

## CHAPTER 5

### PSALM 109

#### 5.1 Introduction

The fourth promising candidate for the study of imprecatory psalms is Psalm 109. In the research history, this psalm has frequently been classified by scholars as an imprecatory psalm (see section 1.5.2). As Mays (1994:348) states, Psalm 109 “contains the most vehement of the imprecations in the Psalter.”

Psalm 109 is a lament by an individual who is being persecuted by his enemies and who calls upon God for deliverance. The psalmist is surrounded by hostile enemies who are making false allegations against him (verses 2-5). In response to the enemies’ attack, the suppliant prays for the destruction of his enemies together with their families (verses 6-20). The suppliant asks God to deliver him from impending death (verses 21-23). He discloses all the misery that is afflicting him (verses 24-28). He prays for his accusers to be disgraced and shamed (verse 29). The suppliant concludes the psalm with a vow of thanksgiving to YHWH (verses 30-31).

This chapter is organized in the same way as previous chapters 2-4.

#### 5.2 Text and Translation<sup>26</sup>

		לְמַנְצֵחַ לְדָוִד מְזִמּוֹר	1 <sup>27</sup>	a	To the music director. Of David. A psalm.
1 <sup>28</sup>	A	אֱלֹהֵי תְהַלֵּתִי אֶל־תִּחַרְשׁ:		b	God of my praise, do not be silent!
	B	כִּי פִי רָשָׁע וּפִי־מְרִמָּה עָלַי פָּתְחוּ	2	a	For wicked mouths and deceitful mouths have opened against me;
		דִּבְרוּ אֵתִי לְשׁוֹן שָׁקֵר:		b	they have spoken to me [with] lying tongues.

<sup>26</sup> This is my own translation. All quotations from Psalm 109 in this study are taken from this translation unless stated otherwise.

<sup>27</sup> When citing the Psalms and other scriptural passages, the numbering and versification of the BHS text is used throughout the present study rather than the numbering and versification of the LXX, Vulgate, or modern translations.

<sup>28</sup> This subdivision of Psalm 109 into **stanzas** (Roman numerals) and **strophes** (uppercase letters) is discussed in 5.4.

		וּדְבָרֵי שִׁנְאָה סָבְבוּנִי	3	a	With words of hatred they surround me
		וַיִּלְחַמוּנִי חֲנָם:		b	and fight me without cause.
		תַּחַת־אַהֲבָתִי יִשְׁטַנּוּנִי	4	a	In return of my love they accuse me,
		וְאֲנִי תַפְלָה:		b	but I am [in] prayer.
		וַיְשִׁימוּ עָלַי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה	5	a	And they repay me evil for good
		וּשְׂנֵאָה תַּחַת אַהֲבָתִי:		b	and hatred in return for my love.
II	C	הַפְקֵד עָלָיו רָשָׁע	6	a	Appoint a wicked man over him
		וְשִׁטָּן יַעֲמֵד עַל־יְמִינוֹ:		b	and let an accuser stand at his right hand.
		בְּהִשָּׁפְטוֹ יֵצֵא רָשָׁע	7	a	When he is judged, let him come forth guilty
		וּתְפִלָּתוֹ תִּהְיֶה לְחַטָּאָה:		b	and let his prayer become sin.
		יְהִי־יָמָיו מְעַטִּים	8	a	Let his days be few;
		פְּקֻדָּתוֹ יִקַּח אַחֵר:		b	let another take his office.
		יְהִי־בָנָיו יְתוּמִים	9	a	Let his children be orphans
		וְאִשְׁתּוֹ אִלְמָנָה:		b	and his wife a widow.
		וְנוֹעַ יְנוּעוּ בָנָיו וְשָׂאוּ	10	a	Let his children wander about and beg;
		וְדָרְשׁוּ מִחֲרֻבוֹתֵיהֶם:		b	let them be driven from the ruins of their house.
		יִנְקֹשׁ נוֹשֵׂה לְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ	11	a	Let the creditor take all that he has
		וַיִּבְזוּ זָרִים יְגִיעוּ:		b	and let strangers plunder the produce of his toil.
		אֶל־יִהְיֶה־לוֹ מוֹשֵׁךְ חֶסֶד	12	a	Let there be none to extend loving-kindness to him,
		וְאֶל־יִהְיֶה חוֹנֵן לִיתוּמָיו:		b	nor any to be gracious to his orphans.
		יְהִי־אַחֲרֵיתוֹ לְהַכְרִית	13	a	Let his descendants be cut off;

		בְּדוֹר אַחַר יִמַח שְׁמֵם:		b	let their names be wiped out in the next generation.
		יִזְכַּר עוֹן אֲבֹתָיו אֶל־יְהוָה	14	a	Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before YHWH,
		וְחַטָּאת אִמּוֹ אַל־תִּמָּח:		b	and do not let the sin of his mother be wiped out.
		יִהְיוּ נִגְדֵי־יְהוָה תָּמִיד	15	a	Let them be before YHWH continually,
		וַיִּכְרַת מֵאֲרֶץ זָכָרָם:		b	that he may cut their memory from the earth.
	D	יַעַן אֲשֶׁר לֹא זָכַר עֲשׂוֹת חֶסֶד	16	a	For he did not remember to show loving-kindness,
		וַיִּרְדֵּף אִישׁ־עָנִי וְאֲבִיוֹן וַיִּנְכָּא לִבָּב לְמוֹתָת:		b	but persecuted the afflicted and needy and the broken-hearted to their death.
		וַיֵּאָהֵב קָלָלָה	17	a	As he loved cursing,
		וַתִּבּוֹאֵהוּ		b	let it come on him;
		וְלֹא־חָפֵץ בְּבִרְכָּה		c	as he did not delight in blessing,
		וַתִּרְחַק מִמֶּנּוּ:		d	so let it be far from him.
		וַיִּלְבַּשׂ קָלָלָה כְּמִדּוֹ	18	a	As he wore cursing as his garment,
		וַתִּבָּא כַּמַּיִם בְּקִרְבוֹ וּכְשֶׁמֶן בְּעֲצָמוֹתָיו:		b	so let it enter into his body like water and into his bones like oil.
		תְּהִי־לוֹ כְּבִגְד יַעֲטָה וּלְמִזְחָ תְּמִיד יִחְגָּרָה:	19	a	Let it be to him as a garment which wraps him, and for a belt which girds him continually.
		זֹאת פְּעֻלַּת שְׂטָנִי מֵאֵת יְהוָה	20	a	Let this be the reward of my accusers from YHWH,
		וְהַדְּבָרִים רָעַע לִּי־נַפְשִׁי:		b	and of those who speak evil against me.
III	E	וְאַתָּה יְהוָה אֲדֹנָי עֲשֵׂה־אֵתִי לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ	21	a	But you, YHWH, Lord, act on my behalf for your name's sake;
		כִּי־טוֹב חֶסֶדְךָ הַצִּילָנִי:		b	because your loving-kindness is good, deliver me.

		כִּי־עָנִי וְאֲבִיּוֹן אָנֹכִי	22	a	For I am afflicted and needy,
		וְלִבִּי חָלַל בְּקִרְבִּי:		b	and my heart is wounded within me.
		כַּצֶּל־פְּנִטוֹתָיו נִהְלַכְתִּי	23	a	I am passing like a shadow when it lengthens;
		וְנִנְעַרְתִּי כְּאַרְבֶּבֶה:		b	I am shaken off like a locust.
		בְּרַפִּי כָּשְׁלוּ מַצּוֹם	24	a	My knees are weak from fasting,
		וּבִשְׂרִי כָּחַשׁ מִשָּׁמֶן:		b	and my flesh has grown lean for lack of fat.
		וְאֲנִי הָיִיתִי חֲרָפָה לָהֶם	25	a	I also have become a reproach to them;
		יִרְאוּנִי		b	when they see me,
		יִנְעִוּן רֹאשֵׁם:		c	they shake their heads.
		עֲזֹרְנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהָי	26	a	Help me, YHWH my God;
		הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי כְּחַסְדְּךָ:		b	save me according to your loving-kindness.
	F	וַיֵּדְעוּ כִּי־יָדְךָ זֹאת	27	a	Then they will know that this is your hand;
		אַתָּה יְהוָה עָשִׂיתָהּ:		b	You, YHWH, have done it!
		יִקְלְלוּ־הֶמָּה	28	a	Although they curse,
		וְאַתָּה תְּבָרֵךְ		b	may you bless;
		קָמוּ		c	although they arise,
		וַיִּבְשׁוּ		d	may they be put to shame,
		וְעַבְדְּךָ יִשְׂמַח:		e	but let your servant rejoice.
		יִלְבְּשׁוּ שׂוֹטְנֵי כְּלָמָה	29	a	Let my accusers be clothed with humiliation,
		וַיַּעֲטוּ כַּמְעִיל בְּשָׂתָם:		b	and let them wrap themselves with their own shame as with a robe.
IV	G	אוֹדָה יְהוָה מְאֹד בְּפִי	30	a	With my mouth, I will exceedingly thank YHWH
		וּבְתוֹךְ רַבִּים אֶתְּלַלְנִי:		b	and in the midst of many, I will praise him.

		כִּי־עֹמֵד לְיְמִין אֲבִיוֹן	31	a	For he stands at the right hand of the needy,
		לְהוֹשִׁיעַ מִשְׁפָּטַי נַפְשׁוֹ:		b	To save his life from those who condemn him.

### 5.3 Text Critical and Translation Notes

#### Verse 2a. רָשָׁע (“the wicked”)

BHS suggests that רָשָׁע (“wickedness”) is a better reading than the Masoretic Text רָשָׁע (“the wicked”). The Masoretic Text רָשָׁע is better pointed than רָשָׁע in light of the abstract nouns after terms relating to speech in verses 2-3 (Gunkel, 1968:478). This present translation stays with the Masoretic Text and translates רָשָׁע in 2a as “wicked.”

#### Verse 2a. פָּתְחוּ (“they have opened”)

The LXX reading ἠνοιχθη (“was opened”) suggests that the Hebrew should be נִפְתְּחוּ (“was opened”) instead of the Masoretic Text פָּתְחוּ (“they have opened”). The Syriac and the Vulgate follow a similar approach to the LXX. When describing his enemies in verses 2-3, the psalmist plunges *in medias res*<sup>29</sup>. The passive verb of the LXX, Syriac and Jerome probably avoids this abruptness. It is also possible that the verb פָּתְחוּ was regarded as indefinite, therefore it is unlikely that a different *Vorlage* underlies the LXX, Syriac and Jerome’s rendering (Allen, 1983:72). The present translation stays with the Masoretic Text and translates פָּתְחוּ as “they have opened.” Most of the translations consulted in this study (e.g. NJB, NIV, NASB, KJV, BBE, ESV, JPS, NKJV, and RSV) follow this approach.

#### Verse 4a. תַּחַת־אַהֲבָתִי (“in return of my love”)

BHS suggests that תַּחַת־אַהֲבָתִי (“in return of my love”) which is repeated in 5b is to be omitted or deleted. This suggestion of the BHS runs counter to the psalm’s repetition of terms in adjacent verses, for example, verses 9, 10, 13, 14, 17 and 18 (see Allen, 1983:72). The present translation stays with the Masoretic Text.

<sup>29</sup> This is a Latin phrase denoting a literary technique where the narrator begins in the middle of the action rather than at the beginning.

**Verse 4b.** וְאֲנִי תַפְלָה (‘‘but I am [in] prayer’’)

The Masoretic Text of 4b, וְאֲנִי תַפְלָה (literally ‘‘and I a prayer’’), is obscure. The LXX has ἐγὼ δὲ προσευχόμενος (‘‘but I pray’’) which suggests the Hebrew text אֲתַפְלֶלָה (‘‘and I pray’’). The Syriac has the equivalent of וְאֲנִי תַפְלַתִּי לָהֶם (‘‘and I pray for them’’) which may reflect an interpretation of וְאֲנִי תַפְלָה. The RSV and TEV follow the approach of the Syriac. The RSV has ‘‘even as I make prayer for them’’ and the TEV has ‘‘and have prayed for them.’’ Kraus (1989:336-337) also follows the approach of the Syriac. The NEB interprets וְאֲנִי תַפְלָה as ‘‘though I have done nothing unseemly.’’ The NJV interprets וְאֲנִי תַפְלָה as ‘‘and I must stand judgment.’’ The NIV has ‘‘but I am a man of prayer.’’ A number of translations follow the LXX interpretation. The NJB has ‘‘and all I can do is pray.’’ The NASB has ‘‘But I am [in] prayer’’ and the KJV has ‘‘but I [give myself unto] prayer.’’ The present translation follows the NASB translation which follows the LXX.

**Verse 7b.** וְתַפְלָתוֹ תְהִיָּה לַחַטָּאָה: (‘‘and let his prayer become sin’’)

The Hebrew of 7b is difficult to understand. Some take the word translated ‘‘prayer’’ to mean the plea to judge. For example, the NAB translates 7b as ‘‘May his plea be in vain.’’ The SPCL has ‘‘may his defence result in his condemnation’’ (this is my back translation of the SPCL). The meaning of תַפְלָה (‘‘prayer’’) in the Old Testament is discussed under the heading *Intra-textual analysis of Psalm 109*. The present translation translates תַפְלָה in 7b as ‘‘prayer.’’ Most of the translations consulted in this study (e.g. KJV, NASB, NIV, NJB, NKJV and LXX) follow this approach. The present translation follows the KJV and NASB which have ‘‘and let his prayer become sin.’’

**Verse 10b.** וְדָרְשׁוּ מִחֲרָבוֹתֵיהֶם (‘‘let them be driven from the ruins of their house’’)

The Hebrew of 10b וְדָרְשׁוּ מִחֲרָבוֹתֵיהֶם (‘‘let them seek from their ruins’’) is difficult to understand and does not make good sense in the context. The LXX reading suggests that most probably the writer made the error of writing יִדְרְשׁוּ (‘‘let them seek’’) instead of יִגְרְשׁוּ (‘‘let them be driven out’’). So the LXX translates 10b as ἐκβληθήτωσαν ἐκ τῶν οἰκοπέδων αὐτῶν (‘‘may they be driven out of their homesteads’’). Most of the translations consulted in this study (e.g. RSV, TEV, NIV, NJB) follow the approach of the LXX. However, the NKJV takes 10b to mean ‘‘from their

homes in search of [bread]." The TOB has "may they beg outside their ruins" and the NASB has "let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes." The present translation follows the approach of the LXX when resolving the translation problem in 10b like most of the translations.

#### **Verse 11a.** יִנְקֹשׁ ("let him take")

Verse 10a commences with the verb יִנְקֹשׁ. The verb נִקַּח means "to knock, strike" (see Fisher, 1980:600). The meaning "to knock, strike" is not very fitting in the context (Anderson, 1972b:762). The LXX translates יִנְקֹשׁ as ἐξερευνησάτω ("to scrutinize, search out, examine") which suggests that the LXX reads יִחְפֹּשׂ ("let him search out") instead of the Masoretic Text יִנְקֹשׁ ("let him take"). Dahood (1970:303) regards נִקַּח as a byform of יָקַח "seize with a snare." As Delitzsch (1980c:179) and Allen (1983:74) suggest, perhaps it should be linked with the Arabic *nakāša* "to exact money from a person." The present translation follows the above approach suggested by Delitzsch and Allen; it translates יִנְקֹשׁ as "let him take". Most of the translations consulted in this study (e.g. ESV, NASB, NIV, NJB, NKJV, BBE, and RSV) follow this approach.

#### **Verse 16c.** נִכְאָה לֵבָב ("broken-hearted")

The LXX reading, καὶ κατανευγμένον τῆ καρδίᾳ ("and stunned in heart"), suggests that the Hebrew should be וְנִכָּא הַלֵּבָב ("and stricken in heart") instead of the Masoretic Text לֵבָב נִכְאָה ("broken-hearted"). The definite article is added to the noun לֵבָב in the LXX. This present translation stays with the Masoretic Text and translates נִכְאָה לֵבָב as "broken-hearted." The meanings of the Masoretic Text and the LXX are similar and both fit the context of the psalm. Either expression, "and the broken-hearted" or "and the stunned in heart," indicates those who are discouraged, disheartened or dispirited (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:942).

#### **Verse 28cd.** קָמוּ וַיִּבְשׂוּ ("although they arise, may they be put to shame")

The LXX translation, οἱ ἐπανιστανόμενοι μοι ἀισχυθησάτωσαν ("let my opponents be put to shame"), suggests that the LXX reads וַיִּבְשׂוּ וְקָמוּ instead of the Masoretic Text וַיִּבְשׂוּ קָמוּ. The LXX translation rendering is parallel to וַיִּבְשׂוּ וְקָמוּ. The TEV, RSV, NEB, and NAB follow

the approach of the LXX. The Masoretic Text can make good sense in the context if the verb “they arise” is understood as a precative which balances the jussive “let them curse” (Dahood, 1970:109). Therefore according to Dahood (1970:109), 28cd is not expressing a statement of fact but a desire or plea: “let them arise” (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:946). Dahood translates *קָמוּ וַיִּבְשֹׁוּ* as “let them rise up, only to be humiliated.” The NKJV follows the approach of Dahood and has “When they arise, let them be ashamed.” This present translation follows the approach of Dahood and translates *קָמוּ וַיִּבְשֹׁוּ* as “although they arise, may they be put to shame.”

#### **Verse 31b.** *מִשֹּׁפְטֵי* (“from those who judge”)

The LXX translation, *ἐκ τῶν καταδιωκόντων* (“from those that keep pursuing”), suggests that the LXX reads *מִרֹדְפִים* (“from those that keep pursuing”) instead of the Masoretic Text *מִשֹּׁפְטֵי* (“from those who judge”). Dahood (1970:110) emends the text to get “from his judge.” The NEB emends the text to get “from his accusers” but this is unnecessary (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:946). This present translation stays with the Masoretic Text and translates *מִשֹּׁפְטֵי* as “from those who judge.” Most of the translations consulted in this study (e.g. NJB, NIV, NASB, KJV, ESV, JPS, TEV, NKJV, and RSV) follow this approach.

#### **Verses 17a, 17c and 18a.** *וַ* (“as”)

This translation follows the approach of the KJV which translates the *waw* consecutive in 17a with “as” because 17b is a causal clause which begins with a *waw* consecutive and indicates the results of the enemy’s behaviour in 17a. The same is true of 17d and 18b which also indicate the results from the deeds of the enemy. So this translation translates the *waw* conjunction in 17a, 17c and 18a with “as.”

### **5.4 The Structure of Psalm 109**

Psalm 109 begins with an urgent cry for deliverance (verses 1-5), which is followed by imprecation (verses 6-20); the psalmist renews his cry to God (verses 21-29) and the psalm closes with a vow of praise to God (verses 30-31). Therefore the psalm may be subdivided into

four stanzas: Stanza I (verses 1-5), Stanza II (verses 6-20), Stanza III (verses 21-29) and Stanza IV (verses 30-31). This four-fold division of the psalm is supported by a number of scholars and commentators (e.g. Leupold, 1959:765-769; Anderson, 1972b:758; Kidner, 1975:388-391; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:936; Harman, 1998:358-361; Gerstenberger, 2001:257; Eaton, 2003:382).

The four stanzas of Psalm 109 may be subdivided into the following strophes<sup>30</sup>, which are discussed in detail in the subsequent analysis.

### **Stanza I (1-5) Invocation & the Suppliant's Distress**

Strophe A (1b): Urgent cry for deliverance

Strophe B (2-5): Wicked character of the enemy & suppliant's response

### **Stanza II (6-20) Petition I**

Strophe C (6-15): Series of imprecations against his enemies

Strophe D (16-20): Character of the enemy

### **Stanza III (21-29) Petition II**

Strophe E (21-26): Petition for deliverance

Strophe F (27-29): Imprecation

### **Stanza IV (30-31) Praise**

Strophe G (30-31): Vow to praise and justification

The interpretation of the malediction in Stanza II (verses 6-20) is problematic among scholars. Some scholars (e.g. Schmidt, 1928:41; Kraus, 1989:338; Weiser, 1962:690; Broyles, 1999:412; McCann, 1996:1125) argue that the malediction is a quotation of the curses uttered by the enemies. The NIV and NRSV follow this approach. Others (e.g. Anderson, 1972b:758-759; Allen, 1983:72-73; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:936) argue that the malediction consists of the very words of the psalmist himself directed against his accusers or against their chief. As Bratcher & Reyburn (1991:936) observe, while the former view or interpretation cannot be ruled out, the following considerations makes it quite improbable:

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<sup>30</sup> This subdivision has been largely influenced by the structures of Gerstenberger (2001:257) and Harman (1998:358-361).

- Firstly, there is no indication in the Masoretic Text itself, that the psalmist's own words stop at verse 5, and that he then begins to quote his enemies' words from verses 6-19; and that he finally resumes his words in verse 20.
- Secondly, much is made of the fact that in verses 1-5 and 20-29 the psalmist speaks of his enemies in the plural, while verses 6-19 are directed against one person who would be the psalmist himself. It is very unusual that in verses 6-19, the psalmist would quote his enemies' words as though they were true statements of what he had done. It is better to take the singular in verses 6-19 as generic or else as directed against the leader of the psalmist's enemies.
- Thirdly, even if verses 6-19 could be considered as the words of the enemies, in verse 20 the psalmist prays for the same curses to fall on them that they have called down on him – which puts him on an equal footing with them.
- Fourthly, although these curses are strong, they do not differ much from the language of other imprecatory psalms (e.g. Pss 35, 69, 137). Such strong language reflects the basic attitude that the psalmist's enemies are, by definition, YHWH's enemies and so the psalmist has not only the right but the duty to pray for their defeat and death.

## 5.5 Intra-textual Analysis of Psalm 109

### 5.5.1 Stanza I (verses 1b-5): Invocation & Suppliant's Distress

Stanza I (verses 1b-5) consists of two strophes: A (verse 1b) and B (verses 2-5).

#### 5.5.1.1 Strophe A (verses 1b)

Strophe A (verses 1b) consists of a single colon (verse 1b).

**The single colon (verse 1b)** is an invocation which urges God not to keep quiet or remain inactive. 1b commences with אֱלֹהֵי (“God”) which also functions as a vocative. The vocative אֱלֹהֵי is followed by תְּהַלֵּלְתִּי (“of my praise”) which may refer to both the suppliant's past and present praise. The suppliant is confident that the same God whom he had praised in the past will help him again in his current situation and he will be his praise once again (Anderson,

1972b:759). The noun **תְּהִלָּתִי** is followed by the vetitive **אַל-תִּחַרְשׁ** (“do not be silent”) which functions like a jussive. The “silence of God” is a metaphor for God’s “seeming inactivity on behalf of his people” (Oswalt, 1997b:297).

To sum up this strophe (verse 1b), the suppliant wants God to deliver him from his predicament and not be silent or inactive because to remain silent is an attitude of unconcern for his welfare (cf. Ps 35:22; 83:2).

### **5.5.1.2 Strophe B (verses 2-5)**

Strophe *B* (verses 2-5) consists of four bicola.

In the **first bicolon (verse 2)**, **2a** begins with the conjunction **כִּי** (“for”) which gives the rationale for the preceding vetitive (**אַל-תִּחַרְשׁ**) - why God is to act or not be silent. The conjunction **כִּי** is followed by **כִּי רָשָׁע וּפִי-מְרִמָּה** (“wicked mouth and deceitful mouth”) which functions as a synecdoche and refers to the suppliant’s enemies. The phrase **כִּי רָשָׁע וּפִי-מְרִמָּה** may be seen as collective (“wicked mouths and deceitful mouths”). The expression **כִּי רָשָׁע וּפִי-מְרִמָּה** is followed by **עָלַי** (“against me”) which shows that the suppliant is the indirect object of the enemies’ wicked and deceitful mouths. The prepositional object **עָלַי** is followed by the verb **פָּתְחוּ** (“they have opened”) which denotes “to slander, to attack with words” (Hamilton, 1980d:743). In this context, the enemies lied and said evil things about the suppliant. The usual word order in Hebrew is: verb, subject (object); but here in 2a the word order is: subject-verb, which is striking. It may emphasize the fact that the mouths were the big problem. It may also be due to the chiasm with the next colon.

**2b** commences with **דִּבְרוּ** (“they have spoken”) which refers to the enemies’ activity. The verb **דִּבְרוּ** is followed by **אֶתִּי לְשׁוֹן שָׂקָר** (“to me with lying tongues”) which shows that the enemies uttered lies or spoke deceitfully against the suppliant. The prepositional phrase **אֶתִּי** shows that the suppliant was the victim of the enemies’ lying tongues. The expression **לְשׁוֹן שָׂקָר** (“with lying tongues”) frequently refers to testimony offered in court (cf Deut 19:18) (see McCann, 1996:1125).

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 2a and 2b. The idea that the enemies lied against the suppliant in 2a is repeated in 2b. The expression **לְשׁוֹן שָׂקָר** (“lying tongues”) is synonymous with **כִּי רָשָׁע וּפִי-מְרִמָּה** (“deceitful mouths”) (Merrill, 1997:821).

There is also an extended parallelism with a chiastic pattern (a b b' a') in verse 2a and 2b (see Goldingay, 2008:278).

a	For wicked mouths and deceitful mouths
b	have opened against me
b'	They have spoken to me
a'	[with] lying tongues

The purpose of the extended parallelism is to highlight or emphasize the point that the enemies' mouths were a big problem to the suppliant – the enemies lied against the suppliant.

The **second bicolon (verse 3)** continues to describe the destructive characteristics of the enemies' mouths. The expression **וְדַבְרֵי שִׂנְאָה סָבְבוּנִי** (“with words of hatred they surround me”) (**3a**) may imply that the enemies surrounded the suppliant and began to make false accusations against him inspired by hate or that their words are reminiscent of people surrounding him. As in verse 2, the suppliant is the victim of his enemies' destructive behaviour. 3a is also connected with 2b by means of a word play between the verb **דִּבְרוּ** and the construct noun **וְדַבְרֵי**.

**3b** is syndetically linked to 3a by the conjunction **וְ**. 3b begins with **יִלְחָמוּנִי** (“they fight me”) which may refer to the enemies' attack on the suppliant or the personified words which fight him. The suppliant's enemies or the words are the subject of 3b. The suppliant is the victim of the enemies' attack or of their words (personified). The consecutive verb **וַיִּלְחָמוּנִי** implies that the suppliant's enemies (or their words) were encircling him like an army preparing for attack and then actually engaging with him in battle. The words are surrounding the suppliant and are fighting him. The verb **יִלְחָמוּנִי** is followed by the adverb **חֵנָם** (“without cause”) which implies that the enemies' or their words accuse the suppliant for no reason whatsoever. The suppliant is innocent of his enemies' charges.

The **third and fourth bicola (verses 4-5)** declare that the suppliant is not guilty of any wrong-doing against his enemies by contrasting his own conduct with that of his enemies.

**4a** commences with **תַּחַת־אֲהַבְתִּי** (“in return of my love”) which shows that the suppliant loves his enemies. The phrase **תַּחַת־אֲהַבְתִּי** is followed by **יִשְׁטְנוּנִי**. According to Baloian (1997:1231) the term **שֹׁטֵן** “basically means adversary, or in a legal sense, accuser. It functions in the Psalms as enemies or adversaries with the nuance of verbal accusation.” The verb **יִשְׁטְנוּנִי** (“they accuse me”) describes the enemies who are rendering the suppliant evil for good

(Payne, 1980:874). This colon shows implicitly a relation of concession (*although I loved them*) and counter-expectation (*they accused me*).

**4b** describes the suppliant's response to his enemies' hostile behaviour. The Hebrew text וְאֲנִי תְפִלָּה is strange; it seems to say "and I a prayer" which shows that the colon generally refers to prayer. The text וְאֲנִי תְפִלָּה may refer to the suppliant's retreat into prayer to tell God about the inequities. The NJB follows this interpretation and translates 4b as "and all I can do is pray!" The NIV has "I am a man of prayer" (similarly ESV and NKJV). Perhaps the most probable interpretation is that the suppliant responds to his enemies' hostile behaviour by praying for them. If 4b is interpreted as a response of the suppliant, the initial *waw* is used in an adversative sense, similar to תַּחַת ("in return or instead of") in 4a. Williams (1967:71) and Van der Merwe *et al* (1997) also observe that the conjunction וְ can have an adversative function and can mean "but." The contrast is made in the midst of other contrasts: that of 4a, 5a and 5b. The enemies repay good with evil; the suppliant responds to evil by doing good (praying). Although the suppliant's response is the reverse of the enemies' responses, all the responses are the opposites of what one would expect. All the responses represent contrasts of the type concession ("although") followed by a contra-expected action. This pattern supports the interpretation that in 5b the suppliant is praying (in love) for his enemies.

To sum up verse 4, although the enemies have attacked the suppliant without cause, in contrast he responds in love and prayer.

In the **fourth bicolon (verse 5)**, **5a** commences with וַיִּשְׁיֹמוּ which applies to both cola (5a & 5b). Usually, the verb שִׁים means "to put, place, set" (Holladay, 1988:351; Brown *et al*, 1979:962-963). In the context of verse 5 the verb conveys the idea of repaying back or inflicting evil for good. The subject of וַיִּשְׁיֹמוּ ("and they repay") is the suppliant's enemies. The *waw* consecutive verb יִשְׁיֹמוּ is followed by עָלַי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה ("me evil for good"). The phrase עָלַי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה portrays the wickedness of the suppliant's enemies. The phrase עָלַי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה may refer to reproach (Brown *et al*, 1979:963) that the enemies brought against the suppliant. The suppliant has done good deeds to his enemies (i.e. he loves them and prays for them), but instead of reciprocating good with good, the enemies return evil for good. 5a follows a similar pattern as 4a, showing implicitly a relation of concession: (*although I do good*) and a counter-expectation (*they do evil*). The idea of 4a and 5a is reiterated in 5b, which implies that verses 4 and 5 are a single unit.

**5b** is syndentically linked to 5a by the conjunction ׀. 5b consists of שְׂנֵאָה תַחַת אֲהַבְתִּי (‘‘hatred in return of my love’’) which shows that the suppliant loves his enemies, but they reciprocate his love with hatred. 5b follows a similar pattern as 5a and 4a, showing implicitly a relation of concession: (*although I love them*) and a counter-expectation (*they hate me*).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, the idea that the enemies return evil for good in 4a is repeated in 5a and 5b. The idea of contra-expected action is also restated in 4b, although in 4b the substitution is reversed (good replaces evil) and the suppliant is no longer object but subject. This singles 4b out as a semantical contrast to 4a, 5a and 5b.

In short, the suppliant in Strophe *B* (verses 2-5) gives reason for his urgent petition for God not to remain silent in verse 1b. The suppliant is surrounded by his enemies. They attack him verbally by making false allegations inspired by hate (verses 2-3). The behaviour of his enemies is opposite to what one would expect: instead of reciprocating good with good, the enemies return evil for good. The suppliant is convinced that he is innocent of his enemies’ charges. Although his enemies are hostile towards the suppliant for no reason, he responds in love and prayer.

### **5.5.2 Stanza II (verses 6-20): Petition I**

Stanza II (verses 6-20) consists of two strophes, *C* (verses 6-15) and *D* (verses 16-20). Strophe *C* (verses 6-15) is a series of imprecations, wherein the suppliant calls on God to punish his enemy severely. Strophe *D* (verses 16-20) describes the devastating characteristics of the enemy which are the reason for the preceding as well as subsequent imprecations.

#### **5.5.2.1 Strophe C (verses 6-15)**

Strophe *C* (verses 6-15) consists of ten bicola.

In the **first bicolon (verse 6)**, **6a** commences with the imperative הַפְקֵד (‘‘appoint’’). This command is directed toward God. The imperative הַפְקֵד is followed by עָלָיו רָשָׁע (‘‘a wicked man over him’’). The preposition עָלָיו evidently implies that the suppliant’s enemy is a single person. In the previous strophe (verses 2-5), the suppliant’s enemies/accusers are plural. How do we reconcile this apparent contradiction? It seems best to think of the suppliant’s enemies as

a band of accusers and now the leader is being singled out for special attention (see Harman, 1998:358; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:936). The word רָשָׁע shows that the suppliant's enemy is a wicked man. Dahood (1968:101) believes that the setting of the psalm is a court where the psalmist is standing trial, and his prayer is directed against the judge and the false witnesses. The TEV follows Dahood's approach that the setting of the psalm is a court and translates רָשָׁע as "corrupt judge." In the book of Psalms, רָשָׁע refers to the wicked who stand diametrically opposed to the righteous. In addition to being enemies of God's people, the wicked oppress the poor, the needy, widows, orphans and strangers (see Carpenter & Grisanti, 1997a:1202).

**6b** is syndetically linked to 6a by the conjunction וְ. 6b begins with שֹׁטֵן ("the accuser"). The noun שֹׁטֵן ("the accuser") later came to be used of the devil or Satan (see 1 Chron 21:1; Zech 3:1), but in the context of Psalm 109 שֹׁטֵן simply designates an accusing witness (see verse 4a where the cognate verb is used; McCann, 1996:1125). Therefore, as Anderson (1972b:761) observes, it would be incorrect to translate the noun שֹׁטֵן in verse 6 as Satan as the KJV, AV and the LXX have done. The noun שֹׁטֵן is followed by יַעֲמֹד ("let him stand") which functions like a jussive. The verb יַעֲמֹד describes the activity of the accuser. The verb יַעֲמֹד is followed by עַל־יְמִינָךְ ("at his right hand") which shows the position where the accuser is to stand against the enemy. In the court trials, the right hand side of the accused was the position of both the accuser and of the witness for the defence (see Allen, 1983:73; Harman, 1998:359; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:939). Dahood (1968:101) believes that the trial takes place after the death of the enemy. In light of verses 7-15, this trial takes place during the lifetime of the enemy. If this trial takes place after his death, as Dahood suggests, how can the psalmist still pray for the premature death of his enemy? The SPCL's translation "May his own lawyer condemn him" seems plausible because the translation implies that the trial takes place during the enemy's lifetime.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 6a and 6b. The idea of appointing a wicked man in 6a is repeated in 6b because שֹׁטֵן ("the accuser") in 6b is synonymous with רָשָׁע ("a wicked man") in 6a (VanGemeren, 1991:691). With regards to the translations that see 6a's רָשָׁע as the judge and 6b's שֹׁטֵן as the accuser in the court, the corrupt judge and the accuser are not the same person in court. Therefore in verse 6, the suppliant is asking God to appoint a wicked man, the accuser, to bring his enemy to the bar of God's justice. The enemy is to get a dose of his own

medicine, since he has proven himself to be wicked (verses 2-5). The suppliant wants his enemy to have another wicked man, the accuser, to go after him so that he will be found guilty.

In the **second bicolon (verse 7)**, **7a** begins with *בְּהִשָּׁפֵטוֹ* (“when he is judged”) which refers to the activity of the judge/accuser in verse 6. The word *בְּהִשָּׁפֵטוֹ* supplies the circumstances for verse 7. The word *בְּהִשָּׁפֵטוֹ* is followed by *יֵצֵא* (“let him come forth”) which has a jussive function. The verb *יֵצֵא* is followed by the adjective *רָשָׁע* (“guilty”).

**7b** is syndetically linked to 7a by the conjunction *וְ*. 7b commences with *תִּפְלֵתוֹ*. Some translations take the word *תִּפְלֵתוֹ* to mean the plea to judge; for example, the NAB translates 7b as “May his plea be in vain” and the SPCL has “may his defence result in his condemnation.” The primary meaning of *תִּפְלָה* “in the various contexts is petition, with a strong element of intercession” (Verhoef, 1997:1061). The noun *תִּפְלָה* means prayer (see Hamilton, 1980b:726; Holladay, 1988:394). Therefore, as Bratcher and Reyburn (1991:939) observe, the noun *תִּפְלָה* (“prayer”) does not mean anything other than prayer in the Old Testament. It is best to translate *תִּפְלָה* in 7b as “prayer” rather than “plea to judge” or “defence.” *תִּפְלָתוֹ* (“his prayer”) refers to the enemy’s prayer. *תִּפְלָתוֹ* is followed by *תִּהְיֶה* (“let it become”) which has a jussive function. The verb *תִּהְיֶה* is followed by *לְחַטָּאָה* meaning “sin” (see Brown *et al*, 1979:308). The colon “and let his prayer become sin” means that the suppliant’s “lamentation and protestation of innocence will turn out to be a mockery of God, or an expression of guilt because he is actually guilty” (Anderson, 1972b:761).

To sum up verse 7b, the suppliant prays for his enemy’s plea for innocence, in which he would call upon the name of God, to only add to his guilt because he is actually guilty.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 7ab. The idea that the enemy is found guilty in 7a is repeated in 7b.

To summarize verse 7, the suppliant is asking God to make his enemy’s attempts to be declared innocent before men in the court of law and to receive mercy from God through his prayers, to be futile and unsuccessful.

In the **third bicolon (verse 8)**, **8a** commences with *יְהִי* which functions like a jussive “let it be.” The verb *יְהִי* refers to the enemy’s days. The verb *יְהִי* (“let it be”) is followed by

יָמָיו מְעַטִּים (“his days be few”) which refers to the life of the suppliant’s enemy which is to be cut short. Therefore in verse 8a, the suppliant wants his enemy’s life to be cut short.

**8b** begins with פָּקְדָתוֹ. The noun פָּקְדָה “is frequently used for various positions of authority” (Williams, 1997:662). Brown *et al* (1979:824) argue that in 8b, the noun פָּקְדָה can be taken to mean “things laid up.” The RSV and NEB follow this interpretation. The RSV translates פָּקְדָתוֹ as “his good” and the NEB has “hoarded wealth.” The LXX translates פָּקְדָתוֹ as ἐπισκοπή αὐτοῦ which means “place of oversight” or “office.” In the context of Psalm 109, the noun פָּקְדָתוֹ refers to the office of the suppliant’s enemy rather than his goods or wealth because the latter is referred to in verse 11 (Kraus, 1989:340). Verse 8b is also quoted in Acts 1:20 where Judas’ office is to be transferred to someone else. The noun פָּקְדָתוֹ (“his office”) is followed by יִקַּח (“let him take”) which has a jussive function. The verb יִקַּח refers to אַחֵר (“another”).

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 8a and 8b; the idea that the enemy is to die a premature death in 8a is repeated in 8b. The enemy’s reduction of life (i.e. death) in 8a is synonymous to the appointment of another person in his office in 8b. Verse 8 implies that the suppliant’s enemy is probably a leader either in a nation or of a band of men seeking his destruction (Harman, 1998:359).

To sum up verse 8, the suppliant prays for his enemy’s premature death.

The **fourth bicolon (verse 9)** repeats the request for the enemy’s premature death. **9a** begins with יִהְיוּ which has a jussive meaning “let them be” which applies to both 9a and 9b and refers to the enemy’s family (i.e. his wife and children). The verb יִהְיוּ is followed by בְּנָיִי יְתוֹמִים (“his children ... orphans”) which refers to the children of the suppliant’s enemy. The noun יְתוֹם means orphans, that is, fatherless ones (Brown *et al*, 1979:450). Hamilton (1997:570) argues that the psalmist’s prayer for the children of his enemy to become orphans in 9a is not a desire for personal revenge but an appeal to a higher authority to obtain redress and justice.

**9b** is syndetically linked to 9a by the conjunction וְ. 9b commences with אִשְׁתּוֹ (“his wife”) which refers to the wife of the suppliant’s enemy. The noun אִשְׁתּוֹ is followed by אֵלְמִנָּה (“a widow”). The noun אֵלְמִנָּה means “widow” (see Van Leeuwen, 1997:414).

Orphans and widow point to the weak and helpless segments of society who were most vulnerable to injury and abuse (see Hamilton, 1997a:570). Orphans were without protection and they were destitute. Widowhood often involved great hardship (see Anderson, 1972b:761).

Orphans and widows had “no set place in society and no means of support” (Goldingay, 2008:281).

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 9a and 9b. The idea that the enemy’s family is to be deprived of their father/husband and become destitute in 9a is repeated in 9b. The phrase “his children orphans” in 9a is parallel to “his wife a widow” in 9b.

In summary, in the fourth bicolon (verse 9) the suppliant asks God to deprive the enemy so that his children become fatherless and his wife a widow. The enemy’s family will be without protection and become destitute. The reduction of the enemy’s wife to widowhood and his children to being orphans is a disgrace to the family name, as they would be at the mercy of their fellow men (see VanGemeren, 1991:692).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a causal correlation, REASON-RESULT in verses 8 and 9. The enemy’s premature death in verse 8 would therefore mean that his children become fatherless or orphans and his wife a widow in verse 9.

**The fifth bicolon (verse 10)** focuses on the devastating consequences of the enemy’s death on his family. **10a** is syndetically linked to verse 9 by the conjunction ׀. 10a begins with the infinitive נָוֵעַ which describes the aimless wandering of a vagrant or dispossessed (Van Pelt & Kaiser, 1997c:63). The infinitive נָוֵעַ (“wander about”) is followed by יִנְוְעוּ which means “to totter, go tottering; as beggars” (Brown *et al*, 1979: 631). The verb יִנְוְעוּ (“and let them beg”) has a jussive meaning. The verb יִנְוְעוּ refers to the activity of the enemy’s children. The verb יִנְוְעוּ is followed by בְּנָיִי (“his children”) which refers to the children of the suppliant’s enemy. Therefore in 10a, the suppliant wants the children of his enemy to become wandering beggars.

**10b** is syndetically linked to 10a by the conjunction ׀. 10b commences with דָּרְשׁוּ (“let them be driven”) which refers to the enemy’s children. The verb דָּרְשׁוּ is followed by מִחֲרָבוֹתֵיהֶם (“from the ruins of their house”) which indicates the place or location which the enemy’s children are to be driven from.

There is a synonymous parallelism, BASE-RESTATEMENT in 10a and 10b. The idea that the enemy’s family is to be wandering beggars in 10a is repeated in 10b. The phrase “wander about and beg” in 10a is parallel to being “driven from the ruins of their house” in 10b. Being wandering beggars goes hand to hand with being homeless.

To sum up verse 10, the suppliant wants his enemy’s children to be driven from the ruins of their house and to be wandering beggars and to be homeless.

The **sixth bicolon (verse 11)**, like in the previous bicolon (verse 10), focuses on the situation of the enemy's family after his death. **11a** commences with the verb **יִנְקֹשׁ**. The verb **יִנְקֹשׁ** means "to knock, strike" (see Fisher, 1980:600). Anderson (1972b:762) observes that the meaning "to knock, strike" is not very fitting in the present context. Delitzsch (1980b:179) and Allen (1983:74) suggest that perhaps it should be linked with the Arabic *nakaša* "to exact money from a person." The verb **יִנְקֹשׁ** has a jussive function ("let him take"). The verb **יִנְקֹשׁ** refers to the creditor. The verb **יִנְקֹשׁ** is followed by the participle **נוֹשֵׂה** ("creditor"). The participle **נוֹשֵׂה** is followed by **לְכָל־אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ** ("all that he has") which shows that the suppliant's enemy is the victim of the activity of the creditor. The suppliant wants his enemy's family to be dispossessed of any wealth which might otherwise be available for them.

**11b** is syndetically linked to 11a by the conjunction **וְ**. **11b** begins with the verb **יִבְזֹזוּ** ("let them plunder") which has a jussive function. The verb **יִבְזֹזוּ** describes the activity of the strangers (**זָרִים**). The verb **יִבְזֹזוּ** is followed by the word **זָרִים** ("strangers"). The word **זָרִים** is followed by **יְגִיעוֹ** ("his toil") which indicates that the suppliant's enemy is the victim of the activity of the strangers.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 11ab. The idea that the enemy is to be dispossessed of any wealth which might otherwise be available to his family in 11a is restated in 11b.

To sum up verse 11, the suppliant hopes that after his enemy's death, his creditor and even strangers will come and take possession of all his belongings that he worked for, depriving his family from enjoying the family fortune. The forfeiture of the family possession would further reduce the survivors to dependency, indebtedness and destitution.

The **seventh bicolon (verse 12)**, like the two preceding bicola (verses 10-11), focuses on the situation of the enemy's family after his death. Verse 12 is a negative request. **12a** begins with the vetitive **אַל־יִהְיֶה** ("let there be none") which is also a negated jussive. The prepositional object **לוֹ** ("to him") attached to the vetitive refers to the suppliant's enemy. The prepositional object **לוֹ** is followed by the participial phrase **נֹשֵׂךְ חַסֵּד** which means "to prolong, continue in kindness" (Brown *et al*, 1979:604). In 12a, the suppliant prays for his enemy to be deprived of loving-kindness from individuals or the community.

**12b** is syndetically linked to 12a by the conjunction **וְ**. **12b** like 12a, is a negative request and begins with the vetitive **אַל־יִהְיֶה** ("let there be none"). The vetitive **אַל־יִהְיֶה** is followed by the

participial phrase *לִיתוֹמִי חוֹנֵן* which means to show favour when dealing with orphans (Brown *et al*, 1979:336). The phrase *לִיתוֹמִי* (“to his orphans”) refers to the fatherless children of the suppliant’s enemy.

There is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 12a and 12b. The idea that the survivors of the guilty should not receive kindness and generosity in 12a is repeated in 12b. The noun *חֶסֶד* in 12a is synonymous to the participle *חוֹנֵן* in 12b.

To sum up the seventh bicolon (verse 12), the suppliant prays for his enemy’s family to be deprived of the community’s kindness and generosity. In the Israelite community, the destitute such as widows and orphans had legal rights and claims on expressions of love and kindness. The Israelite community had the responsibility of showing kindness to the disadvantaged such as widows and orphans (see Exod 22:22; Lev 19:9-10; 23:22; Deut 24:19-22).

It is interesting to note that the imprecation in Psalm 109 is directed at the enemy’s dependants. The enemy’s life must be cut short and his dependants must suffer. The enemy’s kin must be wiped from the face of the earth. Why should imprecation come on the enemy’s descendants? Perhaps, in the ancient mind, a long life and descendants gave meaning to life. Therefore, imprecations are directed against meaning in the life of this enemy. Probably the fact that one had descendants meant a continuation of his name.

Kraus (1989:340) argues that the suppliant’s enemy and his descendants are to be punished severely because the enemy persecuted the afflicted and the needy and had denied them kindness. Kraus’ suggestion seems plausible because in the Pentateuch, Israel is exhorted to show kindness and generosity to the disadvantaged such as the widows and orphans (Exod 22:23; Deut 24:19-22; 26:12). Those who ill-treated the widows and orphans were cursed (Deut 27:19) and were exposed to God’s wrath. The punishment for ill-treating the widows and orphans was death by the sword so that the perpetrators’ wives would become widows and their children, fatherless (Exod 22:23-24).

The **eighth bicolon (verse 13)**, like the three preceding bicola (verses 10-12), focuses on the situation of the enemy’s family after his death. **13a** commences with *יְהִי* (“let them be”) which refers to the descendants of the enemy. The jussive *יְהִי* is followed by *אַחֲרֵיתוֹ* (“his descendants”). The noun *אַחֲרֵיתוֹ* is followed by *לְהַכְרִית* which means “to eradicate, exterminate, annihilate” (Kutsch, 1997:636). The suppliant wants the enemy’s descendants to

be exterminated - cut off from life which also implies that they would be cut off from the flow of generations (see 13b).

**13b** begins with בְּדוֹר אַחֵר (“in the next generation”) which refers to the names of the enemy’s descendants. The phrase בְּדוֹר אַחֵר is followed by יִמַח (“let them be wiped out”) which refers to the names of the enemy’s descendants. The jussive יִמַח is followed by שְׁמֵם (“their names”) which refers to the suppliant’s enemy’s descendants in 13a.

There is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 13ab. The idea that the suppliant’s enemy’s family should be eradicated in 13a is repeated in 13b. יְהִי לְהַכְרִית (“let them be eradicated”) in 13a corresponds to בְּדוֹר אַחֵר יִמַח (“let them be wiped out in the next generation”) in 13b. The phrase אַחֲרֵיתוֹ (“his descendants”) in 13a is parallel to שְׁמֵם (“their names”) in 13b.

In summary, the suppliant in verse 13 prays for the extermination or extinction of his enemy’s descendants so that they are cut off from the flow of generations.

In the **ninth bicolon (verse 14)**, **14a** commences with יִזְכָּר (“let it be remembered”) which has a jussive function. The verb יִזְכָּר (“let it be remembered”) is followed by עוֹן אֲבוֹתָיו (“iniquity of his fathers”) which refers to the iniquity of the enemy’s fathers. The phrase עוֹן אֲבוֹתָיו is followed by אֶל־יְהוָה (“before YHWH”) which indicates the person to whom the request is presented. Therefore in 14a, the psalmist prays for the sins of his enemy’s fathers or ancestors to remain in YHWH’s memory.

**14b** is syndetically linked to 14a by the conjunction וְ. 14b commences with חַטַּאת אִמּוֹ (“the sin of his mother”) which may be a synecdoche – it refers to the sin of the enemy’s ancestors. The phrase חַטַּאת אִמּוֹ is followed by the vetitive אַל־תִּמַּח (“do not let it be wiped out”). Therefore in 14b, the suppliant asks God not to wipe out the sin of his enemy’s mother.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 14ab. The idea that YHWH should remember the iniquity of the enemy’s parents or ancestors in 14a is repeated in 14b. The phrase עוֹן אֲבוֹתָיו (“iniquity of his fathers”) in 14a is parallel to חַטַּאת אִמּוֹ (“sin of his mother”) in 14b; both phrases refer to the enemy’s parents or ancestors. The verb יִזְכָּר (“let it be remembered”) in 14a is parallel to the vetitive אַל־תִּמַּח (“do not let it be wipe out”) in 14b - both mean the same thing.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is also a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in verses 13-14. In both verses the psalmist wants the name of the enemies and their kin to be wiped out.

To sum up verse 14, the suppliant prays for the sins of his enemy's fathers or ancestors to remain in YHWH's memory.

The imprecation of verse 14 is carried further in verse 15. The **tenth bicolon (verse 15)**, **15a** begins with יְהִי ("let them be") which has a jussive function. The "iniquity" (עֲוֹן) and "sin" (חַטָּאת) of the enemy's forefathers in 14a and 14b are included in the verb יְהִי ("let them be"). The verb יְהִי is followed by בְּיַד יְהוָה תָּמִיד ("before the Lord continually") which means that the unatoned sins of the suppliant's enemy's forefathers will not be forgotten by God and the delayed punishment will be brought upon the family of the enemy (Anderson, 1972b:763). Therefore in 15a, the suppliant prays for the iniquity and sin of the family of his enemy to remain before YHWH continually.

**15b** is syndetically linked to 15a by the conjunction וְ. 15b commences with יִכְרֹת ("he may cut") with "YHWH" as the subject of יִכְרֹת. The jussive יִכְרֹת is followed by מֵאֶרֶץ זְכָרָם ("their memory from the earth") which refers to the memory of the enemy's family – both his descendants and forefathers (verses 13-14) (see Kirkpatrick, 1910:657). Therefore, in the tenth bicolon (verse 15), the suppliant is asking YHWH not to forgive or forget the sins of his enemy's family in order that the memory of their names on earth may be forgotten.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is also an antithetical parallelism between verse 15a and 15b: the sins of the enemy's parents must be before YHWH where he resides (verse 15a), but by contrast, their memory is to be wiped out from the earth (verse 15b) where men reside!

In summary, Strophe C (verses 6-15) is a series of imprecations where the suppliant calls upon God to punish his enemy severely. Firstly, the suppliant asks God to appoint a wicked man, an accuser, to legally condemn his enemy (verse 6). Secondly, he asks God that his enemy's attempts to be declared innocent in court and to receive mercy from God to be futile and unsuccessful (verse 7). Thirdly, he prays for his enemy's premature death (verse 8), which would reduce his family to a life of destitution (verse 9), becoming wandering, homeless beggars, without their father's possession (verses 10-11). Fourthly, he prays for his enemy's

family to be deprived of the community's kindness and generosity (verse 12) so that they would be reduced to further dependency, indebtedness and destitution. Fifthly, he prays for the death of his enemy's descendants (verse 13) and he asks YHWH not to forgive or forget the sins of his enemy's parents (verses 14-15).

### **5.5.2.2 Strophe D (verses 16-20)**

Strophe *D* (verses 16-20) consists of a five bicola (verses 16ab, 17ab, 17bc, 18ab and 20ab) and a single colon (19a).

In the **first bicolon verse (verse 16)**, **16a** begins with the adverb יַעַן (“for, because, since”) which functions as a preposition (Brown *et al*, 1979:774). The adverb יַעַן gives the reason or justification or rationale (see Swanson, 1997; Anderson, 1972b:763) for the preceding as well as subsequent imprecations directed at the enemy by the suppliant. The adverb יַעַן is followed by the relative particle אֲשֶׁר, which is followed by לֹא זָכַר (“he did not remember”) which refers to the activity of the suppliant's enemy. The negated verb לֹא זָכַר is followed by עֲשׂוֹת חֶסֶד (“to show loving-kindness”) which shows that the suppliant's enemy did not show loving-kindness.

**16b** is syndetically linked to 16a by the conjunction וְ. 16b commences with יַרְדֵּף which means “he persecuted or harassed” (Brown *et al*, 1979:922) and refers to the activity of the psalmist's enemy. The suppliant's enemy is the subject of the colon (16b). The *waw* consecutive verb יַרְדֵּף is followed by אִישׁ-עָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן (“afflicted and needy man”). In view of 22a, the phrase “the afflicted and needy” may have been a roundabout expression for the psalmist, although it may also include all who belong to this category who may have been persecuted by the suppliant's enemy (see Anderson, 1972b:763). The expression נִכְאָה לְבָב לְמוֹתָת (“broken-hearted to their death”) functions as an additional object of יַרְדֵּף (see Kissane, 1954:187) and shows that the enemy aimed to bring about the death of the afflicted, the needy and the broken-hearted. The expression “broken-hearted” indicates either intense suffering or discouragement (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:942). In the context of the psalm, the latter view seems more plausible. The NJV follows this interpretation and translates לְבָב נִכְאָה as “one crushed in spirit.”

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism GENERAL-SPECIFIC in 16a and 16b. The second extended colon (verse 16b) explains in detail how the enemy did not show kindness in 16a.

To sum up verse 16, the suppliant's enemy ill-treated the destitute and vulnerable. He aimed at bringing about the death of those who should have been protected and should have been the object of love and kindness.

The **second bicolon (verse 17ab)** is syndetically linked to the previous bicolon (verse 16) by the conjunction ׀. **17a** commences with יֵאָהֵב ("he loved") which refers to the suppliant's enemy. The verb יֵאָהֵב is followed by קָלָלָהּ ("cursing"). In the Old Testament, a curse involved the invoking of a particular fate on another person. God is directly invoked as having the power and authority to implement the curse (see Gordon, 1997:491; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:942).

**17b** consists of וַתְּבוֹאֵהוּ ("let it come on him") which refers to the enemy's cursing (קָלָלָהּ). Since the enemy loved cursing the afflicted and needy, the suppliant in 17b wants the enemy's curse to recoil upon its originator (see Gordon, 1997:492).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, 17b states the desired result of 17a. 17a states the reason and 17b the imprecation, which is an obligation presented to YHWH on the grounds set out in 17a.

The **third bicolon (verse 17cd)** is syndetically linked to 17ab by the conjunction ׀. **17c** commences with לֹא־חָפֵץ ("he did not delight") which refers to the activity of the suppliant's enemy. The negated verb לֹא־חָפֵץ is followed by בְּבִרְכָה ("in blessing"). To give blessings may mean to ask God to do good to others or to give good things to others (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:942; Oswalt, 1980b:132).

**17d** is syndetically linked to 17c by the conjunction ׀. 17d begins with תִּרְחֹק ("let it be far") which refers to the idea of blessing. The noun בְּרִכָּה ("blessing") is the subject of תִּרְחֹק. The verb תִּרְחֹק is followed by מִמֶּנּוּ ("from him") which refers to the suppliant's enemy. To sum up 17cd, the psalmist wants his enemy to forfeit any blessing because he did not delight in blessing others.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, 17d states the desired result of 17c, similar to the way that 17b stated the desired result of 17a. In verse 17ab YHWH is asked that cursing should come upon the one who loves to curse. The same notion is repeated in verse 17bc: the act of no-blessing should result in no-blessing. Therefore 17ab and 17bc are essentially parallel; there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 17ab and 17cd. Verse 17cd restates the idea that the enemy of the psalmist loved cursing as in 17ab. The phrase יֵאָהֵב קָלָלָהּ ("he loved cursing") (17a) is synonymous to לֹא־חָפֵץ בְּבִרְכָה ("he did not

delight in blessing”) (17c). Also וַתְּבוֹאֵהוּ (”let it come to him”) (17b) is parallel to וַתִּרְחַק מִמֶּנִּי (let it be far from him) (17d).

To summarize verse 17, the enemy loved cursing and would not delight in blessing others and as a result the suppliant wants the enemy’s curse to recoil upon its originator. The suppliant is not so much asking for active intervention by YHWH, but rather that the enemy should reap the fruits of his own actions.

The **fourth bicolon (verse 18)** is syndetically linked to the previous two bicola (verse 17) by means of the conjunction וַ. **18a** commences with יָלַבַּשׁ (”he wore”) which refers to the suppliant’s enemy who is the subject of the colon. The waw consecutive verb יָלַבַּשׁ is followed by קִלְלָהּ כְּמִדּוֹ (”cursing as his garment”), the noun קִלְלָהּ functions as the object of the colon (18a). The preposition כְּ (”as”) which is attached to the noun מִדּוֹ (”garment”) indicates a simile and compares the enemy’s cursing to wearing a garment. The point of the comparison is to show that the suppliant’s enemy cursed others all the time or he never stopped cursing others. Cursing had become as natural to him as wearing a garment. The TEV brings out this interpretation clearly when it translates 18a as “He cursed as naturally as he dressed himself.”

**18b** is syndetically linked to 18a by means of the conjunction וַ. 18b begins with תָּבֵא (”it entered”) which refers to the enemy’s cursing (קִלְלָהּ) in 18a. The enemy’s cursing (קִלְלָהּ) is the subject of 18b. The verb תָּבֵא is followed by כַּמַּיִם (”like water”), then בְּקִרְבּוֹ which means “into his body” (Brown *et al*, 1979:899). The preposition כְּ (”as or like”) attached to the noun מַיִם (”water”) indicates a simile and compares the cursing of the suppliant’s enemy to water that enters the body when someone drinks it.

The expression בְּקִרְבּוֹ כַּמַּיִם is followed by וְכַשֶּׁמֶן בְּעֲצָמוֹתָיו (”and into his bones like oil”). The preposition כְּ (”as or like”) attached to the noun שֶׁמֶן introduces a second simile in this colon. It compares the enemy’s cursing to olive oil spread over the human body and seeping into the bones. This is probably according to popular belief at the time of the psalmist that oil seeps into the bones.

**18b** states the desired result of 18a. As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, verse 18 is similar to 17a-b and 17b-c. 18a states the reason and 18b the imprecation, which is an obligation presented to YHWH on the grounds set out in 18a. Both 18a and 18b contain a metaphor. YHWH must see to it that the enemy bears the consequences of his deeds: he wore cursing like a garment. Now this cursing should enter his body like water

and his bones like oil. Bratcher and Reyburn (1991:943) argue that there seems to be a degree of intensification involved in the movement in through the lines in verse 18. From outside the body (into the garment), to the inside of the body (water entering the body) and finally into the bones. This intensification suggests that the suppliant goes further than in verse 17. Not only must the enemy get his dues (as in 17a-b and 17b-c), but he must get more than what he deserves.

In summary, the psalmist asks YHWH for his enemy to suffer the consequences of “wearing cursing as his garment” – the curses should backfire on the enemy. Instead of wearing the curses, the curses must enter him and affect him negatively. A number of translations such as the ESV, KJV, NJB, RSV and TEV follow this interpretation.

The **single colon (verse 19)** continues with the idea of the curse in verse 18. Verse 19 begins with *תְּהִי־לּוֹ* (“let it be to him”). The verb *תְּהִי* (“let it be”) refers to the cursing (*קָלָלָהּ*) of verse 18 and the prepositional phrase refers to the suppliant’s enemy. The verbal phrase *לּוֹ תְּהִי* is followed by *כַּבְּגָד יַעֲטָהּ* (“as a garment which wraps him”) which shows that the suppliant wants his enemy’s curses which he wore to strangle him. A number of translations such as the ESV, KJV, NJB, RSV, NIV and TEV follow this interpretation. The curses that the enemy pronounced on others are to backfire on him. The expression *כַּבְּגָד יַעֲטָהּ* is followed by *יַחֲגֹרֶהָ* *לְמִנְחָה תָּמִיד* (“for a belt with which he continually girds himself”) which shows that the suppliant wants his enemy’s curses which he has pronounced on others to gird him continually like a belt around the waist. Harman (1998:360) echoes this when he says “the curse was thought to surround the person [so] that it was like a garment held tight around the body by a belt.”

In summary, the suppliant in verse 19 prays for his enemy’s curses which he has pronounced on others to backfire on him and to wrap him like a garment and continually gird him like a belt, so that they hang over him and never let him go. The suppliant needs justice and vindication to be executed on the principle of *lex talionis* (VanGemeren, 1991:694). He even wants more than just redress. The enemy wore cursing like a garment (18a), but this same cursing now should strangle and impede the enemy (19a). In this sense the same intensification of redress is found in 19a as in 18b.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 17b, 17d, 18b and 19a. The suppliant’s wish is that his

enemy's curses return on him (17b and 17d) and even backfire with increased intensity on him (18b and 19a).

In the **last bicolon (verse 20)**, the suppliant asks YHWH “to punish his enemies with all the misfortunes listed in verses 6-19” (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:943). **20a** commences with **זאת פְּעֻלָּהּ** (“let this be the reward”) which applies to both cola. In this colon, **פְּעֻלָּהּ** means “punishment” (Vollmer, 1997:1017) and in the context of Psalm 109 refers to the imprecations in verses 6-19. The noun **פְּעֻלָּהּ** refers to the reward of sin or the punishment that God gives to the wicked (Carpenter, 1997b:649; Hamilton, 1980c:730; Brown *et al*, 1979:821). Swanson (1997) argues that **פְּעֻלָּהּ** means “recompense, just due, proper pay-back, i.e., a response to a situation by an authority, giving a just response to a completion or violation of a principle or command (Ps 109:20; Isa 40:10; 49:4; 61:8; 62:11; Ez 29:20f).” The phrase **פְּעֻלָּתִי שְׂטֵנִי** (“the reward of my accusers”) refers to the punishment of the suppliant's enemies. The participle **שְׂטֵנִי** is followed by the phrase **יְהוָה יִמְאֵת** (“from YHWH”) which shows that YHWH is the one who punishes the enemies or accusers and not the suppliant.

**20b** is syndetically linked to 20a by the conjunction **וְ**. 20b consists of **הַדֹּבְרִים רָעֵי עַל-נַפְשִׁי** (“of those who speak evil against my soul”) which is parallel to **שְׂטֵנִי** (“of my accusers”) in 20a.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 20a and 20b. The suppliant's wish for his enemies to be punished is restated in both cola.

In summary, the psalmist in verse 20 finally asks YHWH to punish his enemies. The word **זאת** (“this”) at the beginning of verse 20 is an *anaphora*, referring back primarily to verses 16-19, but may also allude to verses 6-15.

To sum up Strophe *D* (verses 16-20), the suppliant gives the justification for the preceding as well subsequent imprecations directed at the enemy of the suppliant in verse 16, namely that the enemy must bear the brunt of their own actions. He did not show kindness to the vulnerable but persecuted them and brought about their death. Therefore God is asked to execute justice and vindication (verses 17-19). The enemy's curse on the afflicted is to backfire on him. In verse 20, the suppliant asks God to reward his enemies with all the imprecations in verses 16-19, or even 6-19.

### 5.5.3 Stanza III (verses 21-29): Petition II

Stanza III consists of two strophes, *E* (verses 21-26) and *F* (verses 27-29). In Strophe *E* (verses 21-26), the suppliant asks God to deliver him. In Strophe *F* (verses 27-29), the suppliant wants his accusers to know that his deliverance is solely YHWH's action and that they should be ashamed and dishonoured.

#### 5.5.3.1 Strophe *E* (verses 21-26)

Strophe *E* (verses 21-26) consists of five bicola (verses 21, 22, 23, 24, 26) and a tricolon (verse 25).

In the **first bicolon (verse 21)**, **21a** commences with the emphatic pronoun אַתָּה (“you”) which draws the attention from the enemy (Strophe D) to YHWH, the object of the supplication. The pronoun אַתָּה is followed by a pair of invocations יְהוָה אֱדָנִי (“YHWH, Lord”) which are vocatives. This pair of vocatives is followed by עֲשֵׂה-אֵתִי (“act on my behalf”) which refers to YHWH's act of deliverance. The suppliant is the beneficiary or object of YHWH's activity or action of deliverance. The expression לְמִעַן שְׁמֶךָ (“for your name's sake”/ “because of your name”) gives the basis of the suppliant's plea for YHWH to act on his behalf. The noun שְׁמֶךָ refers to the name of YHWH. The suppliant wants YHWH to act so that his name would not be discredited. This implies that the suppliant is the servant of YHWH and the attack by the enemies is an indirect attack on YHWH himself. Internally the semantic relation in 21a is that of desired result (“act!”), followed by a reason “for your name's sake.” One may regard these two clauses in 21a as separate cola, although in this analysis it is handled as a single colon.

As with 21a, **21b** may also be regarded as a bicolon, but is analysed as a single colon in this analysis. 21b begins with the conjunction כִּי (“because”) which gives the basis of YHWH's deliverance of the suppliant. The adjective טוֹב (“good”) attached to כִּי describes the noun חַסְדֶּךָ (“your loving-kindness”), which refers to YHWH's loving-kindness. The noun חַסְדֶּךָ is followed by the imperative הַצִּילֵנִי (“deliver me”) which is directed to YHWH. The suppliant is the beneficiary or object of YHWH's deliverance. The suppliant asks YHWH to deliver him because this is in accordance with his loving-kindness. Internally the semantic relation in 21b is that of a reason (“because your loving-kindness is good”), followed by a desired result (“deliver me”).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 21a and 21b. In both cola (21a and 21b) the suppliant wants

YHWH to deliver him. The two imperatives עֲשֵׂה־אֵתִי (“act on my behalf”) (21a) and הַצִּילֵנִי (“deliver me”) (21b) are synonymous. The phrase לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ in 21a is parallel to כִּי־טוֹב חַסְדֶּךָ in 21b and both phrases are the basis for YHWH’s deliverance. There is an extended parallelism with a chiasmic pattern (a b b’ a’) in verse 21:

<b>a</b>	But, YHWH, Lord, act on my behalf ( <i>imperative = desired result</i> )		
	<b>b</b>	for your name’s sake	
	<b>b’</b>	because your loving-kindness is good	
<b>a’</b>	deliver me ( <i>imperative = desired result</i> )		Reason

The purpose of the extended parallelism is to highlight the fact that the suppliant’s urgent appeal for divine deliverance is based on YHWH’s name and his loving-kindness which is good. The suppliant asks YHWH to deliver him because he regards God’s character as being on trial when he is not delivered. This lifts the imprecation from the level of personal vengeance to divine vindication.

In the **second bicolon (verse 22)**, **22a** commences with the conjunction כִּי attached to עֲנִי וְאַבְיוֹן אֲנִי (“I am afflicted and needy”) which describes the distress of the suppliant. The conjunction כִּי may only serve as a particle focusing on the distress which is described in the verses that follow and which should propel YHWH to deliver the suppliant. The conjunction כִּי is often used as an emphatic particle in a deictic or emphatic sense (see Holladay, 1988:155). One may then translate 22a as: "How afflicted and needy am I!" Even such an emphatic sense still carries the notion of cause. The condition, subsequently described by the suppliant, should propel YHWH to deliver him. Therefore a translation such as "For I am afflicted and needy" is valid.

**22b** is syndetically linked to 22a by the conjunction וְ. 22b commences with לִבִּי (“my heart”) which refers to the suppliant’s emotions (Brown *et al*, 1979:525). The noun לִבִּי is followed by חָלַל which means “it is wounded” (see Wiseman, 1980:288). The verb חָלַל is followed by בְּקִרְבִּי (“within me”). The phrase “my heart is wounded within me” shows that the suppliant is in distress, anguish, emotional turmoil and pain (Bratcher & Reyrburn, 1991:944).

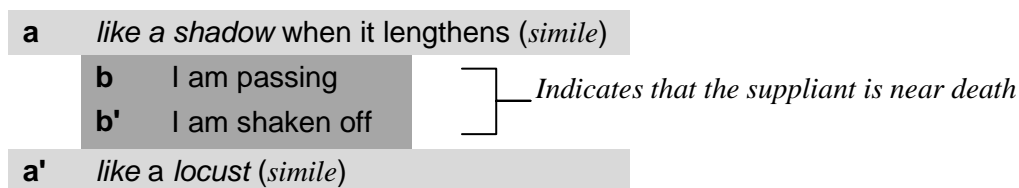
As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 22a and 22b. The idea that the suppliant is afflicted or in distress in 22a is restated in 22b by means of a simile. The phrase עֲנִי וְאַבְיוֹן אֲנִי in 22a is synonymous with לִבִּי חָלַל בְּקִרְבִּי in 22b.

Therefore in verse 22, the suppliant focuses the attention to his affliction, distress, emotional turmoil and pain. In 21a he appeals to YHWH's name and loving-kindness for delivery. His condition, which is described in verse 22 and subsequent verses, may serve as secondary reason for his plea in 21a.

In the **third bicolon (verse 23)**, **23a** begins with כַּצֶּל־כִּנְטוֹתוֹ (“like a shadow when it lengthens”) which refers to the end of the day, when the shadow grows no longer (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:944). The expression כַּצֶּל־כִּנְטוֹתוֹ is followed by נִהְלַכְתִּי (“I am passing”) which shows that the suppliant’s life was flowing out of him, like the disappearance of the evening shadow (see VanGemeren, 1991:695).

**23b** commences with נִנְעַרְתִּי (“I am shaken off”) which refers to the activity of the suppliant. The verb נִנְעַרְתִּי is followed by כְּאַרְבֵּה (“like a locust”). The suppliant compares himself to a locust that is being shaken off. Probably this refers to the locust that is awaiting destruction (cf. Exod 10:19) (Kroll, 1987:327). This comparison could imply that the suppliant is near his death like a locust which has been shaken off from the plant.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 23a and 23b. The idea that the suppliant is near death is implied in both cola, 23a and 23b. The two similes (כַּצֶּל־כִּנְטוֹתוֹ and כְּאַרְבֵּה) and the two verbs (נִנְעַרְתִּי and נִהְלַכְתִּי) are parallel to each other. The two similes also intensify what has been said in 22a (i.e. the suppliant is afflicted and in distress), since it refers to imminent death. There is an extended parallelism with a chiasmic pattern (a b b' a' ) in verse 23:



The purpose of the extended parallelism is to highlight the point that the psalmist’s death is near, just as a shadow that grows no longer in the evening and a locust that is shaken off from the plant about to be destroyed. Therefore in verse 23, the suppliant is near death and in need of urgent deliverance.

In the **fourth bicolon (verse 24)**, **24a** commences with בְּרַכְי (“my knees”) which refers to the suppliant’s knees. The noun בְּרַכְי functions as the subject of the colon. The noun בְּרַכְי is followed by כְּשָׁלוּ (“are weak”) which shows that the suppliant’s knees are weak. The verb כְּשָׁלוּ

is followed by מְצוּם (“from fasting”) which shows that the suppliant’s knees are weakened by fasting. The reason why the psalmist has fasted is not given by the text, but some scholars (e.g. Anderson, 1972b:765; Dahood, 1970:108) think this is voluntary fasting, which the psalmist has undergone as he awaits his trial.

**24b** is syndetically linked to 24a by means of the conjunction וְ. 24b begins with בְּשָׁרִי (“my flesh”) which refers to the suppliant’s body. The noun בְּשָׁרִי is followed by כָּחַשׁ (“it has grown lean”) which shows that the suppliant’s body is lean and thin. The verb כָּחַשׁ is followed by מִשְׁמֶן (“for lack of fat”) which shows that the suppliant’s body was lean and thin because of lack of nourishment.

Therefore verse 24 shows that the suppliant is in a feeble condition. His strength is gone. He has no power of his own because his body is weak and helpless.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in verses 23 and 24. The idea that the suppliant is near death in verse 23 is also alluded to in verse 24.

The **tricoloric verse (verse 25)** is syndetically linked to the previous verse (verse 24) by means of the conjunction וְ. **25a** commences with the pronoun אֲנִי (“I”) which refers to the suppliant. The pronoun אֲנִי is followed by הָיִיתִי חֲרָפָה לָהֶם (“I have become a reproach to them”) which shows that the suppliant had become an object of scorn to his enemies.

**25b** consists of יִרְאוּנִי (“when they see me”) which refers to the activity of the enemies. The suppliant is the object of the enemies’ seeing.

**25c** commences with the verb יִנְיֵעוּן (“they shake”) which refers to the activity of the enemies. The noun רִאשָׁם (“their heads”) refers to the heads of the suppliant’s enemies. When the accusers see the suppliant in his frailty and weakness, they shake their heads in contempt and supposed holy indignation (see Anderson, 1972b:765).

There is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 25a and 25bc. The idea that the suppliant is an object of scorn to his enemies in 25a is repeated in 25bc – the attackers shake their heads in contempt and supposed holy indignation.

In addition to seeing his weakness and frailty (verse 24), the accusers mock and ridicule the suppliant (verse 25).

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a causal relation between verses 22-24 and 25. Verse 25 states the consequence of the suppliant's condition described in verses 22-24. The suppliant's affliction and feeble condition in verses 22-24 has brought about further mockery and ridicule (verse 25). In the suppliant's mind verse 25 may be the contra-expected outcome of verses 22-24. One would expect compassion in such dire circumstances (verses 22-24), but instead, the enemy gloats over the suppliant's condition. The specific causal semantic relation is that of concession (verses 22-24) – contra-expectation (verse 25).

In the **sixth bicolon (verse 26)**, **26a** begins with the imperative עֲזֵרְנִי ("help me"). Here again, as in 21a, the suppliant turns to YHWH for help. The suppliant is the object of YHWH's help. As in 21a, the invocation יְהוָה ("YHWH") is coupled by a second invocation with a first person suffix. In 21a the second invocation is אֲדֹנָי ([my] Lord) and here in 26a it is אֱלֹהֵי ("my God"). Both these second invocations give a very personal ring to the invocation.

**26b** commences with the imperative הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי ("save me") which is directed to YHWH. YHWH is the subject of הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי. As in the previous colon (26a), the suppliant is the object of YHWH's activity (i.e. deliverance). The imperative is followed by כְּחַסְדֶּךָ ("according to your loving-kindness") which shows that the suppliant wants YHWH to save him in accordance to his loving-kindness. Here the psalmist is repeating his appeal to YHWH's loving-kindness in verse 21b.

There is a synonymous parallelism BASE-AMPLIFICATION in 26a and 26b. The idea that the suppliant is in need of urgent help in 26a is repeated in 26b. The suppliant wants God to save him. 26b also amplifies that the suppliant's need for help (26a) is based on YHWH's loving-kindness. The verb עֲזֵרְנִי in 26a is synonymous with הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי in 26b.

The direct invocation of YHWH as "my Lord" and "My God" in 21a and 26a and the appeal to YHWH's loving-kindness in 21b and 26b, mark verses 21- 26 as an inclusion, which support the demarcation of Strophe *E* (verses 21-26).

To sum up Strophe *E* (verses 21-26), the suppliant makes an urgent petition to YHWH. He wants YHWH to deliver him for his name's sake and according to his loving-kindness. The suppliant is in need of urgent deliverance because he is in a feeble condition. His strength is gone, his body is weak and helpless and his life is falling away. To make matters worse, his

accusers know the reality of his position and they mock and ridicule him in his weakness and frailty. The suppliant's only resort is to repeat his plea to YHWH to save him from his distress on the basis of his loving-kindness.

### **5.5.3.2 Strophe F (verses 27-29)**

Strophe *F* (verses 27-29) consists of three bicola (27ab, 28ab, 29ab) and a tricolon (28cde).

The **first bicolon (verse 27)** is syndetically linked to verse 26 by means of the conjunction ׀. **27a** commences with יִדְעוּ ("let them know") which has a jussive function. The suppliant's accusers are the subject of the verb יִדְעוּ. The verb יִדְעוּ is followed by כִּי־יָדְךָ זֹאת ("that this is your hand"). The phrase כִּי־יָדְךָ זֹאת means "my restoration is no accident" (Kidner, 1975:391). In this context, God's hand refers to God's mighty acts of deliverance.

**27b** begins with the emphatic pronoun אַתָּה ("you") which refers to YHWH. The pronoun אַתָּה is followed by the vocative יְהוָה, followed by עָשִׂיתָהּ ("you have done it") which refers to YHWH's hand (i.e. YHWH's mighty acts of deliverance or restoration). Here the psalmist is referring to some sort of prophetic reference to what YHWH will do and he is sure of it in his heart. The Afrikaans Bible (1983) and the NBV follow this interpretation.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 27a and 27b. The idea that the suppliant's enemies will know that YHWH has saved him in 27a is restated in 27b. The phrase יָדְךָ זֹאת ("this is your hand") in 27a is synonymous to עָשִׂיתָהּ ("you have done it") in 27b.

In summary, the suppliant in verse 27 is absolutely certain that YHWH will answer his plea, so he prays that his accusers or enemies will see and recognise that YHWH has saved him. The suppliant's salvation is solely YHWH's action.

In the **second bicolon (verse 28ab)**, the suppliant is again expressing a desire or plea. **28a** consists of יִקְלְלוּ־הֶמָּה ("they curse") which refers to the suppliant's accusers or enemies. The suppliant's enemies are the subject of יִקְלְלוּ־הֶמָּה. The verbal expression יִקְלְלוּ־הֶמָּה in this context is rather a concession ("although they curse") than a plea ("let them curse").

**28b** consists of **וְאַתָּה תְּבָרֵךְ** (“may you bless”) which refers to YHWH’s activity. The verbal phrase **וְאַתָּה תְּבָרֵךְ** is the contra-expected outcome of the accusers’ deeds in 28a. The enemies’ conduct towards the suppliant is diametrically contrasted to YHWH’s conduct towards the suppliant. The suppliant is confident that though the enemies may curse (28a), YHWH will bless him (real outcome) or he asks that YHWH may bless him (desired outcome) (28b).

In the **tricoloric verse (verse 28cde)**, **28c** consists of **קָמוּ** (“they arise”) which refers to the suppliant’s accusers or enemies. The idea is that they arise in aggression against the suppliant. This action of the enemies parallels that of 28a. In this context **קָמוּ** is rather a concession (“although they rise”) than a plea (“let them rise”).

**28d** consists of the *waw* consecutive verb **יִבְשׁוּ** (“may they be put to shame”) which shows that the suppliant’s enemies must be ashamed. The verb **יִבְשׁוּ** is the contra-expected outcome of the accusers’ deeds in 28c.

**28e** consists of **וְעַבְדְּךָ יִשְׂמַח** (“but your servant will rejoice”) which refers to the activity of the suppliant, who is indirectly identified by the courteous expression **עַבְדְּךָ** (“your servant”). The suppliant is the subject of the verb **יִשְׂמַח** (“rejoice”). The suppliant will rejoice in his deliverance while the enemies will be shamed by it.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, 28e is in direct contrast to 28d. The joy of the suppliant is in stark contrast to the plight of the enemies. 28de expresses the double outcome (negative-positive) of the action in 28c. The suppliant is confident that though the enemies may rise (28c), YHWH will put to shame/let rejoice (real outcomes) or he asks that YHWH put to shame/let rejoice (desired outcomes) (28de).

The cola in verse 28 alternate between concession and plea for a desired outcome/contradiction, with the last colon (28e) providing the outcome for the suppliant in contrast to the plight of the enemies.

<b>a</b>	28 a Although they curse, ( <i>concession</i> )
<b>b</b>	28b may you bless; ( <i>plea = desired outcome, contra-expected</i> )
<b>a'</b>	28c although they arise, ( <i>concession</i> )
<b>b'<sub>1</sub></b>	28d may they be put to shame, ( <i>plea = desired outcome, contra-expected</i> )
<b>b'<sub>2</sub></b>	28e but let your servant rejoice. ( <i>plea = contrasting desired outcome, contra-expected</i> )

To sum up verse 28, the suppliant makes a plea to YHWH. Although his enemies curse, the suppliant is certain that YHWH will bless him. Although the enemies rise against him, the

suppliant is sure that YHWH will put his accusers to shame while he, the servant of YHWH, will rejoice. On the basis of this sure conviction, the suppliant asks YHWH to bless, put to shame and let rejoice.

The idea that the suppliant's enemies will be ashamed in verse 28d is extended to the **third bicolon (verse 29)**. **29a** begins with **יִלְבְּשׁוּ** ("let them be clothed") which refers to the suppliant's accusers. The verb **יִלְבְּשׁוּ** is followed by the participle **שׂוֹטְנֵי** ("my accusers") which refers to the suppliant's accusers. The participle **שׂוֹטְנֵי** is followed by **כְּלָמָה** ("humiliation"). Therefore, in 29a, the suppliant wants his accusers to be humiliated.

**29b** is syndetically linked to 29a by means of the conjunction **וְ**. 29b commences with **יַעֲטוּ** ("let them wrap themselves") which refers to the activity of the suppliant's accusers. The suppliant's enemies are the subject of the verb **יַעֲטוּ**. The verb **יַעֲטוּ** is followed by **בְּשִׁתָּם** ("with their own shame as with a robe"). The phrase **כְּמַעֲיֵל** ("as with a robe") compares the accusers' shame with a robe that wraps around them. The noun **בְּשִׁתָּם** refers to the accusers' shame. Usually, wearing of clothes gives honour and covers shame. Here in verse 29, clothes are a simile of shame. The same idea of verse 19 is taken up here. Whereas in verse 19, the curses were to backfire on the enemy like clothes that had become restrictive. Here in verse 29 we have the inversion: the clothes that supposedly give honour are now to give shame and humiliation.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-RESTATEMENT in 29a and 29b. The idea that the suppliant wants his accusers to be humiliated in 29a is restated in 29b. The verb **יִלְבְּשׁוּ** in 29a is synonymous to the verb **יַעֲטוּ** in 29b. The noun **כְּלָמָה** in 29a is synonymous the noun **בְּשִׁתָּם** in 29b.

Therefore, in verse 29, the suppliant prays for his accusers to be greatly disgraced and ashamed.

To summarize Strophe *F* (verses 27-29), the suppliant prays for his accusers to see and recognise that YHWH has saved him. He is confident of and prays for an unexpected outcome. Though his enemies may curse, YHWH is able to transform that into blessings for him. As God's servant, the suppliant will rejoice while his accusers will be ashamed. The suppliant concludes the strophe, by praying for his accusers to be greatly disgraced and shamed. This final plea also calls for public humiliation and inversion of roles.

#### 5.5.4 Stanza IV (verses 30-31): Praise

Stanza IV consists of a single strophe, G (verses 30-31). The strophe is a vow of individual praise and justification.

##### 5.5.4.1 Strophe G (verses 30-31)

Strophe G (verses 30-31) consists of two bicola.

The **first bicolon (verse 30)** is a vow to praise God. **30a** commences with אֹדְתָהּ (‘‘I will give you thanks’’) which refers to the suppliant’s activity. The verb אֹדְתָהּ is followed by בְּפִי (‘‘with my mouth’’) which is the instrument of praise. The preposition בְּ in בְּפִי is a *beth instrumenti* (see Van der Merwe *et al*, 1997). The phrase בְּפִי is followed by the adverb מְאֹד which means ‘‘exceedingly’’ (Brown *et al*, 1979:547). The adverb מְאֹד shows the measure of thanksgiving the suppliant will give YHWH. The adverb מְאֹד is followed by יְהוָה who is the object of the suppliant’s thanksgiving. Therefore in 30a, the suppliant vows to give praise to YHWH.

**30b** is syndetically linked to 30a by the conjunction וְ. 30b begins with בְּתוֹךְ רַבִּים (‘‘in the midst of many’’) which reveals the context of the suppliant’s thanksgiving and praise to YHWH. The phrase ‘‘in the midst of many’’ seems to indicate that the suppliant will give thanksgiving and praise, in the community gathered for worship. The phrase בְּתוֹךְ רַבִּים is followed by אֶהְלֵלָנּוּ (‘‘I will praise him’’) which refers to the suppliant’s activity. The suppliant is the subject of the verb אֶהְלֵלָנּוּ (‘‘I will praise him’’) and YHWH is the object of the suppliant’s praise.

As far as coherence or semantic relations are concerned, there is a synonymous parallelism BASE-AMPLIFICATION in 30a and 30b. In both cola (30a and 30b), the suppliant vows to give praise to YHWH. The verb אֹדְתָהּ (‘‘I will give you thanks’’) in 30a is synonymous with אֶהְלֵלָנּוּ (‘‘I will praise him’’) in 30b. However, 30b adds the new idea that the suppliant would be in the midst of many when he gives thanksgiving to YHWH. There is also an extended parallelism with a chiasmic pattern (a b b’ a’) in 30a and 30b:

<b>a</b>	I will give thanks to YHWH abundantly ( <i>vow to give thanks</i> )
<b>b</b>	with my mouth ( <i>instrument of praise</i> )
<b>b'</b>	in the midst of the many ( <i>context of praise</i> )
<b>a'</b>	I will praise him ( <i>vow to give praise</i> )

The purpose of the extended parallelism is to highlight or emphasize the main point of verse 30: that the psalmist vows to use his mouth in giving thanksgiving and praise to YHWH in the midst of the community.

The phrase *I will praise him* in 30b forms an inclusion with the phrase *God of my praise* in 1b.

There is also an inversion: the suppliant's affliction by the enemy has been enacted before others (e.g. the suppliant has been accused in court – see verses 2-7). The suppliant has been humiliated (verse 25). Now in verses 29-30, the enemies are to be humiliated and the suppliant, who has been humiliated, can be confident in the gathering of God's people.

In the **last bicolon (verse 31)**, **31a** commences with a conjunction כִּי (“for”) which gives the justification or rationale for the preceding vow of praise in verse 30. The conjunction כִּי is followed by יַעֲמֹד (“he stands”) which refers to the activity of YHWH. The verb יַעֲמֹד is followed by לְיָמִין אֲבִיּוֹן (“at the right hand of the needy”) which denotes the position where YHWH stands as the protector or defender of the psalmist and not as his accuser (Putnam, 1997:467). God protects and delivers his people from the wicked adversaries (VanGemeren, 1991:696). Verse 31a forms an inclusion with verse 1b: in verse 1b, the psalmist asks God to deliver him from his predicament and not be silent or inactive but here in verse 31a, God does not keep silent and is a God of action. His acts of deliverance reveal God as a God of action.

To sum up verse 31a, YHWH stands at the right hand of the needy as their defender and he fights for them.

**31b** begins with לְהוֹשִׁיעַ מִשֹּׁפְטֵי נִפְשׁוֹ (“to save his life from those who condemn him”) which is the reason for YHWH's position at the right hand of the needy. YHWH stands on the right hand of the needy and defends them from their accusers. The participle שֹּׁפֵטִי refers to the activity of the suppliant's accusers. The noun נִפְשׁוֹ (“his life”) refers to the suppliant in his existence, his very person. The enemies condemned the suppliant to death (Anderson, 1972b:767). The RSV and TEV follow this interpretation translating 31b as “to save him from those who condemn him to death.”

The idea that YHWH defends the needy from his accusers in 31a is extended to 31b. 31b gives more information on why YHWH stands at the right hand of the needy. YHWH is at the right hand of the suppliant as his defender and deliverer. The suppliant vows to praise YHWH because he defends and delivers the needy from their accusers.

In short, the suppliant in Strophe G (verses 30-31) vows to use his mouth in giving thanks and praise to YHWH publicly because YHWH always defends and delivers the needy from their accusers. This final strophe also puts the imprecation within the context of God as righteous judge over all mankind and advocate for the aggrieved.

### **5.5.5 Summary of intra-textual analysis**

Psalm 109 commences with an urgent call for deliverance which is directed to YHWH because the enemies have surrounded the suppliant and, inspired by hate, they have made false allegations against him (verses 1-5). The suppliant is convinced that he is innocent of his enemies' charges. Although his enemies have been hostile towards the suppliant for no reason, he responds in love and prayer (verses 4-5). The suppliant calls upon God to punish his enemy severely (verses 6-15).

- Since the enemy has proved himself to be wicked (verses 2-5), the suppliant asks God to appoint a wicked man, the accuser, to legally condemn his enemy (verse 6) (inversion).
- The suppliant asks God for his enemy's attempts to be declared innocent in court and to receive mercy from God to be futile and unsuccessful (verse 7).
- The suppliant prays for his enemy's premature death (verses 8-9), which would reduce his family to a life of destitution where they would be wandering beggars, homeless and without their father's possession (verses 10-11).
- The suppliant prays for his enemy's family to be deprived of the community's kindness and generosity so that they would be reduced to further dependency, indebtedness and destitution (verse 12).
- The suppliant prays for the death of his enemy's descendants (verse 13) and he asks YHWH to remember the sins of his enemy's forefathers (verses 14-15).

The reason for the imprecations is that the suppliant's enemy has not shown kindness to the vulnerable (verse 16a). He has persecuted them (verse 16b) and aimed at bringing about their death (verse 16c). Since the enemy has loved cursing the vulnerable, the suppliant wants the enemy's curse to recoil or backfire upon its originator (verses 17ab; 18ab & 19) (inversion). Since the enemy has not delighted in blessing others, the suppliant wants his enemy to forfeit any blessing (verse 17cd) (inversion). The suppliant asks YHWH to punish his enemies with all the imprecations in verses 6-19.

The suppliant makes an urgent appeal for divine deliverance on the basis of YHWH's name and loving-kindness (verse 21) because he is in distress, anguish, and emotional pain (verse 22). The suppliant is in feeble condition. His strength is gone, his body is weak and helpless (verse 24) and his life is falling away (verse 23). To add salt to the injury, the enemies are aware of the suppliant's feeble condition and they mock and ridicule him in his weakness and frailty (verse 25). Therefore, the suppliant repeats his plea of verse 21, asking for YHWH's loving-kindness. He wants YHWH to save him from his distress on the basis of his loving-kindness (verse 26).

The suppliant is certain that YHWH will answer his plea, so prays that his accusers will see and recognise that YHWH has saved him (verse 27). The suppliant makes a final plea to YHWH. Although his enemies curse, the suppliant is confident that YHWH will bless him. Although the enemies rise against him, the suppliant is certain that YHWH will put his accusers to shame while he rejoices (verse 28). The suppliant prays for his accusers to be greatly disgraced and ashamed. In this final plea the suppliant calls for public humiliation and inversion of roles (verse 29).

The suppliant closes the psalm with a vow to use his mouth in giving thanks and praise to YHWH in the midst of the community because YHWH defends and fights for the needy against their accusers (verses 30-31).

## **5.6 Literary Genre, Historical and Life Setting of Psalm 109**

Psalm 109 could best be described as an individual lament of a person who is being hounded by his enemies (Weiser, 1962:690; Anderson, 1972b:758; Allen, 1983:75; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:936; VanGemeren, 1991:689; Davidson, 1998:358; Gerstenberger, 2001:261), although some scholars (e.g. Mowinckel, 1962a:219; Eaton, 2003:382) regard it as a national psalm of lamentation, where the king or the national leader prays on behalf of his people. Both suggestions are possible, but it seems more likely that Psalm 109 is a prayer of a private individual, perhaps that of an accused man (Weiser, 1962:690; Anderson, 1972b:758; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:936). Structurally, Psalm 109 has elements that are typical of an individual lament. The psalm begins with an urgent plea for deliverance (verse 1b); continues with a complaint (verses 2-5), a petition (verses 6-20) and a second petition (verses 21-29); and closes with a vow to praise and a profession of trust (verses 30-31).

The suppliant in Psalm 109 faces accusers who are bringing false charges against him. The setting may be a religious court where the psalmist claims his innocence before priestly judges as representatives of YHWH (cf. Exod 22:7-8; Deut 17:8-13; 1 Kgs 8:31-32) (see Allen, 1983:75; Davidson, 1998:359).

The date of the psalm is uncertain. Briggs and Briggs (1907:366) argue that the psalm is post-Exilic while Kraus (1978:922) argues that there is nothing in the psalm that would definitely contradict a pre-Exilic date. Anderson (1972b:759) argues that the psalm is more likely post-Exilic because the malediction in the psalm (verses 6-20) is reminiscent of Jeremiah 18:19-23. Allen (1983:76) views Anderson's view as ignoring the presence of traditional language in Psalm 109.

With regards to the cultic setting of the psalm, Anderson (1972b:759) contends that it is unlikely that Psalm 109 was used in the normal worship service (e.g. temple worship). The setting of the psalm "may have been some ritual connected with the obtaining of the divine decision in a serious but complex legal case." Kraus (1989:339) sees Psalm 109 as the prayer of a person threatened by a curse of enemies, probably spoken in the sanctuary. Gerstenberger (2001:262) views Psalm 109 as a prayer that grew out of a special situation involving cursing and sorcery, comparable to the Babylonian series *namburbi* ("untying") which deals with undoing magical spells. The setting of the psalm is the incantation of a sorcery expert to heal or protect a person who claims to be innocent. Healing rituals were held at the home of the sick or persecuted, perhaps at local sanctuaries. Later, prayers like Psalm 109 were drawn into the community of YHWH. The early Jewish community must have continued to offer services for people accused of wrongdoing, modelled on these incantations of a sorcery expert. Psalm 109 was probably used in this fashion (Gerstenberger, 2001:262).

In summary, Psalm 109 is an individual lament of an unjustly accused person. The background of the psalm may be a religious court where the suppliant claims his innocence before priestly judges. The date of the psalm is uncertain. With regards to the cultic setting, scholars have given various suggestions:

- The cultic setting of the psalm may be some ritual connected with obtaining a divine decision in a complex legal case.

- The psalm may be a prayer that grew out of healing rituals where curses and sorcery were removed from the innocent party. The setting of the healing rituals was the home of the sick or the local sanctuaries.

The latter view seems implausible because sorcery was a forbidden practice and liable to punishment in Israel (see Exod 20:7). Therefore, it is highly unlikely that “imprecatory prayers” such as Psalm 109 grew out of contexts where curses and sorcery were removed.

### 5.7 Canonical Context of Psalm 109

Psalm 109 belongs to the fifth book of Psalms (107-150). Book 5 is the last and longest of the five books of the Psalter. Book 5 may be subdivided into the following divisions (see Wilcock, 2001b:145, 168-169, 219-220, 246, 274):

- Psalms 107-110: A further Exodus Psalm (Ps 107) and the third Davidic collection (Ps 108-110)
- Psalms 111-119: Three acrostics (Pss 111, 112, 119) and the first Hallel (or the “Passover or Egyptian Hallel”) (Pss 113-118)
- Psalms 120-134: The Songs of Ascents
- Psalms 135-145: The second Exodus collection (Pss 135-137) and the fourth Davidic collection (Pss 138-145)
- Psalms 146-150: The final Hallel

From the above subdivisions of Book 5 (107-150), it is clear that Psalm 109 belongs to the first subdivision (Psalms 107-110). In the first subdivision, Psalm 109 belongs to the subgroup referred to as “the third Davidic collection” (Psalms 108-110) because the three psalms are headed by the name of David.

Psalm 109 shares common words and themes with Psalms 107, 108 and 110.

#### Common vocabulary shared by Psalms 107 and 109

יָדָה	to give thanks	107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31	109:30
כִּי־טוֹב	for good	107:1, 9	109:21
חֶסֶד	loving-kindness	107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31, 43	109:12, 16, 21, 26
יָד	hand	107:2	109: 27

אָרֶץ	land or earth	107:3, 34, 35	109:15
נַפְשׁ	soul	107:5, 9, 18, 26	109:20, 31
נָצַל	to deliver	107:6	109:21
בֶּן	son(s)	107:8, 15, 21, 31	109:9, 10
אֵל	God	107:11	109:1, 26
לֵב	heart	107:12	109:16
יִשַׁע	to save	107:13, 19	109:26, 31
מַיִם	water	107:23, 33, 35	109:18
יְהוָה	YHWH	107:1, 2, 6, 8, 13, 15, 19, 21, 24, 28, 31	109:14, 20, 21, 26, 27, 30
רָאָה	to see	107:24, 34, 42	109:25
עָמַד	to stand	107:25	109:6, 31
רָעָה	evil	107:26, 39	109:5
קָם	to arise	107:29	109:28
חִפֵּץ	to delight	107:30	109:17
הִלֵּל	to praise	107:32	109:30
עָשָׂה	to do	107:37	109:27
בֵּרַךְ	to bless	107:38	109:28
מְאֹד	much or abundance	107:38	109:30
דְּבַר	word(s) or speech	107:20	109:3
אֲבִיּוֹן	needy	107:41	109:16, 22
עָנִי	afflicted/affliction	107:41	109:16, 22
פֶּה	mouth	107:42	109: 2, 30

### Common vocabulary shared by Psalms 108 and 109

יָדָה	to give thanks	108:4	109:30
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יָמִין	right hand	108:7	109:6, 31
חֶסֶד	loving-kindness	108: 5	109:12, 16, 21, 26
אֶרֶץ	land or earth	108:6	109:15
אל	God	108:2	109:1, 26
לב	heart	108:2	109:16
ישע	to save	108:7, 13	109:26, 31
יהוה	YHWH	108: 4	109:14, 20, 21, 26, 27, 30

### Common vocabulary shared by Psalms 110 and 109

אֲדֹנָי	Lord	110:1, 5	109:21
יָמִין	right hand	110:1, 5	109:6, 31
קִרְבִּי	inward part or in the midst	110:2	109:18
אֶרֶץ	land or earth	110:6	109:15
אַתָּה	You	110:4	109:27
רֹאשׁ	head(s)	110:6, 7	109:25
יהוה	YHWH	110:1, 2, 4	109:14, 20, 21, 26, 27, 30

Thematically, the theme of deliverance is seen in Psalms 107-110 and themes of loving-kindness and thanksgiving are seen in Psalms 107-109.

**Deliverance:** Psalm 107 recounts how God delivered his people from adversity. God delivered his people from hunger and thirst (verses 4-9), prison (verses 10-16), sickness (verses 17-22), perils at sea (verses 23-32), misfortunes on their land (verses 33-38) and calamity (verses 39-42). The theme that God saves his people is also seen in Psalm 108. Psalm 108 is a prayer to God for Israel's deliverance from foreign powers. The psalmist prays for victory and deliverance. The psalmist wants God to deliver Israel with his right hand (verses 6-7). In verses 11-13, the psalmist prays for God's help and he closes the psalm with a confident statement that God will answer his prayer. Psalm 109 is a lament of an individual who has been hounded by enemies and who cries to God for deliverance (verses 1, 21 and 26).

YHWH is seen as the psalmist's deliverer and the one who stands at the right hand of the needy (verse 31). Psalm 110 focuses on the priest-king (i.e. the Messiah – see Matt 22:41-46; Mark 12:35-37; Luke 20:41-44) enthroned by YHWH. The priest-king would sit at the right hand of YHWH. YHWH promises the king-priest victory over his enemies – thus providing deliverance to his people (verses 5-7). YHWH would be at the right hand of the priest-king (verse 5).

**God's loving-kindness:** In Psalm 107, God's deliverance of his people from adversity is based on his loving-kindness (רַחֲמֵי) (see verses 1, 8, 15, 21, 31, 43). In Psalm 108, the psalmist expresses his purpose to praise YHWH because his loving-kindness is so vast that the earth cannot contain it (verse 5). In Psalm 109, the suppliant asks God for his community to deprive his enemy's family of kindness and generosity because their father has not shown loving-kindness to the vulnerable (verses 12 and 16). The suppliant also wants God to urgently deliver him from his distress on the basis of his loving-kindness (verses 21 and 26).

**Thanksgiving:** Psalm 107 commences with the exhortation to give thanks to YHWH (verse 1). It then recounts his acts of deliverance and the psalmist calls upon God's people to respond with thanksgiving. Hence the refrain "let them give thanks to YHWH" is repeated in verses 8, 15, 21 and 31. The theme of thanksgiving also features in Psalm 108 where the psalmist vows to give thanks and sing praises to YHWH among the nations (verse 4). The theme of thanksgiving is also seen in Psalm 109, where the suppliant vows to use his mouth in giving thanks and praise to YHWH publicly in the temple because he always defends and delivers the needy from their accusers.

Therefore, Psalms 107-110 have important philological and thematic links. The theme that runs through this group of psalms is the theme of deliverance: YHWH saves his people from their distresses. YHWH's salvation or deliverance is based on his loving-kindness. The proper response to YHWH's acts of deliverance is thanksgiving. Among these psalms, our imprecatory Psalm 109 provides admonition to the followers of YHWH. The psalm exhorts the listeners/readers to call on YHWH rather than to rely on themselves whenever they are persecuted by their enemies because YHWH is their deliverer, the one who stands at their right hand, who fights for and defends his people against their oppressors. He executes his justice by delivering and vindicating the righteous and punishing the wicked. Therefore, the listeners/readers should continuously trust in YHWH, in the midst of difficulties, false

accusations or persecution, for their deliverance. The canonical context does not warrant any notion that God's people may take revenge into their own hands.

### 5.8 Imprecatory Implications in Psalm 109

The intra-textual analysis of Psalm 109 has shown that the enemies have been hostile and have been making false allegations inspired by hate against the suppliant. The suppliant responds by praying for his enemies (verses 1-5). He appeals for justice before the ultimate Judge, YHWH, in verses 6-20. Since the enemy has proved himself to be wicked (verses 2-5), the suppliant asks YHWH to appoint a wicked man, the accuser, to legally condemn his enemy in court and to ensure that he is found guilty in court (verses 6-7). The enemy is to be found guilty because the suppliant is innocent of all the charges brought against him.

The basis for imprecation (verses 6-20) in this psalm is *lex talionis* (retribution principle) (cf. Exod 21:23-24; Lev 24:19-20; Deut 19:18b-19, 21). In this psalm this *lex talionis* is given the name פִּעֻלָּה which means the reward of sin or punishment or just due or proper payback that God gives to the wicked (see verse 20). The psalmist's imprecations fit the crime of the enemy. The enemy deserves no kindness because he has shown no kindness (verse 12). The enemy and his family deserve to be impecunious (verses 8-11) because he has persecuted the afflicted and needy (verse 16). The enemy deserves to be cursed because he has cursed others (verses 17-19, 28). In summary, the enemy deserves to die (verse 8) because he has persecuted others to their death (verse 16) (McCann, 1996:1126).

In this psalm, the suppliant prays for his enemy to be punished severely, not because he is vindictive, but because the enemy has persecuted the afflicted and needy and has denied them kindness. In the Pentateuch, Israel is exhorted to show kindness and generosity to the disadvantaged such as widows and orphans (Exod 22:23; Deut 24:19-22; 26:12). Those who ill-treated widows and orphans were cursed (Deut 27:19) and were exposed to God's wrath. The punishment for ill-treating the widows and orphans was death by the sword so that the perpetrator's wives would become widows and their children would become fatherless (Exod 22:23-24). Therefore, the suppliant is praying for his enemy to receive the proper punishment that fits his sin (*lex talionis*).

The suppliant's enemies are to get punishment or proper payback (פִּעֻלָּה) from YHWH (verse 20a) which indicates that YHWH is the one who punishes the enemies and not the

suppliant. Although some commentators (e.g. Lewis, 1958:20) see the psalmist in Psalm 109 as endowed with the spirit of vengeance, the psalmist is not vengeful in act or spirit (Motyer, 1994:559). In response to his enemies' hatred and hostility the psalmist's whole being is identified with the exercise of prayer. Thus he does not retaliate but he brings his prayer for justice to God. Vengeance is entrusted to God, and the suppliant is relatively free from its power (Brueggemann, 2007:67). The psalmist submits his prayer to God and leaves vengeance to God (cf. Rom 12:19). It is YHWH who will punish the enemies rather than the suppliant. Even if the psalmist's prayers proved to be blameworthy in word and spirit, his way is preferable to that of the modern day suicide bombers who are driven by hatred and vengeance to bring about the death of many innocent people (Motyer, 1994:559).

The theme of inversion of roles is also seen in Psalm 109. The enemy is to get a dose of his own medicine.

- Since the enemy was a wicked man who was making false allegations against the suppliant (verses 2-5), the suppliant also asks God to appoint a wicked man to legally condemn his enemy (verse 6).
- Since the enemy has not shown kindness to the vulnerable (verse 16), the psalmist prays for his enemy's children and wife to be deprived of community's kindness and generosity (verse 12).
- Since the enemy has aimed at bringing about the death of the vulnerable (verse 16c), the psalmist prays for his enemy's premature death (verses 8-9).
- Since the enemy has loved cursing the vulnerable and afflicted (this also included the suppliant), the suppliant prays that the enemy's curse would back fire upon his enemy (verses 17ab, 18ab & 19).
- Since the enemy has not delighted in blessing others (this includes the suppliant), the suppliant prays that his enemy forfeit any blessing (verse 17cd).
- Since the suppliant is humiliated (verse 25) and his affliction by the enemy has been enacted before others (e.g. the suppliant has been accused in court –see verses 2-7), he prays for his enemies to be humiliated while he, who has been humiliated, can be confident in the gathering of God's people (verses 29-30).

While some commentators (e.g. Kirkpatrick, 1910:652) view Psalm 109 as a departure from the spirit and ideals of the New Testament or the Gospel, the psalmist does not deny the duty of love (see verses 4-5 cf. Lev 19:18). Although his enemies attacked him for no reason, the psalmist prays for them (verses 2-5), which implies love towards his enemies. According to Motyer (1994:559) “verses 4-5 begin and end with an affirmation of his love for his enemies and the present tenses indicate that this love continued through the whole experience of enmity.” The psalmist’s love for the enemy is pursued for a long time (Piper, 2006:222). The enemies resisted the suppliant’s love (verse 5). Still, the psalmist in Psalm 109 does not depart from the principle of love. In other words, the psalmist is shown to be like the New Testament believer, because he loved his enemies and probably prayed for them.

The focus of this psalm is not on personal revenge, but on YHWH's deliverance. In that sense verse 31 is the climax and the point of the whole psalm. The canonical context of Psalm 109, Psalms 107-110, attests that YHWH delivers his people from their adversities (see first theme discussed in 5.7). This thematic context confirms YHWH's deliverance as the main theme.

YHWH's deliverance rests upon his loving-kindness. Repeatedly in the psalm the suppliant falls back on YHWH's חַסֵּד ("loving-kindness") (verse 21 and 26) and the notion that God is good (טוֹב) (verse 21) as the reason why YHWH is to help him. This is set in contrast to man's lack of חַסֵּד (verses 12 and 16). In 5.7 above YHWH's loving kindness was indicated as a second major concept in Psalms 107-109, the canonical context of Psalm 109. In the imprecations, the suppliant is not so much exculpating himself, but rather takes refuge in God's goodness.

God helps as in a court of law. Not only is the suppliant falsely accused as in a lawsuit (verses 1-3), but God will be his advocate at his right hand (verse 31) and be a righteous judge who will see to it that wicked people get their due punishment or payback (verses 6-10). Although the word צְדָקָה ("judgement" or "righteousness") is not used in the psalm, it is essentially an ingredient of the psalm's main theme. YHWH executes his deliverance and goodness through righteousness. Psalm 109 encourages readers/listeners who are being persecuted by the wicked for no good reason, not to despair but to ask YHWH to execute his justice and righteousness. God is concerned with deliverance and restoration of justice (Peels, 2003:97). YHWH is their deliverer, the one who stands at their right hand, who fights for and

defends his people against their oppressors. He executes his justice and loving-kindness by delivering and vindicating the righteous and punishing the wicked (Peels, 2003:97). Therefore, the listeners/readers should continuously trust in YHWH, in the midst of difficulties, false accusations or persecution, for their deliverance and refuge.

The psalm also teaches that evil, injustice and oppression must be confronted, opposed, and hated because God hates them. The followers of YHWH are to embody YHWH's loving-kindness (see verses 12, 16, 21 and 26), and they are to stand with and for the afflicted and needy. God's loving-kindness means judgment upon the victimisers for the sake of the victims – the afflicted and needy.