

## INTERPRETING THE CURSES IN THE PSALMS

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Imprecations or curses in the Psalms are not confined to the familiar imprecatory psalms of 35, 58, 69, 83, 109 and 137. The last two psalms are especially known for their harsh language, which calls for the destruction of the children of the psalmists' enemies. The phenomenon of psalmic imprecations is further complicated by the use of some of these psalms as Scriptural witnesses in the NT. Previous studies have not given adequate attention to the Biblical basis of these imprecations and the similarity of their language to the other parts of the OT, especially the prophetic writings. Through examining the prophetic role of the psalmists, the imprecatory parallels in prophetic speeches, and the prior Scriptural bases of the psalmic imprecations, this study will suggest that it is best to consider the imprecations as prophetic judgment proclamations, and that in light of this consideration a proper understanding of the psalmic curses themselves and their contemporary implications for Christians may be attained.

### I. APPROACHES TO PSALMIC IMPRECATIONS

In this study, the term "imprecatory psalm" does not suggest a genre but refers to a psalm that contains one or more verses of imprecation. The imprecations are basically the psalmists' call or wish for divine punishments on the enemies. They are generally expressed in the form of a jussive statement (as in 55:15, "Let death come upon them!"), sometimes in the form of an imperative (as in 59:11, "Make them totter by your power, and bring them down!"), or a mix of the two, as in Psalm 109, which begins with an imperative and then continues with jussives: "Appoint a wicked man over him! . . . Let his days be few; let another take his office. Let his children be orphans, and his wife a widow" (vv. 6–9).

Chalmers Martin suggests that there are only 18 psalms that "contain any element of imprecation" in the Psalms.<sup>1</sup> But his calculation is too conservative. On the other hand, R. M. Benson lists 39 psalms in the category of what he labels as "comminatory" psalms, but some of these psalms do not contain imprecations in the jussive or imperative mode.<sup>2</sup> When we survey all the statements or the so-called "wishes" against the enemies or evildoers in the

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<sup>1</sup> Chalmers Martin, "Imprecations in the Psalms," *Classical Evangelical Essays in Old Testament Interpretation* (ed. by Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1972) 113.

<sup>2</sup> Of the 39 psalms listed, 17 are futuristic than imprecatory, see R. M. Benson, *War Songs of the Prince of Peace* (London, 1901), quoted in John W. Wenham, *The Goodness of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1974) 149, n. 2. Willem A. VanGemeren lists 24 psalms, but 6 of these do not contain

Psalms, based on their use of the jussive or the imperative form and not on the degree of harshness in language, there are 28 psalms that contain one or more verses of imprecation.<sup>3</sup> The elements of punishment called for in the imprecations may include shame, physical infliction, death, misfortune for family members, and unspecified retributive punishment (see Table 1 at the end of this article, “Imprecations and Their Dominant Elements” for further details on all these 28 psalms).

Before discussing the approaches that are directly relevant to our purposes, a word of clarification is needed on two closely related issues that have gained attention in the current studies of psalmic imprecations. One concerns the interpretation that considers the imprecations in Psalm 109 as the words of psalmist’s enemies, so their harshness, and not as the words of the psalmist. The strongest evidence supporting this view is the shift of pronouns between v. 5 (“they”) and vv. 6–19 (“he”), a shift regarded as confirmed by v. 20, where the psalmist asks God to return on his “accusers” the evils spoken in vv. 6–19 by them.<sup>4</sup> Those who reject this interpretation argue that the text lacks any indicator (a word such as “saying”) in v. 6 to support such a change of speaker, and that in view of the harshness of the imprecations, the psalmist would have clearly indicated the shift if those were not his words.<sup>5</sup> Even if the imprecations in vv. 6–19 are from the enemies, the problem of harshness is not lessened, because in v. 20 the psalmist turns around and wishes the same

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the jussive or imperative mode: 3:7; 6:10; 7:14–16; 37:2, 9–10, 15, 20, 35–36; 63:9–11; 64:7–9 (“Psalms,” in *Expositor’s Bible Commentary* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991] 5.832). The translation of the verbs in 3:7 is uncertain because they are in Hebrew perfects, and the other five passages are futuristic. I have assigned these passages to the category of judgment predictions on the fate of the enemies (see Table 2).

<sup>3</sup> I have included Ps 54:5 by following יִשׁוּב *yāšōb* (a jussive, the *ketib* in the MT), which is supported by the Targum (יִתּוּב *ytwb*), as correctly reflected in NIV: “Let evil recoil.” Some have followed the *qere* (יִשְׁיב *yāšīb*) of the MT and the LXX (ἀποστρέψαι) to read it as “he will bring” (e.g. NRSV), but this reading ignores the parallel force of the imperative (הַשְׁמִיט *hasmīt* “destroy!”) in the second stich of the verse. For the following reasons, I have not included the passages of 11:6; 36:11; and 45:5 in the list. Though the verb יַמְטֵר *yamṭēr* in 11:6 is in the short form and its long form יַמְטִיר *yamṭir* does occur (e.g. Ezek 38:22), I agree with Keil and Delitzsch (*Psalms* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973] 189) that because of its particular context the verb need not be treated as jussive (so “he will rain”; same in NIV and NRSV). Though in jussive, Ps 36:11 is only the psalmist’s wish not to be overwhelmed by the enemies. For Ps 45:5, NIV’s “Let your sharp arrow pierce . . . enemies” is problematic because no verb for “pierce” exists in the Hebrew text to support the jussive rendering.

<sup>4</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Psalms 60–150* (trans. H. C. Oswald; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989) 338; Leslie C. Allen, *Psalms 101–150* (WBC; Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 72–73; C. M. Cherian, “Attitude to Enemies in the Psalms,” *Biblehashyam* 8 (1982) 115. See also a recent expression of this view in Thijs Booi, “Psalm 109:6–19 as a Quotation: A Review of Evidence,” *Give Ear to My Words: Psalms and Other Poetry in and Around the Hebrew Bible* (ed. Janet Dyk; Amsterdam: Kok Pharos, 1996) 91–106.

<sup>5</sup> A. A. Anderson, *The Book of Psalms* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 2:758; Martin J. Ward, “Psalm 109: David’s Poem of Vengeance,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 18 (1980) 164; J. Carl Laney, “A Fresh Look at the Imprecatory Psalms,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 138 (1981) 37–38. Derek Kidner points out that taking vv. 6–19 as the enemies’ words would make Peter’s quoting of v. 8 of this psalm in reference to Judas in Acts 1:16 “very forced” (*Psalms 73–150* [London: IVP, 1975] 389). Oscillation between the singular and the plural also occurs in some psalms but implies no change of speaker. In Psalm 55, vv. 9–11 point to the psalmist’s “enemies” while vv. 13–14 to a “foe”; vv. 15, 19, 23 “they,” but vv. 20–21 “he.” In Psalm 143, “an enemy” (v. 3) pursued the psalmist, but in vv. 9–12, he asks God to save him from his “enemies.”

things on his enemies: "May this be the Lord's payment to my accusers." Moreover, the quotation approach explains only Psalm 109 and not the imprecation phenomenon of the Psalms as a whole. Commentators will still face the challenge of interpreting the harsh language of the other imprecatory psalms.

Another issue concerns the context of the imprecations being a prayer of lament, a context sometimes overemphasized by commentators in explaining the harshness of the utterances. They point out that the curses may not be as offensive as they appear if the reader keeps in mind that they are private expressions before God and not direct verbal attacks on the opponents. As Erich Zenger points out, the fact that these psalms are poetic prayers "distinguishes them from insistent complaint and propagandistic rhetoric."<sup>6</sup> Though an appeal to the context of the imprecations as prayer is important, it does not constitute a strong argument to justify the overall phenomenon of the psalmic imprecations. First, not all the imprecations appear in prayers: Psalm 68 and Psalm 104 are hymns, Psalm 119 a wisdom psalm, and Psalm 11 and Psalm 129 trust psalms. Second, imprecation is not an indispensable part of a lament prayer, even though it is often analyzed as part of this psalmic genre.<sup>7</sup> There are at least 60 psalms that can be classified as laments, but less than half of them contain any curses; though many laments reflect extreme pains, the psalmists do not invoke imprecations.

In surveying literature on the subject, there are only three approaches directly relevant to the whole issue of interpretation of psalmic imprecations.<sup>8</sup> First, a number of commentators have considered the imprecations as merely the psalmist's own sentiments before God. The strength of this approach is that it takes seriously the harsh language of the imprecations. It suggests that these are personal expressions and are not to be treated as inspired words seen in the other psalms or in the other parts of the same psalm. They are utterances of a psalmist who faces extreme pains and evils, spoken either out of his own frail human nature or out of the limited perspective of the OT. As Peter C. Craigie suggests, these "expressions of vindictiveness and hatred" cannot be "purified" simply because they are in Scripture, and they are the psalmist's "natural reactions" to evil and pain, and "the sentiments are in themselves evil."<sup>9</sup> The

<sup>6</sup> Erich Zenger, *A God of Vengeance? Understanding the Psalms of Divine Wrath* (trans. L. M. Maloney; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1994) 78.

<sup>7</sup> See a discussion of imprecation as part of the lament genre in Claus Westermann, *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 52–54, and Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988) 27–28.

<sup>8</sup> One other possible approach that I have not included is the interpretation of the "enemies" as spiritual forces and not humans, but this approach is hardly convincing. This view may be seen in a recent work by Fredrik Lindström, *Interpretations of Illness in the Individual Complaint Psalms* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 1994), but the work is criticized for its flawed methodology by Michael L. Barré (*Critical Review of Books in Religion 1996* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1997] 156–158). See also a critique of any mythicizing or spiritizing of the "enemies" in Zenger, *A God of Vengeance* 74–75. That Sigmund Mowinckel can truly be considered a proponent of this view, as suggested by Laney ("A Fresh Look" 39), is uncertain, since Mowinckel often interprets the enemies in these psalms as human beings (*The Psalms in Israel's Worship* [New York: Abingdon, 1962] 2.7, 49, 51–52).

<sup>9</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *Psalms 1–50* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 41. Similarly, C. S. Lewis holds that their presence in the Bible does not make them "good and pious," and that "the reaction of the Psalmists to injury, though profoundly natural, is profoundly wrong" (*Reflections on the Psalms* [London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958] 22, 25).

sentiments may also be understood as a product of the limited perspective of the psalmist being an OT believer. William L. Holladay points out that the imprecations exhibit “a very different spirit” from the one set forth in the NT, partly because the OT understands the human nature as “the undivided self,” and the psalmists are “wrong about the location of evil,” not distinguishing the sinner from sin.<sup>10</sup>

The challenge, however, that this view faces is the use of some of these psalms in the NT, the presence of the NT imprecations, and the OT teaching of loving one’s enemies. The NT quotes from Psalm 35, Psalm 69 and Psalm 109, psalms which contain some of the harshest language of imprecation. In addition, Jesus uses an expression somewhat similar to Ps 137:9 when he rebukes Jerusalem, saying that the enemies “will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls” (Luke 19:44). In judging the Corinthian offender, Paul says, “Hand this man over to Satan” (1 Cor 5:5; cf. Ps 109:6).<sup>11</sup> As to the perspective of the OT, loving one’s enemies is taught in Exod 23:4–5 and Prov 25:21, and God’s people are called to live a life reflecting God, who abounds in “compassion, love, and forgiveness” (Exod 34:6–7). While the OT teaches God’s compassion and love for one’s enemies, nowhere does the OT judge these imprecations as unacceptable. All this suggests that viewing the imprecations as merely the psalmists’ own sentiments ultimately has to rely more on the interpreter’s own judgment of the imprecatory language than on Scriptural judgment.

A second approach is to see the imprecations as prophetic predictions, and thus as divine announcements and not personal sentiments. This approach finds support in the use of some of these psalms by the NT as prefiguring the life of Christ and in the role of David being called “a prophet” in Acts 2:30 (see also 4:25). In commenting on Psalm 109, Augustine calls the imprecations in the psalm “predictions,” which are in “the mode of predicting the future, under the appearance of wishing evil.”<sup>12</sup> C. H. Spurgeon also considers the curses in this psalm “predicting the future,” being a “mirror of warning” to Christ’s enemies.<sup>13</sup> Herbert Lockyer suggests that “it is better to consider them not as imprecations but as predictions” of the wicked.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, medieval Jewish commentator Yefet ben Ali interprets this psalm to be a prediction of the Karaite-Rabbanite conflict in his time and the imprecations are against the Karaites’ opponents.<sup>15</sup> An important insight of this prediction approach is that it recognizes the prophetic nature of the

<sup>10</sup> William L. Holladay, *Long Ago God Spoke: How Christians May Hear the Old Testament Today* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1995) 302, 308. Somewhat similarly, W. Graham Scroggie, *The Psalms* (London: Pickering & Inglis, 1950) 77–79.

<sup>11</sup> See also other references to NT imprecations in Kidner, *Psalms 73–150* 31; Wenham, *The Goodness of God* 154–157; E. Calvin Beisner, *Psalms of Promise* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988) 171–176.

<sup>12</sup> St. Augustine, *Expositions on the Book of Psalms* (trans. H. M. Wilkins; London: Oxford, 1853) 5.213.

<sup>13</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Pasadena, TX: Pilgrim, repr. 1983) 168, 174.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert Lockyer, Jr., *Psalms: A Devotional Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1993) 446–447.

<sup>15</sup> Uriel Simon, *Four Approaches to the Book of Psalms: From Saadia Gaon to Abraham Ibn Ezra* (trans. L. J. Schramm; Albany: State University of New York, 1991) 94–95.

Psalms, a recognition which has recently gained attention in Psalms studies, a point to which we will return. But a major weakness of this approach lies in not giving sufficient explanation to the dominant use of the jussives (and imperatives) in the imprecations. Though uncertainty sometimes exists in the interpretation of a Hebrew imperfect, the presence of a jussive in a speech becomes quite certain when the short form of the imperfect is used or when it is parallel to an imperative. For example, in Ps 109:13, “Let his posterity be (יהי *yēhi*, not יהיה *yihyeh* “will be”) cut off, let their name be blotted out (ימח *yimmaḥ*, not ימחה *yimmaḥeh* “will be blotted out”).<sup>16</sup> The jussive language in the imprecations cannot be bypassed lightly.

Appealing to the covenant as the basis for the psalmic curses is the third approach. An obvious strength of this approach is that it identifies the connection between the imprecations and a prior Biblical framework which provides them a basis. J. Carl Laney suggests that the covenantal basis provided by the Abrahamic covenant is the “fundamental ground on which one may justify the imprecations in the Psalms,” and that David “had a perfect right, as the representative of the nation” to pronounce the curses on Israel’s enemies.<sup>17</sup> But Laney does not explain on what basis the other psalmists, without being king like David, may justify their imprecations. Commenting on Psalm 109, E. Calvin Beisner argues that the curses are justified because the enemies are “covenant breakers.”<sup>18</sup> Allan M. Harman’s recent study further investigates this covenantal basis, covering both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants. Harman argues that the imprecations are “covenant curses incorporated into the hymnology of Israel” and that a number of the imprecatory psalms employ covenantal terminology and structure. He uses Psalm 5 and Psalm 109 as important evidence. But for Psalm 137, unlike the other two, he justifies the imprecations on the basis of two prior prophetic texts (Hos 13:16, Isa 13:16).<sup>19</sup> His analyses are insightful but are supported through only a few selected psalms, and for Psalm 137, he does not follow through with his covenantal analysis.

Though the covenant idea provides an important Biblical basis for the imprecations, it merely serves as a general framework. Its relevance is obvious when we deal with the curses on Israel’s national enemies, but many imprecations are against the people of the psalmists’ own circle. In addition, explicit appeals to covenants for the curses are lacking from the psalms themselves. First, though “covenant” is used 24 times in the Psalms, except in

<sup>16</sup> Note also in this example, Psalm 109 begins the whole imprecatory section (vv. 6–19) with an imperative (הפקד *hapqēd* “appoint”), signaling the subsequent imperfects to be jussives. The jussives are reflected rather consistently in the renderings by the LXX into either optatives or imperatives.

<sup>17</sup> Laney, “A Fresh Look” 41–42.

<sup>18</sup> Beisner, *Psalms of Promise* 168.

<sup>19</sup> Harman shows that in Psalm 5, God is addressed as “my King and my God” (v. 2) and by his covenant name (vv. 6, 12), and following the covenantal structure, the psalm begins with the relationship between God and his people, then the law of God (vv. 4–6), and blessings and curses (vv. 7–10). He also points out the blessings and curses to be an important feature of Psalm 109 (“The Continuity of the Covenant Curses in the Imprecations of the Psalms,” *RTR* 54/2 [1995] 66–67, 72).

two cases, the term does not occur in any of the imprecatory psalms. But even in these two cases, they are human covenants and not divine covenants: Ps 55:21 refers to the covenant made between the psalmist and his companion who turned enemy, and Ps 83:6 refers to the enemies' making a covenant in opposition to God. To examine the Biblical basis of the imprecations, we must look beyond the general teaching of the covenants. Second, the curses in the Pentateuchal covenants are presented either in the forms of "I will," "you will" and "they will" (Gen 12:2; Lev 26:13–44; Deut 29:20–23; 30:1–20; 31:16–18; 32:20–43) or in the form of "cursed is (are)" (Deut 27:13–26; 28:15–19, 45, see also Gen 27:29; 49:7). They are not exactly in the jussive and imperative forms that we see in the psalmic imprecations. Direct parallels for the psalmic language must be sought beyond the general framework of covenants, as will be discussed later.

## II. PSALMIC IMPRECATION AS PROPHETIC JUDGMENT

An analysis of the imprecatory psalms suggests that in interpreting the curses we must take into account the prophetic nature of the Psalms, the language of the imprecations, and their Scriptural bases. As the following will show, the language and the content of these imprecations are not very different from the direct or indirect judgment speeches of the prophets as seen elsewhere in the OT. This proposed approach, imprecation as prophetic judgment, will be supported by observations involving three areas: First, the prophetic role of the psalmists; second, the imprecatory parallels in prophetic speeches outside of the Psalms, and lastly, the prior Biblical bases of the imprecations.

1. *The Prophetic Role of the Psalmists.* In this section, we will examine the prophetic role of the psalmists and their judgment speeches in relation to our proposed understanding of imprecation as prophetic judgment. Being writers of psalms does not mean that the psalmists cannot be prophets. From Abraham and Moses to the post-exilic prophets, we have witnessed the prophetic message presented in a variety of genres: not only oracles of salvation or judgment, visions, and parables, but also hymns, prayers, and laments.<sup>20</sup> Any approach that compartmentalizes the prophetic speeches and the psalms into two very distinct genres imposes arbitrary patterns on these biblical texts. The prophetic nature of the psalms and their parallel to the prophetic writings have received some significant attention in recent Psalms studies. As Raymond J. Tournay observes, the "prophetic dimension" of the canonical Psalter has too often been neglected in modern Psalms studies, a dimension long recognized by the Judeo-Christian tradition. For example, on Ps 14:1, the Targum interprets that David the psalmist is "in the spirit of prophecy," and on 46:1, the same description is used to describe the sons of Korah. The *Midrash Tehillim* points out that in Ps 45:2 "the sons

<sup>20</sup> See additional genres of the prophetic speeches in J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976) 155–156.

of Korah predicted the future.”<sup>21</sup> Among the Dead Sea Scrolls, 11QPs acknowledges that David in composing the many psalms “uttered through prophecy which was given him from before the Most High.”<sup>22</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the prophetic role of the psalmists is recognized by the NT. Not only David is called “prophet” in the NT, but many psalms, including some imprecatory psalms, are interpreted as prophetic speeches concerning the life and work of Christ (e.g. Ps 41:9 in John 13:18 and Matt 26:23–24; Ps 35:19 in John 15:25) and concerning those opposed to him (e.g. Ps 109:8 in Acts 1:20; see also Tables 1 and 2). Within the OT itself, David characterizes himself in a manner similar to many prophets, saying that “the Spirit of the Lord spoke through me” (2 Sam 23:2; cf. 1 Chr 22:8; 28:6), and “the hand of the Lord was upon me” (1 Chr 28:19). He is called “the man of God” (Neh 12:24, 36), a familiar description for a prophet. Other psalmists, Asaph, Heman and Jeduthun are also servants of God who “prophesied” (1 Chr 25:2, 5).<sup>23</sup>

The prophetic role of the psalmists is recognized not only by the NT and OT writings other than the Psalms but is evident from the Psalms themselves. One important proof of their prophetic function is their role of delivering divine oracles, an act common to the prophets. There are 15 psalms containing one or more oracles of God, and among these psalms, Psalm 89 contains the longest oracle (vv. 3–4, 19–37) and Psalm 90 the shortest (where in v. 3 God says “Turn back, you mortals”).<sup>24</sup> The oracles are frequently introduced in a way similar to prophetic speeches, such as “says the Lord” (12:5; 110:1), “God says” (50:16), and “God spoke” (60:6).

In light of the psalmists’ prophetic role, the judgment predictions in form of prophetic utterances provide a helpful comparison with the imprecations. The term “judgment prediction” is used here to cover broadly the psalmists’

<sup>21</sup> Raymond J. Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God with the Psalms: The Prophetic Liturgy of the Second Temple in Jerusalem* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991) 31–32. See also Amos Chakam, *Sepher Tehillim* (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986) 13–15; W. H. Bellinger, Jr., *Psalmody and Prophecy* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 9–21; Walter Houston, “David, Asaph and the Mighty Works of God: Theme and Genre in the Psalm Collections,” *JSOT* 68 (1995) 101–102. On the relation between the Psalms and the prophetic writings, see e.g. Graham S. Ogden, “Prophetic Oracles Against the Nations and Psalms of Communal Lament: The Relationship of Psalm 137 to Jeremiah 49:7–22 and Obadiah,” *JSOT* 24 (1982) 89–97, and Bernard Gosse, “Le Psaume 83, Isaïe 62, 6–7 et la tradition des Oracles contre les Nations des livres d’Isaïe et d’Ezéchiel,” *BN* 70 (1993) 9–12.

<sup>22</sup> For an additional discussion on the prophetic nature of the Psalms in the Qumran and early rabbinic writings, see S. E. Gillingham, *The Poems and the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994) 261–264.

<sup>23</sup> Simon, *Four Approaches* 187; Wilf Hildebrandt, *An Old Testament Theology of the Spirit of God* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995) 173. See also Keil and Delitzsch, *Psalms* 75, 419; Tournay, *Seeing and Hearing God* 67–68.

<sup>24</sup> The divine oracles in the 15 psalms are 2:6–9; 12:5; 46:10; 50:5–23; 60:6–8; 68:22–23; 81:6–16; 82:2–7; 89:3–4, 19–37; 90:3; 91:14–16; 95:8–11; 105:15; 110:1, 4; and 132:11–18. Of these 15 psalms, 4 psalms are assigned to David (if including Psalm 2), 3 to Asaph, 1 to Moses, 1 to Sons of Korah, and 1 to Ethan the Ezrahite. Most of the oracles contain God’s words of blessing. As for the oracles of judgment and the elements of punishment similar to that of the imprecations, see Table 2. See also Gillingham, *The Poems and the Psalms* 226–230, and A. A. Anderson, “Psalms,” *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture* (ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 56–59.

futuristic statements concerning the destiny of the wicked, whether stated in form of a divine oracle or from the psalmist's confident perspective. For example, "his enemies I [God] will clothe with disgrace" (132:18) or "all my [the psalmist's] enemies will be ashamed" (6:10). There are at least 27 psalms that contain this type of judgment prediction. Though the punishments called for in the imprecatory psalms seem severe, they are not very different from those we see in the judgment predictions on the fate of the enemies or evildoers in the Psalms. The elements of punishment we have seen in the imprecations also occur in the judgment predictions, including shame, physical infliction, death, misfortune for family members, and unspecified retributive punishment (see the enclosed Table 2, "Judgment Predictions on Enemies and Dominant Elements"). A few examples of their parallels may illustrate this point:

- 1) Pour out Your indignation upon them,  
and let Your burning anger overtake them.  
May their camp be a desolation;  
let no one live in their tents (69:24–25, imprecation).  
The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath,  
and fire will consume them.  
You will destroy their descendants from the earth,  
and their children from humankind (21:9–10, judgment prediction).
- 2) Let sinners vanish from the earth,  
and let the wicked be no more (104:35, imprecation).  
The wicked will perish, and the enemies of the LORD . . . like smoke will  
vanish away (37:20, judgment prediction).
- 3) Let the net that they hid ensnare them;  
let them fall into their own destruction (35:8, imprecation).  
Their mischief will return on their own heads,  
and on their heads their violence descends (7:16, judgment prediction).
- 4) Let the wicked be put to shame;  
let them go dumbfounded to Sheol (31:17, imprecation).  
My enemies shall turn back,  
and in a moment be put to shame (6:10, judgment prediction).

In light of the psalmists' prophetic role, the similarity between these two types of statements suggests that we should not place a sharp distinction in function between the imprecations and the judgment predictions. This observation is reinforced by the instances where an imprecation and a judgment prediction occur in the same context, with one echoing and affirming the other, showing that the imprecations are an important part of the psalmists' overall proclamation:

- 1) Repay them according to their work (28:4, imprecation).  
God will break them down and build them up no more (v. 5, judgment prediction).
- 2) Let his enemies be scattered . . .  
let the wicked perish before God (68:1–2, imprecation).  
God will shatter the heads of his enemies (v. 21, judgment prediction).
- 3) Let death take them by surprise;  
let them go down alive to Sheol (55:15, imprecation).

You [God] will cast them down into the lowest pit (v. 23, judgment prediction).

In addition, in Psalm 109, the lengthy section of imprecations (vv. 6–19) is echoed by a proclamation, “My accusers will be clothed with disgrace and wrapped in their own shame” (v. 29).<sup>25</sup> In Psalm 12, the curse on the oppressors “May the Lord cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that speaks great boasts” (v. 3) is echoed by God’s affirmation, “Because the poor are despoiled . . . , says the LORD, I will. . . .” (v. 5). In short, the severity of the imprecations is not very different from the judgment predictions. In light of the prophetic role of the psalmists and their similarity and relation to the predictions, psalmic imprecations should be considered a form of prophetic judgment proclamations, a consideration supported by the parallels from the prophetic speeches outside the Psalms and the prior Biblical bases of the imprecations in the subsequent discussions.

*2. Imprecatory Parallels in Prophetic Speeches.* Since the challenge of the psalmic curses has much to do with the so-called “wish” language, to support the idea of imprecation as prophetic judgment, important evidence must come from direct parallels, especially in language, from the prophetic speeches outside the Psalms.<sup>26</sup> To correspond to what can be seen in the Psalms, the parallels from the other parts of the OT will be discussed in two groups, those in contexts where God is addressed in the second person and those where he is not.<sup>27</sup>

Early parallels in contexts where God is addressed in the second person may include Moses’ proclamation whenever the ark procession begins, “O LORD, let your enemies be scattered, and your foes flee before you” (Num 10:35), and the prophetess Deborah’s call, “Let all your enemies perish, O LORD” (Judg 5:31). Among the prophetic writings, Isaiah’s apocalyptic song in chap. 26 contains an imprecation in the midst of praising God for his ultimate victory and his punishment on the wicked: “O LORD . . . let them see your zeal for your people, and be ashamed; let your fire for enemies consume them” (Isa 26:11). The confessions or laments of Jeremiah provide some notable parallels. In Jer 11:20, the prophet cries out to God when facing possible death from those who seek his life: “O LORD of hosts . . . let me see your

<sup>25</sup> Though uncertainty exists, NRSV’s rendering of this verse as jussive (“May my accusers be. . . .”) is less convincing than NIV’s futuristic translation. The futuristic force is supported by the immediate context (v. 28 and v. 30). In v. 28, “they will curse” is favored over “let them curse” because of its being parallel to “you will bless,” supported by the parallel of “they” (הֵמָּה *hēmmā*) and “you” (אַתָּה *attā*); in v. 30, the tense is clearly futuristic (“I will”).

<sup>26</sup> Though listing only several parallels from the prophetic writings, Wenham regards the use of a similar imprecatory language as an important point for understanding the psalmic curses (*The Goodness of God* 150–153).

<sup>27</sup> As indicated earlier, not all of the imprecations occur in prayers. In addition, even in prayers, seven imprecations appear in an immediate context where God is not addressed in the second person but in the third person, e.g. the imprecation of Ps 55:15 in the context of vv. 12–19. The other six psalms, with the immediate context in parentheses, are Ps 12:3 (vv. 4–6), Ps 54:5 (vv. 3–4), Ps 68:1–2 (whole psalm), Ps 104:35 (vv. 31–35), Ps 119:78 (whole psalm), and Ps 129:5–8 (whole psalm).

vengeance upon them!" His cry is immediately followed by God's own proclamation of judgment on these enemies, which includes punishment on their children: "Thus says the Lord of hosts, I am going to punish them; the young men shall die by the sword; their sons and their daughters shall die by famine" (vv. 21–22). God's response to Jeremiah's cry makes difficult any attempt to view the prophet's imprecation as merely his own vindictive utterance.<sup>28</sup> In Jer 17:18, we encounter another imprecation, "Let those who persecute me be put to shame . . . Let them be dismayed. Bring on them the day of disaster, and crush them with double destruction!" In addition, the call for punishment on the enemies in Jer 18:21, in a language quite similar to the imprecations of Psalm 109, deserves special attention: "Give their children over to famine, and deliver them over to the power of the sword. Let their wives become childless and widowed; let their men be smitten to death, and their young men slain by the sword in battle."

Because of the prophet's personal sufferings and the resemblance of his laments to the psalmic laments, it appears to be an exercise of circular reasoning to use the Jeremian parallels to shed light on the imprecatory psalms. But the Jeremian parallels can actually provide an important perspective to our understanding of the psalmic curses. To understand Jeremiah's laments, and thus the psalmic laments, we must recognize the public role of a prophet, a role representing God to a particular audience. Even when presented in the form of private dialogues or prayers, the prophetic speeches possess a public message. An obvious example is the public function of a call narrative. Though the narrative may involve only dialogues between the prophet and God, it carries a message ultimately intended to impact a public audience. This noteworthy dimension of prophetic prayers of lament may also be seen in a recent study by Mark S. Smith. He argues that the laments of Jeremiah go beyond defending his prophetic legitimacy, functioning in the Scriptural context "to announce Yahweh's judgment" of the people and to show their guilt.<sup>29</sup> The laments, though presented in the form of prayers by the prophet before God, serve not merely as private expressions but public proclamations of judgment. The same understanding is important to our interpretation of the imprecations in the psalmic laments. Whether viewed from their setting in life, especially their use in ancient Israelite worship, or from their setting in writing (the canonical context), the public dimension of the psalms has frequently been noted in Psalms studies. An obvious piece of textual evidence for the public function of the psalms is the frequent uses of the phrase "for the director of music" in the titles of psalms that in content appear to be private prayers (e.g. Psalms 5, 9, 58, 69, and 109).

<sup>28</sup> There is a rebuke from God in Jer 15:19 to call Jeremiah to turn back (שוב *šwb*), but the rebuke has much to do with Jeremiah's complaint that God is like a "deceptive brook" and with his being at the point of giving up his ministry (v. 18).

<sup>29</sup> Mark S. Smith, *The Laments of Jeremiah in Their Contexts* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990) xx–xxi, 63–66. Lindblom holds that even with these words Jeremiah still "speaks as a prophet" (*Prophecy* 296–297), and R. E. Clements suggests that the experience of Jeremiah may serve to show the extent of his contemporaries' rejection of God (*Jeremiah* [Atlanta: John Knox, 1988] 117). See also Timothy Polk, *The Prophetic Persona* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 139–140.

For the parallels to the psalmic phenomenon that appear in contexts where God is not addressed directly in the second person, i.e. not as prayers but in the form of a proclamation, we have an early example in Gen 9:26–27, where Noah pronounces a curse on his descendant Canaan, “Let Canaan be his [Shem’s] slave.” In Isaiah, the prophet also uses a language similar to what we see in the psalms in his judgment against the king of Babylon: “Let the evildoers’ descendants never be named! . . . Let them never rise to possess the earth or fill the face of the world with cities” (Isa 14:20–21), and in his prophecy addressing Babylon for her inevitable fall, “Let your nakedness be exposed!” (47:3).<sup>30</sup> In Isa 44:11, the proclamation of judgment is against the idol makers and worshippers, “Let them all assemble themselves, let them stand up, let them tremble, let them together be put to shame!”

A proclamation similar to Isa 44:11 appears in Jer 50:27, where God delivers his judgment on Babylon through Jeremiah, “Kill all her bulls, let them go down to the slaughter! Woe be on them, their day has come, the time for their punishment!” In Dan 4:23, a divine curse is placed on king Nebuchadnezzar because of his pride, “Let him be drenched with the dew of heaven, and let him share with the beasts of the field until seven periods of time pass over him” (see also 4:15). Lastly, we may mention two judgment oracles against God’s people. In rebuking them for their worship of other gods, God announces a judgment on his people, “Let them be just like this [ruined] waistband, which is completely useless” (Jer 13:10); and years later facing again the potential danger of worshipping foreign gods, Malachi warns, “May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob anyone who does this” (Mal 2:12).

3. *Prior Biblical Bases of the Imprecations.* Besides the similarity of language, like prophetic judgments, the psalmic imprecations depend on prior Biblical teaching for their authority. Behind many imprecations are the psalmists’ concerns for social justice in Israel and the destiny of God’s people among the hostile nations, concerns commonly seen in the prophetic writings. These concerns clearly reflect the teaching of the Pentateuch. The covenants, as mentioned earlier, undoubtedly serve as the general Biblical basis for the imprecations when these concerns are violated. The imprecation in Ps 58:6–7 is against the rulers who “devise injustice” and “mete out violence” (vv. 1–2), and the wicked in Psalm 109 is rebuked for “having hounded to death the poor and the needy” (v. 16; see also 10:9–11, 18; 12:5; 55:9–11; and 94:5–7). Imprecations against the oppressive nations in Ps 79:6, 12 have to do with their “destroying” God’s people and causing their blood “poured out like water” (vv. 2, 7; see also 9:17–18; 83:2–5; 129:1; and 137:3, 7). These psalmic concerns reflect the psalmists’ desire for God’s glory to be manifested, often because their enemies despise God and mock at him for failing to protect his people (e.g. 28:5; 64:5; 69:6; 74:10; 79:6–10; 83:2; 109:27; 137:3).

<sup>30</sup> The verb “expose” is correctly considered a jussive in M. O’Connor and Bruce K. Waltke, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake, IN: 1990) 569, contrary to NIV and NASB, which translate the verb as futuristic or predictive even though it is in the short form תגלה *tiggāl* (not תגלה *tiggāleh* as in Exod 20:26, Ezek 16:36, 57, and Prov 26:26).

To demonstrate further the prior Scriptural basis of psalmic curses, I will focus our discussion on Psalms 109 and 137 because of their well-known harsh language.

The harshest imprecations in Psalm 109 involve David's appeal to God to punish also the wicked's family: "Let his children be orphans, and his wife a widow. Let his children wander about and beg, let them be driven out of the ruins they live" (vv. 9–10).<sup>31</sup> As mentioned earlier, the psalmist is against the wicked who hounded to death the poor and the needy (v. 16), and the psalmist's appeal is not without prior Biblical support. In Exod 22:21–24, God commands that none of his people shall oppress a stranger, widow, or orphan, "If you abuse them, and when they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry; and my wrath will be kindled, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans." In light of this command, the psalmist is in essence asking God to realize the judgment he has proclaimed to show forth his justice.<sup>32</sup> As already mentioned earlier, Jer 18:21 contains an imprecation resembling what we see in Psalm 109. A similar judgment occurs in Amos 7:17, where the prophet announces a punishment on Amaziah, "Thus says the Lord, Your wife will become a harlot in the city, your sons and your daughters will fall by the sword, your land will be parceled up by a measuring line, and you yourself will die upon unclean soil." If the identity of David's enemy is as explicit as can be seen in Amos or Jeremiah, we may be less troubled by the extensive imprecations in the psalm. Historical specificity does make a difference, a point we will elaborate later.

In Psalm 137, the captors ridicule God's name, implying that the destruction of Jerusalem has been perceived as evidence that their god is greater than the God of Israel. In that context the psalmist calls out to God to realize his judgment on Babylon the aggressor: "O daughter of Babylon, you destroyer (שֶׁדָּה *šdd*, or "the doomed one")! Blessed will be the one who repays (שָׁלַם *šlm*) you what you have done (גָּמַל *gml*) to us! Blessed will be the one who takes your little ones (עָלְיָם *ʿlym*) and dashes them against the rock!" (vv. 8–9). The date of the psalm is not quite certain; it was written either near the end of the exile or after the return from exile.<sup>33</sup> In either case, the prophecies

<sup>31</sup> Kidner sees these imprecations reminiscent of a curse by David on Joab for shedding innocent blood, as recorded in 2 Sam 3:29, "May the guilt fall on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house; and may the house of Joab never be without one who has a discharge, or who is leprous, or who holds a spindle, or who falls by the sword, or who lacks food" (*Psalms 73–150* 390).

<sup>32</sup> Michael Fishbane also adds as background the warning from Exod 34:6–7 that God visits "the iniquity of the parents upon the children" (*Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1985] 340, 347–348).

<sup>33</sup> Though commentators frequently consider the psalm post-exilic, some date it to the exile, before Babylon's fall: Zenger, *A God of Vengeance* 47, Ibn Qiqatilah (Simon, *Four Approaches* 194), and W. C. Kaiser, Jr., *Hard Sayings in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988) 174. The exilic date explains better the intense yearning for the fall of Babylon. Though the use of "there" (שָׁם *šām*) and the Hebrew perfects in vv. 1–3 seem to support the post-exilic date, the evidence is inconclusive. Ezekiel uses "there" (שָׁם *šām*) to describe his experience in Babylon (1:3; 2:15) while he wrote the narrative in exile. The perfects do not necessarily imply a distant past, and the verbs in vv. 4–6 and v. 9 are in imperfects. Elmer A. Leslie dates the psalm to right before the fall of Babylon, but with the psalmist writing somewhere in the Diaspora, and not in Babylon or Jerusalem (*The Psalms* [New York: Abingdon, 1949] 256).

concerning Babylon in Isaiah 13 and Jeremiah 51 are the important Scriptural bases for the imprecation, as supported by the use of similar terminology between these two earlier texts and the psalm.<sup>34</sup>

In Isaiah 13 (c. 8th cent. BC), “an oracle against Babylon” (v. 1), the prophet proclaims Babylon’s eventual fall in spite of its awesome power. The devastation that the Babylonians brought to the other peoples will turn back on them, “their little ones (עַלְלִים *‘Ulym*) will be dashed to pieces before their eyes, their houses will be looted. . . .” (v. 16, see also v. 18). Dated sometime before 562 BC,<sup>35</sup> the judgment oracle on Babylon in Jeremiah 51 is another important biblical basis for the psalm: “Babylon must fall because of Israel’s slain . . . The Lord will destroy Babylon . . . A destroyer (שָׁדָד *šdd*) will come against Babylon, her warriors will be captured, their bows will be broken. For the Lord is a God of retribution (גַּמְלָה *gml*), he will repay (שְׁלֵם *šlm*) in full” (vv. 49, 55, 56).<sup>36</sup> Though harsh, the statement “dash little ones against the rock” is also a literary expression that uses a part for the whole, describing total defeat in war (see similar expressions in Hos 13:16; Nah 3:10; 2 Kgs 8:12; and Luke 19:44). In summary, Ps 137:9 can be understood as the psalmist’s call on God, in the midst of oppression and cruelty, to fulfill his earlier judgment predictions on Babylon so that the nations will know Yahweh alone is God, and the one who realizes the predictive word is “blessed” because this person serves God’s will.

### III. IMPRECATIONS AND CHRISTIANS TODAY

Can the imprecations be used by Christians on our contemporary enemies today? For commentators who consider the imprecations as the psalmists’ own sentiments, these statements are clearly inapplicable to the Christian era. For those who see the imprecations just as inspired as the other parts of the Psalms, the responses vary. Laney argues that since the imprecations are based on the Abrahamic covenant, which is God’s promise to Abraham and Israel, the “church-age believers” cannot do what the psalmists did.<sup>37</sup> Longman points to a somewhat different reason, noting that the type of enemies of the OT era is different from that of our era, and thus we cannot pray these prayers the same way as David prayed.<sup>38</sup> On the other hand, Beisner appeals to the existence of curses in both testaments and argues for the continued use of curses on our enemies. But his arguments are greatly weakened by his proposed conditions that only those who are “truly innocent” may pray curses, and that the curses can only be used against those “who are hardened beyond redemption.”<sup>39</sup> Similarly, Zenger holds that the imprecations are no

<sup>34</sup> S. L. Gordon, *Tehillim* (Tel Aviv: S. L. Gordon Publishers, 1978) 2.238, 243.

<sup>35</sup> J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 732.

<sup>36</sup> See also Kidner, *Psalms 73–150* 460.

<sup>37</sup> Laney, “A Fresh Look” 44.

<sup>38</sup> Longman, *How to Read 138–139*; somewhat similarly, Donald M. Williams, *Psalms 73–150* (Dallas, TX: Word, 1989) 290–291.

<sup>39</sup> Beisner, *Psalms of Promise* 178. Also J. C. McCann holds, though cautiously, that the curses of Psalm 109 can be used by Christians as prayers for other Christians who suffer like the psalmist, but not as prayers for themselves (*Theological Introduction to the Book of Psalms: The Psalms as Torah* [Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1993] 116–117).

less relevant for people of faith today, and that denying the use of these imprecations is to refuse the sufferers “the right to lament . . . a fundamental act of their humanity.” Yet in dealing with Ps 137:9, Zenger retranslates it as “O daughter of Babylon, happy the one who puts an end to your rule.”<sup>40</sup>

Though Christian responses vary, by acknowledging imprecation as prophetic judgment this approach has implicitly accepted certain boundaries within which the question of application may be answered. In general, how we apply the judgment proclamations in the prophetic speeches, especially their warnings and their punishments, will affect how we apply the psalmic imprecations today. The historical and theological factors that determine our interpretation of prophetic judgments are directly relevant to this question of application. The greatest challenge to the reader of prophetic judgments is not whether there are timeless theological truths or principles taught in these judgment speeches, but whether the exact terms of judgment or elements of punishments may be pronounced on our contemporary enemies. Two factors need to be considered. First, it is the historical factor that we have noted earlier. If the original audience did not expect the exact terms of punishment to apply to someone other than the intended person (e.g. on the Babylonian king in Isaiah 14 or Amaziah in Amos 7), we should not use the exact terms on someone today. Second, because the prophetic view of history acknowledges the Messianic era as the climax, an era toward which all prophetic messages directly or indirectly make a contribution, prophetic proclamations of judgment must be understood in light of the coming of Christ, an understanding reflected in the NT. Some elaboration is needed on these two factors.

Like other proclamations of judgment, many psalmic curses in their original contexts are directed to specific persons, and consequently the historical specificities of the imprecations cannot be ignored. The historical superscriptions testify to the fact that many psalms were the psalmists' responses to real life situations, e.g. both Psalm 54 and Psalm 59 begin with a historical superscription, each concerning a different occasion involving Saul and his men seeking David's destruction. The antiquity of these two superscriptions is witnessed by their presence in the LXX. Clues to their historical context may also be present within many psalms themselves. Two of the 28 psalms in our study have explicitly identified who the enemies are: in Psalm 83, the names of the ten nations threatening Israel (83:5–8) are clearly identified, and in Psalm 137, the names of Edom and Babylon (vv. 7–8). But the absence of names in other imprecatory psalms does not automatically mean that no specific enemies were envisioned by the psalmists. Except in Psalm 104, where the enemies are the wicked in general, and if we do not relegate the references to merely stylistic reasons, the imprecations in the rest of the psalms concern enemies who in various degrees affected the life of the psalmists. For example, the enemy cursed in Psalm 109 can be identified as a former acquaintance, and in Psalm 55, the psalmist points to a known enemy, “But you” (v. 13). Though less specific, the enemies in the other psalms are described as “my enemies,” “those who seek my life,” a former acquaintance

<sup>40</sup> Zenger, *A God of Vengeance* 92, 95.

turned adversary, or “nations” that mocked God and threatened the survival of his people (e.g. 71:7).<sup>41</sup> Historical specificity in these cases (the above Psalms 54, 55, 59, 83, 104, 109 and 137) makes it problematic for Christians to pronounce the exact imprecatory terms of punishment on enemies today, even though important principles may be gleaned from them.

Besides the historical factor, the question of application must be evaluated in light of Christ. In line with the prophetic view of history, the NT interprets some of the imprecatory psalms, which in the MT are “of David,” as descriptions of the life of Christ or as prayers of Christ (e.g. Ps 69:21 in John 19:28).<sup>42</sup> Thus from the NT perspective, the enemies in the imprecatory psalms are enemies of Christ, the Son of David. This perspective is in line with the OT expectation that under the Messianic rule, a new era of peace will dawn. While not condoning sin, Christ has taught us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matt 5:44, Luke 6:27). The enemies are now defined by Christ’s perspective and not by our perspective. It is too easy for us to read into these psalms the contemporary enemies we want to name. The only contemporary enemies that we can confidently wish their destruction are those Paul has told us: “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world, and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly spheres” (Eph 6:12). Though using the exact terms of psalmic curses on our enemies today may run the risk of disregarding the stated historical and the theological factors, the imprecations continue to serve as important reminders of God’s concern for justice in this world and of his judgment on those who practice evil.

#### IV. CONCLUSIONS

A study of the prophetic role of the psalmists, the imprecatory parallels in prophetic speeches, and the prior Biblical bases of the curses suggest that the psalmic curses are quite similar to the prophetic proclamations of judgment in the other parts of the OT. First, the prophetic role of the psalmists is witnessed by the evidence in both the OT and the NT; second, the imprecations have many parallels from the prophetic speeches in language and function; and third, like other prophetic judgments the psalmic imprecations depend on prior Biblical teaching for their authority, especially on the Pentateuch. Though the imprecations are generally expressed through a mode that appears to be personal wishes, they are prophetic judgments against the wicked and are not to be treated as merely the psalmists’ own vindictive sentiments. The psalmic curses continue to remind us of the reality of evil and judgment, and for Christians the curses must be understood in light of Jesus and in light of the larger Biblical context they now possess.

<sup>41</sup> Also “my enemies/my adversaries/my accusers” (5:8; 9:3; 17:9; 31:11, 15; 35:19; 54:7; 55:15; 59:1, 10; 69:18, 19; 71:10, 13; 119:78, 139, 157; 139:22; 143:9, 12), and “those who seek my life/my hurt” (17:11–12; 54:3; 40:14; 69:4; 70:2; 71:10, 13; 109:25; 141:8–9).

<sup>42</sup> Gillingham, *The Poems and the Psalms* 265–266; Holladay, *Long Ago* 316; Martin, “Imprecations” 130–131.

Table 1. *Imprecations and their Dominant Elements*

	<i>Sh</i>	<i>Ph</i>	<i>Dth</i>	<i>Fm</i>	<i>Rtr</i>	<i>NT</i>		<i>Sh</i>	<i>Ph</i>	<i>Dth</i>	<i>Fm</i>	<i>Rtr</i>	<i>NT</i>
5:10					•	•	69:22–28		•	•	•	•	•
7:13		•	•				70:2–3	•					
9:19–20		•					71:13	•					
10:15		•				•	79:6, 12					•	
12:3		•					83:13–17	•		•			
28:4					•		104:35			•			•
31:17–18	•					•	109:6–20	•		•	•	•	•
35:4–8, 26	•	•			•	•	119:78	•					
40:14–15	•					•	129:5–8	•		•			
54:5			•		•		137:7–9		•		•	•	
55:15			•				139:19–22			•			
58:6–7		•	•				140:9–11		•			•	•
59:11–12	•				•		141:10					•	
68:1–2		•	•			•	143:12			•			

*Abbreviations:*

Sh=Shame, Ph=Physical infliction, Dth=Death, Fm=Family members suffered, Rtr=un-specified Retributive punishment, NT=The psalm (not necessarily the imprecation it contains) is quoted in the NT.

Table 2. *Judgment Predictions on Enemies and Dominant Elements*

	<i>Sh</i>	<i>Ph</i>	<i>Dth</i>	<i>Fm</i>	<i>Rtr</i>	<i>NT</i>		<i>Sh</i>	<i>Ph</i>	<i>Dth</i>	<i>Fm</i>	<i>Rtr</i>	<i>NT</i>
2:9*		•	•			•	68:21			•			•
6:10	•						68:22–23*			•			•
7:16					•		72:8–10	•					
9:3		•	•				82:7*			•			•
11:6		•					89:23, 32*		•	•			
21:8–10			•	•			92:9		•	•			
28:5		•					94:23			•		•	•
34:21			•			•	95:11*		•				•
37:15–20		•	•				108:13		•				
50:22*		•					109:29	•					•
52:5		•	•				110: 5–6	•		•			•
55:23		•					112:10	•					•
63:9–10			•				132:18*	•					•
64:7–8		•	•										

Note: Any reference marked with an asterisk is part of a divine oracle.