

The Psalms of Imprecation



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Nine psalms in which the enmity of the world against God and His anointed is carried up to the throne and left there. Each entry gives the psalm's occasion, its theme, and the movements it falls into, so that a household or a congregation can see the whole shape of what it is about to sing.

I · THE ACCUSED SUFFERER *False witness, hatred without cause, the tongue as a weapon*

35 Plead my cause, O LORD

Three cycles of complaint, petition and vow, before the court of heaven.

28 verses · three cycles · Common metre 8.6.8.6

- 1-10 First cycle: the advocate and the soldier**
St. 1 · 1-3 God asked to contend and to arm
St. 2 · 4-6 Chaff before the wind, the angel pursuing
St. 3 · 7-10 The hidden net; the vow of praise
- 11-18 Second cycle: kindness repaid with witness**
St. 4 · 11-14 He had mourned for them as for a brother
St. 5 · 15-18 Their glee at his stumbling; thanks vowed among much people
- 19-28 Third cycle: let them not wink over me**
St. 6 · 19-21 Deceitful mouths against the peaceable
St. 7 · 22-24 Awake, judge me according to thy righteousness
St. 8 · 25-28 Shame on the proud, praise all the day long

69 The zeal of your house has consumed me

Deep mire for God's sake; gall and vinegar; and Zion rebuilt.

36 verses · descent and ascent · Common metre 8.6.8.6

- 1-12 Sinking, and for God's sake**
St. 1 · 1-5 The waters, and the wrong not his own
St. 2 · 6-9 Reproach borne for God's sake
St. 3 · 10-12 Sackcloth become a proverb; the song of drunkards
- 13-21 Prayer out of the pit**
St. 4 · 13-15 Let not the deep swallow me
St. 5 · 16-18 Draw near to my soul and redeem it
St. 6 · 19-21 Reproach broke his heart; gall for meat
- 22-28 The table made a snare**
St. 7 · 22-25 Snare, darkness, desolation
St. 8 · 26-28 Because they persecuted the smitten of God
- 29-36 Praise, and Zion built**
St. 9 · 29-33 Praise pleases God more than an ox
St. 10 · 34-36 Heaven and earth praise; Zion inhabited

109 Do not be silent, O God of my praise

The longest malediction in the Psalter, and Peter's text concerning Judas.

31 verses · four movements · Common metre 8.6.8.6

- 1-5 The accusers open**
St. 1 · 1-3 He asks God not to be silent
St. 2 · 4-5 Love answered with accusation
- 6-20 The sentence sought of God**
St. 3 · 6-10 The man, his office, his household
St. 4 · 11-15 His estate and his memory
St. 5 · 16-20 The ground: he loved the curse
- 21-25 The plea of the poor**
St. 6 · 21-25 Weakness laid before mercy
- 26-31 Judgment turned to praise**
St. 7 · 26-29 That men may know it is God's doing
St. 8 · 30-31 Thanks in the congregation

II · BETRAYAL AND THE WATCHING ENEMY *The friend at the table, the hunters round the house*

55 It was not an enemy that reproached me

The treachery of a familiar friend, and a burden cast on the LORD.

23 verses · three movements · Common metre 8.6.8.6

- 1-8 Anguish and the wish for wings**
St. 1 · 1-5 The complaint: a heart sore pained
St. 2 · 6-8 Oh for the wings of a dove
- 9-15 The familiar friend**
St. 3 · 9-11 Divide their tongues; the city walled with mischief
St. 4 · 12-15 Not an enemy - my equal, my guide
- 16-23 Cast thy burden upon the LORD**
St. 5 · 16-19 Thrice daily prayer; God hears and abases
St. 6 · 20-23 Words smoother than butter; the burden cast

59

They go round about the city like dogs

Two strophes with a refrain: prowling by night, mercy in the morning.

17 verses · twin strophes · Common metre 8.6.8.6

1-10

First strophe: deliver me, and see

St. 1 · 1-5 Defend me; awake to visit the nations

St. 2 · 6-8 The dogs return at evening; God laughs

St. 3 · 9-10 Refrain: my strength, my defence

11-17

Second strophe: scatter them, that they may know

St. 4 · 11-13 Scatter them; let them know God rules in Jacob

St. 5 · 14-15 The dogs again, wandering for meat

St. 6 · 16-17 I will sing of thy mercy in the morning

III · JUDGES CORRUPT, NATIONS CONFEDERATE *Where the prayer is public, and against powers*

58

Do you indeed speak righteousness?

Magistrates arraigned as deaf adders; sentence, then verdict.

11 verses · indictment, sentence, verdict · Common metre 8.6.8.6

1-5

The indictment of the mighty

St. 1 · 1-2 The question put to the bench

St. 2 · 3-5 Poison, and the ear stopped on purpose

6-9

The sentence sought

St. 3 · 6-7 Break their teeth; let them melt away

St. 4 · 8-9 Undone before their power ripens

10-11

The verdict men will speak

St. 5 · 10-11 Verily there is a reward for the righteous

83

Do not keep silent, O God

Ten nations in league, answered by old victories and a prayer that they seek His name.

18 verses · league, precedent, petition · Common metre 8.6.8.6

1-8

The league and its aim

St. 1 · 1-4 The stated purpose of the confederacy

St. 2 · 5-8 The roll-call of the allies

9-12

Precedent: do as thou didst

St. 3 · 9-10 Kishon remembered

St. 4 · 11-12 Their princes, and their boast

13-18

Stubble, storm, and the knowledge of His name

St. 5 · 13-15 Wind, fire and tempest

St. 6 · 16-18 That they may seek thy name

IV · ZION LAID WASTE *The Church in ruins asks how long, and remembers*

79

The nations have come into your inheritance

Temple defiled, Jerusalem in heaps: how long, and remember not.

13 verses · lament, petition, vow · Common metre 8.6.8.6

1-4

The inheritance defiled

St. 1 · 1-2 The nations in the holy place

St. 2 · 3-4 Blood poured out; a reproach to those around

5-12

How long - help us for thy name

St. 3 · 5-7 How long? Pour out on those who know thee not

St. 4 · 8-10 Where is their God? Let the nations know

St. 5 · 11-12 The prisoner's sighing; the reproach returned

13

The vow of the flock

St. 6 · 13 Praise to all generations

137

By the rivers of Babylon

Harps on the willows, an oath to prefer Jerusalem, and Babylon's sentence.

9 verses · exile, oath, sentence · Common metre 8.6.8.6

1-4

Harps on the willows

St. 1 · 1-3 The request of the captors

St. 2 · 4 The refusal

5-6

The oath

St. 3 · 5-6 Jerusalem preferred above my chief joy

7-9

The sentence spoken

St. 4 · 7 Edom remembered

St. 5 · 8-9 Babylon, O daughter appointed to ruin