

Psalm 69:1-18: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Psalm 69 verses 1 to 18. To the choir master, according to lilies, of David. Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold. I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out. My throat is parched. My eyes grow dim, with waiting for my God. More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause. Mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal must I now restore? O God, you know my folly. The wrongs I have done are not hidden from you. Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord God of hosts. Let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel. For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face. I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons. For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me. When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me. But as for me, my prayer is to you, O Lord. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love, answer me in your saving faithfulness. Deliver me from sinking in the mire. Let me be delivered from my enemies, and from the deep waters. Let not the floods sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me. Answer me, O Lord, for your steadfast love is good. According to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

Hide not your face from your servant, for I am in distress. Make haste to answer me. Draw near to my soul. Redeem me. Ransom me because of my enemies. Psalm 69 is one of the longest of the psalms calling for deliverance, and it is one of the psalms that is more explicitly related to Christ in the New Testament. It shares several features in common with another such psalm in Psalm 22. It is a psalm of one who is suffering for righteousness' sake, calling upon God to vindicate him against his oppressors.

Marvin Tate observes a doubling arrangement of parallel elements in verses 2-14 and verses 14-30. The precise situation of the psalmist is not made clear to us. However, like other such scriptures, in its vagueness, it invites the hearer to figure his or her situation of distress into its words.

Beth Tanner suggests that the opening line, Save me, O God, for the waters have come up to my neck, might function as an inclusio, or bookend statement, with the statement of verse 29, But I am afflicted and in pain. Let your salvation, O God, set me on high.

The imagery is of one about to be overwhelmed by the waters of his troubles. He can't find secure footing. The waters continue to rise and threaten completely to submerge him. He is crying out for deliverance, scanning the horizon for anyone to come to help, but his throat is now hoarse and his eyes are sore. God doesn't seem to be coming to his rescue. Besides the troubles that surround him, he might feel that he has been abandoned by God. Yet while he scans the heavens for signs of the Lord's deliverance, his enemies are gathering in their multitudes, compounding his distress.

[3 : 4 0] He is hated without cause, condemned for wrongs he never committed. Our Lord relates these words to himself in John chapter 15 verses 24-25. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin.

But now they have seen and hated both me and my father. But the word that is written in their law must be fulfilled. They hated me without a cause. The psalmist is calling for vindication from the hostile and unjust accusations of his enemies, but he is not pretending that he is perfectly innocent.

However, he has been open with the Lord concerning the ways in which he has acted foolishly and concerning his sins in the past. He isn't hiding anything. The psalmist is keenly aware of the ways in which the wider community of the righteous might be dismayed by his plight. Here is a righteous man suffering at the hands of unrighteous men, and not for his own faults. He is bearing shame and reproach, not because of his sins, but because of his faithfulness to the Lord. He suffers ostracization and rejection from those nearest and dearest to him. The zeal for God's house that drives him is probably broader in its meaning than merely the temple. The temple is the condensed image of Israel as a house, but concern for the house must be bound up with concern for the nation and its spiritual state more generally. The taunts that are cast at him are taunts directed at the Lord himself.

They mock him by mocking the God of Israel. As Tanner observes, there is a progression. Each verse further describes the alienation. Home, verse 8. Temple, verse 9. Religious ritual, verses 10-11, and the city gate, in verse 12. It has gotten so bad that she is the subject of songs made up by drunken revellers, in verse 12. The enemies are in all the spheres of life. There is nowhere to turn for comfort. Everyone, family, friends, and the community, all have either deserted this one, or actively make fun of her. This one's commitment to God has cost everything.

Once again, these words are related to Christ in John chapter 2, verses 13-17. When Jesus purges the temple in that chapter, his disciples recall this particular passage, Zeal for your house will consume me. Reading the plight of the sufferer of these verses should bring to mind several characters from scripture, the suffering servant of Isaiah's prophecy most notable among them, Jeremiah and Job also. Like them, he is unjustly accused. He is consumed with concern for the spiritual well-being of the people and the holiness of the Lord's house, but he finds himself increasingly alone and rejected as a result. He calls to the Lord again to come to his aid, appealing to God's steadfast love and saving faithfulness. God has committed himself to his righteous people by promise, and with the doggedness of his insistent faith, the psalmist draws assurance from this. In verses 14-15, we might see a return to the themes of verse 2, paralleling the two sections together. Once more, the psalmist describes his situation of sinking in deep mire, surrounding by enemies and rising waters, at the point of being overwhelmed and near to being submerged beyond remembrance. Persistent in his petition, he calls upon the Lord on account of his steadfast love and his abundant mercy. In the midst of his struggle, it is in the character of the Lord that he finds comfort and assurance. He may not see the Lord's face, but he is nonetheless confident of his favour and goodness. In the words of the great hymn writer, William Cooper,

[7:19] Judge not the Lord by feeble sense, but trust him for his grace. Behind a frowning providence, he hides a smiling face. A question to consider. In verse 5, the psalmist declares, O God, you know my folly, the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you. How can such confession stand alongside confident pleas for deliverance and vindication as a righteous man? How might the psalmist's example inspire us to pray with more confidence, even as flawed and sinful persons, for God to vindicate us against our adversaries?