjects of the kingdom and those who are the reprobate.

Some earlier commentators seem satisfied with interpreting the harsh images allegorically (so Jerome and Augustine). However, as is seen in the comments of Augustine, there existed a very real notion of a painful and horrific future punishment for those who oppose the will of God. Nevertheless, the effect of the allegorical and spiritualizing approaches seems to soften, if not mute, the violent images of judgment. It must be noted that the NT writers did not try to allegorize the images of judgment. Rather, the images of judgment were peripheral to their main concern of relating judgment to how one understood the person of Christ. The NT writers simply did not develop the violent images of judgment against a recalcitrant enemy outside of the apocalyptic images of the end times.

The utter defeat of the enemies of Yahweh's throne partner, resulting in his world-wide universal rule, is the focus of this psalm. The allusions to Ps 110 in the New Testament, especially in the book of Hebrews, help to set this psalm in an eschatological framework which has been inaugurated but as yet is unfulfilled. This understanding of time is already latent in the allusion in Ps 110 to Melchizedek (Gen 13:14-17), which stands outside of the timeframe of the Aaronic priesthood. In this regard, Christ is understood as the type of the Melchizedekian priest. All stand in opposition to Yahweh's throne partner, yet through the sacrifice of this Melchizedekian priest some of the enemies become subjects, whereas others remain recalcitrant. The lack of concrete historical references in the psalm, such as boundary markers, and the use of universals, *the wide earth*, also lend support to the understanding of many commentators that the devil is somehow included in this anti-Christ scheme. Furthermore, the enemies are portrayed in the imagery of Ps 110 as active agents of aggression who wish to exterminate all that Yahweh and his throne partner stand for. Therefore the extension of the kingdom and the establishment of justice by Yahweh and his throne partner are justified.

Overall, the NT witness to Ps 110 helps us to see the spiritual nature of the violent images. From its very inception in Book V, the violent images took on meaning beyond their intrinsic violence. The emphasis here is not on allegorical meaning without any parameters for interpretation. The images of violence were used because that was the frame of reference by which those who composed and edited the psalm understood the working out of justice. However, with the identification of Christ as the *lord* a more specific historical time frame is provided. For those who become subjects of the kingdom the images take on a metaphorical meaning. For those who are recalcitrant the images take on a meaning which is consistent with the nature of their aggressive and deceptive recalcitrance. The connection between these images of subjugation in Ps 110 and the actual working out in history of the subjugation of the enemies covers a wide range of possibilities which are dependent on the secret working out of the kingdom and hence the actualization of God's justice in history.⁸⁹ The response appeals for the complete rule of Christ which in its end is consummated eschatologically.

2.3 Exegesis of Psalm 119

1 Blessed⁹⁰ are those whose way is blameless,
 who walk in the law of the LORD.
 2 Blessed⁹¹ are those who keep his decrees,
 who seek him with their whole heart,
 3 who also do no wrong⁹²
 but walk in his ways.

⁸⁹ Some in the Antiochene school, such as Theodoret, allow for an imminent judgment on those who remain enemies, but he does not expand on it. Luther and Calvin attempt to comment on this aspect of judgment. Both answer the questions why Christ does not always bring justice on the enemies now, why there are still enemies present, and why there appears to be a lack of judgment in general. Calvin also tries to reconcile the fiercely violent militaristic image of Christ as the *lord* of the OT with the gracious images of Christ in the NT through the image of the shepherd. Luther in particular gives suggestions about what the secret working out of the judgment of Christ might look like in history. Calvin does in other places but not in his commentary on Ps 110.

⁹⁰ NRSV has *happy*. But in my opinion *blessed* better captures the depth of the term בְּרָכָה and is used by the NIV, ESV, KJV, NKJV and NAB.

⁹¹ NRSV has *happy*.

⁹² The LXX tries to maintain the masculine participle form from v. 2 and has the translation of ἐργαζόμενοι instead of the perfect form in the MT. The effect in the LXX is to introduce the enemies earlier than they are introduced in the MT (see Zenger [Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:285]).

4 You have commanded your precepts
to be kept diligently.
5 O that my ways may be steadfast
in keeping your statutes!
6 Then I shall not be put to shame,
having my eyes fixed on all your commandments.
7 I will praise you with an upright heart
when I learn your righteous ordinances.
8 I will observe your statutes;
do not utterly forsake me.
78 Let the arrogant be put to shame, because they have subverted me with guile;
but I⁹³ will meditate on your precepts.

2.3.1 Statement of investigation

A premise of this study is that an investigation of enmity cannot be limited to psalms which only contain explicit expressions of enmity against an adversary. Other psalms in which the psalmist responds without expressions of enmity can provide a different perspective on responses to adversity. Psalm 119 is one such psalm where the psalmist experiences the hostility of adversaries, yet in all but one verse responds with affirmations towards *Torah* rather than imprecations against his prosecutors. In v. 78 the psalmist wishes for shame on his adversaries. The form and length of Ps 119 also contribute to it being unusual for its selection. Its length raises questions about the unity of the psalm and the identification of the enemies. Furthermore, Ps 119 has no heading and contains various motifs. The goal here will be to determine the suffering of the psalmist and then how that suffering provides a context for understanding the psalmist's response.

2.3.2 Form and setting

From a form-critical perspective, Gunkel (1998:20, 305) classified this psalm as a "formless" mixed genre,⁹⁴ which was "confusingly mixed together." He was reticent

⁹³ NRSV *as for me*.

about categorizing Ps 119 as exclusively an individual complaint song because it lacked the initial “*summons in the name of Yahweh*,” even though he recognized that it uses the motifs of the individual complaint genre (Gunkel, 1998:153). For Gunkel, the *Sitz im Leben* was the post-exilic liturgy.⁹⁵ Gunkel (1998:7-8) did believe, however, that the wisdom sayings found in the psalm-like sayings in all psalms originally arose out of the context of a real life setting.

Mowinckel (1962a:78) understands Ps 119 to be a non-cultic psalm, but classified it as an individual psalm of lamentation. He explains the numerous instances of the psalmist’s own devotion to the law as motivations for the prayer. According to Mowinckel (1962b:75) modern interpreters fail to understand mixed psalms because there is a “lack of consideration for this difference between Hebrew and modern ways of thinking and poetry and technique of composition.”

As is apparent, the mixture of genres in Psalm 119 presents a challenge to modern scholars who wish to classify it in a specific form-critical category, usually wisdom or lament. According to Allen (2002:181) the lament-orientated imperative and jussive petitions number forty-nine, whereas the number for Torah wisdom-orientated ones is twenty-nine. Allen (2002:182) himself does not believe the hymn and wisdom elements can be subsumed under the genre of lament. Neither does he see Psalm 119 functioning with a cultic purpose. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:263) concurs with a non-cultic setting and considers the psalm a work of Torah wisdom, although “in terms of form criticism, Psalm 119 is a petition for rescue from manifold threats, or more precisely for rescue through YHWH’s Torah” (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011: 256). Goulder (1998:209) on the other hand argues from internal evidence in the psalm that it was used in the cultic festival of Pentecost. The psalm is both “a prayer and instruction for his [the psalmist’s] pupils” (Goulder, 1998:199). Furthermore, “The insistent persecution theme fits better in the earlier part of the postexilic period” (Goulder, 1998:207).

Despite the lack of consensus as to the form-classification and the setting, there are good grounds to suggest that the psalmist intended Psalm 119 to be understood as a prayer arising out of the experiences of a particular individual. In this regard,

⁹⁴ Also included are motifs from the hymn, the thanksgiving song, wisdom poetry and the individual complaint song (Gunkel, 1998:310).

⁹⁵ For Gunkel (1998:330), around 500 B.C.E.

Eaton's (1995:32) criticism of Gunkel's assessment is *apropos*: "Gunkel does not consider the radial character, like spokes of a wheel, the unity being formed by the relation of each statement to the center in God." The unity is reinforced by the poetic artistry behind the piece.

Psalm 119 is a carefully construed alphabetic psalm consisting of twenty-two sections of eight lines (distiches). Each section has lines beginning with the same letter, progressing through the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In addition there are only two verses (122, 132)⁹⁶ which do not mention a synonym for God's revealed word (תורה, דבר, עדות, שפט, חק, מצות, אמרה, פקוד). Furthermore, it cannot be coincidental that the term *Yahweh* occurs twenty-two times. Consistency is also achieved through the constant theme of suffering⁹⁷ in the psalm and the voice of the psalmist; each verse addresses Yahweh except vv. 1-3 and 115. Artistic unity does not of necessity imply the actual experiences of one individual as opposed to a literary anthology, but does suggest that the composer intended the psalm to be understood coherently.⁹⁸

2.3.3 Identification of the psalmist

Earlier commentators saw a single person who lay behind the artistry of Psalm 119. Delitzsch (1975c:243, 245), basing his view on vv. 9, 99, and 110, saw the psalm as expressing the laments of a young man who was in prison during the Maccabean age. He saw in the psalm a progression of the psalmist's thought through each of the successive strophes. Perowne (1966:349), in the late 19th century, also viewed the psalm holistically, although Perowne disagreed with Delitzsch's understanding of vv. 9, 99, and 110 and in seeing a progression of thought in the arrangement. Perowne

⁹⁶ Verse 132 has תְּמִשְׁפֵּךְ which is the relevant Hebrew word, although it is translated *as is your custom*.

⁹⁷ The lament ethos of the psalm is reinforced by its similarity to Chapter 3 of Lamentations, the next largest alphabetic acrostic in the Bible. The content of Lamentations is generally understood to represent a lament over a fallen Jerusalem very soon after its destruction in the 6th century B.C.E. This form of poetry was thought fitting to portray the tumultuous events of the destruction of Jerusalem and its use during the exile would certainly not have been unreasonable.

⁹⁸ Whether the psalm was composed as a literary anthology as suggested by Deissler (1955:19-31), Levenson (1987:563) and Allen (2002:182-183) in my opinion cannot be answered for certain. Does a similarity in written expressions between Jeremiah and the psalmist (see Levenson, 1987:563) suggest literary dependency or speak of culturally-shared norms as means for expressing lament?

believed that vv. 9, 99, and 110 represent the reflections of an older man looking back on his life.

Internal evidence in the Psalm suggests that the psalmist is most likely a member of the exilic community. Furthermore, indications in the text also point to an exilic composition. In verse 19 the psalmist refers to himself as a גֵּר בְּאֶרֶץ (v. 19); he does not have a permanent residence, but lives בְּבֵית מְגוּרָי (v. 54). We would not expect this language to express the sentiments of those who had returned to the land in the post-exilic restoration. But who in the exile would be important enough to become the object of the *slander*⁹⁹ of the שָׂרִים (v. 23)? Or who would have the status to speak before מְלָכִים (v. 46)? W.B. Soll (1991:126-54) has argued that the psalm was written in the exile, possibly by Jehoiachin. In contrast, many scholars tend to see a post-exilic dating for the psalm (Allen, 2002:183). The crux of this post-exilic argument depends on the definition of the term *tora* and its sequential relationship to other books such as Deuteronomy, Proverbs, Isaiah and Jeremiah. Further evidence of post-exilic composition is cited because of Aramaisms in the text, which is characteristic of late or post-biblical Hebrew.¹⁰⁰ However, if we assume that Ezra brought the Law with him when he returned with the exiles, we can assume that the Law was in circulation and in use by certain groups in the exilic community.¹⁰¹ The Aramaisms in the text may be explained as the result of later minor editorial changes.¹⁰² A scribe might have replaced antiquated terms with more commonly used terms when the text was copied. Assuming the psalm was composed during the exile explains both the interest in the Law, which we know from Ezra (7:10) was a concern of certain exilic groups, and the overarching ethos of lament in the psalm. It is probably best to date the composition of Psalm 119 between the exile and the return of Ezra.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ NRSV - *plotting*

¹⁰⁰ For a list of the Aramaisms see Allen (2002:183).

¹⁰¹ The dating of Ezra's journey to Jerusalem challenges scholars because it seemingly contradicts the dating of Nehemiah's stay in Jerusalem. See Grabbe (1992:88-93) for a discussion of the various historical issues. I am assuming Ezra was a real person as described in the biblical accounts and that he first visited Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes around 458 B.C.E.

¹⁰² Note, however, Dahood's (1970:173) comment relating to the numerous poetic usages that were not employed in the post-exilic period. Also see Waltke's (Waltke & Houston, 2010:544) arguments for Ps 110 which caution against placing too much emphasis on using Aramaic forms to date texts.

¹⁰³ Although a pre-exilic dating cannot be excluded either, see Dahood (1970:173).

2.3.4 Identification of the enemies

Positing the experiences of a single psalmist, whether according to the earlier patterns of seeing the psalm as the personal experience of a suffering individual or whether assuming the psalm was an anthological-literary composition composed in a cultic setting, does not simplify the identification of the enemies. Psalm 119 especially presents a problem for the majority of scholars who categorize the enemies in the Psalms from a form-critical perspective. Such a perspective sees the enemies divided into three groups according to whether the psalm can be classified as a communal lament, individual lament or royal psalm (Van Rooy, 2009:41; Kraus, 1992:125). However, the mixed genres (lament, wisdom, hymn, thanksgiving), the length (176 verses) and the number of terms for enemies (6 identifiable groups) in Psalm 119 caution against the limitations of using only the form-critical approach.

The enemies can be divided into identifiable groups of persons: שָׁרִים (vv. 23, 161); מְלָכִים (v. 46); זָדִים (vv. 21, 51, 69, 78, 85, 122);¹⁰⁴ רְשָׁעִים (vv. 53, 61, 95, 110, 119, 155); אֲיָבִי (v. 98) and צָרִי (v. 139). Sometimes the enemy is also described using a participial form. At times this participial term refers to one of the identifiable groups of enemies and at other times it is uncertain. For example, in v. 21 the זָדִים are described by the participles אֲרֻרִים¹⁰⁵ and הַשְּׂגִיִּם. However, in v. 42 the closest identifiable group to the הַרְפִּי are the מְלָכִים of v. 46. Positing that the two terms are the same group would be speculative.¹⁰⁶

Another way to identify the enemy is according to their relationship to the law.¹⁰⁷ The מְלָכִים (v. 46) are non-Israelite kings to whom the psalmist will speak of Yahweh's עֲדוּת. The רְשָׁעִים are described as those who *forsake your law* (vv. 53, 155). They are not only Israelites, but found all over the earth (v. 119). By means of

¹⁰⁴ זָדִים occurs 8x in the Psalms and only five other times: Pr 21:24, Isa 13:11, Jer 43:2, Mal 3:15, Mal 3:19.

¹⁰⁵ The LXX rendering of אֲרֻרִים as a predicate *ἐπικατάρατοι* which modifies v. 21b does not alter the fact that the זָדִים are the ones being referred to.

¹⁰⁶ The Masoretes pointed הַרְפִּי as singular and מְלָכִים as plural.

¹⁰⁷ By law, I am referring to one of the eight synonyms mentioned above. Croft (1987:43) suggests that in the Psalms “the רְשָׁעִים are defined primarily in relation to God’s judgment rather than by race.”

comparison, the psalmist implies the אֹיֵב (v. 98) do not have the מְצַוֹת since the psalmist is made wiser than these enemies by means of the מְצַוֹת. In vv. 21 and 85 the יְדִים stray from the מְצַוֹת and flout the תּוֹרָה respectively. The צָרִי are those who forget Yahweh's דְּבָר (139). There do not appear to be any implicit or explicit references in relation to the law for the שָׂרִים. In summary, then, there appear to be at least two different groups of enemies in Psalm 119, who can be grouped into those external to the nation and those internal. Even though this observation goes against seeing a unified enemy in the psalm, the totality of the experiences represented in the acrostic structure suggest that it might not be unreasonable to suggest the psalmist is dealing with all possible enemies.

2.3.5 Perceived suffering of the psalmist

In order to understand the meaning behind the response to adversity, we will first sketch a general picture from the psalm of the psalmist's suffering. After a general overview, we limit our investigation to several instances where the psalmist responds to adversity by appealing to the *Torah*. In the response we shall seek to understand the meaning behind the psalmist's use of *Torah* and the relationship it establishes between the psalmist, victim and Yahweh. We shall include in our picture of the general suffering of the psalmist any descriptions from any sources of the psalmist's distress including those originating from Yahweh, the psalmist because of his perspectives on Torah, and the enemies. Nevertheless, our main focus will be on the suffering caused by the moral evil of the enemies.

To begin with, the psalmist feels as if he has been *forsaken* (v. 8) by God. He is a יָגֵר (v. 19) without permanent abode, בְּבַיִת מְגוֹנִי (v. 54). He has not been able practically to live up to the ideal of the law (vv. 4, 176), and so has experienced frustration. He sees God as the one who has afflicted him (v. 75). But it is unclear whether the psalmist means that God is responsible for all of his suffering portrayed in the psalm or whether there is a particular suffering that the psalmist believes that God is responsible for.

During the course of the psalm the psalmist mentions that he is עָנִי, *afflicted*, four times (vv. 50, 92, 153, 107). In verse 107 this is clarified with the adverbial modifier עַד-מְאֹד, *severely*. He suffers from *human oppression*, מֵעֲשָׂק אָדָם (v. 134). His affliction is further described in the following ways: his soul clings to the dust (v. 25), his life melts from sorrow (v. 28), his soul languishes for salvation (v. 81), his eyes fail waiting for salvation (v. 82), he is a wineskin in smoke (v. 83), he has suffered for some time (v. 84), he has almost lost his life (v. 87), and trouble and anguish have come upon him (v. 143). At times his feelings are the result of his enemies' failures to keep Yahweh's law: *hot indignation seizes* him because the wicked forsake the law (v. 53). His eyes shed streams of tears because Yahweh's law is not kept (v. 136) and zeal consumes him because his foes (צָרִי) forget Yahweh's words (v. 139).

As for persecution identified as arising directly from the enemies, the שָׂרִים (*princes*) plot against him¹⁰⁸ (v. 23) and persecute him without cause (v. 161). The יְדִים are many (v. 157); utterly deride him (v. 51); smear him with lies (v. 69); subvert [him] with guile (v. 78); dig pits to trap him (v. 85); oppress him (יַעֲשֶׂה קָנִי) (v. 122); and persecute him (v. 157). The רְשָׁעִים ensnare him with cords (v. 61); lie in wait to destroy him (v. 95); set a snare for him (v. 110). No description is given for what the אֲיָבִי have done, but the צָרִי enrage him because they have forgotten Yahweh's laws (v. 139).

2.3.6 Meaning of the response

In investigating the response of the psalmist there are several factors that can influence our understanding. First is the cause/effect relationship between the psalmist's statements of devotion to Yahweh's Torah¹⁰⁹ and his circumstances of adversity. Wisdom readings tend to emphasize the difference between the righteous and wicked using the technique of contrast. So, for example, verse 69, טָפְלוּ עָלַי יְשָׁקֶר,

¹⁰⁸ Either translation *plot against* or *slander* may be acceptable, but if the psalmist is a member of the exile there would be no need for rulers to plot against him.

¹⁰⁹ Including any synonyms.

זָדִים אֲנִי בְכָל-לֵב אֶצַּר פְּקוּדֵי, *The arrogant smear me with lies, but with my whole heart I keep your precepts*, in the wisdom tradition focuses on the contrast between the psalmist's righteousness and the hostility of the זָדִים as a descriptive teaching tool. Or in the category of lament, this plea of devotion would function as part of a motivational prayer for Yahweh to act. But are there grounds to suggest that the psalmist's dedication to the Torah is a response to adversity? I believe the answer to be yes. The psalmist did not follow the Torah before his suffering,¹¹⁰ but now he does (vv. 67, 71 and 75).¹¹¹ In other words, his affliction has been the means of motivating him to turn to the Torah. There is a discernible chronological progression then of the psalmist's experience in Psalm 119: the psalmist strayed¹¹² from the Torah before his suffering and now the psalmist seeks Yahweh's Torah during his suffering. The psalmist's resolute dedication to Torah as a response to his affliction stands behind an understanding of the psalmist and his responses. As Brueggemann (1984:41) noted, "To enter into the piety of this psalm we must break the stereotype of *retribution* regularly assigned here. It is not a psalm of bargaining, but a psalm of utter trust and submission."

Another factor which influences how one interprets the responses of the psalmist to adversity is the hermeneutical key of the psalm. I suggest that the first three verses give the basis by which to understand the psalmist's use of Torah (or synonyms) when confronted with adversity. Structurally, the אֲשֶׁר־י formula at the beginning of vv. 1 and 2 and the הֲאֵל of v. 3 provide coherence for the unit.¹¹³ Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:265) divides this strophe (א) into two sections: vv. 1-4 and 5-8. However, the shift in voice from third person in v. 3 to second person in v. 4 also serves to differentiate vv. 1-3. I propose that bicola 1a, 1b, 2a, 3a, 3b are metonyms for 2b which is the symmetrical center of vv. 1-3. Verse 1a speaks of *Those who*

¹¹⁰ In some way the psalmist sees God as responsible for his suffering (v. 75), although it is not clear the extent to which he sees God as responsible for the suffering he must endure at the hands of his enemies. However, it is clear through the tone and petitions of the psalm that he sees God's intervention as necessary for his rescue from his suffering.

¹¹¹ Vv. 67 and 71 belong to the ה strophe and v. 75 belongs to the י strophe. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:274-275) suggests a thematic link between the two.

¹¹² The term for straying אֲשֶׁר־י has connotations of being on a path of sin (Zenger [Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:273]).

¹¹³ אֲשֶׁר־י finds its parallel as an introductory formula at the beginning of Psalm 1 which many scholars believe functions as a hermeneutical key for the whole Book of Psalms.

walk (הִלְכוּ) in the *Torah of Yahweh* (בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה) and 3a states *They walk* (הִלְכוּ) *in his ways* (בְּדַרְכָיו). The parallelism and use of the term הלכ suggest equivalence between the two ideas. Likewise verses 1a, 2a and 3a are expressions of the same idea presented first positively, *completeness of way* (תְּמִימֵי־דַרְךְ),¹¹⁴ then as *those who keep his decrees* (נֹצְרֵי עֲדוֹתָיו) and finally negatively as *they do no wrong* (לֹא־פָעִלוּ). In other words, these first six bicola are different ways of expressing the phrase *they seek him with their whole heart* (בְּכָל־לֵב יְדַרְשׁוּהוּ). As such they help the reader to understand the psalmist's expressions about Torah (1b), about sin (3a), and about walking in Yahweh's ways (1a and 3b as an *inclusio*) and as expressions of his desire for the presence of Yahweh, epitomized in the last verse of the 8 strophe: אֶת־הַקֹּי אֶשְׁמַר אֶל־תְּעִיבֹתַי עַד־מָאֵד (v. 8).¹¹⁵ Moreover, the term לֵב in 2b, which defines the psalmist's intensity in his pursuit of Yahweh, with its phrasal variations, is a major theme in Ps 119, occurring more times than in any other chapter in the MT.¹¹⁶ This theme is further reinforced at the beginning of Ps 119 in v. 5,¹¹⁷ where the psalmist expresses his longing to be able to keep the דִּקְוָה of Yahweh and in the last verse, v. 176, where the psalmist has תִּעִיבֹתַי פָּשָׂה אֲבָד although he has not forgotten Yahweh's commandments (לֹא נִשְׁכַּחְתִּי). Further, the pursuing of the Torah as a means of seeking Yahweh is contrasted with the זָדִים who are described as מִמְצֹדֹתַיָּהוּ (v. 21) and those under Yahweh's judgment are כָּל־שׁוֹגִים מִחֻקֵּיָּהוּ (v. 118), *all who stray from your [Yahweh's] statutes*.

The multifaceted meaning behind the use of the term Torah in Psalm 119 does not appear to be limited to this notion alone. P.J. Botha's (2012) study of the meaning of

¹¹⁴ NRSV *blameless*. However, the Hebrew term has a positive nuance and is translated in English with a negative nuance in order to create a parallel with the idea of v. 3a.

¹¹⁵ If the chronological progression depicting the psalmist's suffering and his relationship to the law mentioned above is accepted, then the verbs may be translated into present or future. Translation of these verbs presents a perspective as to how one should understand the psalmist's devotion to Torah. It is also worth noting that many of the verbs used to express the relationship between the psalmist and Torah were used in other and earlier texts to describe the relationship between the Israelites and God (Zenger [Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:260]).

¹¹⁶ Occurrence of לֵב in Ps 119 (14 out of 176 verses); Deut 35 (9/35) and then Prov 15 (9/33). Psalms has 99 uses of the term לֵב and Proverbs follows with 95 mentions. However, Proverbs has a greater concentration of usage when the number of verses is taken into consideration.

¹¹⁷ I am interpreting v. 4 as a *Janus* verse.

Torah in Pss 1, 37 and 119 and the book of Proverbs suggests that Torah functions as a metonym for true wisdom found in Proverbs, and also subsumed in the meaning of Torah is an understanding of the Promised Land. The exhaustive nature of the repetitive mentioning of Torah in Ps 119 without explicitly making reference to its content seems to support the fact that the theme is neither the nature nor the content of the Torah, but an individual who speaks of his relationship to Torah (Zenger [Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:256-257]). Furthermore, formulaic expressions are applied to Torah that are otherwise used only or mainly when addressing Yahweh (Zenger [Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011: 271]).¹¹⁸

The psalmist's response to his adversity through his devotion to the Law is particularly clarified in v. 78 because here the psalmist responds to the יְדִים both by offering an imprecation יִבְשׂוּ יְדִים (v. 78a), *may the insolent be put to shame*, and by meditating on Yahweh's precepts, אֲשִׁיחַ בְּפִקּוּדֵיךָ (v. 78c). According to the psalmist both are valid responses.

יִבְשׂוּ יְדִים כִּי־שָׁקַר עֲוֹתוֹנֵי אֹנִי אֲשִׁיחַ בְּפִקּוּדֵיךָ: (v. 78)

The response of the psalmist is highlighted through the emphatic particle אֹנִי, *Let the arrogant be put to shame because they have subverted me with guile, but I will meditate on your precepts*. We can conclude that meditating on Yahweh's precepts and cursing his enemies are closely related for the psalmist. Meditation on Yahweh's law brings the psalmist into the *way of Yahweh* which is devoid of the שָׁקַר of the יְדִים (vv. 29, 104, 128 and 163). Imprecating against the enemies is the psalmist's way of calling on Yahweh to bring the psalmist's enemies in line with *the way of Yahweh* which entails Yahweh's judgment (vv. 118). The psalmist loves Yahweh's decrees because (note the לִכְן v. 119) Yahweh *discards*¹¹⁹ *as dross all the wicked of the earth* (v. 119, כָּל־רְשָׁעֵי־אֶרֶץ, הַשִּׁבְיָהּ הַשִּׁבְיָהּ). This understanding of Yahweh and his posture towards the *wicked* is reflected in the psalmist's own response, *Hot*

¹¹⁸ Zenger gives Ps 48 as an example, literally *I lift my hands to your commands* (וְאֶשָּׂא־כַפַּי אֶל־ךָ מִצְוֹתֶיךָ). He is basing his information on Y. Amir's (1985:4-11) study, which is not available to me. N.T. Wright (2013:113) makes the case that "the Temple theology that is so characteristic of the psalms had already developed in the direction of a Torah theology, in which the devout worshiper could be assured of God's presence and love in any geographical location."

¹¹⁹ NRSV – *count as*

indignation seizes me because of the wicked, those who forsake your law (וְלִעֲפָה וְאֶחְזֹתֶנִי מִרְשָׁעִים עֲזָבֵי תוֹרַתְךָ, see also v. 139).

The psalmist is also resolute in his pursuit of the Torah while being persecuted. *The wicked lie in wait* to destroy the psalmist, but his response is to *consider your decrees* (וְעִדְתִּיךָ אֶתְבוֹנֵן, *I consider your decrees*, v. 95); the wicked have set a snare to entrap him, but the psalmist has not strayed from Yahweh's precepts (וּמִפְקוּדֵיךָ לֹא תִעְיִיתִי, v. 110). Even at his breaking point the psalmist continues to seek Yahweh's *precepts* (וְאֲנִי לֹא־ עֲזַבְתִּי פְקוּדֵיךָ, v. 87). It is his delight in *Torah* (v. 92) which prevents him from perishing in his affliction (וְאִזְ אֶבְרַחְתִּי בְעֲנָיִי, v. 92). In the midst of persecution by princes his heart is steadfast in the Law (vv. 23, 61).

If we assume that the psalmist's posture towards the Law is an actual response to the injustices that he has faced we can conclude several things. First, his perusal of the Law subsumes in it the notion that those who are far from the Law (the enemies) will experience Yahweh's judgment. Why would delight (v. 92) come to the psalmist unless Yahweh were to deliver him, that is, the psalmist delights in the Law because contained therein is the notion that Yahweh is just in punishing the wicked and exonerating the righteous. We can infer in the psalmist's responses that subsumed under the Law is the notion of Yahweh's justice.

Then again the connection can be further clarified. Curses are the tool of the powerless, so it is also in a state of powerlessness that the psalmist uses dedication to the Law as his response. Curses as a means of seeking justice turn outward, whereas dedication to the Law forces the psalmist to turn towards Yahweh. Nevertheless, both appeal to Yahweh. One asks for justice to be brought according to the constraints of the Law. The other turns to the aspect of Yahweh's presence, which guarantees justice. Merely seeing the psalmist's responses as expressions of steadfastness or bargaining pleas limits the range of meanings inherent in Torah's use in Ps 119. As a response to persecution the people understood that the Law must maintain a central place in their response to persecution. This is because the Law ensured with it an understanding of Yahweh's presence. In turn Yahweh's presence was a guarantee of victory over one's enemies. Undoubtedly, there is an implied

exilic theology here relating to the king and the keeping of the Law.¹²⁰ More pertinent to our discussion, though, the Law is seen for what it is really meant to be and that is a guarantee of Yahweh's presence which brings forth justice.

2.3.7 Conclusion of exegesis

In summary, Psalm 119 allowed the community to place together a renewed understanding of the Law coupled with lament. In other words, it allowed the community to start to redefine its identity, to come to grips with understanding the exile as a failure to keep the Law in the context of the new situation of suffering that exists in the post-exilic community. One aspect of that suffering in particular was the suffering caused by the persecution of enemies. One important response was walking in the way of Torah, a guarantee for the presence of Yahweh which would eventually bring about the rectification of all injustice.

2.4 A Select Historical Survey of the Interpretation of Psalm 119

We will investigate in this section what the commentators have to say about the suffering of the psalmist and his response to that suffering. In particular, in Psalm 119 there are several areas of note. As was mentioned above, the length of Ps 119 presents a challenge in identifying the enemies. How were the enemies identified by the commentators? Furthermore, given that the psalm talks about the psalmist's relationship to the Law, but not necessarily its content,¹²¹ what was it the psalmist perceived in his meditation on the Law? And hence, what was the psalmist's motivation for pursuing the Law? Further, what did the commentators notice about how the psalmist understood justice and judgment from his meditation on the Law?

¹²⁰ Was there a particular message that the editor was trying to convey by placing a kingship psalm 118 before Ps 119 (so Grant 2004:240-251)?

¹²¹ Ps 119 does not focus on the nature or content of the Torah but on an individual who speaks of his relationship with Torah (Zenger 2011:271; Eaton, 1968:557; *et al.*).

2.4.1 Psalm 119 in the early Post-Exilic Restoration¹²²

The formulaic language in Psalm 119 makes identification of the enemies of the post-exilic community speculative.¹²³ Nevertheless a general sense of the scope of meaning the terms may have had can come from the picture given of those who opposed the restoration project. The biblical picture of the restoration of the temple with cultic worship and the reestablishment of Jerusalem is that the post-exilic community met with resistance from the time of Cyrus (559-530 B.C.E) until the time of Darius (423-404 B.C.E).¹²⁴ The inhabitants of the land, along with bribed officials (Ezra 4:4-5), opposed the reconstitution of Jerusalem as an independently functioning district in the time of Cyrus. In the time of Ahasuerus (Xerxes, 486-465 B.C.E.) the people of the land wrote an accusation against the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem (Ezra 4:6).¹²⁵ In the reign of Artaxerxes I (464-424 B.C.E.) “Rehum the royal deputy, Shimshai the scribe, and the rest of their associates, the judges, the envoys, the officials, the Persians, the people of Erech, the Babylonians, the people of Susa, that is, the Elamites” (Ezra 4:9) all appealed to have the restoration stopped. Furthermore, when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs (led by Gesham) and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and the gaps were beginning to be closed, they were very angry, and all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem (Neh 2:19). The enemies were also the Jewish kin themselves who practiced unjust servitude (Neh 5:1-5). Religious leaders are also depicted as the enemies of the restoration, the prophet Shemaiah (Neh 6:12) and the prophetess Noadiah (Neh 6:14) and priests (Eliashab *et al.*, Neh 13:4, 28). In the reign of Darius, Tattenai the governor of the province “beyond the River” and Shethar-bozenai and their associates (Ezra 5:3) acted against Nehemiah’s mission to build the wall.

¹²² The following identification of the enemies in the post-exilic period will form a general background for Ps 119 and the other psalms in this study, so it will not be reproduced for each psalm.

¹²³ I am assuming the biblical dating of Ezra’s arrival in Jerusalem (c. 538 B.C.E.). For a range of the historical issues involved see Grabbe (1992:88-93); for a canonical perspective see Childs (1979:624-638).

¹²⁴ Interestingly the biblical portrayal of the Persian kings is sympathetic to the plight of the post-exilic community, but the kings are uninformed regarding Cyrus’ decree (Ezra 4:6 to 6:12).

¹²⁵ Perhaps the lack of mention of Ahasuerus in Ezra 6:14 means that he was unsupportive?

The exact circumstances of how the psalm was used in the post-exilic restoration must remain speculative. Croft assumes that the length of the psalm precluded it from cultic use. Yet Ezra himself gave a reading of the law to all the people, who attentively listened, from “daybreak until noon” (Ezra 8:3).¹²⁶ As was pointed out in the exegesis, the psalm represents the lament of a man of standing, who else would have an audience of *princes* and *kings*. As such, it would have easily had credibility to be adopted into the liturgical reforms of the post-exilic community at the time of the restoration. The importance and support given to the reforms of Ezra (see the letter from Artaxerxes in Ezra 7:11-28) made clear that the identity of the restored community was to be associated with the implementation of the Law. Furthermore, the Law being brought to Jerusalem (Ezra 7) after the dedication of the temple (Ezra 6:13-18),¹²⁷ Yahweh’s dwelling place, is in itself suggestive of the close relationship which existed between the Law and Yahweh’s presence. Finally, the circumstances for lament closely coupled with rededication to Torah thoroughly fit the general ethos of the post-exilic restoration quite well.

2.4.2 Psalm 119 in the New Testament

In investigating the psalmist’s meditation on the “law” from a NT perspective I will reserve my comments to the verbal parallels with Ps 119 in the NT and some general perceptions of the law held by Jesus and Paul.

According to the Greek New Testament (1983:906) Psalm 119 is not quoted in the NT, but it is alluded to or contains a verbal parallel five times (119:46¹²⁸ in Rom 1:16; 119:137 in Rev 16:5,7 and 19:2; 119:165 in 1 Jn 2:10). In the first verbal parallel the term *statutes* from the psalms is syntactically equivalent to the term *gospel* in Romans. The implication from the collation of each term with not being ashamed (שְׁבוּחָה, Ps 119:46; ἐπαισχύνομαι, Rom 1:16) is the utter trustworthiness which the psalmist and Paul attribute to God in how he has revealed himself. The point of reference for both is their unsympathetic audience.

¹²⁶ As with later Jewish and Christian uses, it may have been divided into smaller units and used over a successive time frame.

¹²⁷ As given in the biblical narrative.

¹²⁸ Also connected through the act of testifying before kings in Mt 10:18 and Acts 26:1-2.

The context for the second parallel (119:137) with its three parallels in Revelation suggests that God’s judgments of wrath on the earth are just. The term in the MT is **טִפְשָׁמִ** (NRSV: *judgments*; NIV: *laws*). However, when used to describe God’s punishing acts, the term carries the notion of righting wrongs (Waltke & Houston 2010:511). The terms in the Revelation passages (16:5 and 19:2)¹²⁹ are from the verb κρίνω, which is used nine times in the book of Revelation and here emphasizes the punishment which lies beyond the divine verdict (*BAGD*, s.v. κρίνω 4b, 1978:452). In Ps 119:137 Yahweh is **קָדְוָה** (righteous) and his **טִפְשָׁמִ** is **רָשָׁה** (*right*). In Rev 16:5 the *Holy One* is δίκαιος (*righteous*; NRSV: *just*) because (ὅτι) he has judged. In Rev 16:7 the Lord God Almighty’s *judgments are true and just* (ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις σου). In Rev 19:2 God’s judgments are also *true and just* (ἀληθινὰ καὶ δίκαια αἱ κρίσεις αὐτοῦ). In Revelation, then, we have the notion that God is righteous because he judges and that his judgments are just and true. In Ps 119:37 we have both ideas—that Yahweh is righteous and that his judgments are right. Depending on how strongly a case can be made for the connection between the passages, the idea of Yahweh’s self-disclosure in the law as righteous is inextricably linked to the nature and actualization of his judgments upon the earth, which are *true* and *just*. Yahweh’s character and his judgments become inseparable.

The connection between Ps 119:165 and 1 Jn 2:10 relates in verbal parallel those *who love your law* (**לְאֵהֱבִי תוֹרָתְךָ**) with *whoever loves his brother* (ὁ ἀγαπῶν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ).¹³⁰ In the psalm passage nothing can make them **מְשָׁלִים** (*stumble*) and in Revelation there is *no cause for stumbling* (σκάνδαλον, 1 Jn 2:10; Ps 119:165 LXX). Furthermore, according to the parallel there is a connection between *great peace* (119:165) and *living in the light* (1 Jn 2:10). Moyise (2012: 5.8.2) suggests that the similar use of the phrases in 119:65 and 1 Jn 2:10 is no more than a similarity in the use of biblical language. However, this third parallel which relates the love of one’s brother with the love of the Law resulting in a perfect life (i.e., σκάνδαλον and **מְשָׁלִים** free) echoes Ps 119:1-3 which also expresses the same idea of a fault-free life. Furthermore, Ps 119:2 describes the

¹²⁹ The term used for judgment in Rev 16:7 is from the noun form, κρίσις.

¹³⁰ The Law itself has the notion of love for neighbor (Lev 19:18).

relational nature of the Law by expressing the same idea positively as those who seek Yahweh with their whole hearts.

It will be worthwhile making some general comments about the Law¹³¹ as it was understood by Jesus and Paul. First, both Jesus and Paul are not ambiguous about the central role of the Law as part of divine revelation, but challenge a misuse or misunderstanding of the Law. Of particular importance are Jesus' statements where he equates the fulfillment of the Law and prophets with himself (Mt 5:17-18; Lk 24:27; Jn 5:39, 46). His criticism of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law is that they misinterpret the Law (Mt 23:23-24) and burden others with their misinterpretation of the Law (Lk 11:52; Mt 23:13).

Paul writes about the Law not from the perspective of a first-century Jew under the Law or as a Jewish Rabbi, but as one whose whole understanding of the Law had been transformed by his Damascus Road experience. His general understanding was that the Law "revealed the will of God and showed what a right relationship with God was; but Israel failed to attain to that goal because they misused the law by making it a means of attaining righteousness by their own works instead of through faith (Rom 9:32)" (Ladd, 1993:539). Important for Paul was the notion that the promise to Abraham (Galatians 3 and Romans 4) had preceded the giving of the Law and so even before the time of Christ had defined the relationship of the Law to that of the covenant (see Ladd, 1993:550-552).

2.4.3 Psalm 119 in the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

2.4.3.1 Suffering in Psalm 119

For some of the commentators the term יִשְׁרָאֵל (LXX and NT: μακάριος) which begins verses 1 and 2 and provides a key for interpreting the psalm. So Cyprian (fl. 248-258)¹³² when writing about the benefits of martyrdom quotes Ps 119:1-2 alongside Mt 5:10. The suffering in Ps 119 is connected to the suffering of

¹³¹ According to Ladd (1993:547-548), the תּוֹרָה is not the same as the Greek term νόμος which "is fundamentally 'custom' hardening into what we call 'law' and is human in perspective."

¹³² The fact that Cyprian, bishop of Carthage, would go on to martyrdom makes this insight remarkable in itself.

following Jesus from the connection with the term “blessed” also found in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5:10) where “the Lord in the Gospel, Himself the avenger of our persecution and the rewarder of our suffering, says: ‘Blessed are they who suffer persecution for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’” (Cyprian, 1990:506). The *blessedness* of those who are undefiled, walk in the way of the Lord, and search his testimonies is used to describe those who keep themselves faithful after the manner of Paul (2 Tim 4:7,8; Rom 8:16, 17) (Cyprian, 1990:539). Psalm 119:1 and 2 provide motivation to be faithful “for the righteous and for martyrs after the conflicts and sufferings of this present time” (Cyprian, 1990:506).

The overall understanding seems to imply that the suffering has a purpose in God’s scheme. Hilary of Poitiers (2007:322) interprets the psalmist’s reference in Ps 119:50 to “his humility”¹³³ as the spurning, mocking, vexing by injustices and being dishonored by insults. However, the second part of the verse responds that “his soul, renewed by the utterances of God, contains within it, so to say, the nourishment of eternal life.” Ambrose (c. 333-397) interprets Ps 119:136, *Streams of tears flow from my eyes; for your law is not obeyed* as relating to the common experience of personal penitence which all saints have (Ambrose, 1989b:357).¹³⁴

In contrast, the Antiochene John Chrysostom linked the “blessed” formula in 119:1 with other scripture containing the formula (including Ps 1:1, 94:12, 2:13, 33:12, 112:1 and Sirach 14:2) with the beatitudes in Mt 5:3-10 as part of his argument that hostilities, calumnies, contempt, disgrace, and torments, and all things without exception will be as pleasurable as riches for the person who has taken hold of virtue (Chrysostom, 1978a:462). Chrysostom interprets Ps 119:71 to mean that tribulation is profitable for the saints so that they may exercise moderation and lowliness and not become puffed up by their miracles and good works (Chrysostom, 1978a:337). He cites Paul as saying the same thing in 2 Cor 12:2, 4, 7.

2.4.3.2 Meaning of the psalmist’s meditation on the Law

¹³³ NRSV: *suffering*

¹³⁴ Interestingly, Ambrose applies Ps 119:46, *I will speak of your statutes before kings and not be put to shame*, to his successful attempt to persuade emperor Theodosius that his decision to allow the restoration of a burnt Jewish synagogue would be perilous (Ambrose 1989a :440).

There is an understanding that the meaning of “the way” in Ps 119:1 goes beyond a pathway marked out by written stipulations. Ignatius (c. 35-107/112) in his epistle to Ephesians equates the “way” in Ps 119:1 with Jesus’ own declaration as the exclusive way to the Father in Jn 14:6 (Ignatius, 1989:53). Similarly, Athanasius (295-373) in his discourse against the Arians, links the expression *blessed are the undefiled in the Way* (119:1) with Mt 5:8, “Blessed are the pure in heart”, and then further links the term *way* with Jesus’ own claim in John’s Gospel to be “the way” (Athanasius, 2007a:314). The “blessedness” then is being able to understand the true nature of Christ. Ambrose links one’s relationship to God closely to his precepts. That is, Ambrose (2007:322) equates Isa 54:17 with Ps 119:57 and v. 111. In doing so he equates “God is my inheritance” with *I have become an heir of your precepts*.

Bede (c. 672/673-735)¹³⁵ takes an existential view towards the “blessed” formulas in vv. 1 and 2. Based on Jesus’ saying, “you will be blessed if you do these things” (μακάριοί, Jn 13:17), he equates human happiness with doing the heavenly commands and not just knowing them. This is summarized in the phrase “Blessed are they who search his testimonies and seek him with their whole heart” (Bede, 2007:314).

In Origen, Jerome, and Chrysostom’s reflections on Psalm 119, there is inherent in meditating on the Law a sense of needing the aid of the Holy Spirit. Origen (fl. 200-254) interpreted Ps 119:18 as the basis for understanding “when Moses is read” since the Law as the written OT scripture is shrouded in mysteries (Origen, 2007:315). For Origen this involved entreating the Holy Spirit to remove the darkness that obscures the vision of one’s heart, which has been stained by sin (Origen, 2007:315). Jerome, quoting Rom 7:14, insists that “‘the law is spiritual’, and a revelation is needed to enable us to comprehend it and, when God uncovers his face, to behold his Glory” (Jerome, 2007:315). Chrysostom (2007:316) also recognized, on the basis of Ps 119:18, that the way to approach the scriptures was meditatively with “prudent reflection in order to understand God’s word,” and to seek for wisdom more than silver or gold.

¹³⁵ Bede falls into the chronological category of Augustine and Medieval exegesis but is included here.

2.4.4 Psalm 119 in Augustine

Psalm 119 (118) was the last psalm on which Augustine expounded; he did this by sermon and dictation (Fiedrowicz, 2000:342-496). The reason for putting off this work was because of the profundity of Psalm 119 rather than its length.¹³⁶ Of importance in this investigation will be Augustine's understanding of the psalmist's meditation on the Law in Ps 119.

2.4.4.1 The enemies and suffering

Some brief comments about how Augustine viewed the enemies and the suffering of the psalmist in Ps 119 will be useful. In v. 61 Augustine (2003:415) identifies the enemies as the devil, his angels and people. However, Augustine's practical emphasis is evident. In 119:53 those who forsake the law are the large number of people joining the Church who show no signs of true faith and who are "bad people" (Augustine, 2007:322).¹³⁷ The enemies of v. 98 are those who by their own efforts strive to establish a righteousness which, though conformed to God's law, is in essence their own (Augustine, 2003:444). The enemies show their hostility towards the psalmist in v. 139 for the reason that the psalmist wanted them to love God (Augustine, 2003:477).

Augustine gives the psalmist's suffering several different interpretations. In v. 67 Augustine (2003:421) interprets the affliction which the psalmist had as "best understood of the humiliation suffered by Adam, in whom the entire human creation was corrupted at its root and was subjected to futility." The psalmist's petition "Do not utterly forsake me" is interpreted as the Church who is praying

¹³⁶ Augustine's work consists of 32 expositions. In addition to the *Enarrationes in Psalmos* (Expositions of the Psalms) he has 31 sermons or verses on the psalms. Furthermore, his *Confessions* has been described as an amplified Psalter (Fiedrowicz, 2000:13).

¹³⁷ In the context of the Donatist controversy.

this and it most likely refers to God in a sense abandoning the world because of its sins (Augustine 2003:358).

The suffering of the psalmist is also linked to martyrdom in the Church.¹³⁸ For example, in v. 107 Augustine (2003:452) interprets the psalmist's suffering for his oath (v. 106) and decision to observe the judgments of God's justice in this light. Nevertheless, there is a strong sense that God is in some way behind the suffering. In v. 71 the reason for the psalmist being humbled is in order that he would seek the Lord's justifying acts (Augustine, 2003:412). Augustine (1988:469) links Ps 119:71 with Romans 8:28, seeing that God is purposeful and that "suffering is meant to jar the calm of treacherous prosperity which prevents the soul from pursuing the haven of true and certain safety." Persecution from the enemies is also attributed to the psalmist's self-deception in vv. 169 and 170. Through parallelism Augustine (2003:493) notes that "By being given understanding he is delivered, because when he did not understand he was self-deceived."

2.4.4.2 Meditating on the law as a response to adversity

Augustine's understanding of the notions of the relational nature of the law and the concepts of justice and judgment as they pertain to Ps 119 is relevant to this investigation. In v. 119 Augustine attempts to explain how Paul's teaching on the law can be reconciled with the psalmist's understanding of the law in Ps 119. He understands the law as the Mosaic Law (Augustine, 2003:460) but also recognizes a natural law for Jew and Gentile (Augustine, 2003:462) which was a law through the bonds of original sin (Augustine, 2003:463). Furthermore, "Not only does law bear witness to the justice of God to be revealed outside the law; it also turns those who know the law into law-breakers, to such a point that the letter is death-dealing" (Augustine, 2003:463; 2 Cor 3:6). According to Augustine (2003:463) the psalmist's statement "I have loved your testimonies" is because the testimonies tell of God's grace: "The function of the law is to send us Grace." For Augustine,

¹³⁸ The influence of the liturgical calendar and the practical nature of Augustine's sermons are reflected in his interpretation of the psalmist's persecution. In particular, the liturgical year is seen in Augustine's interpretation of the Psalms at the vigils and feast days of African martyrs, although Psalm 119 (118) is not listed as one of the seventeen expositions devoted to these occasions. It is also suggested that his endeavor to enhance these festivals was to form a polemic against the Donatists' cult of martyrs (Fiedrowicz, 2000:17).

Jesus liberates the Christian from the thralldom of the law and in this way one can be without sin, that is, one can keep God's commands with the help of God (Augustine, 1987:47). However, Augustine believed that no one could be beyond praying the phrase "Forgive us our trespasses" (Mt 6:12), which is what the Pelagians opposed (Augustine, 1987:12). Augustine also understood the law to contain in it the notion of faith. Augustine (2003:385) interprets the *law* in the psalmist's request for God to be merciful according to his law (v. 29) as the law of faith as Paul uses the term in Rom 3:27.

The relational nature of the law is clear for Augustine (2003:345) since true study of God's testimonies leads one to God. In vv. 1, 2 and 3, "to search the Lord's testimonies carefully, seeking him with one's whole heart is the same thing as to be undefiled in the way and to walk in the law of the Lord" (Augustine, 2003:344). The psalmist is able to love the commandments (תִּשְׂרָרָה, v. 47) through the power of the Holy Spirit (Augustine, 2003:405). So it is God who not only is the one to be pursued, but aids in his own pursuit.¹³⁹ Furthermore, Augustine (2003:365) equates "in the way of God's testimonies" (*in via testimoniorum tuorum*) of v. 14 with Christ "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col 2:3). In v. 57, Augustine (2003:414) comments that the Lord is the portion of everyone who keeps his law, and from v. 163, the lovers of God's law are the lovers of God (Augustine, 2003:489). In his interpretation of v. 34, Augustine (2003:390) suggests that when someone studies the law and obtains its lofty precepts on which the whole of it depends, it must mean that he loves God with all his heart and his neighbour as himself (Mt 22:37-40) because "on these two commandments depend the whole law and the prophets."

For Augustine the psalmist's pursuit of the law convinces the psalmist of God's justice and judgment. Augustine defines the Latin term *iustificationes* as just actions performed with God's help, whereas he defines *iudicia* as the just sentences he pronounces (Augustine, 2003:355). For example, the term תִּשְׂרָרָה (NRSV: *statutes*) is found in the LXX 119:5 as δικαίωμα¹⁴⁰ which is taken into Latin by Augustine as *iustificationes*. So the English translation of v. 5 is "O that my ways

¹³⁹ See also Augustine's (2003:356, 472-473) comments at vv. 5 and 133.

¹⁴⁰ δικαίωμα is derived from δικαιοῶ which means "to act justly" (Louw & Nida, 1988: s.v. δικαίωμα, 33.334).

may be directed toward observing your *ways of justice!* Then I shall not be put to shame, if I look carefully into all your statutes”¹⁴¹ (Augustine, 2003:355). For Augustine (2003:363), “Ways of justice are not statements about justice but just deeds, the works performed by just people in obedience to God’s commandments. They are said to be God’s ways of justice because, although it is we who perform these actions, we can do so only by God’s gift.”

This theme of putting the commands into practice being of utmost importance is found throughout the composition at vv. 6, 12, 15, 34, 71, 135 and 145. God’s ways of justice are just actions which can also be defined as righteous deeds (Augustine, 2003:374). For Augustine the purpose of performing the works prescribed in the law is a love of justice and not fear of punishment and this is the way of God’s commands (Augustine, 2003:388). Furthermore, God’s ways of justice can be described as absent when they are known but not observed (Augustine 2003:376). From v. 26, it is only a person who acts justly who can be said to know justice (Augustine, 2003:384).

The psalmist’s understanding of judgment is closely related to his understanding of the concept of justice. In v. 121 Augustine (2003:466) comments, “he [the psalmist] takes it for granted that it can only be called judgment if it is just. If unjust it is not judgment.” Furthermore, for Augustine (2003:466-467) judgment is the mode of operation of the virtue of justice. In v. 43 Augustine sees the judgments¹⁴² of God towards the psalmist as his discipline. So the psalmist hopes in God’s judgments (MT: *חֲשָׁפֶיךָ*; LXX: κρίμα; Vul: *iudiciis*). However, God’s judgments are also those pronouncements whereby he judges the world, both now and at the end of time (Augustine, 2003:363). Yet he separates a time of mercy and judgment, with the present being the time for repentance and not judgment. Augustine (2003:455) interprets v. 113 to mean “what he [the psalmist] hates in unjust persons is not their nature, which makes them human, but the iniquity that makes them enemies of the law he loves.” In 119:52 the psalmist takes comfort in God’s justice, to which Augustine (2003:409) suggests that through judgments on

¹⁴¹ The LXX has τὰς ἐντολάς σου while the English translation of Augustine’s Latin text is “your statutes.”

¹⁴² Most English translations do not translate the MT *חֲשָׁפֶיךָ* in v. 43 with the sense of judgment.

the vessels of wrath God reveals the riches of his glory on the vessels appointed for mercy.

Finally, Augustine provides some comments on the dynamic which is occurring when the psalmist meditates on the Law as a response to persecution. He interprets the actions of the psalmist in v. 23 who meditates on the Law as a response to persecution as a means of repaying evil with good, as defined by the next verse. Augustine intimates that the Church is praying this psalm and the testimonies are the acts of martyrdom (note the LXX term μαρτύριον). In this way the martyrs are rendering good for evil (Augustine, 2003:380, 381).

In v. 78, Augustine (2003:431-432) comments that the psalmist's meditation on the Law is a fostering of love, which will never grow cold regardless of the sinfulness of those around him. One can only truly know the Law if one lives in accordance with God's ways of justice. The result is that love is born when a person finds God's ways of justice delightful (Augustine, 2003:422). Furthermore, in v. 92 Augustine (2003:440) interprets the law as the law of faith: "not an idle faith but the faith that is active through love" and "in response to such faith believers receive the grace that strengthens them in temporal troubles." Furthermore, "teach me the ways of your justice" (*iustificationes*, v. 64) is growing in the knowledge of the grace of Christ (Augustine, 2003:417). Indeed in v. 40 God's justice (LXX: τῆ δικαιοσύνη σου) is Christ (Augustine, 2003:398). God's law will be sought without end because God's law is his truth (vv. 119, 142) (Augustine, 2003:389). Further, the psalmist's meditation is in itself a keeping of the law.

2.4.5 Psalm 119 in the Reformers

2.4.5.1 Calvin

2.4.5.1.1 Sources of adversity

Calvin, in general, recognizes David as the psalmist and sees in the events of David's life a correlation with the events in the psalm (e.g., vv. 54, 176). Calvin does not always make a direct connection, but his references to David intimate that

this is the background he has in mind for the historical understanding of the psalm. Calvin does note that the sorrows of the psalmist (v. 83) must have been intense in severity and duration (Calvin, 2003a:463).

Behind the psalmist's adversity lie two different sources. The wicked despise the psalmist because of his true godliness and observance of the law (v. 141; 2003b:20). But also behind these adversaries is the work of Satan. So in v. 11 Calvin (2003a:409) suggests that the remedy to protect us from Satan is to have God's law deeply seated in our hearts. In v. 35 Satan is seen as the enemy with the battle ground being the Christian life (Calvin, 2003a:426; see also Calvin's comments on vv. 35, 43, 173). Satan never fails to place snares in the way of Christians (vv. 60, 69; Calvin 2003a:445, 453).

At other times God is seen as the adversary. For Calvin (2003a:429) in v. 39 it is possible that the reproach originates from the calumniators or from God himself. Calvin understands that God has brought adversity to the psalmist in order to bring grace. So in v. 67 we never yield obedience to God until we are compelled by his chastisements, which Calvin (2003a:451) gives in more detail as poverty, shame, illness, domestic distress or painful labours.¹⁴³ Again in v. 71 we only submit to God when he "softens our natural hardness by the strokes of a hammer" (Calvin, 2003a:454). For Calvin (v. 153; 2003b:30) God stands behind the adversity in some mysterious way: "we wrestle against temptations and seek him even when he seems purposely to drive us away." The world is governed by the secret providence of God (v. 155; Calvin, 2003b:31).

2.4.5.1.2 Meditation on the Law as a response to adversity

The Holy Spirit's aid is essential in understanding the true nature of the law. For Calvin this stood in contrast with the "papist" interpretation which suggested that "the saints, of their own free will, anticipated the grace of the Holy Spirit, and afterwards were favored with his aid" (Calvin, 2003a:408). Hence, an important theme in Calvin's exposition is that the only way for a person to understand the true nature of the law is to be completely dependent on the Spirit of God (see Calvin's comments at vv. 19, 26, 29, 33, 34, 64, 73, 102, 112, 125 and 133).

¹⁴³ Calvin gives Jer 31:18 as a cross reference.

At the beginning of his exposition Calvin defines each of the synonyms for the term law, defining each term as signifying a different aspect of the promulgation of the law of God (Calvin, 2003a:401). For Calvin (v. 18; 2003a:413-414) the content of the law which stands behind the psalmist's meditation includes not only the Ten Commandments but "the covenant of eternal salvation with all its provisions, which God has made," and since Christ is the end of the law (Colossians 2:3, Romans 10:4) the law contains sublime mysteries. In v. 103 Calvin (2003a:477) responds to what Paul says in 1 Cor 3:9, that the law strikes fear in men, by intimating that the psalmist can delight in the law because he is not thinking of the dead letter which kills those who read it, but the whole doctrine of the law, the chief part of which is the free covenant of salvation.¹⁴⁴ In other words, the psalmist is not opposing the law to the gospel. Furthermore, knowledge of the law is not just a head knowledge, but one that penetrates to the heart of a person (v. 11; Calvin 2003a:409) and issues itself in a willing obedience (v. 32; Calvin, 2003a:423) from a pure heart (v. 80; Calvin, 2003a:460). And from the coupling of vv. 153 and 154, Calvin (2003b:30) understands the keeping of the law is to show that he is a servant of God not to insist that "God pay him wage for his service" (see also Calvin's comments at v. 160).

With this in mind, we can understand how Calvin understood the benefits which the psalmist gained by his meditation on the law of God especially during times of adversity. Meditating on the law was a primary means of succoring the psalmist. That is, the word, through its insistence on the notions that God is just, that his righteousness lasts forever, and that he will protect his people, was meant to provide comfort (see Calvin's comments at vv. 28, 50, 142, 143, 150 and 165). Calvin notes that God's promise inspires us with courage in sorrow and distress (v. 107; Calvin, 2003a:481). Another function of the psalmist's meditation on the law is to encourage Christians to bear up under their struggles, even when God does not seem to be acting to relieve them (v. 87; Calvin, 2003a:466). Still another function of the psalmist's example of continuing to love the law when exposed "as prey to the ungodly" was to show by example true piety (v. 61; Calvin, 2003a:447).

¹⁴⁴ See also Calvin's similar description of the law in vv. 143 and 168.

Furthermore, since contained in the law is true righteousness, meditating on the law keeps the psalmist from relying on worldly wisdom, including perverse counsel (v. 95; Calvin, 2003a:472). For Calvin there was a danger for people to follow ungodly counsel when assailed by the wicked. The word of God was also a means to prevent the psalmist from following his own judgment (v. 24; Calvin, 2003a:418) or acting in an unjust way to repay evil for evil (v. 121; Calvin, 2003b:2). Under adversity it is difficult to persevere in integrity, and “we rather begin to howl among the wolves,” but “whoever is persuaded that God will be his deliverer and who pillars and supports his mind on the divine promises, will endeavor also to overcome evil with good” (v. 157; Calvin, 2003b:33-34).

For the psalmist (vv. 92, 95; 2003a:471,472) there was “no other experience and no other remedy for adversity, but our reposing on the word of God, and our embracing the grace and the assurance of our salvation which are offered in it.” The law was the guarantee that wickedness must and would be punished (v. 127; Calvin, 2003b:7). Furthermore, for Calvin (v. 137; 2003b:18) when we do not subscribe to the law God is robbed of his praise because righteousness is found in the law. Importantly, the psalmist understood that it is the Lord alone by his Holy Spirit who can provide the benefits of his word (vv. 116, 117; Calvin, 2003a:491).

Finally, it will be helpful to look at the notion of judgment contained in Calvin’s exposition of the law in Ps 119. Of particular importance are his references to *טִפְשָׁנָה*, which can have several different senses. Calvin attributes to the term a meaning of judicial ordinances and decisions or legal sanctions (Calvin, 2003a: 402). In general when the term is used the judgments refer to God’s righteousness, that is, the precepts of the law and the promises (see Calvin’s introductory comments to vv. 52, 75). But at times the judgments are “the examples by which God has made himself known as the righteous judge of the world” and are for the strengthening of our faith, as in the case of v. 52 (Calvin 2003a:438), or to stir us up to repentance (v. 75; Calvin 2003a:456). These judgments have flowed from age to age.

God’s commandments, by which he executes judgment on the wicked and reprobate, are meant as a warning for the righteous not to lapse into sin and that God will ultimately judge the wicked (v. 21; Calvin, 2003a:415-416). When the

psalmist seeks for vengeance, it is not according to the “corrupt affections of the flesh,” but it is suitable to God (v. 84; Calvin, 2003a:464-465). When God does execute judgment his vengeance is not shown all at once, but God compensates the slowness with severity (v. 119; Calvin, 2003a:493). God’s judgments lead the psalmist to love the doctrine of the law more because they show that God governs the world in power. Conversely, when wickedness is allowed to continue for long periods of time a love for God’s word languishes (v. 119; Calvin, 2003a:494). Once again, God’s judgments instruct us and strike such terror that will lead us to true repentance (v. 120; Calvin, 2003a:494). The scope of God’s judgments is so universal that in v. 91 the psalmist, by using the term “judgments”, is making an allusion to the law, suggesting that even the elements obey the secret command of God (Calvin, 2003a:470).

2.4.5.2 Martin Luther

Luther’s commentary on Psalm 119 must be kept in the context of his yet not completely developed theological thought and the crises occurring in his life.¹⁴⁵ As was mentioned in the Introduction, Luther considered his works on the Psalms inadequate, and he was still applying the four categories of medieval exegesis to his commentary, which makes a consistent interpretation slightly difficult to ascertain.¹⁴⁶ An example of the variety of applications using this methodology can be seen in his commentary to v. 17 (Luther, 1976:422-426).¹⁴⁷

His break with the traditional interpretation of Ps 119 can be seen in his introductory statement, “I have not seen this psalm expounded by anyone in the prophetic sense” (Luther, 1976:414). For Luther this “prophetic sense” is the literal sense, which is the key for interpreting the psalm. In essence, “the whole psalm is nothing but a petition that the spiritual law be revealed and the letter be

¹⁴⁵ Luther’s (1956:470, 480, 490) comments on v. 79, vv. 98-100, and v. 109 show that he is still firmly a supporter of the Roman Church at this point.

¹⁴⁶ Luther’s overall theme of seeing Ps 119 as spiritually fulfilled in the Gospel also leads him to the conclusion that individual verses do not depend on each other (see his comments on v. 46).

¹⁴⁷ Note Luther’s (1956:433) comments, “But every Scripture passage is of infinite understanding.”

removed, that the spirit be brought forth and the veil taken away and the face appear, that Christ come and Moses pass away” (Luther, 1976:422).

Judgments in general are the “words of reproof and of the cross of Christ, in which is contained what evils of guilt must be avoided for the purpose of preserving righteousness and which evils of punishment must be borne for the sake of righteousness and Christ” (Luther, 1956:421). So, for Luther (1976:444, 486, 513, 524) there is a pietistic understanding of judgments as being good for the soul. When God’s judgments are avoided then he [God] flees, but when it is received he draws near (Luther, 1956:514). But Luther (1956:454) is willing to admit that judgments can mean both punishment and salvation and refers to a “gloss” which defines judgments as a seizure of the righteous and the destruction of the ungodly. Testimonies are spiritually understood as referring “to nothing but only the Christ who was to come” (Luther, 1956:421).

Luther interprets those who are cursed in v. 21 as the proud hypocrites whom God does not convert, but only reproves because “they are unteachable and incorrigible and of their own turn away from His commandments, therefore they are cursed” (Luther, 1956:429). In interpreting v. 23, which speaks of princes speaking against the psalmist, Luther (1956:429) notes that all who present the truth in humility will be the object of reproach by those who are wise in their own eyes. Commenting on v. 40, the enemies are the Jews, heretics and the proud, of which he suggests the readers should make their own tropological application against the “suggestions, snares, and impulses of the flesh, the world, and the devil” because “these are truly the ones which seek to kill your faith in you and thereby you also” (Luther, 1956:447). But in contrast in v. 51 the proud can be either the iniquity of one’s own righteousness or the iniquitous persecution of the Church (Luther, 1956:453). When commenting on v. 60 and referring to Job 7:18, Luther (1956:456) suggests that for a “beginner” an adversary is raised up so that the Lord may test him. The affliction and humbling of the psalmist leads to his arrival at the true knowledge of the law (Luther, 1956:464).

Luther (1956:473, 508) does make the observation that those who persecute the truth also persecute its devotees because of it. In commenting on v. 91 Luther (1956:478) suggests that all things serve Christ and that he uses evil for “the

increase, strengthening, and firmness of His church. For to the saints they work together for good, as is well known.” Furthermore, the Word of God is the sole comfort in trials because it comforts, exhorts, stimulates and strengthens through the hope of things to come (Luther, 1956:478, 516). Luther (1956:517, 529) recognizes that the ungodly will be punished in the future judgment.

2.4.6 Comparison with the exegetical findings of Psalm 119

The conclusion in the exegesis of Psalm 119 was that in the face of suffering, the psalmist’s meditation on the Law goes beyond mere expressions of steadfastness or bargaining. Affliction was seen as the means of motivating the psalmist to meditate on the Torah. Furthermore, seeking after Yahweh with one’s whole heart was seen as the hermeneutical key to Psalm 119 and synonymous to meditating on the Law. Such meditation on the Law ensured Yahweh’s presence, with which injustice cannot coexist. It was further determined that the psalmist loves the decrees of Yahweh because innate in them is disclosed a certainty that Yahweh will judge the wicked.

The findings in the historical survey for Psalm 119 are helpful in understanding, in greater detail, the dynamics of the adversity of the psalmist meditating on the Law and in clarifying his response. To begin with, the biblical data from the post-exilic period seems to support the proposition (contra form criticism) that more than one enemy is portrayed in Ps 119.¹⁴⁸ The post-exilic period also allows one to see the close and important relationship which existed between the Law and the re-establishment of the temple, Yahweh’s dwelling place.

In the survey, the adversary which the psalmist incurs is considered in a more holistic way. Of course the traditional enemies are recognized and figural interpretations given. However, in general, Augustine identified the enemy as being the devil, demons and people. Calvin also believed that behind the psalmist’s adversaries is Satan.¹⁴⁹ The effect is to remove the focus from the immediate adversity of the psalmist and to see it from a cosmic perspective.

¹⁴⁸ Most commentators up until the nineteenth century understood Ps 119 as related to David’s life in some way. The events in David’s life certainly could be seen as reflected in the range of experiences of the psalmist and the adversity of the different enemies represented in Ps 119: periods of great distress and adversaries who are kings and princes as well as those close to him.

¹⁴⁹ Based on Eph 5:12.

Furthermore, the psalmist is despised because the adversaries despise the Law. Cyprian and Augustine bring out this dynamic of hostility through the example of the martyrs who repay the evil of their persecutors with the good of following the testimonies. Athanasius and Ignatius tie the term *way* to Christ's own claim to be the *Way*. In doing so there is a sense that a defining characteristic of the enemies is their hatred for God. In other words, there seem to be no motivating factors for the adversity besides a hatred of the "Way" as the enemies see it reflected in the psalmist's life and as it is embodied in the Torah. Calvin as well notes the connection between the psalmist's suffering and his observing God's statutes.

In my exegesis the psalmist's suffering was seen as purposeful (on the basis of vv. 67, 71 and 75) and his affliction has been the means of his following the law. Chrysostom, Hillary, Ambrose, Augustine and Calvin, despite their differing hermeneutical methods, also see the suffering of the psalmist as purposeful in some way. Perhaps this is no more clearly seen than in the use of the *blessed* formula as a key which, for many of the early church commentators, connects Psalm 119 to Matthew 5. Moreover, Augustine and Calvin both link the cause of some of the adversity of the psalmist to God. Augustine saw God as the source of some of the psalmist's distress through judgment, but this judgment was discipline. From the psalmist's life, Calvin understands that God can inflict poverty, shame, illness, distress and hardships, which can drive Christians away in their time of need. This infliction, however, is given to the psalmist in order to bring grace, and so is purposeful. Calvin understands God as adversary in the context of God's secret providence.

Important also is the relational dimension attributed to the law. It would be unfounded to insist that the detailed meaning given to the law in the NT is found in the psalmist's exposition on the Law in Psalm 119. However, it seems that the psalmist's focus on his relationship to the Law is akin to the emphasis that Jesus himself made and which Paul clarified through his explanation of the relationship between the promise given to Abraham and the giving of the Law. Augustine's own conclusion was that vv. 1 to 3, searching the Lord's testimonies and seeking him with one's whole heart, was the same thing as being undefiled in the way and to walk in the law of the Lord. So the study of the Law guarantees Yahweh's presence because study of God's testimonies leads one to God. The irony is that

this is a spiritual act dependent on God. Furthermore, meditating on the Law is not just knowledge about the Law, but involves an actualization. Indeed, meditation on the Law is dependent on the love of God and leads to the love of God and the love of one's neighbour (so Augustine). Ps 119:165 and 1 Jn 2:10 link the notion of love for one's brother and love for the Law with a perfect life (i.e., a life free of σκάνδαλον and מְכַשׂוֹל). The latter two notions are captured positively in Ps 119:2 as those who seek Yahweh with their whole hearts. Meditation on the Law contains within it ethical implications which are relational. This too, adds insight into the psalmist's meditation on the Law in response to evil. If Bede, Chrysostom, Augustine and Calvin are correct, then it would be more accurate to say the enemies despise the psalmist for the way he lives.

Important also is what is occurring when the psalmist is meditating on the Law. The post-exilic community saw the inextricable connection between the Law and the presence of Yahweh. The Law authenticates the cult and reinforces the notion of the temple as Yahweh's dwelling place for the restored community. The NT is sparse on direct links to Ps 119, but seems to equate the Law of the psalmist with the gospel (so Luther), both being trustworthy means in which God has revealed himself. Augustine notes that God's Law will be sought because it is truth. Origen, Jerome, Chrysostom, Augustine and Calvin all emphasize the need of the Holy Spirit in order to understand the true nature of the Law. Hence, the meditation on the Law is a spiritual act. But as was mentioned above, for Bede, Chrysostom, Augustine and Calvin, true knowledge of the Law entailed actualization of the law.

Meditating on the Law is also a means of repaying evil with good. The Law is righteous and so meditating on the Law prevents the psalmist from following bad counsel, even his own. As Calvin (v. 157; 2003b:33-34) noted, there is a tendency for Christians when they encounter suffering to want to "howl among the wolves." But there are also many forms of comfort the psalmist sees in the Law. Deliverance from his enemies could cause the psalmist to delight (v. 92). Another of these comforts is the knowledge that God is just and so are his judgments (so Calvin). The parallel with the book of Revelation suggests that God's revelation in the Law as righteous is on par with his revelation in history as judge. Righteousness is part of his character. So, Yahweh's self-disclosure in his Law as well as in history reflects his righteousness and is inseparable from his character.

Augustine provides detailed comment on this aspect of Yahweh's self-revelation through his use of the terms *iustificationes* (just actions performed with God's help) and *iudicia* (just sentences God pronounces).¹⁵⁰ The ways of justice are not statements about justice in the Law but just deeds from which love is born. And so for Augustine meditating on the Law is a form of repaying evil with good.¹⁵¹ Central to Augustine's hermeneutic is the theme of love, which was also suggested by the parallel between Ps 119 and 1 John. For Augustine the justice in the Law is Christ.

Furthermore, the judgment of God which is revealed in the Law is just because judgment is only judgment if it is just. Indeed, judgment is the mode of operation of the virtue of justice. As Augustine notes, the issuing of God's justice gives comfort because the judgment on the vessels of God's wrath reveals the riches of his glory to his people. Calvin also insists that the judgments in the Law act as a warning to the righteous. God's judgments also show that God rules the world in power. Conversely, when the Law is not subscribed to God is robbed of his praise. According to Calvin, even the elements obey the secret commands of God.

In Romans 2:1 Paul argues that "sin is humanity's ambition to put itself in the place of God and so be its own lord. This is what judges do when they assume the right to sit in judgment of their fellow creatures" (Ladd, 1993:548). Perhaps the psalmist's emphasis on the Law rather than on cursing his enemies recognizes this innate concept of how the Law can be used wrongly. "He that forbade revenge now commands long-suffering; not as if just revenge were an unrighteous thing, but because long-suffering is more excellent" (Constitutions of the Holy Apostles, 1989:460). From the psalmist's perspective in Psalm 119, the Law was a means of relationship with Yahweh that guaranteed Yahweh's presence.

¹⁵⁰ Augustine's use of the LXX as his basic text and his use of Latin to comment on that text means that the conclusions he comes to do not always correspond to straightforward interpretations of the MT. However, a thorough treatment here is beyond the constraints of this investigation.

¹⁵¹ Augustine's understanding of justice will be further commented on in Chapter 3.

2.5 Exegesis of Psalm 129¹⁵²

1. A song of Ascents
Greatly¹⁵³ they have oppressed¹⁵⁴ me from my youth.
Let Israel now say,
2. Greatly they have oppressed me from my youth,
yet they have not prevailed against me.
3. The plowers¹⁵⁵ plowed¹⁵⁶ on my back;
They made their furrows¹⁵⁷ long.
4. The LORD is righteous.¹⁵⁸ He has cut¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² The standard text is the NRSV with any changes being indicated. Line division is according to MT accentuation.

¹⁵³ Translated as an adverb of intensity (BDB, 1979:912; s.v. רַב, 1g. *much, exceedingly*) instead of an adverb of frequency (NRSV, *often*) because צָרָר better describes a state here (HOLL, 1997:311; s.v. צָרָר, *be hostile toward, be in a state of conflict*) and the image in v. 3 is severe. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:406) suggests an adverbial usage entailing the notion of very long and very hard.

¹⁵⁴ *Oppress* instead of NRSV *attack*. In Num 10:9 the NRSV translates הַצָּרָר as *the adversary who oppresses you*. The term *attack* in English is usually associated with warfare (note the use of *πολεμέω, to wage war* in the LXX), but if we keep the agricultural metaphors of the MT, then *oppress* has a less limiting connotation. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:418) points out that vv. 1-4 in the MT text give a metaphor of distress, whereas the LXX gives an image of war.

¹⁵⁵ The LXX has οἱ ἁμαρτωλοὶ (הַרְשָׁעִים) *sinners* instead of הַרְשָׁעִים *plowers*. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:418) suggests that this was done because in an urban-cultural context the agricultural imagery was “foreign and perhaps even incomprehensible.” Yet, if this were the case, one wonders why the metaphor of withering grass in vv. 6-8 was not also changed. 11Ps^a contains the reading רִשְׁעִים הַרְשָׁעִים indicating a relatively early textual witness to רִשְׁעִים. However, the fact that Ugaritic bears witness to the term הַרְשָׁעִים seems to support Dahood’s (1970:231) suggestion that the metaphor of the plowmen had become blurred by the time of the LXX and 11Ps^a, and the MT should be favored.

¹⁵⁶ The LXX has the same underlying Hebrew verb הָרָשָׁה as the MT, but offers a different lexical meaning for the word, *practicing their skill* (NETS, 2007:612), *have forged/hammered/engraved* (Zenger [Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:418]). Ironically the subject (הַרְשָׁעִים) of the verb in 6 of its 8 occurrences in the MT is pointed differently and refers to an *artisan* or *craftsman*, which would be the natural subject for the LXX translation of הָרָשָׁה. This might further suggest that the translators of the LXX did not know the meaning of הַרְשָׁעִים *plowmen* or used a text which was emended to הַרְשָׁעִים. On the basis of the LXX having the agricultural metaphor in vv. 6-7, the MT should be favored because of its consistency throughout.

¹⁵⁷ LXX has τὴν ἀνομίαν αὐτῶν (עוֹנוֹתָם) which is a derivative of עוֹן *guilt* or *sin*. The MT use of מַצְעִנָּה, especially the *qere* reading, could be a word play on עָנִי *poor, afflicted, humble*. This might be supported by the Syriac, which has the underlying עֲנוּהָ, translated as *submission* by Allen (2002:246).

¹⁵⁸ There is some debate as to how the syntax in this phrase works. The LXX, κύριος δίκαιος, and Kraus (1989:462) have an adjectival phrase *righteous Lord*, whereas Gunkel (1926:558) has an appositional relationship, *Yahweh the faithful*. The Massorettes apparently read it as a noun clause.

- the cords¹⁶⁰ of the wicked.
5. May they be put to shame and turned¹⁶¹ backward
all who hate Zion.
 6. Let them be like the grass on the housetops
that withers before it grows up,¹⁶²
 7. with which reapers do not fill their hands
or binders of sheaves their arms,
 8. while those who pass by do not say,
“The blessings of the Lord be upon you!
We bless you in the name of the LORD!”¹⁶³

2.5.1 Statement of investigation

Psalm 129 seems to be an unlikely candidate for an investigation into understanding more clearly the imprecatory psalms and God’s just dealing with his people. Scholars have not come to a consensus regarding the classification of this psalm (see

¹⁵⁹ Dahood (1970:231) translates the verb הִצִּיר as a precative perfect because of the jussives that follow in vv. 5 and 6. He states that if a historical perfect is given, then the next verse does not make sense. Consequently Dahood sees the prayer beginning in v. 4 and not v. 5. Allen, on the other hand, believes that the verbs in vv. 5-8a are statements of confidence based upon comparison with Ps 6:11 and 97:11. However, the choice of *piel* perfect may reflect the poet’s desire to portray a state achieved (IBHS, 1990:405, Par 24.3d), which would fit the context here. See “The Enemies and Translation of the Verbs in vv. 4-9” below.

¹⁶⁰ The LXX has $\alpha\nu\chi\acute{\epsilon}\nu\alpha\varsigma$, *necks* but in Ps 2:3 the LXX translators translate the word תַּבּוֹת as $\zeta\upsilon\gamma\acute{o}\nu$, *yoke* (Zenger [Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:418]). The implication is that the translators of the LXX either had a different text or altered the word to fit its warfare imagery.

¹⁶¹ Translated and understood as a *hendiadys* as suggested by Dahood (1970:129). However, also fruitful might be translating the *waw* as an *epexegetical waw* (IBHS, 1990:652, Par. 1.6.2c), which would render a consecutive jussive of explanation (e.g. Gen 28:3).

¹⁶² The LXX takes הִצִּיר as the object of the verb הִשְׁלֵךְ and renders *before one plucks it up* (Brenton, 1990:777); or Pietersma in a passive equivalent *before it was pulled out* (NETS, 2007:612). This common transitive meaning for הִשְׁלֵךְ is to *draw out* a sword or *draw off* a shoe (BDB, 1979:1025, s.v. הִשְׁלֵךְ). However, most English translations, including the NRSV, translate the verb as an intransitive. Delitzsch (1975c:300) translates with הִצִּיר as the subject of הִשְׁלֵךְ , giving an intransitive signification meaning *to put itself forth*. Driver (1930:277) proposes that the term הִשְׁלֵךְ means to *produce a stalk*, on the basis of an Akkadian cognate and the late Hebrew term הִשְׁלֵךְ . On the basis of meter Gunkel (1926:560), Kraus (1989:460) and Weiser (1962:770) amend the text to $\text{הַיָּבֵשׁ הַמִּזְרָחִי הַיָּבֵשׁ}$ *which the east wind scorches* and delete הַיָּבֵשׁ . This should be rejected on the grounds that הַיָּבֵשׁ is attested to collocation with הִצִּיר (occurs 6x within 6 words; 3x times הַיָּבֵשׁ immediately precedes, Isa 15:6; 40:7; 40:8) and more importantly the *inclusio* between הַיָּבֵשׁ (v. 5) and הַיָּבֵשׁ (v. 6) would be affected (so Dahood, 1970:233).

¹⁶³ Allen (2002:250) takes v. 8b as a benediction on the congregation by a priestly group, but see the discussion in the section “Structure and Form” which suggests it is an integral part of the poem.

below), which is a reflection of some of the challenges in understanding the Hebrew text. Luc (1999:410) noted the meaning intended behind the imprecations¹⁶⁴ in vv. 5-8 as indicating shame and death, but the agricultural metaphor seems to dampen their force. If Luc's suggestion is correct, should a psalm that wishes for the shame and death of the enemies through agricultural images be any less problematic to pray? But Psalm 129 is also significant for our study because it is a psalm portraying adversity in some form throughout its entirety. The whole perspective in one sense is the demise of the enemies' past, present and future without any mitigating factors. Furthermore, understanding the agricultural metaphor in the form of imprecation can contribute to understanding the conceptual world of justice of the people who used this psalm.

2.5.2 Structure and form

The structure of Psalm 129 is generally divided into two strophes, vv. 1-4 and vv. 5-8. Gunkel (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:44-45, 82) classified this psalm as a mixed genre, seeing vv. 1-4 as a communal thanksgiving and vv. 5-8 as a communal complaint. Westermann (1981:81) categorizes it as a declarative psalm of praise of the people, whereas Kraus (1989:461) sees it as a *community prayer song* on the basis of viewing vv. 5-8 as confident assertion. One's translation of the verbs in vv. 4-8 is crucial in determining the structure and form of this psalm, as Allen (2002:247) points out. Dahood (1970:230-233) translates the *piel* perfect in v. 4 as a precative, reasoning that the subsequent verbs in vv. 5-7 are jussive and the wishes against the enemy do not make any sense if the translation is in the past, *he has cut the cords of the wicked*. Accordingly he structures the psalm with two different strophe divisions, vv. 1-3 (oppression and preservation) and vv. 4-8 (directed against the enemies), reinforcing this division by noting the *inclusio* in vv. 4 and 8 formed by יהוה. This structure allows him to classify the psalm as a communal lament.

The placement of the metaphors and the evoking verbal expressions may provide another way of understanding the structure of the poem.

¹⁶⁴ For Luc (1999), *prophetic judgement speeches*.

vv. 1- 2	The summons to praise יִאֲמְרוּ־נָא with the repetition of content צַרְר (2x)	v. 8	Negative invocation of blessing וְלֹא־אֲמָרוּ with the repetition of בִּרְךְ (2x)
v. 3	Agricultural metaphor of oppression	vv. 6-7	Agricultural metaphor of imprecation
v. 4	The Lord cuts the chords of the רְשָׁעִים	v. 5	Imprecation against the שׂוֹנְאֵי צִיּוֹן

Table 3. A proposed structure of Psalm 129 based on the chiastic arrangement of similar content.

The chiastic structure of similar content seems to support two strophes. The two summonses to praise in vv. 1-2 are balanced by the two invocations to blessings, which suggest that both blessing formulas in v. 8 are integral to the poem and that 8c is not just a late addition.¹⁶⁵ Scholars tend to separate v. 8c on the basis of voice (van der Wall, 1988:364-365; Allen 2002:248) and assign it to a function as a priestly blessing for the congregation. In addition, the two agricultural metaphors mirror each other, which may implicitly lend support to the superiority of maintaining the agricultural metaphor in the first strophe of the MT over the slightly altered LXX (see above). Finally, rather than one distinct center, vv. 4 and 5 parallel each other. This overall parallel structure, however, does differ in the total number of stichs and stresses included in each strophe, as do all of the proposals listed above.¹⁶⁶

2.5.3 The enemies and the translation of the verbs in verses 4-7

Identification of the enemies is closely tied in to how one translates the verbs in verses 4-6. The following table indicates the possibilities.

¹⁶⁵ A stichometric and stress analysis of v. 8 suggests a similar conclusion (see Botha, 2002:1403).

¹⁶⁶ This is made difficult to determine because scholars do not always count the same number of stresses in each stich. For example, Botha (2002:1402) has v. 5b as containing three stresses, whereas Allen (2002:246) counts only 2 stresses.

		Dahood	Weiser, Anderson	Allen, Kraus, Gunkel	Perowne, Delitzsch
v. 4	קִצֹץ	precative	perfect	perfect	perfect
vv. 5-6	יִבְשׁוּ (5) וְיִסְגּוּ (6) יִהְיוּ	jussives	jussives	confident assertions	jussives
Enemies		foreign	1-4 foreign 5-8 internal	foreign	foreign

Table 4. Translation of the verbs in verses 4-6 and the identification of the enemies

Dahood (1970:231) proposed that translating the verbs as wishes in vv. 5-6 does not make sense if one translates קִצֹץ the *piel* perfect in v. 4 as a perfect tense. However, his assumption is that the enemies of v. 4 are the same enemies the community is praying against in vv. 5-8. Allen (2002:247-248), Kraus (1989:461) and Anderson (1972:871-872) translate the verbs in vv. 5-6 as statements of confidence rather than as wishes, allowing קִצֹץ in v. 4 to be translated as a perfect tense. In this case the first strophe points to Israel's past and the second strophe asserts with confidence the inevitable demise which is to come to all of Israel's enemies. Allen's basis is that the only other occurrence in the Psalter of *all* (כָּל) enemies being put to shame is found in Ps 6:11, which is an assertion of confidence. However, Botha (2002:1404) rightly queries whether both instances must serve the same function. In contrast, grounds for translating the verbs in vv. 5-6 as jussives comes from the volitional tone of Psalm 129, which is created by the *inclusio* between vv. 1, 2 and 8. Verse 1 begins with יֹאמְרוּ־נָא,¹⁶⁷ a summons, *Let Israel say*. The blessing formulas at the end (v. 8) also have a volitional tone, *not say ... we bless you in the name of the Lord*. The overall mood is that of a petition and, as Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:407) notes, one would expect jussives in a petitionary prayer of Israel. The traditional way¹⁶⁸ of viewing these verbs as jussives is well justified.

Weiser (1962:771; so Anderson, 1972:873) suggests that the enemies are members of the covenant community, on the basis that a different description (vv. 5-8) would

¹⁶⁷ Note the particle.

¹⁶⁸ Most English translations translate them as such (ESV, NIV, NKJ, NLT, NRSV, KJV, etc.).

be expected for Gentiles and 8c would seem harmless applied to a foreign foe.¹⁶⁹ But the use of v. 5a could be expected with foreign foes. First, the phrase **יִבְשׁוּ וַיִּסְגּוּ אֶתְחֹרֶר** has a military connotation to it. The same phrase in different word order occurs in Isa 42:17, **וַיִּסְגּוּ אֶתְחֹרֶר יִבְשׁוּ**, where it is used to depict a military judgment¹⁷⁰ on those who trusted in idols, and is clearly implying the devastating effects of the exile.¹⁷¹ But the idea of turning back can also be applied to the hostile nations (Ps 9:3 ff.). The phrase depicts the complete defeat and shame of those to whom the phrase refers. In the case of this psalm the foes are identified as **שׂוֹנְאֵי צִיּוֹן**, *those who hate Zion*.¹⁷² Botha (2002:1406) notes that *love* and *hate* are terms of the covenant and *those who hate Zion* (Yahweh) could not be members of the same covenant. Furthermore, the description for the enemies as *all* (**כֻּלָּם**) *those who hate Zion* carries an eschatological nuance of the foreign enemies, which is further connected through the military nuance of 5a and the mention of *Zion*, which finds similarity with the Royal Psalms 2 (v. 6) and 110 (v. 2). This military notion may have influenced the translators of the LXX.

Further reasons for Weiser's internal identification of the enemies comes from what he believes is the inefficacy v. 8b would have if applied to a foreign foe. However, the blessing formulas, at least 8b, seem to be part of an expansion of the metaphor of the withering grass (so Perowne, 1966:401). Therefore its function within the metaphor should be the primary means of understanding it. The identification of the enemies in vv. 5-8 as foreign enemies and the assertion that the verbs in vv. 5-7 are more naturally translated as jussives does not limit the translation of **קִצְצוּ** to a traditional perfective sense. However, there are grounds to encourage translating it as such. First, Dahood's (1970:231) grounds for translating it as a precative were

¹⁶⁹ Van der Wall (1988:364-367) also proposes, on the basis of how the enemies are linguistically portrayed differently in vv. 4-8b with vv. 1-3 and the phrase **שׂוֹנְאֵי יְהוָה** (2 Ch 19:2), that the enemies are from within. He sees vv. 4-8b as forming a subdivision of the main division vv. 1-8b. The argument that the metaphors seem awkward if applied to the same enemy – in v. 3 the enemies are merciless plowmen, whereas in vv. 6-7 they are those who wither away – is not convincing. First, the enemies are separated chronologically, and secondly the metaphors serve a different purpose.

¹⁷⁰ **יְהוָה** is a soldier (v. 13); the devastating effects of the exile are those of war victims (v22). So he (Yahweh) poured upon him (Jacob) the heat of his anger and the fury of war (v. 25).

¹⁷¹ A similar phrase in Ps 44:11, **תְּנִיבֵנוּ אֶתְחֹרֶר מִצָּר**, *you made us turn back from our foes*, has the connotation of military defeat being associated with the predicament of the exile.

¹⁷² Identifying the enemies is made more difficult because the phrase **שׂוֹנְאֵי צִיּוֹן** is a *hapax legomenon*.

based on the premise that the enemies in v. 4 are the same as the enemies in v. 5. Nevertheless, the structure of the poem places v. 4 in the first strophe and in terms of ideas seems more naturally identified with vv. 1-3. It would seem more consistent to translate the term קָצַרְתָּ in the same tense as the verbs in v. 3 (perfect 2x) since they all form part of the first strophe and relate to a similar plowing metaphor. In this case Yahweh's cutting the cords of the wicked would have occurred in the past. Lastly, the *piel* perfective sense (see above) of an achieved state fits well with the indications in the text of the national enemies' failure to succeed (vv. 2c, 4a). The psalm structure more clearly reflects foreign enemies viewed from two perspectives, those who were unable to subdue Israel in the past because of Yahweh's intervention and those which are a present or future threat to Zion.

2.5.4 Perceived suffering

In the first part of the psalm the worshippers recall a long and painful history. The repetition in vv. 1 and 2 speaks of the intensity of this oppression (Anderson, 1972:872). *Youth* (נְוָרִים) is used here as a metaphor which refers to the early stages of the nation (cf. Hos 2:15; Jer 2:2), to the time of the Exodus and wilderness wanderings. The emphasis, however, is not on the time of *youth*, but *from* the time of youth (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:411). Through the Egyptians, Philistines, Arameans, Assyrians and Babylonians Israel had experienced successive forms of oppression. As Kraus (1989:462) notes, "The history of Israel is one single passion narrative." Yet the suffering has not been absolute. It has been רַבָּת both long and severe, but the enemies have not been able to annihilate the nation.

In the context of this limitation of the suffering the psalm moves into describing its severity through the metaphor of the plowmen. Plowing is elsewhere used as a metaphor of military judgment issued by Yahweh as a result of the injustice of the rulers of Zion (Mic 3:12; Jer 26:18). The plowmen here $\text{הַאֲרִיכוּ לְמַעַנְוֹתֵם}$ *make long* their furrows. The image is one of excessive harshness. There has been no part of the field left untouched. Anderson (1972:872) suggests that the plowmen are an allusion to the use of taskmasters' whips which would leave welts or weals resembling furrows.

After a declaration that Yahweh is righteous, the psalm continues in its metaphor with the speaker representing the ploughed field (so Allen, 2002:249). Dahood (1970:232) suggests that, if the metaphor continues, the plowmen's harnesses are broken so they can no longer continue to plow, but if Israel becomes the ox, then the yoke represents servitude. However, it is probably best not to make too linear a comparison of the metaphor and so reduce the effect of the images. Israel can remain the field plowed by its enemies without losing the symbolism of the yoke. The yoke still connotes subjugation and exploitation by foreign rulers. It is difficult to know for certain if the *cutting of the cords* refers specifically to restoration from the exile. But the image is that of liberation (Kraus, 1989:462), and the restoration would best fit such an image. Weiser (1962:771) suggests that the psalm does not refer to a specific event because it was composed in the cult. Nevertheless, the time frame given in vv. 1-4 seems to be a panoramic history of the nation's suffering. Furthermore, the editing of Book V, I have argued, seems to support a post-exilic framework. The allusions would seem to cover the time from youth to the time of cutting of the cords, which would seem to be the restoration.¹⁷³

In v. 5 the psalm changes focus from the external enemies who have subjugated and exploited the Israelites in the past to the enemies of the present and future. As the translators of the LXX noticed, the psalm supports a militaristic theme, something which they made explicit in their translation of vv. 1-4. This militaristic theme continues and is implicitly found in the imprecatory metaphor of vv. 5-8 with an eschatological nuance (see below "Meaning"). Furthermore, the hostility of אֲנִי־שׂוֹנְאֵי צִיּוֹן, those who hate Zion, is given a theological emphasis because the term Zion entails in its meaning an identification with הַהֵר. The enemies despise the Israelites because they despise all that Zion stands for.

2.5.5 Meaning of the response

According to the observations above, the psalm can tentatively be classified as a special form of communal lament or complaint, with vv. 1-4 acting in a double function as recounting the suffering and Yahweh's deliverance in the past, but also

¹⁷³ This statement is related to the dating of the psalm and the editing of Book V, the latter of which I have discussed in the introduction.

as a foundation for understanding the imprecations in vv. 5-8.¹⁷⁴ The congregation offers a petitionary prayer through the personified singular voice in the psalm against all their enemies. How the community understood the agency of the response to the adversity of the enemies depends to a large degree on how one interprets the verbs in vv. 5-8. If one interprets vv. 5-8 as statements of confidence then the agency of the working out of the curses remains unclear. The symbol of the **הַצִּיר** on the rooftop which **שָׁבַר** *withers* representing the enemies' demise could be the result of Yahweh's active judgment or the natural outworking of the self-demise of the **שָׁבַר אֶתְּצִירָיו**.¹⁷⁵ However if vv. 5-8 are taken as imprecations expressing the speaker's volition, then the demise of the enemy is more naturally identified as occurring through the agency of Yahweh's active judgment. In Psalm 129 that judgment derives its meaning from the context of Yahweh's past dealings with Israel and the imprecations themselves.

The metaphor of the withering grass can be considered as consisting of vv. 5-8.¹⁷⁶ The image of grass withering on a mud-packed roof was readily observable. In the sweltering heat of the Middle East, the shallow-rooted grass was bound to wither. But the metaphor continues, and the latter part in v. 7 is also significant in contributing to its meaning. Here, we find the relative **שֶׁ** and a switch in verb stems (*piel-qal-piel*) indicating a distinction from the jussives of vv. 5-6, which seems to support its function as an explanation of the preceding wish. The grass has withered and it is dead, but now the focus becomes the lack of grass for the reapers to gather. The concept of harvesters reaping on a roof is a strange one since the normal place of harvesting would have been in cultivated fields. Consequently, the metaphor is

¹⁷⁴ I thank Dr. Kathleen Rochester for suggesting another way of seeing the frustration of the enemies in not being able to overcome the Israelites. She suggests that in the first metaphor the enemies are the ones who plow and expect to reap. In the second metaphor the enemies are like the grass that is withered. But in both the plowman/reaper is bitterly disappointed by a loss of blessing or fruitfulness in his labor, which is reinforced by v. 8. The only weakness with this way of seeing the metaphors is that it confuses the focus on the enemies. The enemies are the plowmen in the first metaphor and the grass in the second, but it is the reaper in the second metaphor who is bitterly disappointed. According to the way I am reading the metaphors, the reapers in the second metaphor only play a supporting role to indicate the complete destruction of the wicked represented as the grass.

¹⁷⁵ Delitzsch's (1975c:300) translation of **הַצִּיר** as the subject of **שָׁבַר** with an intransitive signification meaning *to put itself forth* leads him to conclude that "their [enemies of Israel] life closes with sure destruction, the germ of which they (without any need of rooting out) carry within themselves."

¹⁷⁶ In Perowne's (1966:401) words, "These two verses [7-8] are a poetic expansion of the figure, an imaginative excursus."

not implying that harvesting occurs on the roof, but rather by degree of comparison, indicating the utter uselessness of withered grass on the roof.¹⁷⁷ It is completely destroyed, nothing is left to harvest. Perhaps this uselessness of the withered grass signifies an essential characteristic of the wicked as well (Anderson, 1972:872).

The image of withering grass is associated with that of divine judgment with all its nuances. Withering grass can represent the godless (Job 8:12) or the wicked (Ps 37:2). In Ps 37:2 the metaphor functions as a warning to the Israelites not to follow the wicked. It can also be used to signify the transitoriness of human life (Ps 103), but even in this regard the transitory nature of life can be conceived of as a category of God's wrath (Ps 90:5). Grass on the rooftop which is *הַפֶּתַח* *blighted* symbolizes the devastating effects on the victims of military invasion (2 Kgs 19:26; Isa 37:27).¹⁷⁸ Botha (2002:1410) suggests on the basis of these two verses that the image of the withering grass also has the connotation of shame. The community prays that the enemies not only fail in their attack on Zion, but that the defeat of the enemies will be such that they experience shame.

Verse 8, as a negative blessing formula, seems to continue the curse with its volitional tone. As Perowne (1966:401) noted, v. 8 functions as poetic expansion of the metaphor. Therefore, Delitzsch's (1975c:300) comment that the blessing formulas were not withheld from the heathen misses the point. The grass on the roof has died. There has been nothing for the harvesters. Now, a negative form of blessing, and hence a curse, will ensure that the process is not temporary. What we have is a threefold development of the metaphor: the utter devastation of the grass in terms of substance, quantity and time. Verse 8 b and c may be given in covenantal language, but that is most likely for the sake of those who use this prayer.

The concept behind the use of these "agricultural" blessings alludes to Boaz's exchange with the harvesters in Ruth 2:4. As in the book of Ruth, blessing is tied into the abundance-desolation theme. God's presence and favor is represented through the abundance of crops provided for Ruth and Naomi. A lack of blessing, as

¹⁷⁷ So the LXX transitive *before it is plucked* (*שָׁלַף*) is normally used in the transitive sense of drawing out a sword, shoe, or umbrella) presents an unrealistic picture of harvesting occurring on the rooftop, although the meaning does not alter the force of this metaphor.

¹⁷⁸ Withering grass can refer to either the Israelites or foreign nations. One sees how the nuance of this metaphor could be interpreted as supporting the LXX's military imagery in vv. 1-4.

is depicted in Ruth 1-2:4 (before these words are spoken by the harvesters to Boaz and he responds in kind) is represented by the famine in the land and then the loss of husbands to provide. What the community was wishing on these enemies is for their utter demise, something which was represented in the covenantal language of the dying grass, the utter lack of crop for the harvesters, and withholding of any blessing which would reverse the situation.¹⁷⁹ The image then is the complete defeat of the enemies to such an extent that they cease to exist.

The Israelite's concept of Yahweh's righteousness in their deliverance as given in the panoramic history of vv. 1-4 also contributes to understanding these imprecations. Israel knew of unwarranted oppression in their youth, but they also knew of oppression in the form of judgment. In the context of the exile, the yoke was a symbol of the cruelty of the Babylonians, but it was also a symbol of divine judgment. So, in Hos 10:11 (also Deut 28:48 and Isa 9:3) Ephraim is put under the yoke of the nations as a judgment for its wickedness and injustice. The nation experiences *shame and is turned back* in defeat (Isa 42:17) because of its sin. The people were judged for not observing the commands and decrees of Yahweh.

In another episode, through Hezekiah's prayer (2 Kgs 19; Isa 37) they had come to a deeper understanding of the justice of Yahweh. It is clearly explained that Israel had sinned. The consequence was that the LORD had sent Sennacherib and his army as a form of judgment. Their repentance had caused Yahweh to deliver them from the very instrument he had set against them. In the context of this antinomy, their cry in Psalm 129 is *Yahweh is righteous*. The enemies with all their oppression have not been able to overcome Israel (לֹא יִכְלֹוּ לִי, v. 2). They understood that although Yahweh acted both as punisher and deliverer he was just in doing so. The enemies themselves are portrayed as oblivious to the plan of Yahweh. Yahweh's covenantal loyalty to Israel is the basis on which Israel prays for the destruction of its enemies. They could perceive their own history in terms of Yahweh's covenantal justice. How much more would he punish the foreign enemies! The psalm has a distinct chronological movement in it. The enemies are not able to prevail, Yahweh delivers

¹⁷⁹ The final blessing formula in 8c most likely serves a double function as Allen (2002:248-250) *et al.* suggest – it is a benediction to the congregation. But it also functions to heighten the severity of the negative curse in v. 8b. According to Gerstenberger (2001:354) the plurality of blessing people is unique.

Israel from the Exile, and then, in a petitionary prayer, all enemies are reduced to nothing.

2.5.6 Conclusion of the exegesis

Finally, the image of this imprecation goes beyond the mere wish for physical death. The scope of the metaphor is the complete destruction of the enemy in manner, space and time. This lack of agricultural virility takes on a symbol of the eschatological judgment of Yahweh. This perspective is reinforced implicitly throughout vv. 5-8 through the military nuances attached to the phrase in vv. 5a and the metaphor of the withering grass. Furthermore, the scope of *all those who hate Zion* carries in it an eschatological perspective. As in the royal Psalm 2 and the royal messianic Psalm 110 the enemies are enemies of Zion and all that it stands for. Zion is the holy hill where Yahweh and his throne partner reign. These imprecations are tied into the covenantal worldview of the worshippers, a connection strongly implied in the negative covenantal blessing formulas in v. 8. However, unlike the depiction of explicit military victory, Psalm 129 approaches the demise of the enemies through agricultural imagery. One can only surmise that one type of imagery could not contain all the nuances of the eschatological imagination of the worshippers.

2.6 A Select Historical Survey of the Interpretation of Psalm 129

A quick survey of secondary literature in any major commentary reveals the fact that Ps 129 has not elicited as much academic writing as other psalms. This scarcity also holds true for ancient works on Ps 129. Nevertheless, it will be helpful to state what we are investigating in these commentaries on Ps 129. We are interested in how the commentators understood the adversity in the psalm. An observation in the exegesis was that this psalm portrays adversity across time in its entirety, vv. 1-4 relating to the past and vv. 5-8 relating to the present and future. We are also interested in how the agricultural imprecation was understood and the intensity the curse was perceived to have. It will be left to Chapter 4 to discuss how agricultural metaphors in the form of imprecations contributed to the conceptual world of justice of the people who prayed Psalm 129.

2.6.1 Psalm 129 in the Post-Exilic Restoration

Goulder takes the main portion of the background to Ps 129 as the Chronicler's narrative told in Nehemiah 13:4-14.¹⁸⁰ Specifically, Ps 129 is a "dual response" which refers to thanks for deliverance seen in the re-establishment of the government in Jerusalem by exiles and cries of confusion and shame on the opponents who are presented as Tobiah and Eliashib (Goulder, 1998:77). Hence he sees the phrase "all who hate Zion" as referring to internal enemies. However, Goulder (1998:78) allows for the imagery in vv. 1-3 to refer not only to the deliverance seen in the cleansing of the temple, but also to the events surrounding Israel's slavery in Egypt. The long furrows of the plowmen in v. 3 depict the harsh flogging (so Isa 50:6; 51:23). But the pressing concern of the defilement of the temple in the post-exilic restoration provides the primary context for the imprecations. Goulder (1998:78) believes the identification of internal enemies is supported by the "blessing" formula in v. 8 (but contra the exegesis above). Perhaps this is why he can mitigate the force of the imprecations in vv. 5-7 by referring to them as the "mildest of maledictions" (Goulder, 1998:78).

2.6.2 Psalm 129 in the NT

The Greek New Testament (1983) does not list any quotations, verbal parallels or allusions for Psalm 129. However, Augustine¹⁸¹ in his commentary on Psalm 129 seems to make connections with agricultural imagery from the NT, such as Mt 3:12 (Jesus as judge) and the parable of the tares in Mt 13:26, 39. So, despite the lack of specific connections as defined by modern biblical scholars between Ps 129 and the NT, how certain agricultural imagery is used in the New Testament may possibly add insight into the meaning of agricultural imagery as an imprecation in Psalm 129. The amount of agricultural imagery in the New Testament which can be investigated goes far beyond the constraints of this paper. Therefore, I will examine three uses of

¹⁸⁰ For Goulder's (1998:74-76) explanation of the apparent chronological inconsistencies in the Nehemiah narrative due to the Chronicler's specific purposes while editing, see his commentary. Theodore of Mopsuestia considered the psalm as "spoken in the person of the righteous ones among the people in Babel" (Van Rooy, 2013:153).

¹⁸¹ For an explanation and examples of Augustine's many differing interpretive methods see Fiedrowicz (2000:13-66).

agriculture imagery in the context of judgment, predominantly from the perspective given in the book of Matthew (Mt 3:1-12; 13:24-30 and 21:18-21)¹⁸² but also two images of grass (1 Peter 1:24 and James 1:10, 11).

The first passage is Mt 3:1-12 and the scene is John the Baptist's testimony of Jesus' role as judge. The first image of judgment is directed towards the Pharisees and Sadducees and is that trees not bearing fruit will be cut down with an axe and thrown into the fire. The second is the threshing floor where the wheat is gathered up, but the chaff is burned with "unquenchable fire." Mark's (1:3-8) rendering of John's testimony omits both images of judgment, whereas Luke (3:2-17) only has the cutting down of trees that do not produce fruit and which are thrown into the fire.

In the second passage, the Parable of the Tares (Mt 13:24-30), the enemy sows weeds among the wheat. At the time of harvest the weeds are tied in bundles and burned, whereas the wheat is gathered into the barn. In the third image, Mt 21:18-21, the barren fig tree is met with Jesus' words "May you never bear fruit again," and the fruit tree withers immediately. In the Mk 11:12-14, 20-24 passage it is the next morning that Peter discovers the withered fig tree. The cursing of the fig tree is probably prophetic action symbolic of the judgment which is about to befall the nation (Charette, 1992:133). The fig tree has a background in OT passages such as Jer 8:13 and Hos 9:10. "The story of Israel told under the figure of a fig tree is a narrative of decay" (Charette, 1992:135).

The specific use of grass as an image occurs in 1 Peter and James. In 1 Peter 1:24 the reference is to grass (χόρτος) and the flower of grass (ἄνθος χόρτου). The LXX Ps 128:6 (129:6) uses the same term χόρτος. The usage in 1 Peter contrasts the transitoriness of human life with the word of God.¹⁸³ The connotative implication from Isa 40:6-8 and Ps 90:5 is that the transitoriness of human life is a form of God's judgment. The other usage is James 1:10, 11, where both verses have the terms χόρτος (flower) and ἄνθος (grass). In this instance the image of grass is used as a warning to rich people not to become proud because their lives will also fade away. Based on what James says in 5:1-6 about the torment awaiting the rich at the

¹⁸² Matthew has the characteristic of being written for a Jewish audience.

¹⁸³ That this image of grass withering implies a judgment has already been mentioned in the exegesis and seems to be suggested by Isa 40:6-8, from which this passage seems to quote.

last judgment, the scorching of the sun's heat is "indicative of God's judgment which will follow and turn the 'fading away' into an eternal fact" (Davids, 1982:78).

The following observations of the NT use are pertinent. The images in Matthew portray the harshness of the judgment in terms of degree and extent. In general, the image of the burning of the chaff, fruitless trees, and weeds is symbolic of complete judgment. It goes beyond the image of drying up and passively dying to an image of complete destruction. According to Mt 3:42, τὴν κάμινον τοῦ πυρός (*fiery furnace*), which here is a picture of Gehenna, appears in the OT as an image of captivity and exile (Deut 4:20; Jer 11:14; 1 Kgs 8:51). However, in the OT, the furnace is a "metaphor for an ordeal which tests and purifies the people; here it has become a metaphor for the final destruction of the wicked" (Charette, 1992:146). The duration in the images also contributes to the severity. The chaff is to be burned in an "unquenchable fire" in Mt 3. This is true also of the fig tree, which is prohibited from ever bearing fruit again. With this latter example, Matthew emphasizes the efficaciousness of Jesus' curse. The fig tree withered immediately. So the NT's use of agricultural images in the context of judgment portray a painful, complete and very long punishing judgment. There is a sense, though, in the Parable of the Tares that judgment will occur in the future. The two images of grass suggest that grass symbolizes the span of human life. These images do not seem to have the same severe connotation as the images of fire in Matthew. However, the idea of death being a judgment portrayed through grass regardless of the unsettling denotative meaning seems to be implicit rather than explicit.

Finally, although the images of judgment are directed towards the Pharisees and Sadducees (so internal enemies) in John the Baptist's speech, there is nothing in the texts to suggest that the judgments and curses were to be understood as directed exclusively to Israel alone. The repetition of John's words in Mt 3:10b by Jesus in Mt 7:19 suggest that John's words serve as more than a rebuke to Jewish impenitence. They serve as a warning to the church also (Charette, 1992:124). Overall, "the recompense schema connected with the story of Israel in the Old Testament is presented as a paradigm for the recompense schema developed in his [Matthew's] Gospel" (Charette, 1992:164).

2.6.3 Psalm 129 in the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

2.6.3.1 Suffering in Psalm 129

Theodoret of Cyrus (2001:300), in a more literal sense, relates the psalm to the Gentiles' assaults on the Jewish people after their return to the land. As for application, Theodoret (2001:300) applied v. 3, "the sinners did their worst on my back," to "the scourges and abuses inflicted on the victorious martyrs." Cassiodorus (2007a:359-369) writing in the monastic tradition explains that the persecution by the enemies never comes to an end. However, the Church "grows under the persecution of the wicked and grows through its grief." Further, the church may appear to suffer when it loses "holy ones," but those who lose their lives become part of the Church unseen in the "fatherland" and this is what "the enemies could not prevail over it" means (Cassiodorus, 2007a:360).

2.6.3.2 Meaning of the response

Gregory of Nazianzus (1978:387) uses the image of vv. 5-7, "small and untimely sheaves, like those on the housetop, which do not fill the hand of the reaper, nor call forth a blessing from them which go by," to emphasize the ungodliness of the people when he began to work in his "field". But Gregory (1978:387) applies the image to describe the external appearance of those who were perceived as "well-eared and fat in the eyes of Him Who beholdeth hidden things." Besides softening the force of the imprecations, the implication is that all are enemies of God at some point in their existence.

Theodoret (2001:301) seems to understand the psalmist's imprecations in vv. 6-7 as prayer for the enemies' forays to come to an untimely end. However, Theodoret does allow for strong images of violence in his translation of v. 4: "The righteous Lord cut the throats of sinners."¹⁸⁴ In contrast, Cassiodorus interprets the imprecations in vv. 5-8 figurally. He suggests that the death which is spoken of in the image of the grass dying is a spiritual one, "for they also often die off here before they are taken from this world's light" (Cassiodorus, 2007b:360). Furthermore, the heights where the grass unsuccessfully sprouts is taken to symbolize pride.

¹⁸⁴ Theodoret was using a form of the LXX which differed from the MT.

2.6.4 Psalm 129 in Augustine¹⁸⁵

2.6.4.1 Suffering in Psalm 129

Augustine's (2004:117) understanding of the suffering in the psalm is closely linked with his understanding of the composition of the Church. The Church has consisted of select individuals from the time of Abel, but mixed within the Church are "bad people, people of wicked lives, whom the Church carries even to the end" (Augustine, 2007a:359). Even in the early stages of Israel's history, "Moses and the rest of the saints endured the wicked Jews" (Augustine, 2007a:359). In other words, there have always been those who have identified with the Church, but opposed it. Augustine (2004:119) explains the dynamic of persecution through the subtle idea that the enemy is aggressive and hates the word of God because the good person will not follow the bad into bad conduct. Furthermore, Augustine (2007b:360) explains v. 5 by showing the irrationality of the enemies' sin through the example of avarice.¹⁸⁶ The enemies cannot restrain their evil nature and so when a command comes such as "Do not be covetous" they respond that God should not make gold. The implication is that their sin is a result of God's creative acts. In response, Augustine affirms that God's creation is his good work and so the whole notion of hating Zion is shown to be irrational at its foundation.

2.6.4.2 Meaning of the response

When discussing the imprecations it is important to keep in mind that Augustine (2004:117) suggests that the recalcitrant enemies may change. So he interprets v. 4 to mean it is a righteous act to refuse the wicked but it is also a righteous act to bear with them. Augustine sees the angels as the harvesters (Mt 13:39) who will eventually knock these sinners (v. 3) off the psalmist's back.¹⁸⁷ As for the image of the imprecation in vv. 5-7, the high place where the grass withers signifies pride. Augustine (2004:125) seems to mitigate the force of the imprecations by suggesting that they have not been finally dealt with at God's judgment, but already they lack

¹⁸⁵ Augustine's LXX text is different from the MT.

¹⁸⁶ It appears that Augustine may have made a connection between this passage and James 1:10, 11 where grass is used as an image of judgment to warn the rich.

¹⁸⁷ Augustine's (2004:121) translation of v. 3a is "sinners have wrought upon my back."

the sap needed for any green growth. However, at the judgment which occurs at the end of the world, the enemies are thrown into the fire.

2.6.5 Psalm 129 in the Reformers

2.6.5.1 Calvin

2.6.5.1.1 Suffering in Psalm 129

Calvin (2003b:119) begins the introduction to his commentary on Psalm 129: “This psalm teaches in the first place that God subjects his Church to divers troubles and affections, to the end he may the better prove himself her deliverer and defender.” The youth of vv. 1 and 2 refers not only to the time of Egypt, but stretches back to the time of Abraham and the patriarchs (2003b:121). Calvin (2003b:120) suggests that the psalm was written at the time when Israel had almost fainted under the tyranny of Antiochus Epiphanes. He clearly sees the psalm as portraying not slight hurt but severe suffering when the Church was in “a state of extreme distress, or dismayed by some great danger, or oppressed with tyranny, on the verge of total destruction” (Calvin, 2003b:120). Behind these enemies lies the influence of Satan, who arms these “innumerable bands of enemies” (Calvin, 2003b:121). The enemies are not only external to the Church but of an internal kind who profess to belong to the Church (Calvin, 2003b:121).

2.6.5.1.2 Meaning of the response

Calvin gives the introduction to this section of the psalm: “Under the form of an imprecation, he shows that the divine vengeance is ready to fall upon all the ungodly, who, without cause, distress the people of God” (Calvin, 2003b:119). The first part of the psalm (vv. 1-4) stands as instruction for what is to be hoped for in the future (Calvin, 2003b:125). Calvin indicates that v. 5 can be taken as a prayer or promise. He translates the verb in v. 6, *יָשַׁלַח* as *to be brought forth* or *to come forth*, and so the image in v. 6 is that of the grass not persisting, but withering as soon as it springs up. The height of the rooftops is a symbol of the enemies’ pride. In v. 8, the reapers withholding their blessings is meant to suggest that the enemies deserve to be hated or despised (Calvin, 2003b:126). The image is meant to bring comfort during times

of persecution since the enemies “are but barren grass, on which the curse of heaven rests” (Calvin, 2003b:127).

2.6.6 Comparison with the exegetical findings of Psalm 129

There are several areas where the historical findings shed light on the exegesis. In the exegesis, the covenant terminology, *those who hate Zion*, and the structure of the psalm seemed to imply external enemies. However, the military connotation in the phrase used in v. 5a could suggest internal or external enemies. Of the commentators I examined, Augustine, Calvin and Gregory identify the true Israel with the Church. As a result the enemies can be external or internal (so Calvin). Augustine relates the true Church back to the time of Cain and Abel.¹⁸⁸ This notion of a remnant of faithful among unfaithful has always been a theme in the history of God’s people. Given the above observations it is probably better to see the enemies as those who are outside of the remnant whether they appear to be internal enemies as Goulder describes or external gentiles as Theodoret suggests. On a spiritual and practical level, Gregory was correct in identifying all people before their conversion as being the enemies.

Important also is Augustine’s explanation of the dynamic of how these enemies function. Augustine’s observations do not seem to derive from the text, but illuminate the text. They seem to answer the question of why these enemies hate Zion. Augustine explains that to hate Zion involves an irrational posture. He explains this theological precept through avarice, most likely because the term grass (*χόρτος*) is also found in James 1:10,11 in the context of judgment on the rich. There is an absurdity in hating Zion which Augustine captures theologically.

Another observation is the severity of the imprecation. One of the questions which was posed in the Introduction was whether imprecations in the form of agricultural images were severe. The investigation suggested the images of judgment associated with agriculture could indeed be severe. The NT images of agriculture used in

¹⁸⁸ Calvin extends the meaning of “youth” back to the time of Abraham and the patriarchs, and Augustine to the time of Abel. These identifications may be correct. However, for structural reasons and intertextual witness it is better to associate the author’s meaning here with the time of slavery in Egypt. It is only at this time that we have biblical witnesses which explain the agency of God in the punishment and deliverance of Israel.

judgment would support the severity. The image of fire and unquenchable burning has a fearsome connotation. Furthermore, the efficaciousness of Jesus' curse of the fig tree shows the power inherent in the words of Jesus. Even the grass (1 Peter, James 1) as a symbol of human lifespan implies that death is involved. Calvin also noted the severity in the imprecations in vv. 5-7, captured in his use of the phrases "divine vengeance" and "curse of heaven." Augustine allowed for a horrific final judgment, but his figural interpretation mitigated the strength of the imprecations. Gregory and Cassiodorus likewise mitigate the force of the imprecations with their figural interpretations. Grass may not have the paralyzing imagery of physical violence, but the image of grass is one of life and death and hence the denotative meaning is quite significant.

Another area of investigation in the exegesis was how the two stanzas, vv. 1-4 and vv. 5-8, are related. The finding in the exegesis was that the term *righteousness* stands at the heart of the psalm because it connects what Israel experienced in the past with what it can expect in the present and future. Calvin suggests that the term *righteousness* in v. 4 is meant to suggest that although God may dissemble for a time, "the welfare of the Church is inseparably connected with the righteousness of God" (Calvin, 2003b:125; 2 Thess 1:6, 7). In essence, both the deliverance and the punishment in the form of servitude were extensions of Yahweh's justice. If so, how much more could they expect Yahweh to judge those who were haters of Zion, the dwelling place of Yahweh! The commentators who understood Israel as the true Church are able to support such an interpretation because they see continuity in the past, present and future purposes of God.

2.7 Exegesis of Psalm 137¹⁸⁹

1. ¹⁹⁰By the rivers of Babylon –
there we sat¹⁹¹ down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.
2. On the willows there
we hung up our harps
3. For there our captors asked us for songs
and our tormentors¹⁹² asked for mirth
saying “Sing us one of the songs¹⁹³ of Zion!”
4. How could¹⁹⁴ we sing the LORD’s songs¹⁹⁵
in a foreign land?
5. If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand wither.¹⁹⁶
6. Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,

¹⁸⁹ The basic text is the NRSV. Verse division is according to the MT accentuation.

¹⁹⁰ The LXX has the heading τῷ Δαυιδ. Some manuscripts of the Lukan texts have τῷ Δαυιδ δια τερεμιου, *Of David through Jeremiah*. It seems most likely that the gloss *through Jeremiah* was added as an attempt to explain how an exilic psalm could be ascribed to David.

¹⁹¹ Although the term יָשַׁב also means *to dwell* or *live*, the parallelism with *we hung up our harps* suggests that the specific verb *sit* is a better translation for the image here.

¹⁹² This word is a *hapax legomenon* and presents a challenge for translators. The parallelism with יָשַׁב suggests that a *qal* participle should be expected, but the MT has the noun תִּזְלוּ, which BDB suggests is a doubtful word (1979:1064, s.v. תִּזְלוּ). The AV and RV have *they that wasted* (plundered) which is a reading supported by the Targum, but read יָשַׁב. The LXX supported by the Syriac has the more prosaic καὶ οἱ ἀπαγαγόντες ἡμᾶς which retroverted becomes וּמִזְלוּ יָשַׁב. Freedman (1971:192) proposed הִתַּל (*mock, deceive*) a unique *qal* form which is a secondary root of the *Hiphil* form תַּל. The mocking tone of the phrase “Sing us one of the songs of Zion” (see below) seems to support this proposal.

¹⁹³ יָשַׁב is translated as a collective (Gunkel, 1926:581).

¹⁹⁴ Translated as a *non-perfective of deliberation* (IBHS, 1990:508, Par. 31.4f); or modal imperfect (GES, 2005:318, sec 107r-t).

¹⁹⁵ יָשַׁב is translated as a collective (Gunkel, 1926:581).

¹⁹⁶ LXX has ἐπιλησθείη, *be forgotten*. The parallelism with 6a suggests a verb with some form of physical restrictive movement, although the syntax is probably limited by what the fixed form of this Hebrew hand idiom was. The verb יָשַׁב supports the theme of memory found throughout this psalm and could be the reason it was so easily kept as part of the MT. Apparently, the NRSV has adopted *wither* via the Ugaritic root *tkh* (Allen, 2002:302). Bradtke’s (so Kraus, 1989:501) proposal in the BHS (1976/77:1217) תַּכַּח “grow lean” requires the simple explanation of transposed letters. The word *wither* in English has the symbolic connotation of being devoid of strength and skill. Since the different proposals (see Allen, 2002:302) do not significantly affect the meaning intended, as a poetic device *wither* works well.

if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

7. Remember, O Lord, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem's fall,
how they said, "Tear it down! Tear it down!
Down to its foundations!"
8. O daughter Babylon,¹⁹⁷ doomed to be destroyed!¹⁹⁸
Blessed¹⁹⁹ shall they be who pay you back
what you have done to us.
9. Blessed shall they be who take and shatter
your little ones against the rock.

2.7.1 Statement of investigation

Psalm 137 needs little explanation as to why it is an appropriate choice for this study. The images ostensibly depict graphic violence against children as a legitimate means of exacting revenge. How are prayers that ostensibly take vengeance on one's enemies through their children to be understood? Furthermore, for the form-critical scholar, Psalm 137 defies straightforward classification.²⁰⁰ Most interpretive issues relate to how one is to interpret vv. 8-9. A common way to understand these two

¹⁹⁷ NRSV has *daughter of Babylon*. On the basis of Ps 9:15, Dahood (1970:273) suggests the genitives which follow the construct לְבָבֶל are explanatory or appositional (GES, 2005:416, sec. 128k). The constructs in Ps 9:15 and Ps 137:8 are both formed with a *maqṣep*.

¹⁹⁸ NRSV has *you devastator*. The translation of this word is important for understanding the possible time frame and perspective being put forward in the psalm and the meaning of the imprecation (see below). The form of the MT is passive, הַרְבִּיבָה , but if it is translated in the traditional attributive sense of a *qal* passive participle, it creates difficulties on historical grounds since Babylon was never "destroyed violently" (BDB, 1979:994, s.v. הַרְבִּיבָה). Further, the imprecations in vv. 8-9 imply that the judgment is yet to come. The LXX has the adjective ταλαίπωρος , *wretched*, translated in the *NETS*, *you wretch*. The adjective apparently provides a basis for the imprecations which follow. The Syriac, like the Targum (בְּזוּזִיבָה) and Symmachus (ἡ ληστρίς), all use words which can be reverted back to the adjectival הַרְבִּיבָה . But, as Delitzsch (1975c:336) points out, the meaning of these words in the original languages is *plunder* and הַרְבִּיבָה does not mean "to rob or plunder" but to "devastate violently." Delitzsch (1975c:336) suggested translating the MT in the prophetic sense of *vastanda*, the poet anticipating the future destruction as a realized fact. Since Babylon was never devastated according to the MT form of הַרְבִּיבָה , it must be related to the imprecations in a different way than merely historical.

¹⁹⁹ NRSV *happy*. However, *blessed*, here and in v. 9, better captures the covenantal nature of this language, which I argue below imparts meaning to the imprecations.

²⁰⁰ Psalm 137 has been termed "stylized prose" by Seybold (1996:509) and noted for its lack of semantic features of parallelism by Alter (1985:19).

verses is to assign them to the uncontrolled or morally unacceptable passion of the psalmist (Gunkel, 1926; Weiser, 1962; Gerstenberger, 2001; Kidner, 1975c). Additionally the theme of memory seems to be a major thread providing unity to the psalm. How does memory contribute to our understanding of the psalm and the imprecations? There also seems to be historically definable enemies, Edom and Babylon, which, as van Rooy (2009:46) notices, is unusual in the Psalms, and a historically identifiable event, יְרוּשָׁלַם, on which the imprecations are based. How do these historical events influence the interpretation of the imprecations?

2.7.2 Form and setting

Some scholars (e.g., Freedman, 1971:187-205) see a concentric pattern as the basis for the structure in Psalm 137. On the outside, vv. 1-2 and 8-9 are linked by references to Babylon, followed by v. 3 and v. 7, which have quotations of the enemies. Next is 4 and 6aγb, which surround vv. 5 and 6aβ, a precise chiasm at the center.²⁰¹ Generally, however, scholars see a threefold or fourfold division, differing in opinion as to the status of v. 4, with some placing it by itself (so Dahood, 1970). The majority of scholars favor a threefold division. Some (Mowinckel, 1962:102; Kissane, 1954:285; Ogden, 1982:89-90) prefer three strophes of four lines, vv. 1-3, vv. 4-6 and vv. 7-9. Others (Allen, 2002:303; Zenger, 2011:513; Anderson, 1972:896-897 and Gerstenberger, 2001:394) prefer dividing the poem according to vv. 1-4, vv. 5-6 and vv. 7-9. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:513) provides two reasons for including v. 4 with vv. 1-3 in the first strophe. First, v. 1aα and the end of v. 4 form an inclusion “Babylon” and “foreign land.” Secondly, v. 4 maintains the speakers’ identity as “we” which keeps the voice of vv. 1-3. To these reasons can be added the coherence created by the term יְרִי which occurs between v. 3 and v. 4, three times in v. 3 and twice in v. 4.

Some scholars (Kellermann, 1978:48-51; Kraus, 1989:501; Anderson, 1972:303) noticing the prominence of the terms Jerusalem/Zion. see the psalm related to the “Psalms of Zion,” although reworked to reflect the circumstances of lament and mourning. This may be a valid way of understanding the psalm. However,

²⁰¹ For a criticism of this proposal see Allen (2002:305).

Gerstenberger (2001:395) believes that Zion psalms such as 46, 48 and 122 differ in structure and are much more removed from the basic complaint outlook. Even so, the terms Zion and Jerusalem play an important role in understanding the perspective put forward in the psalm. Zion only occurs in the first strophe in vv. 1 and 3 and is tied into the perspective of the community reflecting during its time of captivity. Jerusalem is found once in each of vv. 5-7. In vv. 5-6, a carefully constructed chiasm consisting of self-cursing formulas, v. 6b is highlighted, calling for the absolute loyalty of the psalmist (community) to Jerusalem. Verse 7 is a prayer against Edom for its participation in יוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, *the day of Jerusalem*. Verses 8-9, which are imprecations in the form of blessing formulas, do not mention Zion or Jerusalem. Therefore we can assume that the use of the terms *Zion* and *Jerusalem* was more than just a stylistic issue.

Another important theme which creates coherence in the psalm is the notion of memory. זָכַר *remember* occurs in vv. 1, 6 and 7, while the term שָׁכַח *forget* occurs twice in v. 5.²⁰² Furthermore, the focus on memory introduces the imprecations beginning in v. 7, זָכַר יְהוָה. The use of memory carries the worshippers through a range of experiences from past reminiscence to present longing and then to present/future imprecations. Furthermore, the notion of memory is closely related to the concrete historical reality of the *day of Jerusalem*, יוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַיִם, which is found only here as a phrase.²⁰³

Generally, there are three main positions proposed for the setting of this psalm. The perfects in vv. 1-3 and the adverb שָׁמַיְמָה in vv. 1, 2 suggest the speakers of the poem are removed in distance and time from captivity in Babylon. Kraus (1989:501-502) suggests that the psalm arose out of the observance of lament by the exiles, perhaps removed from the waters but not the rule of Babylon. He understands v. 8 as indicating the Babylonian empire still exists (see above). However, others such as Mowinckel (1962b:130), Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:514) and Gerstenberger (2001:395) believe it was composed at a later date for cultic use, Mowinckel assigning it to cultic imagination, Gerstenberger suggesting that it was remembered in their present setting of being under pressure from majority groups, and Zenger

²⁰² See the section on text notes above.

²⁰³ The phrase also occurs at 2 Sam 24:8, but in the context of meaning “twenty two days.”

suggesting that the Asaphite temple singers are the authors. Allen (2002:304) believes the second strophe vv. 5-6 reflects the psalmist addressing Jerusalem as present, but that the psalmist had experienced the exile. Similarly, Weiser (1962:794) and Dahood (1970:269) suggest the exiles had just returned and saw their city in ruins. Arguments locating the composition of the psalm shortly after the arrival in Jerusalem of the exiles, based on the pathos of vv. 5-6 (so Allen, 2002:304), are strong, but in the end indecisive. There are some wounds so egregious that time does not heal them or alter their memory. However, it makes sense to see the emphasis of the self-curse as indicating loyalty to the historical Jerusalem which the exiles expressed either from their place of exile or shortly after their return while the city and temple were still in ruins. If בַּת־בָּבֶל הַשְּׂדוּדָה in v. 8a refers to Babylon being destroyed in some way then the *terminus post quem* would be 516 B.C.E. when the walls of Babylon were partially destroyed.²⁰⁴ Anderson (1972:897) suggests sometime between 537 and 515 B.C.E. when much of the city and temple were still in ruins. Arguments for an early dating based on lack of explanatory comments about the exile in the psalm are also inconclusive.²⁰⁵ The present form and content reflect the needs and purpose of the worshipping community rather than the total sum of their theological understanding of the exile. The historical markers within the psalm make mention of Edom, Babylon and *the day of Jerusalem*, suggesting that the content of the psalm is very closely linked to the historical experience of the *day of Jerusalem* and exile. Furthermore, it is easy to see how the psalm came to be used to commemorate the fall of Jerusalem on the 9th of Ab.

2.7.3 Perceived suffering

The uniqueness of Psalm 137 makes understanding its form and how it was originally used liturgically a challenge from a form-critical perspective, but there is no mistaking the suffering of the community portrayed in this psalm. The general exigencies of the exile are well known and do not need to be retold here. Rather the focus here will be on the indicators in the text that can provide a perspective of the

²⁰⁴ See notes on text.

²⁰⁵ For example, John Ahn (2008:273-274) dates the composition between 587 and 582, on the basis of what is not mentioned about the third deportation of 582 B.C.E.

suffering which arises out of this psalm. The pathos of the exiles' suffering in vv. 1-3 is reinforced by several features. The poet uses the suffix נִי nine times, denoting collective identity, which gives a strong voice to the suffering. A vivid image of deep sorrow is inferred from the exiles sitting and weeping by the rivers of Babylon, a traditional posture for mourning, בְּכִינּוֹ being a term used for both informal and ritual weeping (Goulder, 1998:225). The exiles hanging their harps on the willows is a picture of both loyalty to Zion and impotence.

The use of the term *Zion*, which is only used in vv. 1-3 in the perspective of the exiles' reflection during the exile, implies a meaning that is more than just geographical. Yahweh is the protector of Zion (Psalms 46 and 48), and Zion becomes a metonymy for everything that Yahweh stands for (*songs of Zion* v. 3 are the *songs of Yahweh* v. 4). The mocking of the captors by asking for songs of Zion was a form of humiliation. As Zenger (1996:48) states, “*the day of Jerusalem* in the eyes of the Babylonians was clear proof of the falsehood of YHWH’s intimate relationship to Zion which was praised in those songs.” Marduk, the primary god of Babylon, was victorious over Yahweh the God of Zion. Whatever injustice, cruelty and shame the exiles had experienced in military defeat was compounded by the religious implications. To their captors’ psychological oppression could be added their own interpretation of the meaning behind the exile. The hand of the living God was upon them in the form of punishment (so Weiser, 1962:795).

The pathos of their suffering also finds voice in the longings expressed in vv. 5-6. Whereas memory was tied to Zion in vv. 1-4, in vv. 5-6 memory is tied to Jerusalem through self-cursing formulas. Jerusalem is found at the centre of this strophe and becomes the focus of longing. To consider Jerusalem above one’s highest joy carries with it a notion which must be understood in the context of the יְרוּשָׁלַיִם in v. 7. Whether the psalmist is speaking from the perspective of the exile or early restoration in vv. 5-6, the poet is expressing his longing for the restoration of everything which was destroyed on this tragic day.

Finally we move to the imprecations in vv. 7-9. The psalmist was in no way ambiguous as to how he perceived Edom’s role in the destruction of Jerusalem.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁶ For an argument which believes there is no historical basis for associating Edom with the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, see Tebes (2011:219-255).

The poet tries to catch the severity of the destruction in the recoding of Edom's speech, עָרֵינוּ עָרֵינוּ, the guttural sounds adding to the tone of suffering. The poet moves on to Babylon. In the course of Babylon's devastation of Jerusalem, the exiles had seen the graphic horrors of warfare, where neither women nor children were spared (2 Kgs 8:12; Jer 6:11; Hos 10:14; Nah 3:10). As Kraus (1989:504) mentions, the use of the graphic metaphor in verse 9 is a reference to the cruelty of ancient warfare. The Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem had been no different (Jer 6).

2.7.4 Meaning of the response

Memory provides a bridge by which one moves through this psalm. The memory of the suffering of the exile had been conceptualized through the use of the term Zion (vv. 1-4). Hence when Jerusalem lay in ruins the exiles wept when they remembered Zion. The use of Zion also hinted at the indestructible part of Jerusalem, the dwelling place of Yahweh who could not be deposed. Then memory expressed through longing (vv. 5-6) provides the link by which to reassert the psalmist's commitment to Jerusalem. These first two strophes provide the background for the poet's request for Yahweh to remember (זָכַר יְהוָה) the destruction of Jerusalem. As Allen (2002:308) notes, in the movement from vv. 5-6 to v. 7 there is a type of bargaining. If the psalmist remembers the suffering of the exile and the centrality of Jerusalem, will not Yahweh remember those who committed such atrocities? Hence if memory unifies the psalm the imprecations can be understood as a vindication of Yahweh. The reversal in fortune implies the restoration of Jerusalem, the outer reality to the never-changing hidden reality of Zion.

The charges brought against Babylon are implicitly brought through Edom's testimony. Anderson (1972:899) believes that זָכַר has associated with it the notion of punishment, as it does in Neh 6:14 and 13:29. If this is the case, then the desire for Edom to be punished is implicitly expressed in the call for Yahweh to remember. But there may be another way to view Edom's role, that is, the mention of Edom could provide a forensic perspective to the imprecations. Edom's role then would be both as a perpetrator/collaborator and witness. Allen (2002:308) suggests that the construction לְזָכַר in its opposite sense of *remembering to someone's advantage* (Ps

132:1) entails a forensic notion with Yahweh invoked as a judge. Since there are no specific imprecations against Edom, could Edom's placement in this psalm function as a witness against Babylon's violence? Edom thus is not only a collaborator, but also a witness to this calamity. After all, one would expect some form of imprecation against Edom as well (Lam 4:21; Obadiah; Ezk 25:12 ff, 35:5 ff; Jer 49:7-11).²⁰⁷ In this way the mention of Edom, rather than appearing as an intrusion into the text, functions as testimony against the *daughter Babylon*, the recipient of the imprecations. The Edomite's own speech עָרוּ עָרוּ הָאֲמָרִים is damning testimony not only to herself but to Babylon's cruelty on יוֹם יְרוּשָׁלַם.²⁰⁸

With a slightly different emphasis, Kidner (1975c:496) provides a cogent way of understanding the imprecations through this type of juridical background based on זָכַר לִי *remember against*.²⁰⁹ In v. 7 Kidner sees a case made against the Edomites and then in vv. 8-9 a case against Babylon. Verse 8b expresses the principle of *lex talionis* which is applied to legal but not personal decisions. With this principle of justice established, Babylon is guilty of *what you have done to us*, v. 9 being the mirror of 8c. The conclusion that Kidner arrives at is that the imprecation in v. 9 is a “white hot” expression which in a “cooler moment” the psalmist would not have uttered.²¹⁰ This cogent explanation provides a way to understand vv. 7-9 as a unit, but the historical and covenantal features in the psalm need to be probed more carefully.

Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:519) believes that since the psalm thinks of the complete destruction of daughter Babylon, the statement בַּת־בָּבֶל הַשְׁדֻדָה in v. 8 is not a clue to a historical dating of the psalm. I would concur to a certain degree with this position. Since Babylon never met with the fate of this imprecation—being violently destroyed—we must look for a different understanding of the meaning.²¹¹

²⁰⁷ Once again, I am working within the context of the MT. Some midrashic interpretations suggest that vv. 8-9 are directed towards Edom (de Wit, 2005:5).

²⁰⁸ It is interesting to note that in Zenger's (1996:49) earlier examination of this psalm, he believed the whole psalm to be shaped by legal categories. For example, the gesture of swearing in vv. 5-6 is formulated in the sense of *lex talionis*.

²⁰⁹ So Childs (1962:32).

²¹⁰ Ps 137 is a carefully composed literary unit.

²¹¹ This, however, does not negate the fact that Yahweh can act in this world and within history, which is an assumption of both the OT and NT (I owe this comment to Dr. Kathleen Rochester). The

It is my belief that the imprecation is a metaphorical expression of the exiles' desire for Yahweh's justice, which in this case is the complete elimination of the functional existence of the enemies of God, here the Babylonians. This seems to be an appropriate explanation because the only way that Babylon was destroyed was in the fact that it ceased to exist as a nation. Babylon never fell violently but was incorporated into the Persian Empire and remained an important city even until the time of Alexander. However, as a nation it ceased to exist after the Persian conquest of 537 B.C.E. This is what I believe the metaphor is trying to get at. It is not a watering down of the violent war images, but rather getting to the essence of what lies behind the violent image. Babylon becomes as if it had been completely devastated.

But there are other clues to this modified understanding of the imprecations. First, the mention of *your little ones* עֲלֵלֵיךָ differs from the pattern of war oracles in the prophetic literature. Jeremiah provides a similarity in outlook with the judgment expressed against Babylon in this psalm.²¹² Jeremiah 50-51 and Psalm 137 both speak of the complete destruction of Babylon (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:519). The normal military expression for total defeat in war oracles usually involves some type of merism such as in Jer 51:22 *man and woman, old man and boy, young man and boy*. Actually, עֲלֵל is not mentioned in Jer 50 or 51, but when it is used in Jer 6:11, 9:20 and 44:7 to describe the devastating effects of war, it occurs in a form of merism. Even the Isa 13:16 use of the term includes the mention of mothers. The sole use of עֲלֵלֵיךָ in an irregular pattern may be because the poet was restricted by the rules of parallelism with v. 8. However, the isolation of children as the sole focus of the war imprecation could be conspicuous as to how it should be understood.

According to Dahood (1970:269) those who believe that it is possible to interpret *daughter Babylon* to mean the ordinary citizens of Babylon ignore the witness of the

judgment of Yahweh then can certainly occur through the most offensive violence. However, the notion of Yahweh's violence is closely tied to agency.

²¹² Cf. Jeremiah 51:56 where the roots שָׁלַם, גָּמַל, שָׁדַד also occur in Ps 137:8. The verb נִפֵץ in Ps 137:9 occurs 22x in the OT, 12 of which occur in Jeremiah (13:14; 22:28; 48:12; 51:20; 51:21 (x2); 51:22 (x3); 51:23 (x3)). It also occurs in Psalm 2 where the LORD's king will *smash them in pieces* – the kings and nations which have set themselves against the Lord.

eighth-century B.C.E. Sefire inscriptions.²¹³ There is some truth to this, but we cannot forget that Israel may have borrowed forms and then adapted them to their own needs. According to Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:522), the psalmist in Psalm 137 picks the image of children for two reasons. First, it corresponds to *daughter Babylon*, so on a metaphorical level she is the mother. Second, it evokes the royal house in Babylon whose continuation is to be thwarted through the death of the children.²¹⁴ Anderson (1972:900) says of v. 9, “The whole verse may be taken figuratively; the dashing of the babes upon the rocks (scarce in Babylonia!).” Ps 141:6 might also provide a figurative reference. There it is שִׁפְטֵי יְהוָה *their judges*²¹⁵ (of those work iniquity פְּעֻלֵי יִרְאַתָּה) who are thrown over the cliff. This type of violent act directed towards the leaders is attested to as a symbol of judgment. There are good grounds then for appropriating the war imprecation against children as a metaphor for the complete ending of Babylonian ability to rule in both space and time. Such a notion goes beyond the *lex talionis* of repaying violent war acts in kind. Babylon as the super-power entity that had once existed would never again exist. The notion of justice comes out much more clearly here, since there is a removal of the evil at the most fundamental level. The evil which is not an abstraction, but the action of agents working against Yahweh, is completely disabled.

But this concept of cursing needs to be seen in the context of the theme of memory in the psalm, which connects the cursing with the *day of Jerusalem* and the tormenting of the captors. The reality of Babylon would cease to exist and so there would be no memory of it as an independent nation from that point onwards, whereas the psalmist pledges loyalty to Jerusalem and the never-ending memory of

²¹³ Dahood’s (1970:269) point is that “To the psalmist the law of retaliation for cruelty seems only just, and the shocking form in which he expresses his desire for the extermination of his country’s destroyer must be judged in the light of customs prevailing in his age.” The Sefire treaties are vassal treaties made between kings and as such the curses are generally directed against the king and his nobles. In Sefire Inscription I, Face A, section IV, the curse for breaking a treaty extends to brutal treatment of the wives of the treaty breaker and his offspring’s wives (Fitzmeyer, 1967:15). Lines 9 to 17 of Face C of Sefire inscription II, when talking about the curses for anyone who effaces the inscriptions, reads “may he and his son die by oppressive torment” (Fitzmeyer, 1967:83).

²¹⁴ Ending Babylon’s “royal rule” is the central perspective of Isa 47:1-15 (esp. 47:1-8, 9).

²¹⁵ Most English translations translate שִׁפְטֵי יְהוָה as *judges* (ESV, KJV, NKJ), *rulers* (NIV), *leaders* (NLT). The NRSV is the exception. It is beyond the range of this discussion to pursue the NRSV translators’ reasons for their difference. This verse merely shows the idea of judges (leaders/rulers) being singled out for punishment and the mention of גִּידֵי יִרְאַתָּה (Ps 141:6) *cliff* (NIV), *rock* (NASB) in conjunction with that punishment.

it. On another level it may be possible to say that an appeal is made to Yahweh the indeposable ruler of Zion who cannot tolerate the infringement of his own majesty by the enemy's mockery.²¹⁶

The use of the covenantal language of the “blessing formulas” is another reason to interpret this war imprecation metaphorically.²¹⁷ By covenantal language here is meant the specific language of the Israelite community which carries explicit religious meaning. The poet used imagery of war and violence which was common parlance, but infused them with new covenantal meaning through the covenantal perspective of the “blessing formula” **יְשׁוּעָה**. This covenantal language of course is meant for the Israelites and has meaning in connection with their religious life. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:520) suggests that the beatitudes normally refer to men (so Allen, 2002:308), but that here it refers to God as the agent. Regardless of the agency, it expresses in the language of faith Yahweh's role in the process of cutting off of Babylon. The benediction carries with it the notion that Yahweh would implement it (Allen, 1987:81). Further, there is finality in the irony of blessing one who brutally ends the life of children when children are usually associated with blessings.²¹⁸ Understanding the absoluteness of this judgment is therefore helped through the language categories of the covenantal community.

2.7.5 Conclusion of the exegesis

It has been said that for Israel no distinction was made between the sacred and the secular and that Israel did not reflect after war on whether war was justified or not (Scheffler, 2009:5). The proposed exegesis of Psalm 137 in this study suggests that beneath the common war imagery there was a deeper meaning for the Israelites.²¹⁹ The horrific war imagery of the murder of helpless innocents could be understood as a symbolic means of praying for the removal of Babylon's power base and any

²¹⁶ For Weiser (1970:796) this idea would apply only to the implied imprecations of v. 7, since he holds that vv. 8-9 are the psalmist's uncontrolled outbursts.

²¹⁷ This notion will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

²¹⁸ Gunkel (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:224-226) relegates blessings introduced by the **יְשׁוּעָה** formula to use by the laity. He sees behind the meaning of these formulas the notion of prosperity.

²¹⁹ This can also be said of Ps 110 and Ps 129.

further influence for evil. In other words, the psalmist took war imagery and imbued it with a deeper meaning through carefully chosen imagery and by placing it within the covenantal framework of the blessing formulas. These covenantally understood features, which act as a roadmap for the people who use this psalm, indicate that the real focus lies beyond the ostensible violent images. What this suggests is that the imagery was loaded with more than one meaning, and the underlying meaning was to be the cultic one. Furthermore, there are eschatological tones in the imprecation. The war imagery is not in itself an eschatological perspective but the absoluteness of the judgment is. Such a wish is the ultimate form of judgment—the removal of the existence of evil.

2.8 A Select Historical Survey of Psalm 137

Before I begin the historical investigation of Psalm 137 it will be helpful to restate particular areas of interest which arose out of the exegesis. We are interested in how the commentators understood adversity in the psalm, but specifically how they understood the images of violence against “the little ones.” A further area of interest is how the commentators understood the relationship between memory and the imprecations. Finally, was there anything peculiar about the historical understanding of Psalm 137?

2.8.1 Psalm 137 in the Post-Exilic Restoration

The approach taken in the exegesis of Psalm 137 was from a post-exilic setting and so the results of the exegesis do not need to be reiterated here. Nevertheless, a few comments are in order to show how the possible historical setting and composition of the psalm are related. The exact dating of the psalm depends on how one interprets vv. 5-7 (the psalmist’s oaths) and the word **הַיְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ** (v. 8). Allen (2002:304) sees vv. 5-6 as indicating that the psalmist has just returned to Jerusalem while it still lay in ruins. In this case, Anderson’s (1972:897) date of composition between 537 and 515 BCE is representative. Goulder (1998:227), however, holds to a date between 537 BCE and 400 BCE, but implies it was probably written later than 445

BCE when Nehemiah rebuilt the walls. For Goulder (1998:227), the three ׀ particles in vv. 8-9 suggest a date in the fifth century.²²⁰ Even so, those who suffered by the streams in Babylon are the ones who find themselves in Jerusalem (Goulder, 1998:228). He tentatively suggests Sheshbazzar's company (Ezra 1:11) or possibly Ezra (Ezra 7:1, 8:1), but settles with the possibility of the psalmist being unknown (Goulder, 1998:229).

Since Goulder's observations were not necessarily incorporated into the exegesis, a few of his points may provide a different perspective. The suffering portrayed in v. 1 was not personal weeping but a formal liturgical lament, a liturgical weeping (Goulder, 1998:227). The enemies were hostile local people who made derisive requests (Goulder, 1998:227). Their taunts by the poplar trees were a subtle way of asking where Yahweh was (Goulder, 1998:227). Besides the horrors of war experienced in the exile such as the slaughter of infants, Goulder (1998:229) notes that Edom's treachery was motivated by the desire to annex land in southern Judea. The psalmist, within the historical time frame which Goulder establishes, takes an oath with the threat of a curse on himself to remember Jerusalem (Goulder, 1998:228). Finally, Goulder suggests the imprecations are meant to ask for condign punishment for the crimes committed by Babylon (Goulder, 1998:227).

2.8.2 Psalm 137 in the NT

The Greek New Testament (1983:906) lists two allusions/verbal parallels: Ps 137:8 with Rev 18:6; and Ps 137:9 with Lk 19:44. The first allusion in Rev 18:6 refers to the phrase ἀπόδοτε αὐτῇ ὡς καὶ αὐτὴ ἀπέδωκεν, *pay her back as she herself has paid back others*,²²¹ which is a verbal parallel with LXX 136:8, [μακάριος ὁς] ἀνταποδώσει σοὶ τὸ ἀνταπόδομά σου ὃ ἀνταπέδωκας ἡμῖν, [*happy shall they be who pay you back what you have done to us*].²²² Further similarity is drawn because both texts refer to judgment on Babylon.²²³ Βαβυλών occurs five times as a nominative,

²²⁰ See the exegesis.

²²¹ ESV, in order to highlight the similarities between Rev 18:6 and LXX 138:8 through the English verb *pay back*.

²²² NRSV

²²³ It appears that John has taken Babylon's end-time judgment mainly from Jer 51:13 (Beale & McDonough, 2007:1137). Their discussion also emphasizes Isaiah and Ezekiel as primary sources for

Βαβυλῶνος (Mt 1:11, 12; 17x2; Acts 7:43) where it refers to the country, and once in the dative, Βαβυλῶνι (1 Pet 5:13). In this latter passage, it may be a code word used by God's people in dispersion (Gingrich & Danker, 1965: 32). The term occurs six times in the genitive form, Βαβυλῶν (Rev 14:8; 16:19; 17:5; 18:2, 10, 21) where it is a symbol of demonic world power (Louw & Nida, 1988: 93.420). In Rev 18:6 the phrase occurs in the context of a judgment on "Babylon." Babylon is described as "a home for demons and a haunt for every evil spirit" (Rev 18:2). The latter part of verse 6 reads "repay her double for her deeds." This expression may be an idiom indicating the firmness of the punishment she is to receive or it could be a measured punishment which extends beyond the principle of *lex talionis*. In this latter case the punishment extends beyond the "commensurate punishment" mentioned in the first half of this verse. Further, in v. 24 "In her was found the blood of the prophets and of the saints, and of all who have been killed on the earth." Even in New Testament times Babylon had retained its image as the epitome of evil.

The other passage is Lk 19:44, which corresponds to Ps 137:9. The Luke passage has for its background the triumphal entry of Jesus. The response of the Pharisees in v. 39 can be interpreted as proleptic for the response of Jerusalem itself (Green, 1997:689). The text²²⁴ which Jesus pronounces is "They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you."²²⁵ In actuality, Lk 19:43-44a presents five images of military conquest and judgment (see Green, 1997:691).²²⁶ "Jerusalem's rejection of Jesus is reminiscent of its historic betrayal of the covenant that led to the first destruction of Jerusalem and the exile. As Israel of old fell to its

John's discussion of Babylon's judgment and make reference to Ps 137 at Rev 8:6. However, in Rev 8:6 they only make reference to the first half of the verse, stating that "Babylon's punishment is commensurate with its crime" (Beale & McDonough, 2007:1140).

²²⁴ "Luke's use of OT scripture underlies his conviction that Scripture prophetically announced Jesus' life and ministry (18:31-33; 24:26-27, 44-47), and that Scripture illustrates the story of Jesus' ministry, rejection, and death" (Pao & Schnabel, 2007:252).

²²⁵ Allison (2002:459-478) makes the point based on a comparison of Lk 9:52-56 with several apocryphal texts (Acts of Phillip, Pseudo Clementine Literature, Testament of Abraham) for rejecting violent judgment. He argues that, in the OT texts of judgment alluded to in these texts, there was already an uneasiness towards the notion of violent judgment even among the ancients. However, in the case of the Luke 9:52-56, Jesus' refusal to allow James and John to call down fire may be more indicative of their impropriety in knowing what just judgment was. The prophetic judgment against Jerusalem was not just for rejecting him, but as was explained in the parable of the vineyard for the hostility that is reflected in the parable of the tenants (Lk 20:9-19).

²²⁶ According to Pao & Schnabel (2007:356) the allusions in these five descriptions of hostile activity are 1) Isa 29:3; 2) 2 Kgs 6:14; 3) Jer 52:5 (an allusion to the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; 4) Ps 137:9; and 5) Mic 3:12.

enemies on account of divine judgment for its unfaithfulness, so Jerusalem will be judged for its inconstancy” (Green, 1997:691). It is noteworthy that Jesus is weeping when he pronounces this prophecy of judgment, which is not relayed in the form of an imprecation. The weeping itself is a prophetic image in the OT associated with the destruction of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 8:11; Jer 9:1; see Pao & Schnabel, 2007:356). The judgment to come is not just for the inhabitants’ failure to recognize God’s coming, but their hostility evidenced in their desire to kill the owner of the vineyard’s son (Lk 20:9-10). Further, in the Lucan narrative the next thing that Jesus does is go into the temple and attempt to cleanse it of corruption.

2.8.3 Psalm 137 in the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

2.8.3.1 Suffering in Psalm 137

Methodius²²⁷ interprets the reminiscing of the psalmist in Ps 137:1-4 allegorically to support the value of chastity. The connection between this text and chastity for Methodius apparently comes because the flowers from the “willow” tree when mixed with water and drunk extinguish sensual desire (Methodius, 1987:324). Babylon is interpreted as “disturbance or confusion which signifies this life around which the water flows ... the rivers of evil always beating upon us” (Methodius, 1987:324). Also noteworthy is his understanding of the phrase “If I prefer not Jerusalem above my chief joy” where Jerusalem refers to the incorrupt souls, which God promises to place first after the resurrection (Methodius, 1987:325).

Ambrose,²²⁸ a commentator of the Western Church, interprets the weeping in 137:1 as an example of repentance to be followed “of those who, as a reward for sin, had been led into miserable captivity” (Ambrose, 1989:358). But his figural approach is seen in his interpretation of the strange land in v. 4 as the situation where “the flesh wars against the mind, and is not subject to the guidance of the Spirit ... and so cannot produce the fruits of charity, patience, and peace” (Ambrose, 1989:358). This is part of his argument that in a state of sin one should not take the sacraments.

²²⁷ Methodius (d. 311) was known as the chief antagonist of Origen (Methodius, 1987:307).

²²⁸ According to Gillingham (2008:37) Ambrose combined a more pragmatic reading of psalmody with a neo-Platonist and more allegorical approach.

John Chrysostom,²²⁹ an Antiochene commentator, offers a perspective on both memory in the psalm and the harshness of the suffering. In his exposition on Hebrews 11:20-22 he quotes Ps 137:1 and suggests that the reason that enduring hardship appears difficult is because we do not remember God as we ought to (Chrysostom, 1989:484). Chrysostom's (1989:484-485) analogy captures both his understanding of the relational aspect of memory with God and his practical but figural interpretation of Babylon:

For these two things are involved in each other, yet are two. For great is the effect of God's remembrance, and great also of His being remembered by us. The result of the one is that we choose good things; of the other that we accomplish them, and bring them to their end... Therefore let us also, as being in Babylon, [do the same]. For although we are not sitting among warlike foes, yet we are among enemies.

On a more literal level, Chrysostom (1988:242-243) sees the suffering of the exiles as God's way of making them "contrite." Furthermore, the weeping of the exiles was not just "idle weeping" but the occupation of the exiles (1988:243). The refusal to sing songs of Zion was also an act of observing the Law (1988:242). Chrysostom is also able to explain the intensity of the hostility which was shown towards the Israelites. This is reflected through the speech of the Edomites in v. 7 where Chrysostom (1988:244) notes that the psalm proceeds in an escalating fashion. The Edomites go beyond being satisfied with the captivity of Jerusalem and beyond the overthrow of Jerusalem: "Their [the Edomites'] desire, you see, was that not even a base be left for the city."

Jerome,²³⁰ a Latin Father of the Western Church, takes the suffering figuratively. Babylon, which means confusion, is a figure of the world, and captivity is taken to be the captivity of sin (Jerome, 1964:357-358). In contrast, symptomatic of the Antiochene school, Theodoret²³¹ (2001:323) says that the captives wept many tears

²²⁹ Chrysostom's interest in Christian morality in the Psalms was a reaction to the more mystical and allegorizing approaches in the Alexandrian school (Gillingham, 2008:33). However, his interpretation of Babylon here is indicative that he used certain forms of figural interpretation.

²³⁰ According to Gillingham's (2008:37) analysis of Jerome's comments on Ps 1, Jerome avoids the Alexandrian reading which identifies the ideal figure as Jesus and the Antiochan reading which suggests the ideal figure might be King Josiah. For Jerome the ideal figure in Ps 1 is anyone and everyone who has been saved by Christ.

²³¹ As mentioned previously, it would be a mistake to assign uniformity to all the commentators of a particular school. For example, Theodoret differed with Theodore of Mopsuestia in that Theodoret believed the Psalms should be interpreted as prayers and prophecies for the household of faith and not as a means to argue against the Jews (Gillingham, 2008:33).

like currents of rivers when they contemplated the deprivation of Jerusalem. The captors were humiliated, as the purpose for asking the captives to sing songs was in order to make fun of their situation (Theodoret, 2001:323). Theodoret's (2001:324) understanding of the psalmist's oath in v. 6, of setting Jerusalem as the zenith of the psalmist's happiness, means the psalmist's sight of Jerusalem's restoration and the performance of celebrations in it.

2.8.3.2 Meaning of the response

Most of the commentators in this section try to address the tension which exists between a NT ethic to love one's enemy and the imprecations presented in Ps 137. We begin with Origen²³² (1989:620-621), an Alexandrian commentator of the Western Church, whose spiritualizing approach is seen in his own words:

For "the little ones" of Babylon (which signifies confusion) are those troublesome sinful thoughts which arise in the soul and he who subdues them by striking, as it were, their heads against the firm and solid strength of reason and truth, is the man who "dasheth the little ones against the stones" and he is therefore truly blessed.

More than a century later, and also writing from the context of the Western Church, Ambrose (1989:358) interprets the self-condemning speech of the Edomites in v. 7, "Tear it down! Tear it down!" as "the words of some who want to deprive the soul of protection when it has yielded to the flesh." Regarding the imprecations involving the dashing of the little ones, Ambrose (1989:358) writes:

David ... calls for a healer for her, and says: "Blessed is he who shall take thy little ones and dash them against the rock." That is to say, shall dash all corrupt and filthy thoughts against Christ, Who by His fear and His rebuke will break down all motions against reason, so as, if anyone is seized by an adulterous love, to extinguish the fire, that he may by his zeal put away the love of a harlot, and deny himself that he may gain Christ.

²³² "Origen's real gift is his ability to combine a textual, philological approach ... with a philosophical, Logos-based doctrine which was a development of Clement's allegorical approach" (Gillingham, 2008:28).

The Cappadocian father, Gregory of Nyssa²³³ (1988:36) also allegorizes v. 9 by having “the little ones” refer to Eunomius’s (leader of the anomoean Arians) heretical manifesto:

While we, seeking the blessing in the prophet (“Blessed shall he be who shall take thy children, and shall dash them against the stones”) are only eager, now that it has got into our hands, to take this puling manifesto and dash it on the rock, as if it was one of the children of Babylon; and the rock must be Christ; in other words, the enunciation of the truth.

Chrysostom, in a more literal interpretation, which marks the Antiochenes, says that the imprecations “are the expression of the captives’ feelings in demanding heavy retribution” (1988:244). The psalmist appears to be governed by the stipulations of justice in Ps 7:4, but when he tells of the sufferings of others he depicts their anger and their pain (1988:244-245). Nevertheless, Chrysostom (1988:245) sees the imprecations as contradictory to the NT injunction given in Lk 6:28 (1988:245). Theodoret (2001:324) writes of the imprecations in vv. 7-9 that “the inspired author prophesied the like punishment for them.” Historically, though, Theodoret (2001:324) mistakenly suggests that “consequently Cyrus is declared blessed for punishing them and freeing these [i.e., the Jews].”

Jerome’s use of a prosopological approach, made popular by Origen more than a century earlier, presents the adversity in a different perspective. Jerome (1964:359) interprets Edom (“earthly”, “bloody”) in v. 6 to be the devil. Adam, therefore, is speaking of the devil, “the devil-serpent recognized in Nabuchodonosor [sic]” who thrust him out of Paradise. Therefore, the psalmist asks God to punish the devil for his malice of dragging him to Babylon. Further, the daughter of Babylon is the soul that is ever restless (Jerome, 1964:359). For Jerome (1989b:24) the little children to be dashed upon the rock are symbolic of the sensual passion which the sexually chaste must dash against the rock which is Christ. In his homily he gives his own first person example of being filled with desire for a woman and the consequence that if he does not take that sinful desire by the foot and “dash it against the rock” it will be too late (Jerome, 1964:360).

²³³ According to Gillingham (2008:30), Gregory’s use of the Psalms is close to Origen’s use. However, Gregory saw the *skopos* of the Psalms as the ascent of the soul to God, whereas those who influenced him (Origen, Basil, and to some extent Athanasius) expressed the *skopos* of the Psalms in relation to the person and work of Christ.

2.8.5 Psalm 137 in Augustine

2.8.5.1 Suffering in Psalm 137

To begin with, we are interested in how Augustine understood the adversity resulting from “the day of Jerusalem” and the captivity. For Augustine (2004:229) “the disasters which befell that city in a literal sense were types of what was to happen to us.” The devil and his angels led us into captivity, but they could not have done it without our consent. Furthermore, when we are solicited by people through whom the devil is working, it is he himself who is soliciting us (Augustine, 2004:229). However, in seeing the Church composed of the weak and the strong, those who are strong sit above the rivers of Babylon (Augustine, 2004:231).

In terms of the enemies, Augustine describes them through geographical analogy. He suggests that there are some who do not live in the city centre and so are not completely overwhelmed by the lusts and pleasures of the world, but others are “very bad indeed and live in the center of Babylon” (Augustine, 2004:228). When it comes to applying v. 6 and the Edomites to the Church, Augustine’s words (2004:239) are quite strong:

What fierce persecutions the Church has endured! The sons of Edom are carnally-minded men and women, dominated by the devil and his angels, worshipping stones and wooden idols and pursuing the lusts of the flesh. How often have they shouted, “Stamp out those Christians! Get rid of them, don’t let even one remain.”

Augustine also provides commentary on memory in Ps 137. He steps out of his figural interpretation to say of the psalmist, “Hemmed in by crowds of such people [evil-filled people] he seemed to sense the peril, so he raised his mind to the memory of Zion” (Augustine, 2004:233). Augustine ties in with memory the notion that Zion is the true source of joy for the psalmist. The rivers of Babylon are the things which people love in this world²³⁴ and Babylon symbolizes the desires on every side which snatch people (Augustine, 2004:224). Sadness comes from seeing the things one thinks brings joy slipping away, and so Augustine (2004:227) can say by

²³⁴ It seems that from Augustine’s emphasis on wealth that he is setting up wealth as a rival to the true Jerusalem for the Christian.

comparison that “he will indeed sit and mourn, if he remembers Zion.” For Augustine (2004:236) it is important how we remember Jerusalem, “for we remember some things with hatred and others with love.” Furthermore, “supreme joy is found where we delight in God” (Augustine, 2004:237). By extrapolation, memory is also seen as an aid for the Christian to resist temptation: “If you want to be armed against temptations in this world, let desire for the eternal Jerusalem increase and grow strong in your hearts” (Augustine, 2004:241).

2.8.5.2 Meaning of the response

We are interested here in how Augustine interpreted the responses to the enemies given in vv. 7-9. In his analysis of v. 6 Augustine (2004:237) interprets Edom (although see above) as Esau and then from Rom 9:12 and 13 goes on to suggest that Edom is the Jewish people who are elder and the Christian people are the younger. But this contrast between the elder and younger can also be applied to carnal humanity and spiritual humanity. Edom then is carnal people and this is what the prayer in v. 7 is asking for, to be delivered from carnal people (Augustine, 2004:238).

The day of Jerusalem is the day when the enemies wanted to overthrow Jerusalem. However, interestingly, Augustine (2004:239) equates Babylon with daughter of Babylon, citing Jerusalem and daughter of Jerusalem as being an equivalent example. Augustine, as predicted, interprets the violent images in the imprecations figurally. The infants of Babylon who will be dashed against the rock are “evil desires newly come to birth” and “the rock is Christ (1Cor 10:4)” (Augustine, 2004:240). Augustine (2004:239) notes that the original populace of Babylon did not survive when it was overthrown, but that its successors, those who oppose God, are called the city of Babylon.

2.8.6. Psalm 137 in the Reformers

2.8.6.1 Calvin

2.8.6.1.1 Suffering in Psalm 137

Calvin (1989:189) begins his commentary by recognizing the historical nature of the psalm rather than assigning it as a prophecy of David. The circumstances of the exile left the people in danger of being thrown into despondency because of the cruel bondage and indignities they had to endure (Calvin, 1989:189). Calvin sees two purposes that the psalmist had: (1) by giving expression to their sufferings in prayer they may keep alive the hope of the deliverance that they longed for, and (2) the people would have acquiesced in the corrupt practices unless endowed with mental fortitude through a period of 70 years (Calvin, 1989:189).

Calvin also comments on the indicators of suffering in the text. He notes that sitting on the ground is a posture which “indicates mourning and deep distress” (Calvin, 1989:190). However, tears are also the expression of humility and not just distress. So the tears are evidence that the exiles recognized in their calamities the deserved chastisement of God (Calvin, 1989:190). The tears represented that they “were cut off from the worship of God, upon which they were wont to attend, and felt that they were torn from the inheritance of promise” (Calvin, 1989:191). Furthermore, the reason they hung up their harps was that the “grief was too deeply seated to admit of common consolations or refreshment” (Calvin, 1989:192). The enemies’ purpose in mocking the captives was to cast blasphemies upon God, as if to say, “Your God is dead” (Calvin, 1989: 192). Calvin (1989:195) understands the psalmist’s oaths in v. 5 as God’s people declaring that the remembrance of the holy city would forever be on their hearts, and as instructive for the Lord’s people to be more affected by public calamities which affect the Church than by their own personal trials.

2.8.6.1.2 Meaning of the response

Calvin (1989:195) understands v. 6 to imply that “vengeance is to be executed upon other neighbouring nations.” That is, under Edom are to be included all the neighbouring nations which conspired to destroy Jerusalem. Calvin (1989:195-196) suggests that Edom is specified because it showed more hatred and cruelty than the rest (cf. Deut 2:4-6). In his imprecation, the psalmist is only confirming former prophecies that God would punish Edom, given in Ezekiel 25:13, Jeremiah 49:7, Lamentations 4:21, 22, and Obadiah 1:1-11 (Calvin, 1989:196).

Calvin (1989:196) comments on the call by the psalmist to “Remember, O Jehovah”:

[This was] to remind God's people of the promise to strengthen their belief in his avenging justice and make them wait for the event with patience and submission. To pray for vengeance would have been unwarrantable, had not God promised it, and had the party against whom it was sought not been reprobate and incurable; for as to others, even our greatest enemies we should wish their amendment and reformation.

In terms of the imagery of children being “dashed and mangled upon the stones,” the psalmist does not speak with the impulse of personal feeling, “and only employs words which God had himself authorized, so that this is but the declaration of a just judgment” (Calvin, 1989:197). The psalmist, Calvin suggests (1989:197-198), most likely is aware of the prediction in Isa 13:16 ff.

Calvin does offer a solution to the conundrum that Babylon was “doomed to be destroyed” but never met with the literal fate portrayed in vv. 7-9. He proposes that it was Cyrus and Darius who were supposed to carry out the judgment, but since they had done it negligently they would be cursed (Calvin, 1989:197). The psalmist most likely knew about the prediction in Jer 48:10 (Calvin, 1989:197).

2.8.7 Comparison with the exegetical findings of Psalm 137

Once again my goal here is to use the insights from the survey to supplement the exegesis I have done. In the exegesis I suggested that the historical events surrounding Psalm 137 may hint at a metaphorical interpretation for the imprecations, although somewhat qualified. The predominantly allegorical interpretations of the commentators stand in contrast to a metaphorical interpretation.²³⁵ Metaphoric and allegorical interpretations are both tropes. However, as Brown (2002:6) explains, for a metaphor to work “There must be a correspondence between the metaphor and its target domain that is recognized by both poet and reader; otherwise, the metaphor remains idiosyncratic and indecipherable.” Allegory is idiosyncratic in that it is unrestrained in imagining correspondences (Houston & Waltke, 2010:9). The metaphorical interpretation I offered is closely linked to the historical events. For example, the metaphor still

²³⁵ In Chapter 3 of this thesis I will argue that synecdoche best describes what is occurring in the images of enmity.

talks about the destruction of the real historical Babylon, but the images of violence are taken to refer to the symbolic elimination of the nation.²³⁶

One of the conclusions which led to my metaphorical interpretation was the historical anomaly created by the *qal* passive participle form of קָלַל (see exegesis) in v. 7. However, Calvin offers a plausible explanation for this conundrum: the imprecation was to be carried out through the agency of Darius and Cyrus but they were negligent.²³⁷ Calvin's theory also depends on the date of composition being earlier than the defeat of Babylon. However, it is possible that the psalmist saw the image as a qualified metaphor and understood the deeper truth beneath the literal meaning of the imprecation as a reflection of the true justice of God.²³⁸

Memory was also an important observation in the exegesis, being seen as the thread which held the psalm together. Memory of the suffering of the exile, conceptualized through the use of the term Zion, and memory expressed in the commitment of the returnees in the term Jerusalem, were even seen to be the foundation of the imprecations. With regards to memory, Chrysostom is particularly helpful. Although he might not have been exegeting the psalm in a way that would gain consensus from modern scholars, his observations are connected to the exile's experience in Babylon. Memory of God (Zion) is done in the context of God's memory of us. For without the latter we would choose good things but never do them. Augustine helps to let us understand what the psalmist does when he remembers Jerusalem. When the psalmist is remembering Jerusalem he is remembering where supreme joy is found. Memory allows one to see through the illusions and troubles of this world. For the exiles it allowed them to bear the peril of the crowds of evil-filled people. For Christians it will allow them to overcome the sadness from seeing things they think will bring joy slip away. For Calvin the oaths taken in remembrance of the Holy City were an example to place the Church's well-being above one's own.

²³⁶ This is in itself a severe form of punishment. Although the violent images are shocking to most readers, the idea that a nation would cease to exist and be silenced forever so that there would be no future to create memory may lack the gratuitous violence, but seems to be as severe on a different level.

²³⁷ This may be analogous to the way in which some interpret the prophecy in Ezekiel 26 of the destruction of Tyre. To comment on the prophecy in Ezekiel would go beyond the purpose of this paper. I only offer it as an example to show that Calvin's proposal is not unique.

²³⁸ See the exegesis for my supporting arguments. Furthermore, see Chapter 3 for a discussion of synecdoche.

The commentators are helpful in providing perspective to the hostility shown towards Israel. Goulder and Calvin both note the treachery involved in Edom's part, whereas Chrysostom shows the intensity of their hostility. Nevertheless, most commentators show a struggle to interpret the imprecations of violence. It must be pointed out that Jesus quoted this imprecation as a prophetic judgment on Jerusalem because it failed to recognize him. Jesus' acknowledgement that such violence was part of the historical judgment on Jerusalem is suggestive about the way God may choose to work in the world. Furthermore, Jesus does not show any indication of there being any contradiction with his new Kingdom message. The commentators Ambrose, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Jerome and Augustine all use allegorical approaches to interpret the violent images in v. 9. Chrysostom and Calvin take the imprecations in a literal way and struggle to explain the uneasiness that the images have for Christians. Calvin is especially helpful in the parameter which he sets up around the use of the imprecations.

Finally, we must note the significance that Babylon took on in the Church's history. The evil perpetrated by Babylon in the early 6th century B.C.E. was a significant event not only in the life of the Israelites, but also for the NT Church. Babylon becomes symbolic in the NT of everything that is opposed to God. Specifically in Revelation it is associated with demonic world power and described as the haunt of demons and the place of the slaughter of prophets and saints. Through its actions in the "day of Jerusalem" Babylon came to be understood as the epitome of evil. Consequently, the psalmist's imprecation for Babylon to cease to exist as a nation is certainly suitable.

2.9 Exegesis of Psalm 139

1. <To the director of music.²³⁹ Of David. A Psalm.>

²³⁹ NRSV *To the leader*. The exact phrase occurs elsewhere in Ps 40:1; 68:1; and 109:1. The implication is that the leader was a musical leader.

- O Lord, you search me and know me.²⁴⁰
2. You know when I sit down and when I rise up;
You discern my thoughts from far away.
3. You search out my path and my lying down
and are acquainted with all my ways.
4. Even before a word is on my tongue,
O LORD, you know it completely.
5. You hem me in, behind and before,²⁴¹
and lay your hand upon me.
6. Such²⁴² knowledge is too wonderful for me;
it is so high that I cannot attain it.
7. Where can I go from your spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
8. If I ascend into heaven, you are there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
9. If I take the wings of the morning,²⁴³
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
10. Even there your hand shall guide²⁴⁴ me,
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
11. If I say,²⁴⁵ “Surely the darkness will seize²⁴⁶ me

²⁴⁰ The NRSV translates these perfective and *waw* imperfective verbs into English with the present perfect. But in English the present perfect denotes an unspecified time in the past, or a present state resultant upon a past action. Translating according to a gnomic perfective (so Waltke [Waltke & Houston, 2010:534]) better catches the universal nature of God’s omniscience and accounts for the later part of the psalm, which indicates a present situation (Booij, 2005:2).

²⁴¹ אָחֹר וְקִדְמָה וְצִדֵּי תֵּנִי begins verse 5. The LXX links this phrase with 4b.

²⁴² *Such* is not found in the Hebrew. The LXX and Symmachus read ἡ γνώσις σου, which has the addition of a 2nd person pronoun and makes explicit that the knowledge is Yahweh’s. The need for the translation *such* captures the ambiguity in the MT as to what the antecedent of תַּעֲרֶךְ is. Booij (2005:3) thinks that תַּעֲרֶךְ refers to Yahweh’s nearness in v. 5 and that תַּעֲרֶךְ influenced by the context of 6b should be translated *understanding*. But תַּעֲרֶךְ can be considered all that the psalmist mentions about Yahweh’s knowledge between the *inclusio* formed by the idea of “knowledge” in v. 1 and v. 6.

²⁴³ The LXX and Syriac have כַּנְּפֵי “my wings” as the direct object.

²⁴⁴ NRSV has *lead*. The Syriac has תִּקְרָהּנִי, *shall seize me*, but the LXX supports the MT.

²⁴⁵ Interpreted as a conditional according to GES (2005:330, 111x), Jerome, and Symmachus. For a slightly modified view see Waltke (Houston & Waltke, 2010:537). For a position which rejects a conditional interpretation see Booij (2005:4).

- and the light become night around me,²⁴⁷
12. Even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.
13. For it was you who formed my inward parts;
you knit²⁴⁸ me together in my mother's womb.
14. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.²⁴⁹
Wonderful are your works;
that I know very well.
15. My frame was not hidden from you
when I was being made²⁵⁰ in secret,
intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
16. Your eyes beheld my embryo.²⁵¹
In your book were written all the days
which were formed for me
when none of them as yet existed.²⁵²
17. How precious²⁵³ to me are your thoughts, O God.
How vast is the sum of them.
18. Were I to count them – they would be more than sand.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁶ The emendation יְשׁוּבֵנִי suggested by BHS (1967/77:1218) and supported by Symmachus does not need to be adopted according to HALOT (2001b:1146b-1447, s.v. שׁוּב) which suggests “grip hard.”

²⁴⁷ Or *the night is light around me* which more accurately represents the syntax in the MT. לַיְלָה is construed as the subject on the basis that in a nominal clause the subject precedes the predicate (so Booij, 2005:4) and on the basis of semantic pertinence with v. 12b (so Waltke [Waltke & Houston, 2010:537]).

²⁴⁸ A biform of שָׁכַךְ cf. Job 10:11.

²⁴⁹ Scholars point out (Allen, 2002:319; Booij, 2005:6; Waltke (Waltke & Houston, 2010:538) that the verb נִבְרַאתִי by itself does not include the notion of “made.” However, the preceding word נִבְרַאתִי suggests an adjectival substantive functioning as an accusative of manner, which describes the way an action is performed (Waltke, [Waltke & Houston, 2010:538]). If the context of v. 15 is also considered, then the idea of “made” does not seem unreasonable.

²⁵⁰ Instead of the *pual* form found here in the MT, the LXX, Vulgate, Syriac and Targum have 2nd person active verbal forms. There is no reason, though, to reject the MT.

²⁵¹ BDB (1979:166, s.v. עֲרֵב) and HALOT (2001a:194) propose *embryo*. The NRSV has *my unformed substance*.

²⁵² Verse 4 might give additional support to favouring the *Ketiv* form אֶלְיָ over the *Qere* form יְלִי.

²⁵³ NRSV *weighty*. Based on structural parallelism with vv. 6 and 14 (פִּלְאָה) the Hebrew stative verb יָקָרָה (*to be precious*) may have the Aramaic sense of “be difficult” (Allen 2002:319). The LXX has ἐμοὶ δὲ λίαν ἐτιμήθησαν οἱ φίλοι σου ὁ θεός, *but to me your friends were honoured, O God*.

- I wake up²⁵⁵ – I am still with you.
19. Oh that you would slay²⁵⁶ the wicked,²⁵⁷ O God.
Bloodthirsty men, depart from me!²⁵⁸
20. Those who speak of you maliciously,
your enemies who speak in vain!²⁵⁹
21. Do not I hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
22. I hate²⁶⁰ them with complete hatred;
I count them my enemies.
23. Search me, O God, and know my heart;
try²⁶¹ me and know my thoughts.
24. And see if there is any way of idolatry²⁶² in me,
and lead me in the way of everlasting.

²⁵⁴ NRSV has *I try to count them – they are more than the sand*. In my opinion, the above translation portrays the subjunctive mood better.

²⁵⁵ BHS and some scholars (Allen, 2002; *et al.*) favour emending the MT to תִּקְצוּן, but קָצַק is not found elsewhere in the *hiphil* stem. Furthermore, the LXX has ἐξήγγερθην, which seems to support the MT. קָצַק is a biform of קָצַק *to wake up*. Waltke (Waltke & Houston, 2010:539) suggests the *hiphil* may indicate an internal notion, “I wake myself up.”

²⁵⁶ NRSV *kill*.

²⁵⁷ A singular form, but a collective meaning because the other enemies are plural. Contra Goulder (1998:246) who believes the *wicked one* here is the governor of the province.

²⁵⁸ NRSV *and that the bloodthirsty would depart from me*. NRSV is following the Syriac and Targum which appear to support יִסְרְרִי. However, as Waltke & Houston (2010:539) note, transition to direct speech is noted elsewhere, in Pss 6:8; 119:15. The LXX, Symmachus and Jerome all omit the copula.

²⁵⁹ NRSV *and lift themselves up against you for evil*, which involves understanding the *qal* perfect אֲשִׁי as reflexive and emending קָצַק to קָצַק (so Gunkel, 1926:593; NEB). Many English translations (ASV, ESV, KJV, NASB, NIV, NKJ, NLT) and Targum refer to variations of *your enemies take your name in vain*, a reading which is reminiscent of Ex 20:7 and Deut 5:11. However, this involves an ellipse of “your name.” The above translation follows Allen’s (2002:318; 320) proposal based on parallelism, suggesting that an ellipse of קוֹל “voice” is assumed as in Isa 3:7; 42:2, 11.

²⁶⁰ NRSV has *perfect*.

²⁶¹ NRSV *test*

²⁶² עֲצָב can be translated with a meaning derived from the sense of *pain* (BDB, 1979:780; *s.v.* עֲצָב). So the NRSV has *wicked way*. But as Allen (2002:320) points out, the ambiguity of who the object of the pain is is removed when עֲצָב is translated according to its homonym form meaning of *idolatry* (BDB, 1979:781; *s.v.* עֲצָב) (so Kraus [1989:511]; Würthwein [1957:173-174]). The author may have used this expression to sharpen the contrast between the religion of Yahweh and the religious myths which are alluded to in the poem. Furthermore, this expression does not have to be considered a protestation of innocence, but can be considered a petition by the psalmist for Yahweh to test his integrity, which has become a matter of concern due to the hostility he is encountering.

2.9.1 Statement of investigation

Verses 19-22 of Psalm 139 are often met with aversion by the modern reader. The psalmist asking for God (אלהים) to kill the enemy and stressing his own hatred of the enemies makes these verses difficult to interpret for those who believe such a prayer is incompatible with the New Testament ethic to love for one's enemy. The apparent contrast between the providential intimacy shown in vv. 1-18 and the ostensible vengeful request in v. 19a, which is expanded by a tirade expressing the psalmist's solidarity with Yahweh in hatred, seems to further exacerbate this hermeneutical difficulty. Gunkel (1926:586, 589) is representative in his Marcionic understanding of this psalm, which suggests that vv. 19-24 represent the underdeveloped and unbalanced religion of the Israelites.²⁶³

There has been no consensus in understanding the enmity in the psalm. Firth (2005:46-49) categorizes the suffering as psychological violence done against the psalmist, the psalmist having been charged with a capital crime, and proposes that the psalmist's response represents a self-curse. Zenger (1996:32) believes the bloodthirstiness in v. 19 represents not the acute threat from an enemy, but the structural violence in the society of the wicked. Goulder (1998:246) believes that the עֲשֵׂה (v. 19) is the governor of the province. The approach taken here is that the interpretation of the suffering and expressions of enmity depend on the form and setting of the psalm.

2.9.2 Structure, form and setting

The psalmist communicates his message through four carefully balanced strophes (vv. 1b-6; 7-12; 13-18; 19-24). However, the carefully placed *inclusio*, found between vv. 1b and 23 via the words חָקַךְ and יָדַע; vv. 2 and 23 via רַעְיִי (*my thoughts*) and שִׁרְעֵי פִי (*my anxious thoughts*); and vv. 3 and 24 via דָּרַךְ, indicates a unified perspective from which the message of the psalm should be derived. Allen

²⁶³ These last four verses of Psalm 139 have often been excised from prayer books. The online *Book of Common Prayer* (<http://www.bcponline.org>, p. 795) contains them, but printed versions (BCP Canada, 1962) in the past have omitted them. The most recent online version of *The Liturgy of the Hours Psalter* ([http://www.liturgies.net/Prayers/lohpsalter.htm#Psalm 139](http://www.liturgies.net/Prayers/lohpsalter.htm#Psalm%20139)) includes them, but they have often been omitted during the actual recital of the Liturgy of the Hours (Zenger, 1996:30).

(2002:321) suggests a slightly different structure based on the direct praise found in v. 14 (1b-6; 7-14a; 14b-18; 19-24). In this case all three strophes would end in either wondering praise (v. 6) or hymnic phrasing (vv. 14a, and 17, 18). However, conceptually v. 13 seems to contribute to the theme of omnificence (v. 14 can also be interpreted in this manner)²⁶⁴ and forms a unified theme of omnificence with vv. 14-18, and so v. 14 can properly be considered part of a third strophe which includes vv. 13-18. In this case in v. 14, the psalmist, in an atypical response, breaks out in praise for Yahweh's creation of himself.²⁶⁵

The first three strophes each successively build the psalmist's perspective on Yahweh's involvement in the world from different angles leading up to the final strophe which contains the petition; the structure is: strophe 1, God's omniscience; strophe two, God's omnipresence; strophe three, God's omnificence.²⁶⁶ Each strophe consists of a quatrain of two couplets, beginning with a summary verse (1, 7, 13, 19) followed by three expanded verses (vv. 2ff, 8ff, 14ff, 19ff) and finally a lone couplet (vv. 5-6; 11-12; 17-18; 23-24) (Waltke [Waltke & Houston, 2011:541-542]). This unity reinforces the need to understand the petition in strophe four as part of the whole psalm.

Besides the *inclusio*, the poet creates the unity of his theme through other rhetorical skills. He uses merisms to highlight the notion of Yahweh's omniscience in the first strophe (vv. 1, 2, 3, 5), each merism representing completeness and so implicitly contributing to Yahweh's complete knowledge. He uses a symmetrical rhetorical question (v. 7),²⁶⁷ the subjunctive mood (vv. 8-12), and geographical opposites (e.g., אֶרֶץ – אֲשֶׁר – אֶרֶץ) to highlight God's omnipresence. The subjunctive mood provides the hypothetical conditions by which to highlight the impossibility of escape from Yahweh. Furthermore, in strophe three the theme of omnificence is reinforced through the mention of body parts: v. 13 כִּלְיָהּ (kidneys), רֶחֶם (womb); v. 14 נִפְשִׁי

²⁶⁴ Allen (2002:319) proposes emendations to v. 14 and translates differently.

²⁶⁵ Atypical because none of the eleven other uses of the form אֶרֶץ in the Psalms refers to creation (אֶרֶץ occurs 67 times in the Psalms out of 114 occurrences in the OT).

²⁶⁶ So Waltke (Waltke & Houston, 2010:541) and Dahood (1970:284-285), although Dahood structures the latter part of the psalm vv. 13-16, vv. 17-22 and vv. 23,24.

²⁶⁷ verb + preposition – preposition + verb

(person?); v. 15 עֲצָם (bones/frame);²⁶⁸ v. 16 גֶּלֶם (embryo), עֵין (eye); v. 17 רַעַי (thoughts?);²⁶⁹ רֹאשׁ (head).

Another technique which the author uses to disclose his perspective is the distribution of divine names. The Psalm begins in v. 1 with the psalmist evoking יהוה (also v. 4), the covenantal name for the God of Israel, to speak of God's omniscience. The psalmist then uses אֵל in v. 17, which is the name which signifies Yahweh's transcendence (Waltke & Houston, 2010:541). Then in strophe four the psalmist alternates between the use of אֱלֹהִים (v. 19), יהוה (v. 21),²⁷⁰ and אֵל (v. 23). This latter use with the verbs חָקַר and יָדַע forms an *inclusio* with יהוה in v. 1, where the same verbs occur. One possible reason may have been polemical, to reinforce that Yahweh was this אֵל. In doing so, the psalmist relates the transcendent nature portrayed in the term אֵל with the covenantal name by which יהוה was known to his people. There is also a switching of the terms for God when dealing with the enemies. It is אֱלֹהִים (v. 19) whom the psalmist asks *to slay* (קָטַל) the *wicked* (רָשָׁע), but it is יהוה who is the object of the enemies' hatred (those who hate you, מְשִׁנְאֵיךָ).

Understanding the Psalm's message also depends on determining its form. Gunkel (1998:306, 46, 121) classified Ps 139 as a mixed genre consisting of the hymn of an individual (vv. 1-18) with an individual complaint added on (vv. 19-24). Mowinckel (1962a:220), seeing the individual's voice in the psalm representing the whole nation, considered the psalm a communal lament. More specifically he classified it as a "protective psalm" which was composed in the middle of or before some threatening danger. Westermann (1981:219) makes sense of the different elements under the classification of praise focusing on the motif of creation. Other variations are also found, for example, Allen (2002:324), individual lament; Kraus (1989:513, 517), an individual psalm of thanksgiving. Gerstenberger (2001:405-406) suggests that the common salient features of the different elements of this psalm are the

²⁶⁸ Note the homonym in v. 17 עֲצָם (many, much).

²⁶⁹ An anthropomorphism rather than an actual body part.

²⁷⁰ BHS notes a few manuscripts do not contain יהוה in v. 21, but other ancient versions (LXX, Targum) have it.

sapiential language and reflective mood and so he styles this psalm a meditation. Hossfeld (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:539) concurs with Gerstenberger's designation.

Helpful is Waltke's (Waltke & Houston, 2010:543) classification of Ps 139 as a petitionary psalm, although in unusual order: (v. 1a address; vv. 1b-12 confidence, although atypical;²⁷¹ vv. 13-18 praise; vv. 19-22 lament; and vv. 23, 24 petition. For Waltke (Waltke & Houston, 2010:549-552) the confidence section is atypical because the psalmist mixes confidence and anxiety. The nuance of anxiety comes from the hostile military metaphors in vv. 5-7.

2.9.3 Identification of the enemies as a clue to the setting

A popular proposal for a legal-ritual setting has been suggested on the basis of v. 24 **בַּדֶּבֶר עֲצָב** literally *way of idolatry* (or *way of pain*),²⁷² but often glossed in English as *wicked way* (KJV and NRSV), *offensive way* (NIV), *grievous way* (ESV) etc. Würthwein (1957:165-182), Weiser (1962:802), Kraus (1989:513, 518), and Dahood (1970:284) all suggest that the psalmist has been accused of idolatry at a religious court and calls upon Yahweh to protest his innocence.²⁷³ Consequently, Dahood (1970:284) believes the reference to the enemies is to religious leaders. But perhaps the enemies being described as enemies of God rather than of the psalmist should caution against too literal an interpretation of the language as representing an actual cultic trial.²⁷⁴ Even if the enemies are associated directly with the psalmist as Allen suggests (2002:324), the psalmist identifies them as Yahweh's enemies and in his second petition in an unusual manner does not ask to be delivered from them.

²⁷¹ Gunkel (1926:587) had recognized that the psalm was unusual because it did not have an introduction and because of the subjectivity of treatment.

²⁷² Both translations seem to have a point of convergence if the translation "pain" refers to the pain his sin inflicts upon him (so Waltke's interpretation of pain [Waltke & Houston 2010:569]) and if "way of idolatry" is taken as a metonymy for sin.

²⁷³ Gunkel (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:140) suggested that the term **עֲצָב** (v. 19) originally belonged to the legal realm and designated the guilty party, and only later did it take on the general meaning of wicked or godless.

²⁷⁴ Which is the reason that Beyerlin (1970:11) did not include this psalm as "an enemy psalm of the individual" in his study *Die Rettung der Bedrängten in den Feindpsalmen der Einzelnen auf institutionelle Zusammenhänge untersucht*.

Croft (1987:46, 81, 90) sees the enemies as evildoers within Israel. His identification of the enemies as internal enemies is tied to a cultic-legal setting, but there may be grounds to question whether the enemies can only be identified as internal enemies. The enemies are explicitly identified by the following terms: v. 19 רָשָׁע *wicked*,²⁷⁵ אֲנָשֵׁי דָמִים *men of blood*; v. 20 לְמַזְמָה לְאֹמְרֵיךָ *those who speak of you maliciously*; v. 21 מְשַׁנְּאִיךָ *those who hate you*; v. 22 לְאֹיְבִים [my] *enemies*.

From the unity of strophe four, all the terms for enemies appear to be representing the same group. Furthermore, the enemies are substantial: “Only in a communal context is Yahweh’s confrontation with hostile groups thematized” (Gerstenberger, 2001:404). This does not necessarily mean that the enemies must be external, but it does indicate that the scope from which to identify the enemies should be considered on more than only a private individual level. For Croft, both of the terms used for enemies in Ps 139, רָשָׁע and אֹיֵב, can refer either to external or internal enemies.²⁷⁶

Croft (1987:32) allows that “foreign enemies and armies can be described as רָשָׁעִים by reason of their opposition to Yahweh or his anointed.” The אֹיֵב, Croft (1987:32) suggests, represent a threat to the psalmist and in about two-thirds of the psalms in which the term appears represents foreign enemies. However, the language used by the psalmist to describe the enemies as מְשַׁנְּאִיךָ *those who hate* is covenantal language.²⁷⁷ As was discussed in Ps 129 (Botha, 2002:1406) the word *hate* when used as an expression towards Yahweh (הַנְּהוּי מְשַׁנְּאִיךָ *those who hate you, Lord*)²⁷⁸ is almost always used to identify those outside of the covenant and hence external to

²⁷⁵ רָשָׁע is construed as a collective singular because the other enemies are identified in the plural. Goulder (1998:241) takes the רָשָׁע as singular, and identifies him as the governor of Judea.

²⁷⁶ For Croft (1987:47) the רָשָׁעִים are classified by being under Yahweh’s judgement. Likewise, Croft (1987:32) categorizes the אֹיֵב as those who represent a threat to the psalmist.

²⁷⁷ Gerstenberger (2001:404) to the contrary says, “By way of this declaration of solidarity (not by covenant formulas) the alliance of the believers with Yahweh is made perfect (cf. Ps 69:10 [RSV 9]).” Is Gerstenberger making too much of a difference between the two?

²⁷⁸ The term מְשַׁנְּאִי occurs four times in vv. 21 and 22. The suggestion that the enemies can be internal because of the use of the phrase וְלִשְׁנֹאֵי יְהוָה in 2 Chr 19:2 may be questionable. The phrase is spoken by Jehu the seer to Jehoshaphat and it is unclear who the subject of the phrase is. If it is Ahab, he was only a nominal member of the covenant community at most. Furthermore, how did Jehoshaphat help? Did he help Ahab by wearing the royal robes of Israel? Ahab was still killed. Or did he help the Aramites by indicating he was not the king of Israel? Most likely the reference is to the former, although the context of the use of the phrase *those who hate the Lord* is a battle with Aram.

Israel. Could the polemical tone of the psalm also mirror non-covenantal enemies?²⁷⁹

Is it possible to be more specific with the categorization of this psalm? It is partially on the basis that the enemies are God's enemies that Eaton (1975:83, 84) identifies the psalmist as a king who is under attack. Eaton (2005:459) adduces that the psalmist is a king by comparison with psalms 16, 17 and 63; the enemies who beseech him are also God's foes; the psalmist claims merit in his total opposition to the enemies, and wants to be led in the total way of eternity, cf. 21:2f; 45:6; 61.7f; 72:5; 110:4.²⁸⁰ Although this categorization has not garnered much following, Eaton finds support from Croft and Goulder. Croft (1987:46, 81, 90) understands Ps 139 as a psalm intended for the ritual preparation of kingship.²⁸¹ Goulder (1998:242) agrees that the psalm must speak of some national leader, but believes the language dates it later. The arguments for a late dating are based on the Aramaisms in the text.²⁸² However, some of the ideas contained in Ps 139 appear to have an early provenance by comparison with the Amarna text (15th century BCE) and the biography of Hattusillis (Hattusillis the 3rd ruled from 1298-1260 BCE).²⁸³ Perhaps at this stage in research it is best to hold with Weiser (1962:802) a tentative dating of the psalm. I will consider the psalm as a protective psalm composed for the king under attack from significant enemies.

²⁷⁹ It is beyond the scope of this study to investigate these allusions, but it is generally recognized that the psalmist makes allusions to the pagan myths of the solar deity, the Mother Earth goddess, and the Tablet of Destiny (see Waltke & Houston, 2011:534-572). There are further indications of a polemical tone: "Ea is the wise lord of the depths, Marduk is the battler against primeval Chaos, and Shamash drives away all darkness. Yahweh's activity embraces all these aspects (cf. Ps 139)" (Keele, 1997:49). Further, in the practice of haruspicy in Babylon, the liver was believed to be a microcosm of the whole body (Keele, 1997:184-185). In Ps 139 Yahweh is the creator and determiner of human life. To these examples can be added the contrast between *the way of idolatry* and *the way everlasting* and the use of the various names for God (see above).

²⁸⁰ Further evidence is the intimacy of the relationship of Yahweh with him and the regal allusions inferred from creation (Eaton, 1975:84).

²⁸¹ He finds similarities with the Babylonian Akitu festival.

²⁸² See Allen (2002:326) and Waltke & Houston (2010:544). Dahood (1970:284-299) has presented linguistic arguments based on similar lexical links with the book of Job, inscriptions, mixed dialects, Northwest Semitic vocabulary, Ugaritic, etc. as a means of suggesting an earlier pre-exilic date.

²⁸³ Young's (1965:101-110) purpose is to show the distinctness of the concept of the omniscience of Yahweh in Israel, but the comparison shows that the concepts existed and were in use relatively early.

2.9.4 Perceived suffering

The caesura between vv. 18 and 19 indicate that the king's meditation about God's active and relational presence stands in contrast with the hostile reality he faces. In v. 19b the psalmist transitions to direct speech and commands אֲנִי־אֶשְׁׁרֵם לְדַמַּיִם *men of blood* to depart from him. This phrase *men of blood* occurs four times in the Psalter and once in Proverbs. It has the meaning of those under Yahweh's judgement (Ps 26:9); those who will not live out half of their days because of Yahweh's judgement (Ps 55:24); those who are out to kill the innocent psalmist (Ps 59:3);²⁸⁴ and those who hate the blameless and seek the life of the upright (Prov 29:10). Although the term אֲנִי has semantic multivalence (TDOT:244-245, s.v. אֲנִי), the ethical implications are that those who are identified by this term have taken innocent blood, or in the case of Ps 59:3 and Prov 29:10 there is an intention to take innocent life. In the context of enemies arrayed against the king we can see this opposition as part of an historical process. "The word אֲנִי occurs frequently in the theological interpretation of a historical process which may often look like a series of bloody wars" (TDOT:244-245, s.v. אֲנִי).

The psalmist's אֲנִי־אֶשְׁׁרֵם (v. 23b) *anxious/disquieting thoughts* provide a wider context for the psalmist's disposition because they appear to be related to all that is included in the *inclusio* between vv. 1b and 23a. In the immediate context 23b refers to the hostility of the enemies with emphasis primarily as God's enemies. However, *the disquieting thoughts* must also be understood in the context of strophes one, two and three. Yahweh, who discerns the psalmist's thoughts אֲנִי from afar (v. 2a), and whose אֲנִי (v. 17a) thoughts are *precious* אֲנִי to the psalmist, is intimately present in the psalmist's existence. This notion of presence stands in distinction to the notion of Yahweh's presence expounded in Ps 119 as presence through Torah, or the presence of place identified in Ps 110 as Zion. The contrast between what the psalmist has adumbrated about Yahweh's intimate knowledge and care and the psalmist's present reality of hostility becomes the basis for him to petition Yahweh to search and know his heart. While in v. 1b the psalmist is stating a habitual fact

²⁸⁴ Possibly from v. 5 identified by foreign nations, but note the heading.

that Yahweh searches and knows him, here the psalmist uses the imperative mood.²⁸⁵

In the psalmist's worldview, he cannot reconcile the disparity between the presence of Yahweh and the presence of the enemies, whose immediate threat is captured in the psalmist's direct speech (v. 19b). Consequently, the psalmist turns to self-reflection to determine whether the cause may be his own shortcomings. Like the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 17:9) the psalmist knows that *the heart is deceitful above all things*. In vv. 5-7 the psalmist's choice of verbs reflects the anxiety that he feels. Now in strophe four, rather than protesting his innocence, the psalmist is asking God to test his mettle. The psalmist is implicitly formulating the problem of God's just dealing with his people. How can those who are enemies stand if God is present and fulfilling his obligations? The psalmist is worried that unknown sin is the cause. Perhaps the second petition (v. 24b) reinforces the psalmist's focus. The psalmist's ultimate concern is not framed in terms of deliverance from the enemies, but rather being led in the way everlasting.

2.9.5 Meaning of the response

The crux of the issue is how to make sense of the psalmist's petition, אִם-תִּקְטֹל אֱלֹהִים (v. 19), *Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God.*²⁸⁶ The אִם is the marker of the optative mood (GES, 2005:477, 151e), and the second person direct address to אֱלֹהִים (v. 19) ensures that the expression is understood as a request and not just a soliloquy. The word קִטֵּל in its biblical use refers to the intentional taking of life. When used to describe a person's actions (only once, in Job 24:14) it carries with it an immoral characterization intensified by the object of the action, in this case the "poor". When Job uses the verb in Job 13:15 with God as the subject and himself as object it serves a rhetorical function. In Oba 1:9 it is used in the context of a prophetic judgment of

²⁸⁵ Dahood (1970:225) believes the imperatives in v. 23 are grounds for translating the same verbs in v. 1 as precative perfects, but this misses the nuance which the author creates. It is because Yahweh knows him that the psalmist is anxious about some unknown wicked way in his life. Further, it is better to translate the two verb forms in v. 1 as a merism in which the totality of God's knowledge is being reinforced not only by content but by rhetorical style.

²⁸⁶ It occurs four times in the OT: Job 13:15; 24:14; Oba 1:9; and Ps 139:19. The Aramaic form קִטֵּל also meaning *kill* occurs five times in the book of Daniel (2:13 x 2; 2:14; 3:22; 5:19).

Yahweh (יְהוָה נִאָּם Oba 1:8) against Edom for Edom's participation in the sack of Jerusalem and will occur on the יוֹם־יְהוָה (Oba 1:15). This last example, then, provides the closest similarity to Ps 139.

Furthermore, by referring to the enemies as *men of blood* the psalmist is implicitly remarking on the obligation that Yahweh has as the דָּרֵשׁ דְּמַיִם “avenger of blood” (Ps 9:13). Bloodshed pollutes the land and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed except by the blood of the one who shed it (Num 35:33; Ps 106:38). God is the ultimate avenger of murder, cf. Deut 32:43; 2 Kgs 9:7; Ps 9:12 (NIDOTTE: 963-966, s.v. דָּרֵשׁ). Perhaps one function of the psalmist's portrayal of Yahweh as omniscient, omnipresent, and omnifiscient in vv. 1-18 is to remind Yahweh of his obligation to avenge the innocent shedding of blood. Yahweh is the creator of both those who murder and the innocent who are murdered. By virtue of his obligation to account for innocent blood, the enemies can be identified as Yahweh's enemies. The enemies in accordance with their characterization find their consequential end in opposing Yahweh himself via his representative the king. The king and the community rally in prayer that asks Yahweh to remember his obligations according to who the enemies are.

At times, Yahweh is portrayed as helping the righteous get revenge on the evildoer (Ps 58:11; Ps 68:24), but here it is Yahweh who is called on to act. The question of agency is left at its primary level. The king and his army would be the natural agency through whom Yahweh would work out his justice, but the king does not formulate this aspect of agency in his prayer. The response to the injustice of the bloodthirsty begins with developing a Yahweh-orientated perspective.

But there is another aspect to this prayer, that is, the psalmist's apprehension with whether there is an offensive way in his life. His direct speech to the enemies, “Bloodthirsty men, depart סוּר from me” provides another perspective from which to see his dilemma. This juxtaposition of two very different approaches to the enemies makes sense if we see them in terms of the removal of the enemies as a sign of God's presence. In other words, whereas the first petition for the death of the enemies holds Yahweh to his obligations as creator, the direct speech for the removal of the enemies can be seen in terms of Yahweh's presence. The psalmist

has a worldview²⁸⁷ that understands the unjust enemies and Yahweh's presence as incompatible. So now the psalmist turns from Yahweh's obligations to his own. Like Jeremiah he recognizes that the heart is evil and so he looks to see if there is any sin in his life. This apprehension is portrayed both in the psalmist's anxiety inferred in vv. 1-18 and in his second petition in vv. 23, 24. That the second petition (v. 24) does not further deal with the enemies by asking for deliverance serves to highlight the psalmist's understanding of the conundrum. To request to be led in the "way of everlasting" returns the focus to the psalmist's reliance on Yahweh's leading. The everlasting way is "the path of unbroken communion and life with the Lord" (Eaton, 2005:461).

2.9.6 Conclusion of the exegesis

In summary, Psalm 139 deals with the problem of God's justice as represented by his presence as maker and sustainer of life apart from expressions of the Law and the cult.²⁸⁸ The meaning of the imprecation comes from the perceived obligation of Yahweh as the avenger of blood and the inability to reconcile the success of the wicked and the presence of Yahweh. The psalmist appeals to Yahweh's omniscience, omnipresence and omnificence as the basis for Yahweh's obligation to account for innocent blood being shed and the psalmist's own fear that there may be sin in his life. As Eaton (1995:460) notes,

He [the psalmist] presents them [the enemies] (vv. 20f.) as hostile to God himself, somewhat as the enemies of God's kingdom in the royal Psalms 2, 101 and 144, planning rebellion, uttering arrogance. And like the anointed in Psalm 2, the psalmist would make the Lord's cause his own, utterly opposing the enemies of the Lord.

Whether the psalmist thought of the defeat of the enemies from an eschatological perspective cannot be proven for certain.

²⁸⁷ The historical narratives of both the judges and the kings would serve to reinforce such a worldview.

²⁸⁸ The use of the psalm in the cult and possibly the allusions of $\square\bar{\eta}$ to cultic sacrifices might infer a cultic use (see also above, the modern commentators who propose a legal cultic setting). However, in a straightforward reading the content of the psalm does not include the Law or the cult *per se*.

2.10 A Select Historical Survey of the Interpretation of Psalm 139

In the context of the findings in the exegesis, it will be helpful to state what our particular focus will be in this section. We will be interested in how the commentators understand the adversity of the psalmist and what meaning they attach to the psalmist's response in vv. 19-24. Since some scholars attach a negative connotation to God's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnificence (see exegesis), how did the commentators understand these images in vv. 1-18? Also of interest will be how the commentators understood the relationship between the two sections vv. 1-18 and vv. 19-24.

2.10.1 Psalm 139 in the Post-Exilic Restoration

One of the proposals in the introduction was that in the editing of Book V, the editors did so in order to present a historical perspective of the post-exilic restoration period.²⁸⁹ This, however, does not mean that the individual psalms were composed in the post-exilic period. Rather, the editor considered the restoration as the central focus by which to arrange the psalms. The conclusion reached in the exegesis was that Psalm 139 was originally a protective psalm for the king under attack from significant enemies. Since the kingship did not exist in the restoration, one possibility of interpretation is that it took on an eschatological meaning at the time of the restoration. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to make some observations about Ps 139 from the perspective of being composed in the post-exilic restoration.

Goulder (1998:241) takes Ps 139 to have been written when Jerusalem was only partially rebuilt. The speaker is a reformist Jewish leader, and Goulder (1998:241) understands the *wicked man* in vv. 19a and 20b to refer to the governor of Judea, who, with his associates, are nominal worshippers of Yahweh. This governor wants to impose an alien religious law on the cities in the land (Goulder, 1998:241). In this context, the religious leader is praying for the death of the "law-breaking governor and his men" (Goulder, 1998:242). The psalmist does not feel God's hand to be hostile (vv. 1-6) or oppressive (vv. 7-12) (Goulder, 1998:243). Goulder (1998:243)

²⁸⁹ Once again, this is irrespective of the date of composition of the individual texts and is not the only perspective which may have been intentionally incorporated during the editing of Book V.

also sees evidence of a prophetic vocation from the imagery in vv. 7-12. Furthermore, the governor and his armed retinue of “men of blood” hate Yahweh and rise up against him (Goulder, 1998:246). Jeremiah’s prayer was more powerful than the psalmist’s because in Jeremiah’s case Hananiah the son of Azzur actually did die (Jer 28:17) (Goulder, 1998:246). Goulder (1998:247) makes a tentative suggestion that Ezra is the religious leader and that Johanan (Neh 12:22) was a wicked man who did not follow God’s true law.

2.10.2 Psalm 139 in the NT

The Greek New Testament (1983:906) lists no quotations of Ps 139 in the NT, but lists three occurrences of allusions/verbal parallels: Ps 139:1 with Rom 8:27; Ps 139:14 with Rev 15:3; and Ps 139:21 with Rev 2:6.²⁹⁰

In the Rom 8:27 passage²⁹¹ the larger context is the future glory of Christians at the resurrection, but the immediate context is of prayer. The general thrust of the passage is that the Holy Spirit aids the Christian in prayer, but that God himself searches the heart and knows the mind of this Spirit. It should also be noted that it is in the context of suffering (Rom 8: 17 and 18) in which this passage of prayer occurs. The searching effect of God then is one which aids the believer, who does not have the depth of knowledge of himself to know what to pray. The Spirit, in a way, reveals to God only what God can know because of the limitation of human self-knowledge.

The Rev 15:3 passage follows the mention of the last seven plagues symbolizing the completion of God’s wrath (Rev 15:1).²⁹² The deeds (15:3, τὰ ἔργα; Ps 138:14 LXX) here, then, are related to the defeat of the beast, his image and the number of his

²⁹⁰ For a discussion of whether John’s use of the OT in Revelation was rhetorical, mystical, or scribal see Moyise (2012: 5.7).

²⁹¹ Chrysostom (1988:252) also notes this connection between Ps 139:1 and Rom 8:27.

²⁹² Blount (2009:285) notes that although Revelation is filled with hymns, only three times does John use the actual vocabulary of singing (ᾄδω), at Revelation 15:3; 14:3; and 5:9. Rev 15:3 relates to Ps 139, whereas Rev 5:9 and 14:3 relate to allusions in Ps 149, the last psalm in my investigation. Given the nature of the Psalms, such a connection should not be thought of as coincidental. “The central focus that joins both prior singing episodes [with 15:3] is celebration prompted by the realization of God’s rule” (Blount, 2009:286).

name (Rev 15:2). Although John appeals to the “song of Moses,”²⁹³ the new song presented in 15:3-4 is based on “a broad cross-section of OT texts that heralds a consensus about God’s almighty and salvific nature” (Blount, 2009:287). Importantly, in the final words of verse 3, “John identifies the almighty judging God as the King, not of Israel or the conquering witnesses, but of the nations” (Blount, 2009:288). As Moyise (2012: 5.6) notes, since the nations have been the subject of judgment in Revelation in chapters 6 to 14, the inclusion of a hymn that proclaims their salvation must be purposeful. The connection is implied in Ps 139, where God is portrayed as the creator of all and hence the sovereign of all. A further point that Blount (2009:286) brings out about the “metaphor of singing” in 15:3 is that its connection with the plagues of wrath (15:1, 5-8) re-establishes “a focus on the realization of God’s rule through the execution of God’s justice/judgment.” The “song of the lamb” explains that Jesus will lead the deliverance of the saints from the beast (Beale & McDonough, 2007:1133)

The last passage where a link is presented is in Ps 139:21 and Rev 2:6. The context for the Revelation passage is the message of John’s vision to the Church in Ephesus. In the passage the Church at Ephesus has lost its first love, but is commended by the risen Jesus because they hate (μισέω; also LXX Ps 138:21) the practices of the Nicolaitans which Jesus also hates. The solidarity of hating the enemies of Christ, then, is commended in this vision given to John.

2.10.3 Psalm 139 in the Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

2.10.3.1 Suffering in Psalm 139

The commentators have various opinions as to the impact that God’s omniscience, omnipresence and omnificence had on the psalmist.²⁹⁴ Writing in the first century,

²⁹³ Beale (1999:358) relates the “song of Moses” to Ex 15 and Deut 32, and notes that the “song of Moses” in Deut 32 ends with “he will avenge the blood of his servants.” The idea of “bloodthirsty” (men of blood) in Ps 139:19 and its relation to Yahweh being the creator of all people was commented upon in the exegesis.

²⁹⁴ The discussion follows a sequential ordering of the verses as opposed to a purely chronological one.

the apologist Clement²⁹⁵ of Rome (2007:385) suggests that God’s omnipresence (139:7-8) should lead to the fear of God and the abandonment of “the abominable lusts that spawn evil works.” A sense of not being able (or not wanting) to completely know oneself comes out in the Cappadocian father, Basil.²⁹⁶ Basil (2007:384), in speaking about God’s omniscience (v. 6), suggests that “even our mind, which contemplates intently another’s sin, is slow in the recognition of its own defects.” For Basil, by contemplating ourselves we can understand the superabundance of wisdom in God. The Antiochene, Theodoret of Cyrus (2007:385), sees the expression from v. 6, “Truly your knowledge was wonderful to me: I was overwhelmed and could not reach to it” as words which should lead to praising of the “Benefactor” with all one’s might. Chrysostom (2007:385) sees v. 6, “Your knowledge is too wondrous for me,” and v. 14, “I will give you thanks for you are fearfully wondrous: wondrous are your works”²⁹⁷ as causing the psalmist to “shudder” and to be “deeply frightened.”

Peter Chrysologus²⁹⁸ (2007:386-387) interprets vv. 7-10 in the context of the fact that sin cannot be hidden from God. That is, sin stands exposed to the eyes of God. Ps 139 is also used apologetically. Basil (2007c:387) uses v. 8 in his argument refuting any insubordination of Christ to the Father. Augustine (2007c:387)²⁹⁹ interprets vv. 7-8 to suggest that if God is everywhere his Spirit is everywhere.

The sense of God’s penetrating searching in the context of judgment comes across in Cyprian (2007:388-389). In the context of Christians who had taken *libelli* (certificates issued by Roman officials during the Decian persecution as proof that they had renounced their faith), he interprets v. 16 to mean that they will not escape judgment. Also interesting is the way he introduces the quotation of v. 16 by saying, “The Holy Spirit says in the Psalms.” The penetration of God’s searching is captured

²⁹⁵ In his *First Epistle* Clement uses the paranetic approach of Philo to highlight the moral teachings of Jesus (Gillingham, 2008:25).

²⁹⁶ According to Gillingham (2008:30) Basil has a more practical appeal to the Psalms and his 15 homilies on the Psalms have much in common with Athanasius. In his homilies, Basil is not so concerned with heresies as were the Alexandrian writers on the Psalms. A further characteristic of Basil is that he differs from his brother Gregory in that Basil sees the *skopos* of the Psalms in relation to the person and work of Christ rather than the ascent of the soul to heaven.

²⁹⁷ The text here differs from the MT.

²⁹⁸ Peter Chrysologus (c. 380-450) was the Latin archbishop of Ravenna.

²⁹⁹ This reference to Augustine does not come from his commentary and is included in this section for convenience.

in “He sees the hearts and breasts of each one, and, when about to pass judgment not only on our deeds but also on our words and thoughts, he looks into the minds and the wills conceived in the very recess of a still closed heart” (Cyprian, 2007:388-389).

3.6.3.2 Meaning of the response

Again, rather than following a chronological order in this section, we will begin by looking at how commentators viewed vv. 19-20 and then move on to vv. 21 ff.

In his commentary on the Psalms, Chrysostom (1988:261) says the psalmist does not ask for people to be killed but for sinners, and the meaning is to change people from sin to righteousness. Further, by commanding bloodthirsty men to depart from him, the psalmist is pursuing a path to growth in virtue by shunning and departing from the company of such people (Chrysostom, 1988:261). The “particular marks of friendship” are solidarity with God in the hating of enemies and the opposing of opponents (Chrysostom, 1988:261).

Another literal interpretation is given by Theodoret (2001:329), who believed that David was prophesying of Josiah in Ps 139: “Consumed with divine zeal, he disposed of all the priests of the idols, whereas on those embracing piety he lavished all attention.” The enemies, then, are the priests of the idols, and he consigns them to death and has their bones burned (1 Kgs 13:1, 2). For Theodoret (2001:334), in v. 19 it is characteristic of good people to love good people and detest the other kind, “Since you [God] in your loving-kindness do away with the sinners, much more shall I avoid their company.” The motivation for God to kill them comes from v. 20 based on the translation “They will take your cities,”³⁰⁰ which means “not unjustly but because they will inhabit the cities to no good purpose, reaping no benefit from your laws” (Theodoret, 2001:334).

³⁰⁰ Theodoret’s text may be different from the MT. The term עָר (enemies) of the MT is translated as “city”.

In contrast to the Antiochene school, Cassiodorus³⁰¹ offers a figural interpretation of v. 19. He understood this psalm to be recited by the mouth of Christ. Hence the psalm is interpreted prosopologically within a Trinitarian framework, with the fourth section describing the “pre-eminence of the faithful in spite of their enemies” (Houston, [Waltke & Houston, 2010: 527]). Cassiodorus (1991: 382) suggests that if we analyze v. 19 in a spiritual sense all the difficulties are removed. The meaning is that God kills the sinners when a person dies to sin and lives for the Lord. The words “bloodthirsty men, depart from me” are directed towards the unfaithful and stubborn who refuse to believe (Cassiodorus, 1991:382). According to Cassiodorus (1991:382), these people are “men of blood” and they “live according to the flesh, and perform bloody deeds.” However, Cassiodorus does not explain what the bloody deeds are.

The commentators offer various perspectives on the call to show solidarity with Yahweh by hating those whom Yahweh hates. The writer of the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (1989:450) uses Ps 139:21 in his exhortation to Christians to avoid communion with impious heretics:

Charge the faithful to abstain entirely from them, and not to partake with them either in sermons or prayers: for these are those that are enemies to the Church, and lay snares for it; who corrupt the flock, and defile the heritage of Christ, pretenders only to wisdom, and the vilest of men.

Similarly, in the context of the Origenist controversy, the anti-Origenist bishop Epiphanius uses v. 21 to support arguments for actions he had taken to root out Origen’s teachings:

Origen’s words are the words of an enemy, hateful and repugnant to God and to His saints; and not only those which I have quoted, but countless others ... deceived by his persuasive arguments, and made by his most perverse teaching the food of the devil (Jerome, 1989a:87).³⁰²

Ironically, Houston (Waltke & Houston, 2010:520-521) suggests that Origen may have had Ps 139 in mind when he argued against Celsus for the compassion shown

³⁰¹ Cassiodorus (c. 485-580) is representative of the monastic authors. According to Gillingham (2008:56-57) Cassiodorus was influenced by Augustine and used an Alexandrian reading of the Psalms within a Latin setting. Also remarkable is the contribution to “gloss” which Cassiodorus made and his novel approach of identifying twelve Christological categories (around the two natures of Christ) with the psalm headings.

³⁰² For a background to this dispute see the introduction to *To Pammachius Against John of Jerusalem* (Jerome, 1989c:424).

to humankind when the Word became flesh. Houston (Waltke & Houston, 2010: 521) concludes that it is Ps 139 which “holds these two aspects in remarkable tension: ineffability and intimacy.”

Chrysostom, while giving a homily on 1 Cor 13:4, sees a tension between Ps 139:22, which speaks of a perfect hatred, and the qualities of love expounded in 1 Cor 13:4. He thinks that in order for the Christian to evangelize, hating is not possible. He argues that David did not pen Ps 137 and by implication he did not pen these words in Ps 139 either. He exhorts Christians, “But now because he hath brought us to a more entire self-command and set us on high above that mischief, he bids us rather admit and soothe them” (Chrysostom, 1979:199). And to the question whether Christians should hate the heathen and the enemy Chrysostom (1979:198) replies, “One must hate, not them but their doctrine: not the man, but the wicked conduct, the corrupt mind. For the man is God’s work, but the deceit is the devil’s work.” According to Basil (2007b:389), the psalmist’s expression of solidarity with Yahweh in v. 21 is praiseworthy because God gives all power to the rational soul to love virtue and justice but to hate iniquity and vice.

Theodoret (2001:334) shows the tension that exists in a literal interpretation of vv. 21-22:

I hate them, but I continue grieving at them and wasting away: as sinners I hate them, but as human beings I pity them, obliged to mourn for them out of natural fellow-feeling but in turn detesting them for their great wickedness.

This appears to be a more nuanced form of the cliché, “hate the sin, but love the sinner,” which Chrysostom (above) and Augustine (below) present. Theodoret (2001:334) closes his commentary by commenting that the psalmist’s prayer “Examine me and lead me in the way” has to do with personal piety.

Cassiodorus (1991:382) has a slightly different perspective on vv. 21-22. He begins his explanation of v. 21 by pointing out that there are two reasons that our enemies rise up against us. The first is that we have offended them through some fault of our own. The second reason for enemies rising up is because of their own obduracy and arrogance, and such men are rightly to be regarded with disgust, for they were unmindful of God’s great kindnesses. However, Cassiodorus (1991:383) defines perfect hatred in v. 22 as “loving men and always loathing their vices.”

2.10.4 Psalm 139 in Augustine

The occasion for Augustine's sermon on Ps 139 (138) was somewhat unexpected for Augustine. He had intended to speak on Ps 138 (137), but the speaker read 139 (138) instead and Augustine took it as a sign of the will of God to provide an exposition on it instead (Augustine, 2004: 256, 270).

2.10.4.1 Suffering in Psalm 139

Augustine spells out clearly his understanding of Christ speaking in the psalm in unity with the Church (Augustine, 2004:256-259). It is this prosopological reading which provides unity for reading the psalm rather than the psalmist's experience. Augustine interprets much of vv. 2 to 6 through the illustration of the parable of the Prodigal Son, whose life represents a fleeing from God and who was "pursued by the righteous punishment of God" (Augustine, 2004:260). Augustine (2004:261) interprets "lay your hand upon me" (v. 5) as "a punishing hand that lies heavy on the proud." God's knowledge is too wonderful and incomprehensible for the psalmist (v. 6) because of his sin (Augustine, 2004:264). In v. 7, Augustine (2004:264) suggests the psalmist is looking for a place where he can go to escape God's anger. The imagery of fleeing on wings in v. 9 is "to flee from your [God's] avenging Spirit, from your stern, menacing countenance" (Augustine, 2004:265). Furthermore, although Augustine is using a text different from the MT, he interprets v. 14 to mean "God shows himself as terrible" (Augustine, 2004:272). Verse 15 seems to be a turning point in Augustine's exegesis. However, the general connotation of Augustine's interpretation up until v. 14 suggests that God's knowledge exposes sinfulness.

2.10.4.2 Meaning of the response

Augustine sees vv. 19-22 very much relating to the bad people who are born within the Church. Christ is suffering through his body the Church as he is still with the Father. According to Augustine (2004:277), "these sufferings are caused by the presence of sinners in the midst of the Church and by the heretics who separate themselves from it." Furthermore, Augustine (2004:277) explains the psalmist's passionate expression in v. 19 as "Sinners are slain because, when they become puffed up with pride, they lose the grace which was their true life ... This is how

sinner are slain: darkened in their understanding, they are alienated from the life of God” (Augustine, 2004:277-278). The heretics are spoken to in the exhortation, “bloodthirsty men depart from me,” but there is also a warning for the “wheat” (Augustine, 2004:278). The good people must not openly separate themselves from the wicked before the final winnowing at the end (Augustine, 2004:278). Good people, through their “praiseworthy conduct” and their different way of life, tacitly say every day, “Men of blood depart from me” (Augustine, 2004:278).

For Augustine (2004:279) it is not possible to separate from the wicked before the end harvest because the wheat would be uprooted with the weeds. Augustine makes sense of the apparent disparity between Jesus’ exhortation to love one’s enemies and this verse to hate them by noting the meaning of the term “perfect hatred.” For Augustine (2004: 280) perfect hatred is hatred that “hates everything in them that makes them sinful and at the same time loves them because they are human beings.” Moses is held up as a figural example because he showed love when he interceded for sinners (Ex 32:11-13), but also showed hatred in that he killed them (Ex 32:26-28) (Augustine, 2004:280). In commenting on the last verse (24), Augustine (2004:281) says that to be led in the way of everlasting is to be led in Christ (Jn 14:6).

2.10.5 Psalm 139 in the Reformers

2.10.5.1 John Calvin

2.10.5.1.1 Suffering in Psalm 139

Calvin (1989:206) begins his introduction to this psalm thus:

Quickened by this meditation to a due reverential fear of God, he declares himself to have no sympathy with the ungodly and profane, and beseeches God in the confidence of conscious integrity, not to forsake him in this life.

Calvin then goes on to explain what this quickening means. He takes v. 1 to mean that it is impossible to deceive God (Calvin, 1989:207). In v. 6, God’s knowledge is seen to be wonderful in forming humankind (Calvin, 1989:210). But then in v. 7 Calvin insists that it is “impossible that men by any subterfuge should elude the eye of God” with the face of God meaning knowledge or inspection (Calvin, 1989:211).

Calvin sees God's hand in v. 11; if one were to attempt to withdraw from God's observation God would easily "draw back and arrest the fugitive" (Calvin, 1989:212). Verses 11 and 12 are also seen to reflect the position that although we are ashamed to let others see our iniquities, we are indifferent to God, supposing our "sins were covered and veiled from his inspection" (Calvin, 1989:213). Nevertheless, in v. 14 the knowledge which the psalmist is talking about is "simply the religious attention to the works of God which excites to the duty of thanksgiving" (Calvin, 1989:215). Calvin (1989:217) interprets God's knowledge of the psalmist being formed in his mother's womb as indicating that the psalmist could not now "elude his observation" since all things "were written in his book." Verse 17 is taken as speaking of the excellence of divine providence (Calvin, 1989:218). Calvin (1989:219) concludes this section of the psalm by saying that nothing can escape God and those who think they can commit a crime and try to hide will be found out.

2.10.5.1.2 Meaning of the response

Calvin does not believe that verse 19 should be interpreted as being connected with v. 18 (Calvin, 1989:220). Neither does he think it expresses David's wish or that David is congratulating himself for "the wicked being cut off" (Calvin, 1989:220). Rather, the vengeance taken on the ungodly would make clear the "divine judgments, and advance in godliness and fear of his name" (Calvin, 1989:220). God punishes in this way so the elect will "withdraw themselves from their society" (Isa 26:9) (Calvin, 1989:220). The psalmist is also presenting himself to God as having integrity because he has come to God's "bar" not as the wicked, nor does he have any connection with them (Calvin, 1989:220).

Calvin offers an explanation as to why God must judge the wicked. In verse 20 the psalmist describes the extent to which the wicked will go when God spares them and does not visit them with vengeance. They not only think they can commit any crime with impunity but "openly blaspheme their judge" (Calvin, 1989:221). Further, when the wicked take God's name in vain they are conceiving of God according to their own fancies (Calvin, 1989:221). The wicked are further characterised by their own pride and their forgetfulness of the Lord's power (Calvin, 1989:221).

Calvin suggests (1989:221-222) that the meditation up until this point serves as a basis for the psalmist to understand vv. 21 ff. Verses 21 to 24 express the psalmist's resolution to live a holy life. The attachment to godliness generates an abhorrence of sin, "For whoever connives at sin and encourages it through silence wickedly betrays God's cause, who has committed the vindication of righteousness into our hands" (Calvin, 1989:222). However, Calvin recognizes that the hatred spoken about in vv. 21-22 is not absolute. He states, "The hatred of which the Psalmist speaks is directed to the sins rather than the persons of the wicked" (Calvin, 1989:223). For Calvin (1989:223), "we are to seek the good in all, and, if possible, they are to be reclaimed by kindness and good offices."

Finally, v. 23 serves to indicate that the psalmist is sincere in his religion, although not sinless, and that he is a genuine worshipper of God. This is why he has opposed the wicked (Calvin, 1989:223). As an example, he gives David who, although he was a man subject to sin, he was not devoted to the practice of it. Ultimately, the reason for opposing the wicked was that the psalmist was a true worshipper and desired others to be so as well.

2.10.5.6 Comparison with the exegetical findings of Psalm 139

The goal here is to use the findings in this historical survey to supplement my exegetical findings. In the exegesis I suggested that there was a relationship between vv. 1-18 and vv. 19-24. The psalmist appeals to Yahweh's omniscience, omnipresence, and omnificence as the basis for Yahweh's obligation to account for innocent blood being shed and the psalmist's own apprehension that there may be sin in his life. In the NT allusion to Ps 139:1 in Rom 8:27, the context for the Holy Spirit's deep knowledge of the individual is his or her suffering. But this occurs in the time of the New Covenant when God has poured out his Spirit into the hearts of people (Acts 2:17; Jer 31:31-34). Most of the commentators in this study see God's intimate knowledge of the psalmist as eliciting a self-consciousness of sin. Basil suggests that there is an unwillingness to search ourselves for sin. Chrysostom saw the knowledge of God's creation (v. 14) as eliciting a type of deep fear. Peter Chrysologus also explained vv. 7-10 in the context of how sin cannot be hidden from God. Cyprian, as well, can interpret the penetrating search of God in v. 16 in

the context of God's judgment. Augustine from vv. 1-15 would seem to make the same link between God's knowledge and sin with all its connotations. Calvin, in a similar manner, looks at this knowledge as indicating that it is impossible for those who do wrong to escape from God. On the other hand, Theodoret looked on God's penetrating knowledge as grounds for doxology. Some of the commentators mentioned above allow for a doxological perspective to a certain degree as well, but their focus seems to be with sin, judgment and purity (Augustine, Calvin, *et al.*).

Calvin (1989:220) interprets the psalmist's pleas for the wicked to depart (v. 19) as the psalmist presenting himself to God as having integrity, but besides Calvin, the commentators in this study do not make any explicit reference to the connection between vv. 1-18 and vv. 19-24. However, this does not mean that they did not see the composition of the psalm from a holistic perspective. Augustine creates unity in the psalm through his prosopological interpretation. Perhaps the other commentators betray an implicit view as well when they emphasize God's intimate knowledge leading to a self-consciousness of sin. This type of reading follows the theme of verses 19-24 which speak of the sinfulness of the enemies as "bloodthirsty haters of God" and the psalmist's desire to go in the "everlasting way" (vv. 23-24). Without an explicit connection it is not possible to say whether the commentators believed the psalmist was approaching God from a position of confidence as grounds for his prayer to be heard (so Calvin) or a position of uncertainty about hidden sin in his life.

The interpretation of the psalmist's acclamation of God's wondrous works (deeds) in v. 14 also seems to be significant. This was brought out by the connection of v. 14 with Rev 15:3. In Revelation, the term ᾄδω (sing) occurs only three times (Rev 15:3; 14:3; and 5:9) with the latter two occurrences being linked to the last psalm in this study, Ps 149. The praise for Yahweh's deeds in Rev 15:3 is connected with the plagues and suggests the realization of God's rule through the execution of God's justice/judgment. Furthermore, John identifies the judging God as king of not only Israel, but all nations. Furthermore, God's "works" of human creation in reference to "bloodthirsty men" in Ps 139 may stand in an analogous relationship to the ideas of the praise and judgment in Rev 15. Brown's (2000:124) comments are propitious here: "Personal creation is the divine charter of life and loyalty by which God becomes bound to a particular life, ensuring that the individual flourishes within the protective sphere of righteousness." The other point worth pondering is whether Ps

139's connection with the book of Revelation (Rev 2:6 as well) betrays a similarity in eschatological genre and perspective.

The psalmist's response that God would slay the wicked and his solidarity in completely hating the wicked was one of the key focuses of the exegesis. The commentators offer a range of interpretations. The request by the psalmist that God would "slay the wicked" and for "bloodthirsty men" to depart from him can be divided into figural and literal interpretations. In the figural interpretations the commentators justify the problem text by pointing out indicators in the text. For example, Chrysostom and Augustine both explain the text as calling for "sinners" to be slain. Chrysostom sees this as the process by which people become spiritually alive, whereas Augustine sees the death as representing the life void of God.

The literal interpretation presents a more substantial challenge. Theodoret interprets this wish of the psalmist as part of the descriptive narrative of King Josiah, the ones he killed referring to the priests whose bones Josiah burned (1 Kings 13:1,2). Calvin does not question the morality of the divine vengeance, but rather focuses on the effects particularly with reference to the godly. Vengeance on the wicked advances the fear of God and acts as a warning for the elect to separate themselves from the company of the wicked. Of particular interest is the insight Calvin offers into the nature of the wicked. God must judge them because if he does not they will think they can commit any crime with impunity and "openly blaspheme their judge" (Calvin, 1989:221).

Almost all the commentators recognize as a type of hyperbole the psalmist's solidarity with Yahweh to hate the enemy with perfect hatred. The *Constitution of the Holy Apostles* using this text identifies heretics with whom Christians are to avoid communion. Origen is also considered to be an enemy, yet ironically, as Houston (Houston & Waltke, 2010:521) points out, the benefit the Church gained from Origen's understanding of Ps 139 is clear from Origen's debate with Celsus.

Nevertheless, several commentators seem to understand "hating them with complete hatred" by distinguishing the person from that person's sin (Chrysostom, Augustine, and Calvin). However, in Theodoret's holistic approach we see the moral tension unresolved: "as sinners I hate them, but as human beings I pity them" (Theodoret, 2001:334). Cassiodorus presents a nuanced approach distinguishing between those

who are hostile to Christians because of the faults of Christians and those who are hostile because they are arrogant and stand opposed to God. The latter should arouse a sense of disgust. However, he eventually resolves the tension by exhorting Christians to love people but to hate their vices.

If the psalmist is using hyperbole in vv. 21-22, then is he using hyperbole in v. 19 as well? In the exegesis it was determined that the verb לַטַּל can be used in a rhetorical way (Job 13:15), but its other two uses seem to be literal (see exegesis). The use in Obad 1:15 is prophetic and seems to be the closest in similarity to Ps 139. Perhaps the psalmist's assertion of perfect hatred is in keeping with the absoluteness of wisdom language, where there is no portrayal of the wicked person as a composite of good and bad. Calvin in the exegesis of Ps 139 comes to the conclusion that the wicked become worse if they are unchallenged. The answer to the question has to do with the nature of Ps 139 as a religious prayer text and so what the psalmist means when he uses these images as prayer will be taken up in Chapter 3.

2.11 Exegesis of Psalm 149

<Hallelujah>³⁰³

1. Sing to the Lord a new song,
his praises in the assembly of the saints.³⁰⁴
2. Let Israel be glad in its maker;³⁰⁵
let the children of Zion rejoice in their king.
3. Let them praise his name with dancing,
and make³⁰⁶ melody to him with tambourine and lyre.
4. For the Lord takes pleasure in his people;

³⁰³ NRS has *Praise the Lord*.

³⁰⁴ NRS has *faithful*. I prefer to retain the KJV and NKJV rendering of *saints* because I feel it better captures the distinction as a particular people that is implied in the term מַשְׁכִּילֵי אֱלֹהִים as it is used in Ps 149. Kidner (1975:110-111, 116) suggests some considerations for translating the term מַשְׁכִּילֵי אֱלֹהִים. Likewise translated in vv. 5 and 10.

³⁰⁵ The LXX and Syriac have the singular form of עֲשֵׂה. The plural form in the Hebrew is usually explained as a plural of majesty (so JM, 2006:470, 136e) or an older form that retained a *yod* before a suffix (GES, 2005:399, 124k).

³⁰⁶ NRS has *making* which reads smoothly, but can hide the fact that מְשַׁכֵּל is a jussive.

- he adorns the lowly³⁰⁷ with salvation.³⁰⁸
5. Let the saints³⁰⁹ exult in glory;
let them sing for joy on their couches.³¹⁰
6. Let the high praises of God be in their throats
and two edged swords in their hands.
7. To execute vengeance on the nations
and punishment on the peoples.
8. To bind their kings with fetters
and their nobles with chains of iron.
9. To execute on them the judgment written.³¹¹
This is glory for all his saints.³¹²
- < Hallelujah >³¹³

2.11.1 Statement of investigation

Whereas some of the violent images in the psalms have been the subject of theoretical musings, historical examples of the use of Ps 149 show the potential consequences of such. Caspar Sciopius in his book *Clarion of the Sacred War (Calssicum Belli Sacri)* inflamed the Roman Catholic Princes to the Thirty Year's War, and on the Protestant side a century earlier, Thomas Müntzer encouraged the

³⁰⁷ NRS has *humble*.

³⁰⁸ NRS has *victory*. The use of the translation *victory* can be inferred from the tone of celebration in vv. 1-6 and the subjugation of the nations and their kings in vv. 7-8. However, the normal meaning of the term *יְשׁוּעָה* describes Yahweh's saving intervention or help (Zenger [Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:642]).

³⁰⁹ NRS has *faithful*.

³¹⁰ The BHS and Kraus (1989:566) propose *מִשְׁפָּחֵהוֹתָם*, *their families*; Gunkel (1926:621): *מערכותם*, *their battle ranks*; Briggs (1906:543): *משכנותם*, *their great tabernacle*. Given the praising tone of vv. 1-6a and the minor modification needed (כ to נ), Briggs' (1906:543) suggestion seems the most probable except that the term *מִשְׁכָּן* is only used with Yahweh as the referent for the pronominal suffix. Allen (2002:396) opposes emendation based on the assonance of vv. 5a and 5b with v. 8. Accordingly he translates the term as *places of lying* from which can be inferred the meaning of *prostrate* (so Anderson, 1972:953). However, the problem with Allen's proposal is that *שָׁכַב* is not used this way anywhere else. If *couches* is retained the meaning could be construed as a metonymy referring to the post-exilic resettlement of the people in their homes. This proposal also seems like an intrusion into what seems to be a cultically transpiring event, but might fit into the theme of *salvation* as being restoration.

³¹¹ NRS has *decreed* but the literal word is *written*.

³¹² NRS has *faithful ones*.

³¹³ NRS has *Praise the Lord*. It is lacking in the LXX and Syriac.

War of the Peasants with this psalm. Although it might seem obvious that this kind of interpretation is a misuse, with its drastic consequences, one of the goals here will be to see if such an interpretation is indeed congruent with the meaning of the psalm. It will not be possible to answer this question completely until I have finished the historical survey and the NT understanding of the violent images in Ps 149. However, the answer begins with understanding Ps 149 in its immediate context. From a form-critical point of view, Ps 149 is generally regarded as a type of hymn (see below), which adds complexity to understanding the perceived suffering and interpreting the meaning of the responses. The harshness of the imprecations in lament psalms is often mitigated by stressing the helplessness of the victims,³¹⁴ but the tone of praise in Ps 149 makes the violent images of war seem even more vindictive. Ps 149 is also pertinent from an editorial perspective. The recognition of *inclusio* with Ps 107 and even Ps 2 can aid in understanding the psalm. The goal here will be to use the text and its location in Book V to understand the perceived suffering of the community and the meaning of the response.

2.11.2 Structure, form and setting

Generally three structures present themselves for this psalm (see Zenger [Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:643-645]). According to strophic divisions the psalm can be divided into three sections: vv. 1-3, 4-6 and 7-9. This gives a balanced strophic structure of three strophes with three bicola. The difficulty with placing structural emphasis on regularity in the poetical pattern is that the content gets subsumed under the form. Gunkel (1926a:51) observed that when an author wished to begin new paragraphing he used the same forms which structured the beginning of a psalm. Hence, the most common way to view the structure of Ps 149 is a twofold division of vv. 1-4 and vv. 5-9. In this accounting, both sections begin with a summons to praise (vv. 1-3; vv. 5-6) followed by a motivation for that praise, in v. 4 indicated by כִּי and in vv. 7-9 by ל plus infinitives. Further indications of two distinct units come from the following *inclusio*: vv. 1/4 קהל and עם; vv. 5a/9b חסידים and vv. 5a/9b כבוד and הדר. This proposal, however, does not account for the change in theme that occurs between vv.

³¹⁴ So, Zenger (1996:48) says about the sufferers in Ps 137 that the imprecations are the “passionate outcry of the powerless demanding justice.”

6a and 6b, which Prinsloo (1997:395-407) has proposed. In his proposal vv. 1-5 constitute praises, and the nominal clause of v. 6a looks back to praise Yahweh, whereas the nominal clause of v. 6b looks forward to the theme of judgment expounded in vv. 7-9. Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:645) responds that Prinsloo's proposal trivializes the significance of verse 4. Those who support the structure of vv. 1-4 and vv. 5-9 must account for the uneven distribution of theme, whereas those who follow Prinsloo's assessment must account for the significant grounds for praise given in v. 4.

The setting of the psalm is open to various proposals. Gunkel (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:22) thought Ps 149 was borrowed from the prophets and is an "eschatological hymn" when the "great Yahweh battle will take place and Zion be redeemed" (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:55). The psalm shows that

YHWH defeats the nations, and is called out as king. Now his entry is prepared, his majestic entrance and thus the beginning of a just kingdom.... Now the victors, holding the blood-drenched sword, stand and sing the victory song to their God. The manacled kings and princes of the nations are before them, those against whom the judgement shall be completed (Gunkel & Begrich, 1998:273).

Hence, the poem is a post-exilic composition for the future when Israel would humiliate its enemies. Kraus on the other hand believes that Gunkel laid too much stress on the eschatological element within the composition at the expense of the cultic. Kraus (1989:566) suggests that Ps 149 is a slightly modified communal hymn, based on two traditions in which either Jerusalem is attacked (Ps 46) or the kings and nations revolt against Yahweh's rule (Ps 2). Kraus (1989:567) does allow for an older date for the composition of the psalm, but prefers to assign it to the time of Nehemiah. Anderson (1972:951-952) considers Ps 149 a post-exilic hymn with a cultic setting being the more likely place of use. The psalm presents the salvation history of the nation with the portrayed events also having present and future significance. Gerstenberger (1970:456) proposes that the psalm has not shaken off its original cultic setting and historical associations (contra Prinsloo, 1997:407) and represents a group under economic, political or religious pressure.

The praise in the psalm is an expectation for the turning of fates of the oppressed Israelites. In terms of pre-exilic interpretations, Dahood (1970:356) believes the psalm was sung and performed in the religious assembly on the eve of a battle

against the foreign nations. Weiser (1962:839) considers Ps 149 a hymn performed at a pre-exilic cult festival with the covenantal armies present. As the above proposals show, the setting of the psalm is open to much speculation. However, the placement of Ps 149 in Book V may provide further insight into identifying the context of the psalm.³¹⁵

Further support for this method of approach comes from Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger 2011:646) who suggests in his own exegesis that the psalm must be read in reference to the “pre-texts” Ps 1 and 2, which Ps 149 takes up and “eschatologizes.”³¹⁶ One of the difficulties in making connections between different psalms through word similarities, though, has to do with the subjective nature of the task. However, as argued in the introduction and recapitulated here, the themes of Psalm 107 and 149 suggest that the purposeful use of *inclusio* cannot be overlooked. In these two psalms, the connection is based upon the people mentioned in the psalms and reversal of fortunes, rather than speculation about grammatical connections irrelevant to the content and contextual meaning those words have. First, the גְּאוּלֵי יְהוָה (107:2), the יִשְׁרָיִם (107:42) and the חֲסִידָיו (149:9) are the same people. Furthermore, in Psalm 107 *the redeemed of the Lord* are depicted as encountering all types of distress, even being עֲנֵי וּבְרִזָּל (Ps 107:10), *prisoners of suffering in iron chains*. In 149:8 it is the חֲסִידִים (Ps 149:5), *saints*, who לְאַסֹּר מִלְכֵיהֶם בְּזַקִּים וְלִגְבֹּדֵיהֶם (Ps 149:8), *bind their [nations] kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron*. The *saints* exact גְּקֻמָּה (Ps 149:7) *vengeance* on the nations and their kings. This reversal in fortune provides a strong link within the context of Book V. The fact that Ps 149 reverses the fortunes of those who had been oppressed in Ps 107 suggests that the editor had a particular understanding of the meaning of justice in Ps 149.

Furthermore, there seems to be a connection between Ps 2 and Ps 149³¹⁷ (Brennan, 1980:26). The *nations, peoples* and *kings* who seek to throw off Yahweh’s authority in 2:1-2 become the object of his retribution in 149:7-9. The holy mountain of *Zion*

³¹⁵ See the Introduction on the editing of Book V.

³¹⁶ According to Zenger, this is only one of four pre-texts that Ps 149 takes up. For the other three see Hossfeld & Zenger (2011:646). Zenger also sees an inter-textual connection with Ps 107.

³¹⁷ Kraus (1989:566-567) also sees a connection between Ps 2 and Ps 149, with Ps 2 being a tradition which has influenced Ps 149.

where the *king* is anointed by Yahweh in 2:6 becomes the parent whose children rejoice in their *king* in 149:2 (although in the latter passage the parallelism of the verse suggests that the *king* is Yahweh himself, not a member of the Davidic dynasty). The divine promise in 2:9 to break the rebels with a rod of *iron* is paralleled in 149:8 by the binding of the princes with fetters of *iron*. Also worth noting is the similarity between the *bonds* and *cords* which the kings attempt to throw off in 2:3, and which are replaced in 149:8 by *chains* and *fetters* of iron. There is also a close similarity between the *princes* and *rulers* who are warned of Yahweh's wrath in 2:2,10 and the *nobles* who are the object of the divine Judgement in 149:8. This mention of the *saints* and the *nations* and the reversal in roles of fortune is substantial in recognizing the connection between Psalms 2 and 149.

We can tentatively suggest the following from the editorial links among Ps 149, Ps 2 and Ps 107. First, the psalm is in an eschatological category, as is Ps 2. Secondly, although the psalm's process of composition most likely extends back to pre-exilic times,³¹⁸ Ps 149 has been edited into the Psalter as a post-exilic psalm on the basis that Ps 107 is recognized as a post-exilic psalm. The psalm functions then as a hymn pertaining to the future.

A further observation on the author's development of the themes of praise and judgment can be made. The author reinforces the theme of escalating praise through his choice of verbs. He begins with *sing* (שָׁירָה) in v. 1 and moves to *be glad* (שִׂמְחָה) and *rejoice* (גִּילָה) in v. 2. Verse 3 begins with *praise* (יְהַלֵּלֵנּוּ), but moves to *make music* (יִזְמְרוּ) with instruments v. 3. In v. 5 there is a further intensifying of the praise through the verbs *exult* (יִצְעֲלוּ) and *sing for joy* (יִרְנְנוּ) literally *give a ringing cry* (BDB, 1979:943). Verse 6b ends the praise with the noun *high praise* (רוֹמְמוֹת). From v. 6b onwards, the poet develops the theme of judgment through the use of the ל of purpose and infinitives. Verses 7a and 9a form an *inclusio* with *to execute vengeance* (לְעֲשׂוֹת נִקְמָה) v. 7a and *to execute judgment* (לְעֲשׂוֹת דִּבְרוֹרָה מִשְׁפָּט) v. 9a. Verse 8 gives a picture of that *vengeance* and *judgment*.

³¹⁸ The lack of a messianic figure, the notion that Yahweh himself is king, and the war imagery are all reasons to suggest that the origin of Psalm 149 is quite old. And as Dahood (1970:357) points out in terms of linguistic similarities with Isaiah, it is hard to determine the direction of influence.

2.11.3 Perceived suffering

The nature of the setting and function of Ps 149 as a variation on the hymn adds different perspectives to the perceived suffering behind the psalm. Kraus (1989:566) rejected Gunkel's eschatological emphasis in interpretation because he felt it was too disconnected with the cult. However, the placement of Ps 149 in Book V could have resulted in a modification of its original cultic emphasis. In terms of determining the perceived suffering behind Ps 149, Mowinckel (1962b:30) is helpful in his perception that Ps 149 represents a mingling of the motives of lament with the genre of hymn. These motives of lament are clues to the perceived suffering of the community. Whether emphasis is placed on past events, cultic events, or on future eschatological events, all three emphases assume that there is some form of adversity to the community.

The beginning-but-not-yet-completed restoration period perspective suggested in the Introduction seems to fit the dual themes of praise and judgment: praise for their return and judgment reflecting the feelings aroused for the recent experiences of the exile and the present hostility which the people continue to face in its reestablishment. The perceived suffering behind the psalm blends the euphoric optimism of eschatological victory with the real circumstances of the suffering community. The *inclusio* between Ps 107 and 149 as part of Book 5 suggests that the optimism in the praise of vv. 1-6a could result from the restoration of the community or that some reversal of misfortune has occurred. Perhaps the difficult term *couch* (מִשְׁכָּב) portrays the community as being able to lie down without fear (Kidner, 1975:527). On the other hand, the term *lowly* (עֲנָוִים) in v. 4b identifies all of Israel by its parallelism with עַמִּי in v. 4a. The Israelites are a helpless group of people assembled on Zion (Kraus, 1989:567). Gerstenberger (2001:456) suggests that the war imagery of vv. 6b to 9a speaks of their oppression by a superior oppressive force in the Near East.

However, in the post-exilic understanding of the psalm, Cyrus and the other Persian leaders were not portrayed as oppressors. In contrast, the nations and kings in Ps 149 are portrayed as hostile to Zion (note the use of בְּגוֹיֵי-צִיּוֹן in v. 2). The idea of the *kings* (מַלְכֵי v. 8) and *nobles* (נְכֻבָּדֵי v. 8), who represent the *nations* (גוֹי v. 7) being bound suggests that the adversaries resist Yahweh's rule to the end. But if the psalm

does represent an eschatological perspective, then the suffering under the enemies is probably best summed up by Zenger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2011:643): “The event has been in progress since the rescue of Israel from the exile and will be ‘hastened’ by Israel’s praise, which hymnically anticipates the completion of the event.” The post-exilic setting linked to historical enemies may not identify the original historical setting which gave rise to this psalm. However, the severity of the Babylonian exile must have formed part of the historical context for the editors.

2.11.4 Meaning of the response

A general tendency (so Delitzsch, Perowne, Kraus, Kidner) in the interpretation of Ps 149 suggests that this psalm cannot be prayed literally by those who come after Christ. Usually an allegorical reading related to 2 Cor 10:4 is given as an interpretive key. Uncommon is Gersetenberger’s (2001:457) position which allows for the “propagation of violence” under certain conditions of survival. My concern here will not be with the hermeneutical shift which might occur when the Christian prays Ps 149,³¹⁹ but rather how the psalm can be understood in its canonical placement within Book V.

The identity of Israel as a nation is central to understanding the horizon portrayed in this psalm. Whereas Ps 139 dealt with the creation of the individual, Ps 149 takes as its premise the creation of the nation בְּעֵשְׂיוֹ (*his creation*, v. 2). In vv. 1-4 the recipients in the psalm are the קְהָל (assembly, v. 1), יִשְׂרָאֵל (*Israel*, v. 2), בְּנֵי־צִיּוֹן (*sons of Zion*, v. 2), עַמּוֹ (*his people*, v. 4), עֲנֻיִם (*lowly*, v. 4), and קְדֹשִׁיִם (*saints*, v. 5)—all terms which describe the unique relationship Yahweh has with his people. After v. 5 there is no mention of the people except the repetition of the term קְדֹשִׁיִם in v. 9b. The use of the term קְדֹשִׁיִם in vv. 1, 5 and 9 provides coherence to the psalm. It is probably the notion of the special relationship between Yahweh and his

³¹⁹ This will be examined during the look at the Psalms as prayer in Chapter 3.

people which is emphasized in the use of **חַסִּידִים** here rather than the notions of doing kindness or being loyal, which are usually associated with the word.³²⁰

In the larger context, the meaning of Psalm 149 derives from its function as an eschatological hymn. As mentioned above, authors may disagree on the historical nature of this hymn, whether it is based on a purely cultic composition (so Kraus) or whether it represents a purely eschatological form (Gunkel & Begrich, 1989:55, 263) or whether it reflects a conventionalized re-presentation of historical experiences projected into the future (Anderson, 1972:952).³²¹ Zenger's (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2010:646) understanding, that Yahweh alone is the agent who carries out the acts of war and that Israel merely offers songs of praise with metaphoric war images, does not seem to be the normal understanding of Yahweh's agency. At times, as Zenger suggests, Yahweh acts in holy war as the sole agent but more common are the examples where Yahweh can be understood as the giver of victory through the agency of the people.³²² Therefore, the congregation of the saints who used this psalm most likely understood Yahweh's eschatological intervention as occurring through the community of the Israelites who were the "organs of Yahweh's governing and judging" (Kraus, 1989:567). Perhaps this also explains the interpretive hermeneutic of Sciopius and Müntzer.

In v. 4 the grounds for the praise of Yahweh in vv. 1-3 three is given as *he will adorn the lowly with salvation* (**הַפְּאֵר עֲנֻוִים בְּיִשׁוּעָה**). That salvation, however, is in the very actions which are portrayed in vv. 7-9. The connection occurs through the term *adorn* (**פָּאֵר** v. 4) which is linked through the term *glory* (**כְּבוֹד**, v. 5) and picked up in the term *glory* (**הִדָּר**, v. 9) in the phrase *this is glory for all of the saints* (**הִדָּר לְכָל-חַסִּידָיו**). The implication is that the agency of this universal salvation is via the covenantal people. The actions of the covenantal people are given in the three infinitive phrases of purpose. The unity of these three phrases is created through parallelism, and in the case of vv. 7 and 9 *inclusio*, and suggests that it is best to

³²⁰ BDB defines as *pious, the godly* who are faithful to God's service and notes the term is found only in the Psalter (1979:339, s.v. **חַסִּיד**).

³²¹ For Gunkel (1903:364) this is the meaning of "new song." Since Yahweh had done a new deed a new song was prepared.

³²² So, for example, the story of Joshua's defeat of the Amalekites through the intercession of Moses, Aaron and Hur in Ex 17:8-16.

understand v. 9b as coordinate to the preceding v. 8 (Delitzsch, 1975:413). That is, the *judgment written* (מִשְׁפָּט כָּתוּב, v. 9) is the *binding* of *kings* and *nobles* rather than their execution.³²³ This latter meaning would require subordinating v. 9b in relation to v. 8. The distinction may be small, but it suggests that the defeat of those who oppose Yahweh's rule is in view and that any gratuitous violence done is secondary to this end.³²⁴

It is worth noting that the two themes of praise and judgment are unified in the psalm. Unity is created through the distribution of the name הַיְיָיִם. Also noteworthy is the fact that the escalating praise in vv. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6a finds a natural link to 6b by means of the alliteration and assonance of the body pairing בְּגִרְוֹנָם (v, 6a) and בְּיָדָם (v, 6b), an intentional connection between the subjects. The overall effect is to show the intentional unity between praise and judgment. The implication is that the adorning of the lowly with salvation (v. 4), the praise (vv. 1, 2, 3, 5, 6a) and the judgment (vv. 7-9) carried out through military conquest form an intricate and mutual relationship. As Weiser (1962:840) says, “by the means of the execution of the judgment on the pagan nations the glory of the people of God is also made manifest [and] is to be understood exclusively on the assumption that it is the glory for God which is the real subject throughout.”

The exact identification of the *written* (כָּתוּב v. 9a) source which legitimates the *vengeance* (נִקְמָה v. 7a) and *punishment* (תּוֹכַחַת v. 7b) on the nations also has not been agreed upon. Gerstenberger (2001:455; also Dahood, 1970:337; Weiser, 1962:838) believes it might refer to the deuteronomistic descriptions about annihilating the inhabitants of the promised land (Ex 20:13, 16-18) and might reflect one of the first allusions to the Torah tradition. Anderson (1972:954) suggests that the allusion is to the heavenly books where all the deeds of men are recorded, similar to that portrayed in Ps 51:1. In any case, judgment occurs early in scriptures

³²³ Execution of the kings is how Gunkel (1926:621-622) and Gerstenberger (2001:455) understand this phrase based on the past examples of the killing of captured kings (Num 31:8; Josh 10:24-27).

³²⁴ This is not to say, as I have argued above, that the covenant community would have understood the war and imprecations in a non-literal way. I am merely suggesting that beyond that literal reading there was already in place a deeper understanding to these psalms that lay beneath the violence. I will argue below that it is this innate deeper understanding which allows some of the psalms of enmity the capacity to be understood, without using the technique of allegorization, in a way that provides a spiritually accurate perspective and use of the images of enmity.

where memory exists independently of any prophetic writings.³²⁵ Hence the judgement written need not refer to the prophecies of the earlier prophets as Kissane (1954:655) suggests it does. If comparison is made with the book which records the destiny of each human being in Ps 139, on the basis that Yahweh is the creator of each individual, and that in Ps 149 He is referred to as the creator of the nation, perhaps the judgment written is on a national level rather than a personal level.³²⁶

The scope of the judgment depicted—the binding of kings and nobles—is symbolic of the utter defeat of the *nations* (גוֹי, v. 7). This picture is a quantified reversal of what Israel experienced in its exile. On the basis of coordinating ideas supported by parallelism, the *vengeance* (נִקְמָה) and the *punishment* (תּוֹכַחַת) can be more clearly defined in the context of the defeat of the nations. Importantly, נִקְמָה in its five uses in the psalms (18:48; 79:10; 94:1 x 2) always refers to the nations.³²⁷ If the notion of נִקְמָה only meant to pay back hostility in the sense of *lex talionis*, then there would be no greater purpose for Israel but to merely punish the specific nations which have harmed them. The hostile nations had devastated and humiliated them and according to this interpretation the same can be expected in turn if not to a greater degree. However, in Ps 149 it is not just the restoration of the people of God and the defeat of the oppressing nation, but the complete universal rule of *king Yahweh* over all nations. As an eschatological form of judgment this goes further than repayment of wrongs done only to Israel. The נִקְמָה can be understood in the context of the purpose of establishing the created order as it was meant to be under Yahweh's rule (וַיִּגְלוּ בְּנֵי-צִיּוֹן, *let the children of Zion rejoice in their king*, v. 2). The term *vengeance*, as it is used here, is not just an expression of the hostile feelings of those who suffered the cruelty of the exile. Rather, the acts of the nations, portrayed in Ps 149 as their hostility to Israel, Babylon included, were acts against God's sovereign rule over the earth. There is a broadening of the concept of vengeance to extend to the greater cosmic plane of all time. Furthermore, the *judgment* (מִשְׁפָּט, v. 9) is from a written source, which is portrayed as originating as part of divine revelation. This

³²⁵ As is the case with the judgment on the Amalekites (cf. Ex 17:14 with Deut 25:17 ff).

³²⁶ The NT idea and also accounted for in the OT is that judgment is primarily on an individual level. The emphasis here may be on the universal rule of Yahweh over all nations and powers.

³²⁷ The headings in Ps 18 and Ps 79 may influence the understanding of the content of those psalms, but such an investigation would be beyond the scope of this thesis.

is no regular war but a holy war where the players are God, the covenantal partners and all the enemies of the earth.

2.11.5 Conclusion of the exegesis

The editing of Psalm 149 into Book V of the Psalter suggests that the circumstances surrounding the exile are important in understanding the images of violence and praise. The oppression that the Israelites experienced at the hands of the Babylonians is understood eschatologically as the subjugation of all nations which are opposed to King Yahweh's rule. Theologically, there is a mystery here which reveals itself in the idea that Babylon was both the means for God's judgment and to be judged as well (Isa 5; Jer 32, 51, 52; Ps 137, etc.). In other words, the exile also indicates Israel as failing to submit to Yahweh's rule. Israel's reversal of fortune then becomes a picture of the nations' failure to submit to Yahweh's rule. For the Israelites this rightful rule was portrayed through their special calling as the covenantal people in which they participated—both with exclamation of praise and a double-edged sword—in the larger issue dealing with Yahweh's legitimate claim as ruler of all the nations of the earth.

2.12 A Select Historical Survey of the Interpretation of Psalm 149

Besides investigating commentators on Ps 149 for how they understood the context and the meaning given to the violent images, it will be helpful to restate the particular areas of interest from my exegesis. One question posed was whether the use of Ps 149 as a text to incite a just war was congruent with the meaning of the text. Other areas of interest were whether the hymnic elements (or lack of lament) in Ps 149 influence the interpretation of the violent images, and whether an eschatological outlook is supported. The goal here will be to supplement my exegesis by determining whether the commentators address these issues and what they have to say.

2.12.1 Psalm 149 in the Post-exilic Restoration

Predominantly in section 1.3, but also in the exegesis of this psalm, I presented my view that Ps 149 was edited into Book V of the Psalter through its *inclusio* with Ps 107. I suggested that Ps 150, the last psalm of Book V, was a doxology to Book V, a type of coda for Book I, and a conclusion of unmitigated praise for the whole Psalter. Although my conclusions may be debatable, it is this post-exilic perspective which stands behind the way I have investigated Ps 149 in its present placement in the canon. Several comments on how Ps 149 may have been understood in the post-exilic restoration were made in the exegesis and need not be repeated here. However, since Goulder believes the psalm was composed in the time of the restoration, he may provide a foil to think about how it may have been understood from a different perspective.

Goulder believes the psalm was sung at the “festal gathering of all Israel at Tabernacles” (Goulder, 1998:298). The setting seems to be the time of Ezra and Nehemiah which is implied by the present הַרְצֵה in v. 4 (Goulder, 1998:298). He implies that the psalmist saw in the turn of his country’s fortune an opportunity for revenge on the nations (Goulder, 1998:300). Further, he interprets v. 9 to indicate the execution of the kings and nobles (Goulder, 1998:300). In my exegesis I suggested that indicators in the text might add support to an eschatological perspective with emphasis being placed in the religious text on the subjugation of the nations rather than on gratuitous violence. Lastly, the psalm was interpreted as post-exilic by Theodore of Mopsuestia, whose introduction to the psalm states, “He admonishes the people that they should praise God unceasingly for their return from Babel and their victory over their enemies” (Van Rooy, 2013:168).³²⁸ Unfortunately, Theodore’s explanation of how this victory over their enemies relates to the violent images does not survive.

³²⁸ I am using Van Rooy’s English translation of manuscript 6t1. For a discussion of the complex issues involved from the various transcripts see Van Rooy’s work (2013).

2.12.2 Psalm 149 in the NT

The Greek NT does not list any quotations for Ps 149 in the NT, but it does suggest that Ps 149:1 is alluded to or supports a verbal parallel with Rev 5:9³²⁹ and Rev 14:3.³³⁰ In the first passage Jesus is depicted as the lamb who has taken the scroll. The picture is of the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders worshipping Jesus in the context of the prayers of the saints. The prayers in 5:8 appear to be a call for God to act in judgment and vindication (Blount, 2005:113). The content of the “new song” is the worship given to Jesus for his crucifixion and the priesthood he has conferred on the people he has redeemed along with their reign over all the earth. In the OT the “new song” always expresses God’s victory over the enemy and sometimes includes thanksgiving for God’s work of creation (Beale, 1999:358). Blount (2005:114) notes that all the hymns which contain a new song, OT and NT, “anticipate God’s impending judgment against those who have persecuted God’s witnesses.” Furthermore, a causal relationship exists which shows that Jesus is the one who is worthy to open the scroll (Blount, 2005:114). In other words, Jesus has become the worthy judge.

In the second passage, Rev 14:3, we again have the lamb symbolizing Jesus, and the 144,000. The mark on these 144,000 counter the mark given by the beast to those in Revelation 13. The song is exclusive—only those who were redeemed could learn the song. The “new song” as per above was an expression of praise for God’s victory over the enemy and sometimes included thanksgiving for his work of creation (Beale, 1999:736). Interestingly, the description of Babylon’s defeat comes very soon in 14:8 and the idea of smoke of torment rising forever in 14:11 (see Beale, 1999:736). Rev 14:2-3 celebrates God’s universal rule which is seen in the judgment of those who reject his lordship and the redemption of those who give witness to it (Blount, 2005:267).

³²⁹ According to Moyise (2012: 5.2.2) most scholars consider Rev 5:5-6 as the most important passage in Revelation because it is placed here as an interpretive key to the book. The juxtaposition of lion and lamb in Rev 5:5-6 is to “reinterpret the traditional Christian image of Christ as lamb. John’s hearers know that Christ died for their sins (Rev 1:5; 5:9); what John wishes to tell them is that he is also the powerful conqueror who will defeat their enemies and win the final victory.” For Moyise’s discussion of other views on the contrast of the lion and lamb see Moyise (2012: 5.2.2).

³³⁰ Despite the many hymns, John uses the actual vocabulary of singing (ᾄδω) only three times, in Revelation 5:9, 14:3 and 15:3. Rev 15:3 relates to Ps 139:14, whereas Rev 5:9 and 14:3 allude to Ps 149:1, the last psalm in my investigation.

2.12.3 Psalm 149 in the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers

2.12.3.1 Suffering in Psalm 149

Given the hymnic nature of Ps 149, it is not surprising that the Alexandrian commentators with their predominantly figural interpretations have little to say about an historical situation of suffering. However, this is not true for those of the Antiochene school. Chrysostom (1988:376) implies a historical connection of the psalm with the Maccabees: “it is the famous and remarkable song they were due to sing for the victories, the doughty deeds, the trophies.” Chrysostom (1988:378) also suggests that “they will rejoice on their beds” shows “the complete safety from the problems he thus led them from, the great relief, the great joy, the great satisfaction.” Theodoret (2001:370) says that this psalm tells of the returnees “who triumphed through divine aid” but suggests that it is also a prophecy of the Maccabees. Further, Yahweh as King defines the peculiar relationship of the Israelites with God (Theodoret, 2001:370). Theodoret goes on to suggest that those “bereft of help and practicing good behaviour” God will lift up.

2.12.3.1 Meaning of the response

There are two ideas in the psalm we will comment on in determining the meaning of the response. First is the understanding of the “new song” (and praise) and then the images of violence.

Cyril of Jerusalem (1989:140) interprets the “new song” as indicative of the emergence of the new Churches of Christ which consist of gentiles. Jerome as well focuses on the idea of the “new song” in his interpretation of the text. A new song is indicative of a new people, so the Church rejoices in its new king, Christ (Jerome, 1964:424). Cassiodorus (1991:458), in the monastic tradition, sees the “new canticle” as referring to the secret of the incarnation, the nativity, the teaching, the suffering, and the resurrection of Christ who now sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

The praise in vv. 5 and 6a is predominantly given a Christian interpretation. The Cappadocian father, Gregory of Nazianzus (1989:336) places the exaltations of v. 6

on the mouths of Christians: “Let us adore the One Godhead in the Three; not ascribing any name of humiliation to the unapproachable Glory, but having the exaltations of the Triune God continually in our mouth.” In the Western Church, Jerome (1964:426) takes the injunction of Paul in Gal 6:14 to “glory in the cross of Jesus Christ” as the proper manner to understand the call for the faithful to “exalt in glory.” Sulpitius Severus (1986:56)³³¹ uses v. 5 on the mouth of David in the context of the return of Christ in the last judgment, where David stands up and declares that only the name of the Lord was to be worshiped.

In terms of the more literal interpretations of the Antiochene school, Chrysostom (1988:378) notes that in vv. 6-7 war is set to music. The implication is that by singing and praising the Israelites will overcome. To execute vengeance on the nations is meant to show the Israelites that it “was not God’s weakness but their own sins that consigned them to subjugation” (Chrysostom (1988:379). Theodoret (2001:371) says that “conquest in war is not inconsistent with repose; in these words, then, he foretells the Maccabees’ valor, exercised by them in subduing neighboring peoples and struggling against the Macedonians.” Theodoret (2001:371) also says, “What they did in justice against [the enemies] was written down and to this day remained their unforgettable glory.”

Turning to a Western father of the Alexandrian school, Jerome (1964:427) makes a connection between the double-edged sword in the saint’s mouth and the one in Jesus’ mouth in Rev 1:16. The two-edged sword that the Lord gives his disciples is his teachings, both historical and allegorical, which slay adversaries and protect his faithful. Jerome (1964:427) makes a distinction between punishment on the people and punishment on the leaders; the former is not the object of the punishment, but of the latter Jerome says, “that I might be able to kill Arius, Eunomius, Manichaeus, and destroy every last heresy!” The monk Cassiodorus (1991:460) understands the two-edged sword as the “word of the Lord Saviour who said in the gospels that he came not to send peace but a sword (Mt 10:34).” For Cassiodorus (1991:460) “There is one sword, but two ways of cutting which He grants to the chosen peoples at various selected moments of time.” But essentially the sword symbolizes the future judgment which the blessed ones will participate in: “To execute vengeance on the

³³¹ Sulpicius Severus (c. 360 – 420) devoted himself to monastic retirement.

nations truly takes place when they shall judge in company with the Lord” (Cassiodorus, 1991:460).

2.12.4 Psalm 149 in Augustine

2.12.4.1 Suffering in Psalm 149

Given the hymnic nature of the psalm and Augustine’s figural reading there is nothing noteworthy to record about the context for this investigation.

2.12.4.2 Meaning of the response

Augustine suggests the “new song” is the song of peace and charity to be sung by “those in whom eternal life is begun” (2004:492). Further, for Augustine (2004:493) one’s deeds determine whether one is really singing a new song. The true Zion (the true Jerusalem) is the assembly of saints in heaven and on earth and “Christ is our creator, our king, our priest, and our pure sacrifice” (Augustine, 2004:496-497). King Jesus fought for us and appeared to lose but in actuality he won (Augustine, 2004:497).

As expected, Augustine interprets figurally the double-edged sword in the hands of the saints (v. 6). The double-edged sword is the word of the Lord (Augustine, 2004:501). One side refers to temporal matters and the other to eternal matters. He illustrates through the example of Mt 10:34 how the sword brings dissention within a family (Augustine, 2004:501). From v. 7 Augustine (2004:502) suggests there will be slaughter, glorious battles and victory, with vengeance being wreaked upon the nations every day by speaking out. He uses Babylon as an example and quotes Rev 18:6, “Repay her twice over for what she has done” (Augustine, 2004:502). He explains how Babylon received a twofold punishment. When Babylon (Rome in Augustine’s example) persecuted Christians, bodies were killed but God was not destroyed. Now pagans are being killed by becoming Christians and idols are being smashed, “But you must not think of people being literally struck with swords or of blood being spilt or of wounds in the flesh” (Augustine, 2004:503). In the *Confessions* Augustine translates the slaying of the wicked with a slightly different emphasis: “Oh, if Thou wouldst slay them with Thy two-edged sword, that they be

not its enemies! For thus do I love, that they should be slain unto themselves that they may live unto Thee” (1988b:180).

For Augustine (2004:205) the kings in fetters and the nobles in chains of iron (vv. 8-9) are also allegorical. The kings in fetters represent rich people who have accepted fetters to hold them back from unlawful deeds (Augustine, 2004:504), whereas the iron symbolizes fear (Augustine, 2004:505). The “judgment written” refers to the events which “were described long ago but are being fulfilled now” (Augustine, 2004:506).

2.12.5 Psalm 149 in the Reformers

2.12.5.1 John Calvin

2.12.5.1.1 Suffering in Psalm 149

Calvin (1989:310) interprets Ps 149 as God speaking of his benefits to the Church exclusively. The psalm was composed at the time of the early restoration and the object of the Psalm was to encourage them to expect complete and full deliverance (Calvin, 1989:310). However, it was also a remedy for evils which would follow under the cruel tyranny of Antiochus (Calvin, 1989:311). A “new song” is meant to convey a rare and unusual benefit (Calvin, 1989:311). The term עֲנֻיִם (v. 4) meaning “poor and afflicted ones” describes the exiles; bodily afflictions have a tendency to subdue pride (Calvin, 1989:313).

2.12.5.1.2 Meaning of the response

Calvin offers an impressive explanation of the images of violence in vv. 8-9. The praise connected to the image of the sword is meant to suggest that the deliverance of God had been remarkable. The symbol of couches is meant to highlight the extent to which the returnees will be secure in the land, that is, they will even subjugate the kings and enemies who formerly ruled over them (Calvin, 1989:314).

Calvin (1989:314) notes that the idea of executing vengeance during and immediately following the exile seems incredible, and that this did not take place before the advent of Christ. The Jews, who were greatly reduced in number, were called to exercise faith in God's promise (Calvin, 1989:314). Calvin (1989:314) says,

The vengeance spoken of is such as the Israelites would take, not under the influence of private resentment, but by commandment of God; and this we mention that none may infer that they are allowed to take vengeance for personal injuries.

Calvin translates the mention of the kings and nobles in v. 8 as an amplification of v. 7. This was fulfilled in only a very slight way at the time of the Maccabees, but only fully in the advent of Christ (Calvin, 1989:315). Verse 9 qualifies what the psalmist has written about the previous verses (Calvin, 2003b:315). At first Calvin (2003b:315) thinks it strange that the "merciful ones of God" should be sent out to "commit slaughter and pour out human blood." However, the meaning, Calvin (1989:315) says, is that "When God himself is the author of the vengeance taken, it is just judgment, not cruelty." This judgment that was written (v. 9) is the divine mandate for the Jews

not to proceed under the influence of private resentment, and to throw a rein over passion; saying upon the matter, that God's children may not execute vengeance but when called to it, there being an end of all moderation when men yield themselves up to the impulse of their own spirits (Calvin, 1989:316).

Yet Calvin is not unaware of the tension that the violent images present with Jesus' meek manner. In response, Calvin (1989:316) says, "Christ is also armed with an iron sceptre, by which to bruise the rebellious, and is elsewhere described as stained with blood, as slaying his enemies on every side, and not being wearied with the slaughter of them (Isa 63:2)." Calvin (1989:316) does note that this is not surprising since the world despises mercy.

Furthermore, the physical violence was permissible to the Jews alone and not to Christians, "except, indeed, that rulers and magistrates are vested by God with the sword to punish all manner of violence; but this is something peculiar to their office" (Calvin, 1989:316). For the Church the sword comes now to symbolize the "word and spirit; that we may slay for a sacrifice to God those who formerly were enemies,

or again deliver them over to everlasting destruction unless they repent (Eph 6:17) (Calvin, 1989:316).³³²

Calvin's concluding comments on how the images of violence are to be appropriated by Christians are given in his own words:

If believers quietly confine themselves within these limits of their calling, they will find that the promise of vengeance upon their enemies has not been given in vain. For when God calls us, as I have said above, to judgement written, he puts a restraint both upon our spirits and actions, so as that we must not attempt what he has not commanded (Calvin, 1989:317).

Finally,

Most men give vent to fury and rage, under the idea that the only way to defend their life is by showing the savageness of wolves. Although God's people, therefore, have nothing of the strength of the giant, and will not move a finger without divine permission, and have a calm spirit, the Psalmist declares, that they have an honourable and splendid issue out of all their troubles (Calvin, 1989:317).

2.12.6 Comparison with exegetical findings of Psalm 149

Once again, the purpose here will be to allow the historical findings to supplement my exegesis. One of the challenging aspects of interpreting Ps 149 is that the immediate adversity of the post-exilic community has passed. In the background stands the suffering of the exile and so the desire to exact vengeance on the nations is isolated in its purist form. In a straightforward historical reading, the Israelites have suffered greatly at the hands of the Babylonians, but that is over and now it is their turn to exact revenge.

One area which was not looked into independently in my exegesis was the term in v. 1, a "new song." However, its connection with Revelation is quite revealing. Of the three uses of the term $\alpha\delta\omega$ (*sing*) in Revelation one occurs in the context of an allusion to Ps 139:14 and the other two (Rev 5:9 and 14:3) occur in the context of an allusion to Ps 149:1. The term a "new song" whether it occurs in the OT or NT always expresses God's impending judgment or victory over the enemy (so Beale

³³² Calvin also quotes Isa 11:4 in the following verses.

and Bount). In Revelation it is Jesus who is acclaimed with this position of judge. Rev 14:2-3 seems to celebrate God's universal rule seen in the judgment of enemies and the redemption of those who witness to it. Many of the commentators in this study comment on this "new song." Cyril of Jerusalem sees the "new song" as indicating the new Churches of Christ. Jerome sees the new song being indicative of a new people with a new king, Christ. Augustine also sees the "new song" as a song of peace and charity for the redeemed, and Calvin sees it as meant to convey rare and unusual benefits.

I argued in the exegesis that the theme of praise is a central theme in the psalm, and that the author has edited his psalm to show an intentional unity between the themes of judgment and praise. Praise and judgment are also linked by Sulpitius Severus, who has v. 5 being spoken by David at the last judgment when Christ returns. Chrysostom notes that the psalm sets war to music, "implying that by singing and praising they will overcome" (Chrysostom, 1988:378). Chrysostom relates this song to the remarkable song of the victories of the Maccabees.

An image of importance in interpreting the violent intent of the psalm was the "two-edged swords." Jerome makes the connection between the double-edged sword in Jesus' mouth (Rev 1:16) and the double-edged sword in the mouths of the saints. But for Jerome the two-edged sword in the NT is the teaching, historical and allegorical, which slays adversaries and protects the faithful (Jerome, 1964:427). In this context Jerome would very much like to figuratively slay the heretics of his time. Augustine, as well, gives a figural meaning to the double-edged sword. He illustrates through Mt 10:13 how Jesus' words as "the sword" can bring dissension. On the other hand, Cassiodorus interprets the double-edged sword and the exacting of revenge by the saints as referring to a future judgment in which they will participate with Christ. The poor will pass judgment on the princes of the earth.

In the exegesis the question was raised as to whether the meaning of the song allowed for its use in motivating a just war. Of the commentators which I examined none allowed it to be used as such. The literal interpretation by Theodoret was descriptive in nature, telling about what the Maccabees had done. Calvin clearly indicates that violence was permissible to the Jews alone and not to Christians. The many different figural interpretations attempt to bridge the gap between the images

in Ps 149 and the calling of the Christian, which, as Calvin (1989:317) suggests, is to the restraints on spirit and action as given in “the judgment written.” Important, though, is how the “new song” and the praise elements interwoven with the violent images are also captured in the allusions to the Book of Revelation. The connection with Revelation 5:9 stresses Jesus as the worthy judge and with Rev 14:3 stresses song in particular to the 144,000 and represents God’s victory over the enemy. Jerome’s observation of the connection between the double-edged sword and Rev 1:16 and Cassiodorus’ explanation of the sword as suggesting a time of future judgment in which Christians will participate with Christ all strongly suggest that Ps 149 has eschatological tones. Given these parameters it seems that Caspar Sciopius and Thomas Müntzer attributed to the meaning of the text a function which was not understood or suggested by any of the commentators in this study.

3.0 TOWARDS DEVELOPING AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE LANGUAGE OF ENMITY AS PRAYER AND GOD’S JUST DEALINGS WITH HIS PEOPLE

3.1 Analysis of Findings

3.1.1 Suggesting an appropriate way to understand the images of enmity

With the exegesis and the historical survey completed, our next task is to understand the meaning of these psalms as prayer and to move towards developing a theology of God’s just dealings with his people. One of the basic assumptions of this study was that form criticism had limited the understanding of the responses of enmity in the psalms because violent images are found in more than just lament psalms of the individual. It was postulated that if images and motifs of enmity can be examined in the larger context of other responses to suffering at the hands of an enemy, then a more accurate picture may be obtained as to what they have to say about how the psalmists perceive justice. In this section I will attempt to compare the responses to distressing situations in Pss 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 and 149 in order to determine a more adequate understanding of the images of enmity. In the next section I will seek to understand the meaning of the findings as normative prayer. Following this explanation, I will examine the relationship between the psalmist, the enemy and God in a canonical context from the perspective of the modern pray-er. It is at this point as prayer reflecting the nexus of relationships between God, psalmist and enemy that a beginning towards contributing to a theology of God’s just dealing with his people can be offered. In an ideal study all three elements would be investigated and commented on at the same time, synchronically, because they each simultaneously contribute to an overall understanding of these psalms. However, the following approach will allow their meaning and use as prayer to be more easily comprehended.

3.1.2 A comparison of the different responses to adversity in Pss 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 and 149

The goal of this thesis is to understand how psalms that contain images of enmity can function as prayers in the life of faith, and to make some proposals in explaining God's just dealings with his people. In other words, an accurate understanding of how the psalms portray justice is dependent on the psalms as forms of prayer which disclose the psalmist's thoughts on the relationship between victim, perpetrator and God. It will be the goal of this section to understand the meaning of the responses of enmity in greater detail as they are key to understanding the psalmist's perspective on God's justice in dealing with people and, in particular, his people. The following table provides a useful summary of the pertinent results of the exegesis and historical survey. For more detailed information on which the discussion is based the reader is referred back to the specific psalm sections in the exegesis and the historical survey.

	Ps 110	Ps 119	Ps 129	Ps 137	Ps 139	Ps 149
Form	Royal (Messianic Prophecy)	Mixed Genre (lament, wisdom, hymn, thanksgiving)	Communal lament	Communal lament	Royal/Petitionary (Protective Psalm of the king)	Eschatological hymn
Response to moral adversity	Oracle and Oath formulas.	Meditation on Torah (precepts)	Agricultural Imprecation	War Imprecation	Capital Imprecation	Praise (hymn)
Image of enmity prayed for	Heap up corpses; shatter heads over the wide earth	N/A	Like dead grass which is depleted in substance, quantity and time	The shattering of little ones against the rock	That אֱלֹהִים (God) would slay the wicked; bloodthirsty men depart from me; perfect hatred for those who hate the Lord	A two edged sword in their hands; to execute vengeance; to bind their kings and nobles; to execute the “judgement written”
Desired outcome	Complete subjugation of all enemies on a cosmic level	Yahweh’s relational presence through Torah means injustice cannot exist	Complete elimination of the wicked	Complete elimination of evil represented in Babylon	Elimination of psalmist’s enemies	Complete subjugation of all enemies on a national level (נִקְמָה)
Theological focus	Eschatological	Torah as pathway to relation with Yahweh	Eschatological	National removal of evil	Individual removal of evil. Perhaps eschatological	Eschatological
Characterization of the enemies	Kings, nations and “heads”; recalcitrant aggressors. They surround Zion. Demonic source	Internal and external. Six different terms used. Far from Yahweh’s Torah. Despise psalmist because they despise Torah	Outside the covenant (internal and external). Irrationality in their “hatred of Zion”	Treachery of Edom and great atrocities of war perpetrated by Babylon. Mocking of Yahweh (songs of Zion)	“Bloodthirsty” i.e., murderers. Defined as enemies of God; will continue in greater boldness (v. 20) if not opposed	Kings and nobles of the nations. Resist Yahweh’s sovereign rule to the end

Table 5. Summary of the pertinent information of Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139, and 149 (continued next page)

	Ps 110	Ps 119	Ps 129	Ps 137	Ps 139	Ps 149
NT perspective	Judgment pertaining to one's understanding of who Jesus ("lord") is. Subjugation of enemies has begun but not completed. Violent images of judgment on recalcitrant enemies found in the New Testament.	Rev 16:5, 9; 19:2 Yahweh's righteous character and his actualized judgments on the earth are inseparable	NT uses agricultural images to reflect a severe form of judgment. Grass is symbolic of human lifespan	Jesus used the images in his acknowledgement of the historical judgment on Jerusalem for rejecting him. Use of Babylon in Revelation as the epitome of evil	"New song" connected with Rev 15:3. Praises are the realization of God's rule through judgment/justice	New song in Rev 1: 6; 5:9; 14:3. Jesus as worthy judge over the whole earth. Victory over the enemy.
Sacred nature indicated in the text	War and Priesthood joined through the liturgical modification of the prophetic oracle יהוה יהוה. Lack of historical markers.	אַשְׁרֵי "Blessed formulas." Synonym for Torah in all verses except v 122. All verses address Yahweh except vv 1-3 and 115. Yahweh occurs 22 times – the poem has 22 strophes	V 8, the formulaic blessing formulas בָּרַךְ and בְּרַכָּה attached to the end of the imprecation. <i>Hapax legomenon</i> phrase, "those who hate zion"	Blessing formulas אַשְׁרֵי accompany imprecations. The use of the term Zion. עוֹלָלִי differs from patterns of use in war oracles.	The direct address to אֱלֹהֵי (God). Yahweh orientated formulation of justice.	Unified themes of praise and judgment. Eschatological theme of Yahweh's reign over the whole earth. String of jussives. Hallelujah superscript and postscript.

Table 5. Summary of the pertinent information of Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139, and 149 (continued from previous page)

Despite the clear differences between the psalms as indicated in the chart, they share a unified perspective in their portrayal of the object of and motivation for the enemies' hatred. The situation in Ps 110 begins by depicting the foes surrounding Zion and as the battle sequence progresses in vv. 5-7, the corpses are heaped up indicating the enemies were actively engaged in battle until the end. In Ps 119 the enemies despise the psalmist because he lives out Torah and so they despise Torah. They are also portrayed as those who are far from Yahweh's precepts. In Ps 129 the enemies are referred to as those who "hate Zion" and are thus portrayed by Augustine as irrational. In Ps 137, besides the atrocities committed against Jerusalem, there is an implicit challenge of Yahweh's authenticity as sovereign God in the taunts for the captives to sing songs of Zion. In Ps 139 the bloodthirsty are indicated as those who hate Yahweh and who challenge his inherent right as the creator of each individual. The binding of the kings and nobles in Ps 149 also speaks of active engagement in battle by the enemies. The *inclusio* between Ps 149 and Ps 2 reinforces the antagonism of the enemies. A unifying theological perspective is that in some way the adversity against the psalmist has its roots in adversity towards Yahweh or against what Yahweh stands for. Even in the case of Ps 119, the enemies may have been ostensibly concerned with the psalmist, but in actuality the reason they despised the psalmist was his close identification with Yahweh as is expressed through his meditating on and living out the Torah.

Yet there is another similarity that these psalms share, which is the desired outcome for the enemies in the response to their adversity. In Ps 110 the psalmist portrays the complete subjugation of all enemies on a cosmic level, "over the wide earth." In Ps 119 the psalmist desires the presence of Yahweh because he knows the enemies cannot co-exist with Yahweh. In Ps 129 the psalmist hopes for the complete elimination of the wicked in substance, quantity and time. In Ps 137 the psalmist hopes for the effective dissolution of a nation. In Ps 139 it is the ending of the life of those who have committed murder and hence the removal of the source of wickedness³³³ which is hoped for. Finally, in Ps 149, we have the complete subjugation of the enemies on a national level. What all the images of enmity, including Ps 119 as a non-violent response and Ps 149 as hymn, share in common is

³³³ As indicated in the survey of the commentators, the question of hyperbole cannot be answered for certain. However, the image is that of the ending of life and hence the absolute removal of the source of wickedness.

a desire for the absolute removal of wickedness as represented in the characterization and activities of the foes. Perhaps this absolutism has developed out of wisdom literature where good and evil are portrayed in absolute categories. However, approached theologically, the absolutism seems to derive from depicting the enemies as aggressors towards Yahweh, which leaves no room for a moral middle ground. Given the utter hopelessness of the enemies' cause, one might find their stance implausible, yet this irrationality is one of the characteristics which defines the enemies, as Augustine keenly observed when commenting on Ps 129.

In keeping with the premise that the meaning of the OT finds its fulfilment in the life, words and witness to Jesus Christ, it will be worth noting some similarities which exist among the NT allusions in the different psalms. Again, I realize that the validity of these intertextual connections and the criteria to determine associations is open to debate, but I will proceed on the basis of the observations I have made in this study. It cannot be coincidental that all of the texts have some form of allusion to the final judgment. Given the severe images of enmity in some of the psalms (Ps 110, 137, 149) one might expect to find a reciprocal connection to the violent images of judgment in Revelation. Surprisingly, Ps 119, a non-violent image of response, has a connection with Rev 16:5, 9 and Rev 19:2. The implication is that Yahweh's righteous character and his judgments on earth are inseparable. Ps 129 was thought to represent a mild form of imprecation because it depicts grass dying. However, in the NT, agricultural images were used to depict a severe form of judgment. The chaff of Mt 3:1-12 is burned in an unquenchable fire. The fig tree which is cursed by Jesus in Mt 21:18-21 will never bear fruit again. Further, grass is symbolic of human lifespan and grass dying is also used to depict judgment.³³⁴

In Lk 19:44 Jesus quotes Ps 137:9 as prophetic judgment against Jerusalem for rejecting and murdering him. Notwithstanding the question of agency, Jesus was asserting that such violence could be a form of divine judgment. Further, Ps 137 finds a strong connection with judgment in the book of Revelation through the use of "Babylon" which by NT times had come to symbolize the epitome of evil. Ps 139 finds a connection with Rev 15:3 and 2:6. The former passage is associated with the "new song" and related to the defeat of the beast while the latter picks up Jesus

³³⁴ As noted in the exegesis of Ps 129, death is a form of judgment regardless of what age it occurs.

commending the Church in Ephesus for hating the practices of the Nicolaitans. In Ps 149 there is also connection with Rev 5:9 and 14:3 through the “new song.” Here the “new song” expresses praise for God’s victory over the enemy. Each of the NT allusions or verbal parallels depicts an aspect of judgment and each has an eschatological element. Perhaps we can conclude two points from these comparisons. The first is that the images of enmity are also images of judgment, and secondly that judgment, even if it is a present phenomenon, has an eschatological element to it. One psalm was not included in the above comparison because its importance in understanding the images of enmity deserves further mention.

In early Church history, Ps 110 became a central Christological text which was used to defend the orthodox position on the nature of Jesus and the Trinity. In understanding images of enmity and their connection to God’s just dealing with his people, in my opinion, it should also occupy a central place. This is so for several reasons. First, Ps 110 betrays its importance as a bridge between the OT and NT by being the most quoted psalm in the NT.³³⁵ Second, it clarifies Jesus’ role as judge. In the quotations of Ps 110:1 in the gospels (Mk 12:36; Mt 22:44; Lk 20:42-43) and Acts (2:34-35), Jesus claims the right to judge based on one’s understanding of who he is. Third, it clarifies the time frame in which judgment will occur. The chronological context for the universal reign of the “lord” is portrayed in an eschatological framework as having been inaugurated but not yet fulfilled through the bringing together of Ps 110:1 and Ps 8:4-6 in Hebrews 2:8-9. Fourth, the allusion to Ps 110 in Heb 10:13 shows that Jesus’ session as the Melchizedekian priest provides the basis for mercy to be shown to those of the New Covenant.

To summarize, several observations have been suggested based on the comparison of the different images of enmity. First, the motivation for the enemies’ animosity towards the psalmist is really an animosity towards Yahweh. Secondly, there seems to be a consensus among the hoped-for outcomes towards the enemy. The psalms portray a hope for the absolute removal of evil. Thirdly and tentatively, according to the NT, but not exclusively, there appear to be themes of judgment and eschatology associated with each of the psalms. So, we may conclude that in these prayers, the one who prays them is praying for God’s judgment on the wicked. Before we move to investigating the images of enmity as prayer, we will discuss this judgment.

³³⁵ The psalms represent two-thirds of all OT quotations in the NT.

3.1.3 Images of judgment

Given that we have established that the images of enmity are images of judgment on a recalcitrant enemy and having established the time frame by which to understand Christ's universal rule, we now turn to understanding judgment as it is portrayed in these psalms.

It will be noted that we have touched on the themes of judgment and eschatology in Ps 110 which are also characteristic of the other NT connections with the psalms in this investigation. If the images of enmity are part of an eschatological judgment then the praying of these images of enmity presents no real challenge for the Christian.³³⁶ However, if they are not, and if Christians are engaging in prayer for God to judge evil in the present, then what type of judgment are they praying for? The Ante-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, along with Augustine, are helpful in seeing how the text applies to the spiritual conversions of the enemies of Christ into followers of Christ.³³⁷ However, besides Theodoret and a few others in the Antiochene school of exegesis, none of the early commentators in this study discusses how God judges recalcitrant evil in the present.

This is not the case with Luther and Calvin, who comment on present judgment in their commentaries on Ps 110. Luther sees two aspects to the extension of the Kingdom of God. The first is a metaphorical battle where the field is full of corpses, which describes the power of Christ's Word (Luther, 1956:342). But the other deals with recalcitrant enemies whose source is the devil. For Luther the subjugation of all enemies is done in a secret way (Luther, 1956:242). He believed that Yahweh alone subdues the enemies under the "lord's" feet without the assistance of Christians or physical power (Luther, 1956:255). Luther gives historical examples to show how God can use violence and warfare on those who oppose the "lord." Calvin likewise divides people into two groups, those who will partake in God's glory and those who are the true enemies and remain lost forever, the reprobate. Calvin does not expound on the present working out of judgement as opposed to its eschatological

³³⁶ Hilary and Cyprian often encourage believers to patiently bear under suffering by the prospect of seeing God's wrath on their enemies. Hilary apparently took the imprecations in the psalms literally. For Hilary the memory of the persecutions were still "within the memory of living men" and his conflict with heretics undoubtedly spurred him on. Further, "it was a Christian duty and privilege to rejoice in the future destruction of his opponents" (Watson, 1979:90-91).

³³⁷ Once again, I refer the reader to the exegesis for details.

working out in Ps 110. However, in Ps 119:52 Calvin comments that God carries out judgments daily, but these are hidden and not perceptible without God's help (Selderhuis, 2007:157).

If we follow Calvin and Luther that God's judgment is a realized eschatology then the images of enmity used as prayer may be efficacious in God carrying out his judgment. That is, the prayers are part of the agency of God working to enact punishment on evildoers before the end time, but this remains hidden to a certain degree. One criticism against those who want to allegorize or who refuse to pray these psalms is that in doing so they mitigate the reality of evil in all its various expressions. The English cliché "out of sight out of mind" does not apply to the reality of evil. Further, they must construe a world where God is active in rectifying injustice in a way which removes the Church from the concrete reality of evil. If the reality of evil is lost, the Church's solidarity with victims of evil becomes elusive. Such a sanitized world is coloured so that both goodness and evil become blended into an indeterminate gray. Perhaps those who wrote wisdom literature with its absolute characterization of good and evil had a clearer understanding about the nature of evil than moderns. It is not enough for the Church to identify with abstractions of evil using generic terms. These prayers are formulated sacred prayers, but they do it in all the textures of the language of enmity. The true nature of the Kingdom of God does not deny the reality of evil as expressed in these images of enmity because the symbols themselves are an accurate representation of evil.³³⁸

One of the goals of praying the psalms with language of enmity is to call for God's judgment on evil. It was observed in the exegesis of Ps 119 and confirmed by Augustine and Calvin that the notion of judgment brought great delight and comfort to the psalmist. That is, as the psalmist meditated on the Law he understood that evil and the presence of Yahweh were incompatible. In his seventh exposition on Psalm 119, Augustine gives a definition of justice and retribution. For Augustine there are four types of retribution: evil retribution for evil; good for good; evil repaid with good; and good may be repaid with evil.

³³⁸ One has only to look to the Bibighar Massacre at Cawnpour (now Kanpur) in the mid-nineteenth century or the Nazi concentration camps of the twentieth century to see a literal picture that what happened to the little ones in Ps 137:9 was not just an ancient practice. News is presently leaking out about the atrocities being committed in Syria and Iraq and historians are undoubtedly going to find that the atrocities committed rival the atrocities of any ancient warfare.

Of these four types of retribution two are manifestations of justice, in the recompense of evil with evil and of good with good. The third is a manifestation of mercy, when good is rendered for evil. The fourth is alien to God, who has never repaid anyone with evil in return for good. The one I mentioned in the third place necessarily has priority, because if God did not repay evil with good there would never be any good people to whom he could render good for good” (Augustine, 2003:369).

Furthermore, judgment is the working out of the virtue of justice. In this regard, justice is never an abstraction of philosophical ideas but directed towards a perpetrator.

Judgment therefore has two purposes in the Scriptures. Ps 110 is a pivotal psalm in this regard because, understood in the context of the NT, it correlates to the session of Christ and his universal rule as already but not yet fulfilled. As many commentators in the historical survey noticed, all people stand as enemies before God and under his judgment. God punishes or judges all forms of evil; this is something that is evident in the experiences of the psalmist (Ps 119) and the exile of Israel (Pss 129, 137, and 149). None escapes judgment; even the elect merely avert it to the type of the Melchizedekian Priest, Jesus Christ. God will and, according to his nature, must punish all evil. Death itself is the final form of judgment for all people and is a form of God’s wrath (see Ps 129). In a certain sense, the imprecations which contain images relating to the death of the reprobate are variations of this judgment. It is Christ who has changed this equation. So Zenger (1996:68) is correct in commenting that one of the purposes of judgement is to lead towards repentance: “Judgment is the way God helps human beings to self-discovery; it is liberation from the delusion of innocence, awakening from the sleep of conscience, release from life’s lie.” So in one sense praying these images is really seeking for judgment in the way Augustine explained as rendering good for evil. Probably this is why Augustine and the others could associate Ps 119 with the behaviour of the martyrs. This form of repaying evil with good is what Christians are exhorted to do in the face of evil (Rom 12:14; Mt 5:44; Lk 6:28; 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Pet 3:9). The other form of judgment on the reprobate is both a present and an eschatological reality with the purpose of restoring everything as it should be (Ps 149) and giving the wicked what they, in their delusional state, desire.

3.2 Understanding the Language of Enmity as Normative Prayer

3.2.1 Prayers as normative scripture

One of the ways of avoiding the images of enmity in the Psalms is to assume a Marcionite-type view towards the OT as scripture and disregard them as reflecting an inferior religion (see Zenger, 1996:13-22). Yet within the OT there seems to be a tension between an ethic which guards the sacredness of life and the value of one's neighbour and its extreme opposite reflected in "dashing little ones against the rock." The sixth Commandment says "Thou shalt not murder," and the codified law in Leviticus speaks about loving one's neighbour (Lev 19:34). Yet, each of the psalms with language of enmity either describes the taking of life or wishes for it. Since we are dealing with the psalms as prayer texts,³³⁹ one way to deal with this ethical tension is to assume that Israel did not distinguish between the sacred and the profane.³⁴⁰ However, I will argue below that the sacred³⁴¹ use of language in the psalms with images of enmity in this study indicates a distinction between the secular use of language and the sacred use. Understanding the message of these "sacred" psalms and how they function as prayer forms a basis towards using them in the life of faith and constructing a perspective about God's justice in dealing with people and, in particular, his people. As Le Moen (2011:93) suggests, the patterns of *lex orandi*, *lex credenda* and *lex agenda* (prayer, belief and action) are tightly interwoven. The prayers come to us as scripture and so the present task is to explain how these images of enmity as normative revelatory scripture function as prayer.

Zenger (1996:81) suggests that "the Bible is not revelation in the sense of an immediate, verbal communication from God, but is 'the word of God in human words.'" To clarify what he means Zenger provides several examples from the NT and OT. In his example using Deuteronomy 7, he insists that according to a fundamentalist view of revelation "one would have to refuse the name 'revelation' to many texts about war and destruction in the Old Testament" (Zenger, 1996:81).

³³⁹ The descriptive texts may require a different line of examination. I am merely speaking about the language of enmity as prayer.

³⁴⁰ Note Scheffler's (2009:5) comments about war and violence in the OT: "The fact is that in ancient Israel generally no distinction was made between sacred and secular reality, especially when life and death issues were at stake."

³⁴¹ The term "sacred" embraces not only cultic use, but its present use as prayer.

Zenger (1996: 85) sees the revelatory normativeness of the psalms in that “God in person confronts us with the fact that there are situations of suffering in this world of ours in which such psalms are the last thing left to suffering human beings—as protest, accusation, and cry for help.” Zenger (1996:85) also makes the point that a revelatory dimension gives victims of violence a voice so as not to become speechless, and he leaves open the question of God’s involvement in helpless situations. These are all important and helpful functions of the imprecatory psalms and Zenger correctly points out that victims can benefit greatly from using these psalms, but he does not explain why victims have the right to pray these violent images. Further, to say that the imprecatory psalms as revelation only speak by giving voice to victimization reduces their function or at least the scope of their function. Part of how these psalms function as normative prayer remains unanswered. Boersma (2009:127-170) has argued *pace* Von Rad’s suggestion that the psalms are Israel’s response to Yahweh’s deeds, that in the psalms there is also the voice of God, the voice of the enemy, the voice of God’s ministrants and a canonical voice especially indicated through the placement of Torah psalms by the editors of the Psalter. In the end, Zenger’s focus on the victims’ plight, although helpful, leaves one with the feeling that these psalms function as the words of man to God, but not as the words of God to man.

A more helpful but also incomplete approach to understanding the images of enmity as normative scripture is the approach taken by Nancy de Claissé-Walford (2011). De Claissé-Walford (2011:80) argues that the communities of faith incorporated imprecatory psalms into the canons of scripture because the leaders acknowledged the importance of these texts. By their inclusion into the canon they have now been transformed from words of the faithful to God into words from God to the faithful (2011:80). Wallace (2005:3-15) takes this one step further and has argued from a survey of the use of the psalms in Church history that the psalms have been understood as words to God and words from God which Christians can receive as gift and offer back to God. The key to understanding the images of violence as prayer starts with the realization that these prayers are unique. So it is as unique prayers given by God to be prayed to God that we must understand the images of enmity as normative scripture.

3.2.2 Towards a spiritual understanding of the images of enmity

The question becomes, What is being prayed for when the modern worshipper prays these particular images? If we refuse to pray with the language of enmity are we merely returning to the notion of the psalms as reflecting a belief that for the ancients there was no difference between the sacred and profane? Or that the psalms are only human words to God? One of the conclusions from the comparison of the psalms used in this investigation was that the meaning behind the images of enmity is the call for the complete removal of evil. In other words, there was a deeper spiritual meaning behind the ostensible images of enmity. But are there any indications within the individual psalm texts in this study that those who composed them understood a deeper spiritual meaning to these images?

In order to address this question we will have to look at the distinctiveness of the language of the psalms. I suggest that in the psalms with images of enmity in this study there was a distinction made between the secular use of these images and the sacred use. In making this distinction, I am making a theological claim which is supported by anthropological and sociological definitions of religious language.

[An anthropological study of religious language] concerns linguistic practices that are taken by practitioners themselves to be marked or unusual in such a way as to suggest that they involve entities or modes of agency which are considered by those practitioners to be consequentially distinct from more 'ordinary' experience, or situated across some sort of ontological divide from something understood as a more everyday 'here and now' (Keane, 2004:431).

This difference is also recognized in a sociological approach to religious language:

Members of any socioculture, or, at least, those who have been fully enculturated and socialized into speech-community, can and do differentiate between religion and non-religion ... No matter how difficult it may be for outsiders ... to find the exact boundaries" (Fishman, 2006:14).³⁴²

By using the term "sacred" I mean the religious use of language in contrast to a purely profane or secular use. In other words, those who composed the psalms composed them as prayer or liturgy, which they realized carried a different inherent

³⁴² I am not framing my argument from either an anthropological or a sociological perspective. I am merely commenting that two different disciplines understand religious language and secular language to be different. I am not necessarily interested in explaining how the denotative meaning of language can describe the ontological as much as I am in showing how the language in the psalms I am looking at combines images and rhetoric in a peculiar way that can be defined as sacred or religious.

meaning than the use of such language in a non-liturgical setting. What this sacred meaning is will be different for each psalm, but the meaning does not need to be limited to only a secular one.³⁴³ If the above proposal about the different purposes of language is valid, the sacred perspective should be detectable regardless of the approach taken to study the psalms—allegorical, historical-critical, form-critical, cult-critical, or literary and canonical. In the most recent movement in Psalm studies, Mays (1993:14-15), in his inaugural address regarding reading psalms in their literary context, suggested that in the Psalms given settings changed, patterns and vocabularies took on new significance and the Psalms changed on the basis of changing conditions. I suggest that the same observation could be applied to the original composers of the psalms who took common language such as warfare and violence and endued it with further meaning by the use of particular vocabulary and/or rhetoric structures. In other words, those who composed these psalms understood that they were composing liturgy and infused this liturgy with distinct meaning.

The following examples³⁴⁴ from the psalms in this investigation seem to indicate that the language of enmity in these prayers functions differently from a non-sacred use. First is the placing together of priest and king in Ps 110, something which has led to much polemical writing for those who hold that David is the “lord.” Further, the secular language of war is merged with the sacred language of the Melchizedekian priest through a liturgical modification of the pure prophetic oracle **הַיְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ**. In addition, the time frame established in Ps 110 and the focus on the utter defeat of the enemy, along with a lack of historical markers, may also be indicative of a spiritual language. In Ps 119 we have the **אַשְׁרֵי** “blessed” formulas (vv. 1, 2) which act as an introduction and are part of the hermeneutical key to understanding the whole psalm. Furthermore, there is only one verse (v. 122) which does not mention a synonym for God’s revealed Torah. And besides the hermeneutical key (vv. 1-3) and v. 115, the voice of the psalmist addresses Yahweh.

³⁴³ In his proposal for the Psalms to be read according to the typology of function, Brueggemann (1995:8-9) comments that form criticism (i.e., Gunkel) could not deal with the interrelatedness of various psalms and actual human experience and that Mowinckel’s proposal was too speculative. My approach sees a sacred reality in the text which can be examined apart from the text’s function.

³⁴⁴ I am not trying to work out general parameters for such a procedure. For this investigation I merely wish to point out some observations from the texts under consideration rather than being exhaustive.

Further, the term יהוה occurs 22 times in the poem of 22 strophes. In Ps 129, once again we have blessings in the form of benediction formulas (בְּרָכָה and בְּרָךְ) attached to the end of the imprecatory portion of the prayer. Moreover, the enemies are characterized by the *hapax legomenon* phrase “those who hate Zion” which has eschatological overtures.

In Ps 137:9 there are again covenantal blessing formulas אֲשַׁרִּי (vv. 8 and 9) which accompany the violent imprecations. There cannot be any doubt that attaching these covenantal formulas to images of enmity adds a new dimension of meaning. The term Zion also has significance related to the character of Yahweh. Further, the use of עוֹלָל in Ps 137:9 differs from the pattern of its use in war oracles in the prophetic literature. In Ps 139 there is the direct speech to God, with the use of the term אֱלֹהֵהָ (God). Comment was made on whether the absolutism of the “hatred” statements reflected hyperbole or wisdom leanings. Moreover, the psalmist is content not to formulate the agency of justice in his prayer. He merely develops a Yahweh-oriented perspective. In Ps 149 we have the carefully unified themes of praise and judgment. It is certainly not standard to include in secular recording of war images themes of praise to God. Further, there is the “written” source of revelation, the eschatological theme of Yahweh’s rule over the whole earth, and the hymnic nature of the psalm noted in the string of jussives and the hallelujah superscript and postscript. In making these observations we are going beyond recognizing the psalms as poetry. The psalms as poetry and song do help us to inhabit and celebrate the psalmist’s worldview (so Wright, 2013:21), but it is not poetry alone that accounts for the distinctness of the psalms. Roughly two-thirds of the OT is poetry. Rather it is their nature as prayer offered up to God that contributes to their distinctiveness.

It is not just as spiritual texts as opposed to secular texts that the psalms distinguish themselves. They also stand unique within the whole range of genres in Scripture. This is not to say that the psalms only address spiritual matters as opposed to historical or political matters, something which Kraus (1992:16) suggests is not true. Rather, once again, according to Wallace (2005:14) commentators such as Athanasius, Calvin and Luther maintained a balance between the two traditions of seeing the psalms as the words of man and the words of God. The balance was also seen in the “complementary approaches of the cathedral and the monastic traditions”

(Wallace, 2005:14). In fact, the dual nature of the psalms is reflected in the incarnational nature of God's word proclaimed in Scripture and in the divine Word come in human flesh (Wallace, 2005:15). In one regard, the whole Bible may be regarded as a religious text. However, even in this context the psalms have a unique role and function.

What the meaning of this spiritual language is will depend on each psalm. Brown (2002, ix) has noted that scholars have overlooked the Psalter's use of imagery at great cost. What I mean by sacred language in this instance is not necessarily dependent on a metaphorical or allegorical interpretation. What modern Christians are doing when they pray these psalms is spiritualizing these prayers, but not in the same way that the Church Fathers did, and in this regard Houston's criticism of the early Church Fathers is justified, namely, that the practice of allegory as exemplified in Origen, Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers and Chrysostom is orthodox in theology but unorthodox in methodology (Houston & Waltke, 2011:7). Metaphor signals the transference of meaning from something familiar to something new (Brown, 2002: 5). Nevertheless, metaphor and allegory assume a disconnection between the target and the source domains regardless of the common ground of understanding. The language of enmity, I suggest, maintains this connection with the referent through the universal unchanging nature of evil.

This is not a novel way of understanding the text. The "sacred" understanding of the text by the earliest canonical communities could not have been limited to only a literal understanding of the images of enmity, especially if the editors intended the setting of Book V to be understood as occurring in the beginning but not yet completed restoration. The rhetorical feature which most closely describes how the language of enmity may be understood in these psalms is synecdoche. Synecdoche states that the part stands for the whole or the whole stands for the parts. So there is a connection between the source and target domains. Brown (2002:x) has rightfully noted that the Psalms are performative in nature and that they find their relevance primarily in what they invoke. His purpose was to highlight the role of metaphor, but this is true of the rhetoric of synecdoche as well.

3.2.3 The language of enmity

But why would Christians need to use these images praying from this side of the Cross? One reason is that they represent the unchanging and true nature of evil: aggressive and recalcitrant (Ps 110); despising of Yahweh to the extent that they despise those who follow his laws (Ps 119); excessively brutal, proud, irrational (Ps 129); mocking, treacherous, and perpetrating war atrocities (Ps 137); bloodthirsty murderers and progressively more evil if not restrained (Ps 139); and defiant in a collective (national) way (Ps 149). The language used to describe the enemies and their actions in the psalms is what can be described as the “language” or “grammar” of evil. Blood and violence, war atrocities such as the killing of little ones, murder, hatred, battlefields and corpses heaped up are part of this language. Praying the language of enmity is really praying the “language” or “grammar” of evil. When Christians pray these “sensational” images, they are merely reflecting back to God what he already sees and knows about the wicked. Brueggemann (2007:64) suggests that the psalms capture the rawness of human experience. Perhaps we can go further and say that the psalms capture in language the rawness of evil in human experience, which has now become embedded in the language of the psalms, the gift of the psalms as God’s word offered back up to God. Brueggemann (2005b:47) also comments that when praying, Israel prays God’s character back to God. If this is the case, then praying the language of enmity is praying back to God what should not be, and what God has an obligation to rectify. The language of enmity is not vague descriptions of evil, but its pointed reality. The language may reflect a particular place, time and worldview. However, the nature of evil reflected in this language has not changed. These psalms pray for the annihilation of evil, the presence of which is incompatible with Christ’s rule, and they do so using real images of evil.

3.2.4 Psalm 137 as an example

Perhaps a clearer way of seeing this can come through the example of Ps 137. To begin with, the attaching of the בְּרֵכָה “blessed formula” to the imprecation of shattering little ones against the rock indicates that the imprecation has a sacred meaning. The “blessed formula” draws God into the psalm and prayer. “Blessed” assumes that such actions will be effected and commended by God. A sacred meaning does not mean an allegorical meaning, although many early Church

commentators allegorize the imprecation of the shattering of the little ones against the rock to mean sinful thoughts. Augustine (2004:240), for example, says that the little children are evil desires and the rock is Christ. In this way the denotative force of the evil images of the children being dashed against the rocks is muted. Further, there is nothing that connects the psalm to the larger issues of justice, which seems to be what those who composed the psalm were looking for. In other words, an allegorical interpretation becomes a pietistic interpretation that looks inward.

I suggested in the exegesis that shortly after the fall of Babylon the language of enmity would have been understood as a metaphor for the complete elimination of the government of Babylon and hence the dissolution of the nation. That the dashing of little ones never seems to have occurred in Babylon's overthrow suggests that there was more to this image than a literal interpretation of *lex talionis*. However, if the fall of Babylon is considered the fulfillment of this prayer, then Yahweh goes beyond the principle of *lex talionis* which was meant to limit the extent retributive justice could take within particular historical communities. He is not bound by this principle.

The principle of *lex talionis* acts as a mirror in reflecting the evil perpetrated. The psalmist holds up the graphic detail of the specific war atrocity of murdering little ones and prays that Yahweh would repay Babylon in kind. Yahweh's response is to put an end to the functional existence of the nation and hence any capacity for the perpetrators to commit any further evil. In other words, the answer to this imprecation goes beyond the confines of the normal retribution which is asked for. Moreover, the synecdochal meaning and use suggests that the most extreme case of physical violence and vengeance then embraces all other forms of violence. The Israelites had suffered great atrocities at the hands of the Babylonians. Their prayer uses the language of these atrocities because it is an accurate reflection of the evil committed against them. Such evil still occurs today in a literal way³⁴⁵ but also in many different shades. The deeper "sacred" meaning, as with all of the psalms in

³⁴⁵ I have already made reference to 19th century Cawnpour (Kanpur) and the 20th century Nazi concentration camps as literal examples of the violent atrocities mirrored in Ps 137:9. There are so many other atrocities that mirror these literal atrocities, such as what occurred at Nanking, and in the Korean War, that I cannot give recognition to all the voices of even the twentieth century. If news stories from Syria and Iraq are an indication of the type of atrocities that have been committed in the first fourteen years of the 21st century, then as is consistent with the unchanging nature of moral evil, these violent atrocities of war continue unabated.

this investigation, is for the annihilation of evil. In other words, all acts of violent atrocities stand linked through the nature of the evil. I now turn to a brief look at how these psalms contribute to a theology of God's just dealings with his people in the context of their use as prayer.

3.3 The Canonical Context and God's Just Dealings with His People

3.3.1 Psalmist, enemy and God and the developing of a theology of God's just dealings with his people

In this section I will attempt to move towards contributing to a theology of God's just dealing with people and his people in particular. I emphasize the word "towards" because the discussion of Pss 110, 119, 129, 137, 139, and 149 in their immediate context of Book V or even the Psalter itself gives only a partial understanding of a theology of God's just dealing with his people. Psalms as prayers speak about a nexus of relationships between the psalmist, the enemy and God and hence developing a theology of God's just dealing with his people should recognize these relationships.

The central issue when talking about God's just dealing with his people is God's ostensible absence or silence in the midst of suffering of which the suffering in itself is offered as proof.³⁴⁶ Brueggemann (2005b:59) frames the question of injustice as one of theodicy or God's abandonment. There appears to be incongruence between God as creator, sustainer and covenantal partner dedicated to the well-being of his people and a world where evil can and does flourish with all its horrendous consequences. But more specifically, the context of suffering can be discussed according to suffering that is intrinsic to life in creation and suffering that arises from embracing evil (Provan, 2013: loc. 2112). This thesis is concerned with the latter problem of moral evil and does not attempt to address suffering in the context of natural world order.³⁴⁷ Furthermore, as Lindström (2003:256) has noted in his

³⁴⁶ According to Crenshaw (1983:4) there are at least eight means of reconciling undeserved suffering with belief in order and purpose. Suffering is understood as retributive, disciplinary, revelational, probative, illusory, transitory, mysterious, or denying the possibility of discovering any meaning behind innocent suffering.

³⁴⁷ So Lindström's (2003:258) contention that the distinction between moral evil and natural evil is seldom obvious in the Psalms will not be investigated.

study of theodicy in the Psalms, “Suffering is not a theoretical problem but an experienced reality.” In an earlier work, Brueggemann (1997:739) noted that the issue of theodicy has been approached by modern theologians mainly by justifying the ways of God to man, but “in Israel what is called theodicy is not explanation but protest.”

Kraus (1992:168) refers to the notion of God’s absence in the suffering and unjust treatment of the innocent as one of the “great questions of life” and suggests that “we should not raise the problem of a general theodicy, but should ask the question that forms the appropriate starting point for understanding the trouble of the psalmist.” Kraus’s (1992:168-169) approach is to follow the line of argument in each individual psalm³⁴⁸ because “Only in this way can we learn how individuals in Israel formulated the great problems of life and in the depths of torment sought to deal with them.” To a large extent, the exegesis followed Kraus’s method in investigating each individual psalm to determine the meaning of the response to suffering that had arisen from adversity at the hands of the enemy. But there are two general questions about moral evil at the hands of an enemy that we will explore here. Lindström (2003:268) gives them as 1) How does God engage with evil and what does he do to overcome it? and 2) Must evil at its root and essence remain irrational and mysterious? This second question can be rephrased in the context of this investigation as What can be known about moral evil?

To develop a theology of God’s just dealing with his people we begin by investigating the psalms as prayers in their original context. The prayers of the psalmist or congregants are addressed to “You,”³⁴⁹ which affirms that the source and ground of life lies outside themselves and hence ourselves (Brueggemann, 2005b:35). I would qualify this to suggest that regardless of the voice of the psalmist in the psalm, for the modern pray-er the psalm is a communication with the “You” (see Introduction). In contrast, the enemy is defined by the absence of a relationship with the “You” (see the description of the enemy in Ps 119) and, as was seen above, the enemy is against everything which Yahweh stands for. Injustice from a

³⁴⁸ His specific example is Psalm 73.

³⁴⁹ The “You” is meant to reflect the nature of Israel’s relationship with God. The term has been made popular by Martin Buber (see Kraus’ introduction [1992:11-16]).

theological perspective is always relational regardless of its categorization (e.g., distributional, retributive, penal, etc.) because even in its most reduced form it involves God. Prayer is the relational means through which the psalmist asks God to remember that certain relationships exist between himself, God and the enemies.

Developing a theology of God's just dealing with his people moves beyond the original constraints of the psalmist's prayers and involves investigating the psalms as prayers of the modern worshipper. Recent proposals for doing a theology of the psalms suggest placing emphasis on an interpretive community of many voices in a multicultural, multivoiced world (Tanner, 2011:140-142).³⁵⁰ Thus, the reader as pray-er is integrally involved in constructing a theology of the psalms of enmity. The basis for this present investigation is not so much the cultural context that the reader brings to the text, but rather the idea that, through the reader approaching the psalm texts as prayer, the texts become canonical texts of Scripture.

Furthermore, in praying the psalms the pray-er inhabits and celebrates a worldview where God's time and the worshipper's overlap and intersect and God's space and the worshipper's overlap and interlock (Wright, 2013:21). To expand on this slightly, the words of the psalmist as God's gift means that the psalmist, God and modern pray-ers occupy the same sacred time and space. Part of the contribution to this overlapping is the eschatological nature of these psalms, which suggests that for both the psalmist and the modern worshipper the psalms have an "already but as of yet unfulfilled" perspective. This perspective links the psalmist and the modern worshipper to God's time. As a result, in what follows I will investigate God's just dealing with his people from a canonical perspective within the context of the findings in this investigation.³⁵¹ For the details behind this discussion, readers are again directed to the respective psalms in the exegesis, the historical survey and the comparative approach above. To a certain degree, there will be some restatement of the findings. However, in what follows, I will attempt to note some salient features from the individual psalms themselves as canonical prayer and allow the psalms to dictate the issues that arise (so Kraus).

³⁵⁰ See also Braulik for a discussion of reception aesthetics (2003:313-316).

³⁵¹ As is clear from Braulik's (2003) study, a Protestant canonical context differs from a Roman Catholic canonical context. However, even within the Protestant tradition there are different views on the role of the interpretive community. Le Moen (2011:105) believes the community is needed to adjudicate the propriety of individuals praying the violent psalms.

3.3.1.1 Psalm 110: Unrestrained evil and Yahweh's "lord"

The pray-er enters Psalm 110 through the voice of the prophet, whether David or some other. The whole psalm maintains the nature of this prophetic speech, although the voice of the speaker changes.³⁵² The time frame inhabited by the pray-er is outside of the Aaronic covenant and there is a lack of pre-exilic land markers. The effect is to focus the conflict on the hostility of the enemies towards the "lord," and their impending defeat. The problem of evil is formulated from the perspective of the "lord" who is the recipient of Yahweh's oracle and oath and the recipient of the enemies' aggressive behavior. In the first strophe, the enemies surround Zion where they aggressively challenge the "lord's" divinely given mandate to rule. In the second strophe, after the Melchizedekian oath, the enemies appear as unjust aggressors who have battled to the last man against the "lord" (vv. 5-6).³⁵³ The situation here is not Yahweh's absence in the midst of suffering violently at the hands of an unjust enemy.

This is not the normal pattern of hostility in the complaints of the individual, where the dishonored human exists in a sphere that is hostile to both man and Yahweh (so Lindström, 2003:264). Rather, historical realities fade and Yahweh is portrayed as the real source behind the "lord's" victory over a recalcitrant and aggressive enemy. The images here reveal how Yahweh deals with his enemies and the true nature of the enemies. He meets their utter evil with complete victory through the agency of his "lord."

The modern pray-er adds several canonical dimensions to this picture. First, there is the working out of the complete defeat of the enemies in a particular time frame. Second, Jesus Christ is identified as the "lord" and type of the Melchizedekian priest. Third, all people are identified as enemies of God at some point in their existence, the elect and reprobate. Fourth is the pray-er's participation in the agency of Yahweh's defeat of the enemies through prayer.

War is a sophisticated form of organized and planned evil. This prayer for Christ's rule accurately reflects the capacity for evil of all those who are enemies of Christ.

³⁵² See exegesis footnote to Ps 110:3.

³⁵³ See the exegesis for other positions on who the subject of vv. 5-7 is.

Their natures have become so calcified in evil and their thinking so delusional that they not only despise the “lord” but think they can defeat Yahweh. Perhaps the singular שׂאֵל which is interpreted grammatically as a collective whole is symptomatic of a synecdochal understanding of the images. Some commentators who understood the term as referring to Satan as the chief enemy of God may have perceived this connection. The language of enmity epitomizes the rebellion against the “lord” and accurately reflects all other latent forms of evil that are only temporarily disguised. For the Christian, the murder of Yahweh’s “lord” has historical precedent. In an eschatological framework evil comes to full bloom in the final battle also depicted in the book of Revelation. There appears to be no restraining grace to limit its potential at that time. In short, the images of battle merely depict the “lord” giving to the enemies what they irrationally pursue.

3.3.1.2 Psalm 119: Torah as Yahweh’s presence and judgment

In Psalm 119 the psalmist begins his long acrostic prayer by presenting a hermeneutic key which affirms what the true nature of dedication to the Law means. The two אֲשִׁירָי (blessed) formulas in vv. 1-2 draw Yahweh into the psalmist’s prayer since Yahweh is the one who effects the “blessedness.” The psalmist’s expressions about Torah (1b), about sin (3a) and about walking in Yahweh’s ways (1a and 3b) are expressions of the psalmist’s desire for the presence of Yahweh (2b) epitomized in the last verse of the 8 strophe (v. 8) that Yahweh not utterly forsake him. For the psalmist, seeking after Yahweh is reinforced throughout the psalm (לָבַח occurs 14 times in 176 verses; Yahweh occurs 22 times).³⁵⁴

In the midst of the psalmist’s pursuit of Yahweh through Torah-dedication the psalmist encounters a world filled with enemies and conflict which challenges his pursuit and understanding of Yahweh’s presence. He identifies his antagonists as *the insolent, princes, kings, the wicked, enemies, and foes*. The enemies are external to the nation, being found all over the earth (v. 119), but also found within the nation

³⁵⁴ According to Lindström (2003:259, 265) the view of life which was developed in the monarchical period and focused on the first temple suggests that Yahweh’s area of power is symbolized by the sanctuary. The notion of Torah would then be a later development of the sphere where Yahweh’s presence and hence protection lay.

itself. However, the psalmist more specifically defines them as those (*kings*, v. 46) who do not know the עֲדֹנִית or those (*enemies*, v. 98) who do not have the מְצֻנָּה of Yahweh. They are also those who forsake Yahweh's Torah (*wicked*, vv. 53, 155) and those who stray from the מְצֻנָּה. They are even described as those who "forget" the דְּבָר (v. 139) of Yahweh. The psalmist is not merely contrasting the enemies with himself but identifying the enemies in relation to Yahweh.

The enemies stand in relation to Yahweh as those who are unaware of his Law or who wilfully reject it. However, in terms of the suffering of the psalmist the enemies are presented as responsible agents. They plot against the psalmist (v. 23), deride him (v. 51), ensnare him with cords (v. 61), smear him with lies (v. 69), subvert him with guile (v. 78), dig pits to trap him (v. 85), lie in wait to destroy him (v. 95), set a snare for him (v. 110), persecute him without cause (vv. 157, 161) and oppress him (v. 122). The psalmist is afflicted (vv. 50, 92, 153, 107) severely (v. 107) and suffers from human oppression (v. 134). Moreover, as Augustine (2003:380, 381) noted, meditating on the law is a form of repaying evil with good. As per Bede, Chrysostom, Augustine and Calvin, meditation on the law contains within it ethical implications which are relational and so we have the principle of *lex orandi, lex credenda, and lex agendi*. So the evil of the enemies here is not an abstraction but has a focus in despising the psalmist.

The psalmist presents to Yahweh his understanding of Yahweh's involvement in his suffering from three different perspectives. He feels abandoned by Yahweh (vv. 8, 19). He feels frustrated at not being able to live up to the ideal of the Law (vv. 4, 176), and in some manner he feels that God has been responsible for his affliction (v. 75). That is, he recognizes in some mysterious way that God is involved in his suffering, although he does not formulate the nature of this involvement. Furthermore, the psalmist expresses his devotion to the Law, not as motivation for answer to his prayers, but rather his suffering has led to his Torah-renaissance (vv. 67, 71, 75). For the psalmist to meditate on the Torah of Yahweh is to seek Yahweh. However, the law has an elusiveness to it and the psalmist is beset by the injustice of his enemies.

The psalmist does respond by cursing the insolent, but only once in v. 78, where in the same verse he offers his other response to the guile of the insolent, which is to

affirm to Yahweh that he will meditate on Yahweh's *precepts*. The psalmist knows that meditating on the precepts of Yahweh brings him into the way of Yahweh, which is devoid of the רָקַץ of the insolent (vv. 29, 104, 128 and 163). Imprecating against the insolent is the psalmist's way of calling on Yahweh to bring the psalmist's enemies in line with the way of Yahweh which entails judgment (v. 118). The psalmist's attitude towards meditating on the Torah is not ambiguous or capricious. The psalmist is also resolute about his commitment to the Torah in the midst of persecution (vv. 95, 110, 87, 92, 23, 61). The Law is the psalmist's delight in affliction because in the Law is the notion that Yahweh is just in exonerating the innocent and punishing the wicked. Curses as a means of seeking justice turn outwards towards the enemies through prayer to Yahweh, but meditation on the Law focuses the psalmist to turn towards Yahweh alone. Two things happen: one is that evil is placed in perspective in relation to Yahweh. Second, the psalmist understands that the wicked cannot coexist with Yahweh and so perceives suffering as the absence of Yahweh. The psalmist continues to seek Yahweh through the Law because it is not only the means of relationship with Yahweh, but in the Law is a disclosure of Yahweh's character which provides much comfort to the psalmist.

The modern worshipper who joins in with the psalmist in this prayer carries also the fuller canonical understanding of the New Testament witness. The modern pray-er takes confidence in the fact that the revelation of God through the Law (Ps 119) and through the gospel (Rom 1:16) is utterly trustworthy. Jesus understood that the Law pointed to himself (Mt 5:17-18; Lk 24:27; Jn 5:39, 46). Furthermore, the modern worshipper knows that Yahweh's disclosure in the Law as righteous is inextricably linked to the nature and actualization of his judgments upon the earth, which are true and just (Rev 16:5, 7 and 19:2). The very act of presenting prayer about one's dedication to Torah is a reminder to Yahweh of his obligation that his character and judgments become inseparable. The modern worshipper formulates the problem of suffering then in terms of Yahweh's character. Prayerfully meditating on the true Law is not only relational but removes the question as to why God allows suffering. God and injustice cannot coexist. Yahweh has no option but that, on the basis of his character, he must eliminate injustice. His latency in actualizing his character through judgment has an eschatological perspective to it, the working out of which has become clarified through Ps 110 and its delineation in Hebrews.

The prayer, however, is not a pleading for a pietistic experience. The psalmist and the modern Christian are seeking for Yahweh's presence in the governance of their affairs, which involves a response to the adversity of the enemies. With such a presence, evil cannot exist. So the modern worshipper in seeking after Yahweh is presenting to Yahweh his role as the rectifier of injustice, not something which is disassociated from him as is sometimes inferred through the use of political or penal metaphors, but is a threat to his very revelation which is trustworthy. To conclude, perhaps besides the many benefits to the believer of meditating on the Law (see especially Calvin), praying this psalm about meditating on the Law rather than cursing their enemies recognizes the innate concept of how the Law can be used wrongly. As the author of the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* (1989: 460) put it, "He that forbade revenge, now commands longsuffering, not as if just revenge were an unrighteous thing, but because long-suffering is more excellent."

3.3.1.3 Psalm 129: Yahweh's righteousness, agency, and agricultural imagery

In Psalm 129 the psalmist presents Yahweh with the history of Israel from the time of its youth in the Exodus wanderings and progresses through the exile to the restoration and into the present and future. The people stand in a situation of suffering at the hands of an excessively cruel enemy. But Yahweh has "cut the cords of the wicked" and so the people have been liberated by Yahweh and restored from the exile. The enemies are those who "hate Zion" and Zion entails in its meaning identification with Yahweh. In presenting the panorama of Israel's suffering at the hands of its enemies, the psalmist establishes in the history of Israel's relationship with its enemies and Yahweh that the past is a basis for understanding the present and the future. In Yahweh's battle with evil he is focused here on his covenantal people and goes back to the beginning. Evil directed towards the Church is inevitable.

In this prayer to Yahweh the "cords" are not only symbolic of the oppressiveness of the enemies at the time of exile, but an indication of the divine judgment of Yahweh on the Israelites. It might be tempting to think that the psalmist was singularly focused on Yahweh's deliverance. However, the language of the psalm alludes to the exile as being a judgment from Yahweh. Biblical precedent has Ephraim put

under the “yoke” (cords) of the nations as a judgment for its wickedness and injustice (Hos 10:11; Deut 28:48; Isa 9:3). The image of the withering grass depicts the devastating effects on the victims of military aggression that can refer to the exilic military aggression against Israelites (2 Kgs 19:26; Isa 37:27; see exegesis). Again, the imprecation begins with the wish that all those who hate Zion be put to shame and turned back. However, the nation of Israel experiences shame and is “turned back in defeat” because of its sin (Isa 42:17).

The acclamation that “Yahweh is righteous” in v. 4, the *Janus* verse in the psalm, indicates Yahweh is equitable in his judgments. The “righteousness” of Yahweh is always manifested as a relational concept, not as an absolute, ideal, ethical norm (Kraus, 1992:43). Kraus (1992:43) sees the notion of punishment as a secondary emphasis of God’s justice, whereas the primary work of God’s justice is “the bringing of assistance, deliverance, and loyalty to those who are victims of injustice, persecution, and false accusations.” The judgment upon the elect and the reprobate may have different purposes, but Yahweh’s covenantal loyalty (blessed formulas) to Israel even when it means their exile is the basis for which they can pray the imprecations on their enemies. If he had punished them, how much more would he punish the foreign enemies!

In this mystery of Yahweh as both punisher and deliverer, which is clearly reflected in Hezekiah’s prayer (2 Kgs 19; Isa 37), there are several points to note. First, the enemies have not been able to overcome Israel. That is, there is a restraining limit to the extent of devastation which the enemies can carry out. Secondly, the enemies are oblivious to the plan of Yahweh. That is, the enemies act in their own agency of wickedness, although in some mysterious way Yahweh uses such an agency in the working out of his “righteousness” which as mentioned above is relational. The psalmist does not ask Yahweh how is it possible, but at the same time he does not avoid the mystery involved in Yahweh’s agency. Israel is not spared in its disobedience, but the enemies are portrayed as those who are aggressive and who will ultimately be annihilated. What makes this even more difficult to perceive is that the enemies are guided by an irrational thought process. For the community, though, Yahweh is righteous and so the suffering aroused through disobedience is given perspective. In the main narrative in Ps 129, the progression is that the enemies are not able to prevail, Yahweh delivers Israel, and then there is an

imprecation for the enemies to be reduced to non-existence. In a parallel hidden narrative the enemies acting in their own agency become the means by which Yahweh punishes a disobedient nation and then whom Yahweh judges to deliver Israel from the exile.

The jussive forms make it clear that the psalmist sees the Israelites participating in the demise of the enemies which occurs through the agency of Yahweh's active judgment. The desired outcome on those who hate Zion is wished for through an agricultural metaphor. The prayer for the enemies to be like the withering grass implies their removal in substance, quantity, and time. By using the benedictory formulas in v. 8 the psalmist draws Yahweh into the process of judgment on the enemies. Such a sacred blessing would only be effected and conferred by Yahweh. The prayer is for the complete defeat of the enemies to the point where they no longer exist.

Modern worshippers who enter into this agricultural world may think they are dealing with less harsh images of judgment. However, the use of agricultural images to depict the judgment of God can be quite severe in both the OT and the NT (see exegesis). In pre-industrialized societies one would expect agricultural imagery to play a central role in people's lives. Yet what made agricultural imagery so effective was the double nuance it carried, having its own life cycle as well as being essential for human sustenance. Famine meant widespread death. Furthermore, flourishing agriculture was an image used for the righteous alone (so Ps 1). As Claudia Sticher (2010:268) has observed from her investigation of Pss 92 and 37, even when the evildoers (*Übeltäter*) seem to have stretched out their roots, they will not endure because the wicked are like grass.

The modern worshipper enters into the psalmist's world which stretches into the worshipper's time frame and beyond into the future, through the eschatological images. In praying these agricultural images the worshipper is seeking for the complete removal of all enemies of the Church in manner, substance, and time. The true Church has existed as a continuum from the earliest of times and today has enemies that are no less oppressive than those of the past.

3.3.1.4 Psalm 137: Memory, violence and the extent of judgment

In Psalm 137, the psalmist begins his prayer by reminding Yahweh that the mocking of the captors is really a form of humiliation which is directed at Yahweh's character. That is, in their asking for songs of Zion, the captors were asserting the falsehood of Yahweh's intimate relationship to Zion. Further, Zion in Ps 137 is a symbol for everything Yahweh stands for. The pathos of vv. 1-3 also relates to Yahweh not only the suffering that the Israelites experience at the hands of their captors, but, just as significantly, their recognition that the hand of the living God was upon them in the form of punishment (see Ps 129 above). The psalmist appeals to Yahweh in his longing for Jerusalem through oath formulas. His hope is for the restoration of Jerusalem, which is a visible sign of the presently hidden reality of Zion. Memory also sets off the imprecation against Edom.

There is irony in the psalmist presenting to Yahweh Edom's calls of treachery "Tear it down!" This is something which Yahweh knows; there is no need for an outside objective witness. The psalmist appeals to Yahweh with the principle of *lex talionis* in the imprecation. This is how the psalmist believes the atrocities of Babylon will be rectified. However, with the dissolution of Babylon the imprecation signifies the complete removal of the functional existence of this nation and its capacity for any evil. Yahweh goes beyond the principle of *lex talionis* which was meant to limit the extent retributive justice could take within particular historical communities. He is not bound by this principle, but the psalmist is. Yahweh addresses the real source of the evil and incapacitates it. The reader is referred above for an explanation of how the sacredness of the language functions as synecdoche.

Memory plays a key role in the relationships in this psalm. As Chrysostom (1989: 484-485) noted, when we remember God we choose good things but when God remembers we accomplish them. On the one hand Babylon ceases to exist as a nation and so it cannot create any more memory. However, its memory lingers on for the Christian and becomes the symbol of the epitome of evil portrayed in Revelation. Jesus remembers as well, not as static historical fact but as bearing on the unbelief of Jerusalem in his day, and he uses Ps 137:9 in a judgment speech. Those who enter into the psalmist's world in prayer are able to understand more

deeply that God's final goal for recalcitrant perpetrators of evil is never merely retributive or penal, but the complete removal of any capacity to commit evil.

3.3.1.5 Psalm 139: Creator and sustainer of all people and avenger of blood

In Psalm 139 the psalmist stands in the midst of or just before danger (protective psalm, so Mowinckel) among substantial enemies.³⁵⁵ The psalmist skilfully holds up to Yahweh His role as the omniscient, omnipresent, and omnifigent³⁵⁶ God, or in common parlance the creator and intimate sustainer of all life. However, God's active and relational presence stands in contrast to the hostile reality that the psalmist faces (vv. 18-19). Both the psalmist and Yahweh stand in relation to the enemy as signified in the phrase אֱנִי־יְהוָה דָּמִים. The psalmist's solidarity with Yahweh is further emphasized in the identification of the enemies as Yahweh's enemies. The psalmist is the recipient of the attacks of the bloodthirsty and responds by presenting Yahweh with a plea to slay the "bloodthirsty." In v. 14 the intricacy of Yahweh's deeds of creation are great, but as the psalmist moves into vv. 19 and 20 the question to Yahweh becomes how he can let his wonderful deeds of creation be so wantonly destroyed. After all, Yahweh is the דָּרֵשׁ דָּמִים "the avenger of blood" (Ps 9:13). Bloodshed pollutes the land and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed except by the blood of the one who shed it (Num 35:33; Ps 106:38). The psalmist is implicitly formulating the problem of God's just dealings with his people. How can those who are enemies stand if God is fulfilling his obligations?

The psalmist's approach to the enemy is twofold. He petitions (taking אֶסְאָל as indicating the optative mood) for God "to slay" his enemies. By the use of the specific verb קָטַל "to slay" the psalm is alluding to the treachery of Edom in the sack of Jerusalem. In the second petition the psalmist commands the "bloodthirsty" to depart from him. The two appeals are unified by the understanding that the

³⁵⁵ According to Lindström (2003:295) Ps 139 belongs to the wisdom tradition, which is the youngest theological tradition in the Book of Psalms.

³⁵⁶ The use of these terms omniscient, omnipresent, and omnifigent is not meant to depict a static view of God.

removal of the enemies is a sign of God's presence. Therefore, in vv. 1-18 the psalmist has related to Yahweh as one with anxious or disquieting thoughts. Yahweh discerns the psalmist's thoughts ׁוּלֵךְ from afar (v. 2a) and Yahweh, whose thoughts are precious to the psalmist (v. 17a), is intimately present in the psalmist's existence.

The psalmist turns from Yahweh's obligations in vv. 19-20 to his own. Like Jeremiah, the psalmist realizes that the heart is evil and seeks to see if there is sin in his life. The reality of the enemies' assault and Yahweh's obligation as the avenger of blood brings the psalmist to a crisis of understanding God's just dealing with his people. So, the psalmist turns to his own life to make sure that there is no hidden sin causing this incongruence he feels. In the end, the psalmist resolves the incongruence by committing himself to the "way everlasting." Perhaps in the psalmist's presentation of the enemies as hostile to God himself, the psalmist is alluding to an ultimate eschatological defeat of the enemies.

Those modern worshippers who use this psalm present to Yahweh his obligation as creator of all life. They are able to worship Yahweh for his "great deeds," which in Revelation 15:3 are associated with the "new song" and are also associated with the defeat of the beast. It was questioned in the exegesis as to whether the psalmist is using hyperbole in v. 19. However, as synecdoche, the whole refers to all the parts. The ultimate form of the degradation of humanity is murder, but there are many other forms in between. This image, whether viewed as synecdoche or hyperbole, contains all other forms of degradation. But it also brings to the forefront the characteristic of evil which Calvin noted, namely, that unchallenged the wicked become worse. There is no sense of restraint.

Praying this language presents to Yahweh his responsibility to rectify all injustices. Brown's (2000:124) comments are relevant here: "Personal creation is the divine charter of life and loyalty by which God becomes bound to a particular life, ensuring that the individual flourishes within the protective sphere of righteousness." The modern worshipper enters into the time frame and space of the psalmist and Yahweh. Yahweh is not limited to the temple in this psalm, but as Paul writes in Rom 8:27 (cf. Ps 139:1) the Spirit of God searches and aids Christians in their prayer. Presence in Ps 139 is not a function of Temple or Torah, but rather God's relationship to all people as creator (Ps 139) and King of the nations (so the allusion in Rev 15:3). In

this eschatological perspective, Yahweh maintains and upholds his relationship and hence obligation to all people.

3.3.1.6 Psalm 149: Praise, violent judgment on the nations and universal reign

The psalmist and congregation enter into Psalm 149 in the context of praising as a nation. “Israel’s prayer life, in lament as in doxology, is saturated with the issue of justice” (Brueggemann, 2005b: 61). The psalm unfolds to the significant grounds for praise in v. 4, “May the LORD take pleasure in his people; he adorns the lowly with salvation.” Whereas Ps 139 dealt with the creation of the individual, Ps 149 takes as its premise the creation of the nation, his chosen people. The use of the term אֱדֹנָי in verses 1, 5 and 9 seems to mark this special relationship. The congregation understood the agency of Yahweh as occurring through the community of the faithful (v. 6). That is, they understood evil not as an abstract principle but as part of their historical reality. However, from the coordination of v. 9b with v. 8 as well as the eschatological markers in the text, it seems the community was interested in the defeat of those who opposed Yahweh’s rule rather than in gratuitous violence. Comparison of the “book” which deals with the individual in Ps 139:16 and the “judgment written” in Ps 149:9 might suggest that the judgment in Ps 149 is on a national level.

So this prayer seems to be against the nations, suggesting that culpability is not just on an individual level, but on a national level, which was also the conclusion of Ps 137.³⁵⁷ Furthermore, נִקְמָה, *vengeance*, always refers to nations in its five uses in the Psalms. The overall image of judgment goes beyond the immediate enemies experiencing a reversal of fortune. The symbol is of the utter defeat of the nations. If the use of נִקְמָה was only meant to symbolize pay back for hostility in the sense of *lex talionis* then the prayer would merely seek to punish the specific nations that had harmed the Israelites. But once again it is the complete universal rule of King Yahweh over all nations that is prayed for and celebrated. In this sense נִקְמָה can be

³⁵⁷ Could Abraham Lincoln’s understanding of the Civil War as a type of judgment on the nation be indicative that previous generations of Christians understood this aspect of judgment more clearly than the modern individualist societies of the West?

understood in the sense of re-establishing the created order as it was meant to be under Yahweh's rule. The acts of the nations, Babylon included, portrayed in their hostility to Israel were acts against God's sovereign rule over the earth. The exile revealed Israel's failure to submit to Yahweh. Israel's reversal in fortune becomes a picture of the nation's failure to submit to Yahweh's rule.

For the modern worshipper, the issue is not of practice here.³⁵⁸ The expansion of the Kingdom of God through the agency of the Church has no political motives and is not accomplished through military means. What is the Christian doing when he or she joins in the praise and hope for judgment depicted in this psalm? On one hand the modern pray-er is offering praise as a normative response to Yahweh's deliverance and his reconstitution of the created order. On the other hand, he or she is holding national enemies before Yahweh. The images of sword and fetters and chains of iron reflect the recalcitrant nature of these enemies. Such images do not represent the conditions of surrender. Thus, as the morally evil so wish, there will be no submission, only defeat.

The sword remains an appropriate symbol in prayer for the Christian because it reflects the true nature of evil, not the violent capricious tendencies of those who composed the psalm. The hope is for the restoration of Yahweh's created order at the national level. So the sword is a synecdoche of the evil perpetrated by nations against Yahweh's people. Once again with Ps 110, warfare is the most organized and sophisticated form of rebellion. In the end, judgment of evil should always lead to rejoicing by those who are the people of God. The praise is directed towards Yahweh and not to the punishment of the enemies. It is the glory of the saints to usher in Yahweh's universal rule over all nations through the agency of praise and prayer.

Christians who use this psalm join in with the "new song" alluded to in Revelation 5:8 and 14:3, which in both the OT and NT express God's victory and judgment over the enemy. The prayers in Rev 5:8 appear to be a call for God to act in judgment and vindication (Blount, 2005: 113). The content of the "new song" is the

³⁵⁸ Besides the findings in this study, the conclusion that Firth (2005:139-142) reaches in his study *Surrendering Retribution in the Psalms*, suggests that in the laments of the individual, the psalmist rejects the right of human retribution and stays within a limitation of what violence can be asked for from God.

worship given to Jesus for his crucifixion and the priesthood he has conferred on the people he has redeemed along with their reign over all the earth. The worshipper who prays this psalm enters into the time and space of the psalmist, God and all the saints. The modern pray-er of this psalm, like the psalmist, celebrates the universal reign of Jesus in all of its eschatological overtones.

3.3.1.7 How God engages moral evil and its nature

Before summarizing the results of the answers to these two questions, I will add a caveat to moving towards a theology of God's just dealings with people which has arisen from this study. In my opinion, a theology of God's just dealings benefits from taking into consideration the role of the sinfulness of God's people and the agency of the wicked as part of God's plan. This complex notion is not commented upon in some theodicies of the psalms because God's presence and absence are understood as unrelated to the sinfulness of the psalmist.³⁵⁹ Psalms 129 and 137 as communal laments are helpful in this regard. Yahweh engages evil equitably and righteously, regardless of the perpetrator, which in the case of Ps 137 is his chosen people and Babylon. This is what the exiles had known and then sought to preserve in these psalms. Yahweh's agency of removing evil involves evil nations themselves. In this case, as Luther commented, Yahweh uses one rogue nation to punish another. However, Yahweh also punishes the rogue nation. The punishment is not for carrying out the judgment decreed, though. The rogue nation's act of hostility towards another nation is symptomatic of its own evil intentions. Yahweh is merely using the tendencies of the rogue nation itself. There is a limit to humanly penetrating this mystery, but at its core Christians are confronted with their own self-identification as enemies of the "lord" at one time and the necessity of priestly grace.

³⁵⁹ Lindström's (2003:291) conclusion for national complaint psalms, which suggests that in these psalms there is a refusal to accept the sin-punishment idea as an explanation of the misfortune, does not seem to reflect the content of Ps 137. Lindström (2003:219), however, does not include Ps 137 in his study and refers to it as lacking both praise and complaint. See comments in the exegesis on Ps 137:1-3 in which I take a different view. It is also interesting to note that allowing for some suffering to result from sin leads to the same conclusion as suggesting that suffering is unexplainable; "evil is given its (proper) place as an inferior opponent to God's rule, but still not a harmless influence on human life" Lindström (2003:293).

Theologians usually define the issue of unjust suffering within the framework of God's absence. In Psalms 119 (Torah) and 139 (Creator) the absence of God's presence is given as a reason for the psalmist's suffering at the hands of enemies. However, we must further define the relationship between unjust suffering and God's presence in the context of the findings of Ps 139. In Ps 139 the psalmist makes clear that the conception of God's absence is not an ontological absence. Therefore the absence in the midst of injustice which the psalmist refers to is Yahweh's failure to engage the enemies accordingly. That is, the language of enmity is not a response to God's absence from the worshipper, but his failure to engage the wicked. God's just dealings with his people is, therefore, conceived of as his activity in overcoming the enemies and restoring the created order to being as it should be. The language of enmity, as trusted and canonical prayer, plays a role.

These texts with language of enmity have been helpful in understanding the nature of recalcitrant moral evil.³⁶⁰ For example, the activity of the enemies is isolated from historical markers in Ps 110 to give a picture of the true unrestrained nature of moral evil. Moral evil in its causes can be sophisticated and determined as is evident in the gathering of armies to wage war. In Ps 137 the principle of *lex talionis*, besides defining a retributive principle, also acts like a mirror, accurately reflecting evil deeds. In his comments on Ps 129 Augustine brilliantly penetrates the irrationality of moral evil. Ps 139 makes clear that moral evil directed towards another person is really an affront to Yahweh, who is creator of both victim and perpetrator. In the case of the psalmist in Ps 119 we noted that the ethical connection between knowing the Law and living out the Law was grounds for the animosity of the wicked. In the case of the disobedience of the Israelites and the moral agency of Babylon, there are apparently no such ethical grounds. Real evil not only wishes to destroy the good, it wishes to destroy everything. The language of evil accurately represents the deeds of the enemies at the level of the individual (Ps 139), the nation (Pss 137 and 149) and all humankind (Pss 110 and 149). In short, moral evil is delusional and, if unrestrained, ever expanding in an aggressive manner.

³⁶⁰ Readers are also referred back to section 3.2.3.

4.0 CONCLUSION

4.1 Summary of Investigation and Findings

In the first section of this thesis I argued through the technique of *inclusio* that the editors of Book V intended its context to be understood as the beginning-but-not-yet-completed restoration.³⁶¹ This open-endedness most likely contributes to the eschatological emphasis of some of the psalms. However, such an investigation was not part of the undertaking in this thesis. I then went on to exegete six psalms as individual independent units, attempting to understand the context of the psalmist's suffering and the meaning of the response to that suffering. The genre, those elements a reader sees as common to certain texts (so Nasuti, 1999:52), was defined broadly as prayer (Pss 1-150) and then more specifically as six psalms where the psalmist responds to some form of perceived suffering. Another defining feature of these psalms was that, except for Ps 119, they all used language of enmity in their response to the adversity.³⁶² Furthermore, none of the psalms was classified as a pure lament or complaint of the individual.

I then moved on to a limited historical survey to determine how these salient elements of suffering and the meaning of the response (language of enmity) had been interpreted. The historical survey added to the exegesis, as in the case of Augustine's insight into the enemies in Ps 129 and Calvin's understanding of the nature of evil from Ps 139. Another example of added insight was the notion of judgment contained in the Torah in Ps 119. An example of how the survey acted as a correction was seen in the confirmation of the enemies as being both external and internal to the kingdom in Ps 129.

It was hoped that by investigating psalms beyond the category of the lament of the individual (so all the psalms in this study) and by including responses to adversity that did not contain images of enmity (so Ps 119) that a better understanding could be determined as to what was occurring behind the use of these images. The images of enmity themselves varied: Ps 110 violent warfare, Ps 119 meditating on Torah, Ps 129 agricultural imprecations, Ps 137 war atrocities, Ps 139 killing, Ps 149 violent

³⁶¹ This is not the only perspective the editors wished to draw attention to.

³⁶² Although Ps 119 was investigated for its unique response to adversity, it still contained one imprecation of shame.

warfare. By comparison of the psalms the following conclusions were made. All the psalms had as their basis the understanding that the enemies' hostility was actually directed towards Yahweh or what Yahweh stood for. Further, the complete removal or annihilation of evil was hoped for in these psalms. This was often formulated in the context of Yahweh's presence (Ps 119, 129, 139). Controversial but consistent despite any pre-conceived expectations of the writer, all the psalms in this study had New Testament inter-textual connections which suggested that the images of enmity are images of judgment and that there was an eschatological element to this judgment.

It was noted in the exegesis and exemplified in the jussive form of the imprecations that the agency of judgment occurred through prayer and was dependent upon Yahweh.³⁶³ Further, the epitome of this judgment could be seen in Yahweh acting through his "lord" in Ps 110. In short, prayer suggests that one is praying these judgments into actualization, whereas prophetic judgment oracles merely state that judgement will occur (see Luc's [1999] proposal). From here I moved on to examining the language of enmity as normative prayer. In this capacity, I noted that there were some shortcomings in limiting the function of the prayers to victim responses, as helpful as such an approach is. I suggested that the unchanging nature of evil was an important emphasis behind the language of enmity and that the use of such language merely reflected back to Yahweh what was true about the character and actions of the wicked.

It was also noted that the language reflected a sacred use of language distinct from its ordinary use. The closest rhetorical device to explain the language of enmity, I suggested, is synecdoche. In synecdoche the parts stand for the whole or, in the case of the psalms, the images of enmity are a whole which stand for the parts. The evil relayed in the dashing of little ones against the rocks covers all forms of evil which are expressed in violent atrocities. What I am proposing goes beyond understanding the psalms as documents which reflect the emotional experiences of human life. The ancients may have been more able than moderns to understand evil and its capacity for destruction. The language they prayed was not a reflection of their immoral pre-

³⁶³ My argument in the Introduction for prayer as the basis of genre implies that all the psalms can be offered as prayer.

Christian beliefs. Rather the language reflects an accurate understanding of evil. They understood that justice meant the removal of evil, and they prayed for it.

I then proceeded towards developing a theology of God's just dealing with people and in particular his people. In this regard, I built on N.T. Wright's observation about prayer and the psalms, and I utilized Kraus's methodology which insists that the individual psalms themselves should pose the questions for any investigation into unjust suffering. The nexus between God, enemy, and psalmist(s) then becomes the vehicle for the modern pray-er who enters into this world to understand what can be known about moral evil and how God engages with moral evil to overcome it. Besides the individual findings of each psalm which contributed to a better understanding of these questions, two salient features are worth repeating. First, a theology of God's just dealing should be able to incorporate the questions posed in Ps 129 and 137 about the sinfulness of God's people as well as the agency of the wicked as part of God's plan to rectify injustice. Second, the absolute absence of God's presence is not the defining characteristic of suffering in the face of moral evil, but, as Ps 139 makes clear, the absence of God's engagement is. In short, the genre of prayer as the method of investigation in this study is also the central answer to the question, "How does God engage and overcome moral evil through the agency of his Church?"

4.2 Implications of this Study

It is hoped that the above investigation of the language of enmity in Psalms 110, 119, 129, 137, 139 and 149 as canonical prayer contributes to the understanding of the nature of moral evil and its eradication. In this respect, I have not focused on the poetry of the psalms outside of the rhetoric of synecdoche. Zenger and Brueggemann have written extensively of the poetry in these types of psalms and the therapeutic effect it has on the pray-er. I have tried to get at the spiritual realities behind the text and have found synecdoche the most helpful rhetorical device for this.

Miller (1994:9.5) in his OT survey on prayer makes the following comment:

The mode of overcoming, God's self-giving and suffering love in Jesus Christ, means that the curse prayers do not finally teach us how to pray or stand as models of prayer for us. They may give expression to the thoughts and words and feelings that we cannot let go except as they are let go to God in prayer.

Behind these sentiments Miller is alluding to Rom 12:14 and Mt 5:44. The exegesis and historical survey of Ps 110 suggests that what the cross of Christ teaches is that without the love of God and his restraining grace in general, I would be an aggressive and recalcitrant foe on the battlefield arrayed with the other enemies despising the "lord" and what he stands for. The cross is how the "lord" has made known his universal mandate to rule and the means by which punishment on the repentant enemies is averted. The cross is also a testimony to the desire of all enemies to destroy the "lord" and prevent his rule.

In contrast to Miller's position, central to the perspective of this study is that God's judgment on moral evil occurs through the agency of God's people praying. God responds to the prayers of his people both explicitly and implicitly. The former falls under the hidden wonders of God's working but the latter is a result of Yahweh's relation to his people and all he has created. When Yahweh's people seek after him, he is found and his engaging presence precludes evil. Yahweh's judgment on evil either leads to salvation or to annihilation. There is no middle ground.

Nevertheless, Jesus showed that believers are not to be engaged in any violent establishing of the Kingdom of God. Even so, God reserves the right to meet evil in its own arena and on its own terms. The outcome hoped for in these psalms goes beyond the principles of *lex talionis*. It is the absolute removal of evil that is at stake. However, the annihilation of evil does not necessarily mean the annihilation of people, as can be seen from Ps 137. Here judgment leads to the permanent incapacity of moral evil. The language of evil accurately represents the deeds of the enemies and God's obligation at the level of the individual (Ps 139), the nation (Pss 137 and 149) and all humankind (Pss 110 and 149). God, so to speak, in the issuing of justice gives the reprobate what they will for themselves.

The conclusion of this study is that the psalms with language of enmity are a great resource to be used as prayer in the church and in my opinion should remain unaltered, because the issue of praying for God's justice in the form of judgment is risky business. The language is not an end in itself because, as the exegesis has

shown, beneath the harshness of the language exist deeper spiritual realities of a desire for justice. The language itself reflects the “grammar” of evil. Blood and violence, battlefields full of corpses, and the killing of the innocent young are all part of this grammar of evil. The deeper spiritual language embedded in these psalms suggests that the language of enmity can be understood as representing all forms of similar evil. In this regard, the rhetorical feature of synecdoche is fitting. Enemies of the “lord” have expressed themselves in the grammar of evil from the earliest times.

The feelings I bring are tainted with my own understanding and how I have been conditioned to understand moral evil on a personal and larger scale. The language of enmity in these psalms as normative scripture acts to counter this bias. The psalms with language of enmity take the personal or public sentiments of rage, anger, and fear and filter these feelings and dispositions through these prayers. The modern pray-er enters into the psalmist’s world and God’s world and what is skewed in one’s perception of wrongs committed, or perhaps is unbalanced by unrequited desire for vengeance, is filtered through these prayers and the just worldview they represent. The unhealthy and unjust sentiments are mitigated. The reason is that within the text lies the reality of God’s revealed justice. This is not to say that justice is impersonal; the very nature of the psalms as poetic prayers shows that it is very personal. But beyond this personal and therapeutic aspect are spiritual realities behind these psalms expressed in the language of enmity, that God restrains himself according to what reflects his righteous character as he has revealed himself in his word (Ps 119). When we pray these psalms we need not fear the consequences for those who use them wrongly.³⁶⁴ Those who pray for selfish gain or for unrequited revenge will not be praying at all. Or they and their prayers will be transformed into genuine expressions of seeking justice. The result will be all the benefits of such a therapeutic experience.

As the theological discussion of Ps 139 made clear, the question of theodicy in relation to moral evil is not really one of God’s absolute absence, but rather of his engagement with moral evil and so also the Church’s. Brueggemann was right when

³⁶⁴ I came across an article (which has eluded me) which mentioned a pastor who was using the imprecatory psalms to pray for the death of the President. Calvin in his commentary on Ps 109 mentions a monk who was hired by a wealthy lady to pray against her son.

he said that the church would lose its voice if it got rid of lament. Evil is real and speaking of evil even in a religious context benefits those who use this language because it allows the community to maintain solidarity with individuals and communities which are experiencing this evil. Not only so, but what really happens is that the Church loses sight of what evil really is. The Church fails to participate in the issuing forth of God's justice and so the establishment of the Kingdom of God. Perhaps Ps 110 will stand as the vanguard psalm for the Church's response to injustice. It was used by the early Church to address the pressing need to define who Christ was and maybe it will occupy a defining place in the issue of establishing the "lord's" justice through prayer.

The final question remains as to how to appropriate these psalms. All I can do is offer one possible way in which they may be appropriated in public worship. The leader can begin with a short introduction to place the psalm in context and note the most troublesome parts of the language of enmity, which may also include a brief statement about synecdoche. After this the leader might proceed, "Dear heavenly father who knows the thoughts, words and deeds of all people. In keeping with the exhortations in your holy word, 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' and 'Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse for it is written, "it is mine to avenge and I will repay,""³⁶⁵ we pray the following prayer asking for your justice to issue itself through the relational righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, that there would be genuine healing for the victim, repentance of the perpetrator, the appropriate punishment,³⁶⁶ restoration and healing. However, for those who are recalcitrant, may your issue of justice give them what they deserve, even what they truly will. We commit the following circumstances..." (situations of injustice can be mentioned). Following this the appropriate psalm is recited as communal prayer.

In short, formulating my prayers with my own language of enmity is risky because instead of asking for God's will to be done, I may be asking for my will. Instead of God's kingdom to come, I may be asking for my kingdom. Instead of asking for

³⁶⁵ Once again according to Augustine's definition of justice, praying the language of enmity might be a blessing to the perpetrator.

³⁶⁶ See footnote in the exegesis. I have not tried to explain how God uses the state to punish moral evil. Such would go beyond the scope of this paper. But its inclusion in this prayer recognizes that God does use different agents in carrying out justice.

strength to forgive others, I may be harbouring unforgiveness. Instead of entreating to be led not into temptation, I may be leading myself into such. Instead of being delivered from evil, I may be perpetrating evil. It may be that I am looking for my kingdom and glory rather than God's. Hidden in these psalms which call for the created moral order to be restored to its proper state is the mystery of grace.

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