Μαράνα θά
as a hermeneutical key
for reinterpreting
the Imprecatory Psalms

Sarel Johannes Petrus Slabbert

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Supervisor: Prof. L.C. Jonker

Co-Supervisor: Prof. J. Punt

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Abstract

Certain Psalms, known as Imprecatory Psalms, cause problems for both academic and devotional readers. They contain curses and prayers asking for vengeance, judgment, and vindication. These Psalms are part of the Bible, creating the question if Christians today can read and study them. Through the years various attempts, ranging from ignoring, censoring, and defending these curses, have been attempted. However, no single methodology can effectively alleviate the problems and questions caused by the Imprecatory Psalms. This thesis looks at the Aramaic cry, Μαράνα θά, in 1 Corinthians 16 as a possible key to help understand the Imprecatory Psalms.

Therefore three Imprecatory Psalms are studied to determine the motivations and context behind the vengeful prayers. Psalms 7, 35, and 59 were studied within their cultural and canonical settings according to the Three Dimensional Reading Methodology. The focus is on the inter-, intra-, and extra-textual aspects. It was determined that the psalmists did not curse for vengeful or personal reasons. The curses were expressed in a time of dire need when enemies were out to destroy the psalmists. Within the covenantal relationship between God and the psalmist, the only option left for the psalmist was to call on God to come to their aid: judging the enemies and vindicating the righteous. Studying the curse within the context of the Ancient Near East it became evident that the curse was commonly used in both Old and New Testament times. In the case of Biblical curses it also becomes clear that executing the curse or not was the sole prerogative of God; the psalmist could not enact vengeance himself.

Curses are not only found in the Psalms, but also other books in the Old and New Testament. Μαράνα θά is found next to a curse in the New Testament. Although considered by some as separate, reading ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά as a unit echoes a similar

essence than the imprecatory prayers: the desire that God will come and act. In the Psalms the desire is that God would come and judge the enemies and vindicate the righteous. Μαράνα θά should be read as an imperative, calling on the Lord to come and act. In the New Testament Μαράνα θά has the παρουσία in mind. Analogous to the Imprecatory Psalms, the παρουσία focuses on judgment of the enemies of God and the vindication of his people. Μαράνα θά can become a prayer that offer an analogy between the hopes and desires of the psalmists and the hopes and desires of those calling on the Lord to return.

Opsomming

Sommige Psalms, bekend as Vloekpsalms, veroorsaak probleme vir beide akademiese en gewone lesers. Dit bevat vloeke en gebede van wraak, oordeel en vergelding. Hierdie Psalms vorm deel van die Bybel en skep die vraag of Christene hierdie gebede mag lees en bestudeer. Deur die jare is verskeie pogings, wat wissel vanaf ignorering, sensuur en verdediging van die vloeke, voorgestel. Daar is egter nie een metode wat die probleme en vraagstukke wat deur die Vloekpsalms veroorsaak word voldoende kan antwoord nie. Hierdie proefskrif kyk na die Aramese kreet Μαράνα θά in 1 Korintiërs 16 as 'n moontlike sleutel wat kan bydrae tot die verstaan van die Vloekpsalms.

Daarom is drie Vloekpsalms bestudeer om die motiverings en die konteks agter die wraakgierige vloeke te ontleed. Psalms 7, 35 en 59 is binne hulle kulturele en kanonieke kontekste bestudeer volgens die Drie-Dimensionele leesmetode. Die fokus is op die inter-, intra- en ekstra-tekstuele aspekte. Daar is ontdek dat die psalmdigters nie vanuit wraakgierige of persoonlike motiewe die vloeke uitgespreek het nie. Dit is uitgespreek in 'n tyd van diepe nood toe die vyande daarop uit was om die psalmdigters te vernietig. Binne die verbondsverhouding tussen God en die digters was die laaste uitweg om tot God te roep om hulp; om die vyande te oordeel en die regverdige vry te spreek. Binne die konteks van die Ou Nabye Ooste was vloeke algemeen, ook binne die Ou Testamentiese en Nuwe Testamentiese tye. In die geval van Bybelse vloeke het dit ook duidelik geword dat die uitvoering van die vloeke was God se mandaat alleen; die psalmdigter kon nie self wraak neem nie.

Vloeke kom nie net in die Psalms voor nie, maar ook in ander Ou en Nuwe Testamentiese boeke. Μαράνα θά word direk na 'n vloek in die Nuwe Testament gevind. Alhoewel baie die twee apart lees, eggo ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά 'n ooreenkomstige begeerte as die Vloekpsalms: die begeerte dat God sal kom en handel. Die begeerte in

die Psalms is dat God die vyande sal oordeel en die regverdiges sal vryspreek. In die Nuwe Testament is die παρουσία die fokus van Μαράνα θά. Die παρουσία se fokus op oordeel van die vyande van God en die vryspraak van sy volgelinge is analogies tot die Vloekpsalms. Μαράνα θά kan 'n gebed word wat 'n analogie verwoord tussen die hoop en begeertes van die psalmdigters en die hoop en begeertes van hulle wat uitroep dat die Here kom.

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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF THE PSALMS

1.1 THE NEED FOR THIS STUDY

The book of Psalms is loved by both Jews and Christians and for two millennia this collection of 150 individual Psalms has helped to shape the public and private worship of Jews and Christians (Holladay, 1996:1). For many Christian believers these prayers are an integral part of "…the center of the life and worship of Christian congregations and in the midst of the personal pilgrimage each of us makes under the shadow of the Almighty" (Miller, 1986:vii).

These ancient prayers are powerful and today, even millennia later, they are still regarded as some of the most treasured parts of Scripture. The Psalms exhibit a unique ability to draw the reader into a kind of merger with the psalmist (Mays, 2006:117), by blending the experiences and feelings of the psalmist with those of the reader. The experiences of the psalmists help the reader to reflect on their own experiences and feelings, making these "reflected experiences" accessible (Schaefer, 2001:xxv). Readers discover in the Psalms "… a mirror in which each man [sic] sees the motions of his [sic] own soul*"* (Prothero, 1907:2). In this mirror readers at times discover that a whole range of human emotions are found in the Psalms, and on reflection, the experiences of the psalmists have the ability to resonate with the reader's own experiences and emotions. Studying these ancient prayers lead many readers to experience a reality where their fears, worries and jubilations are echoed by those of the psalmists. This ability of the Psalms offer an opportunity to devotional readers: readers may find a way to express the words and emotions which are often difficult to articulate. Through centuries believers discovered that the Psalms can speak to, and on

behalf of, almost every human experience. For centuries the Psalms moved, inspired, and comforted believers, and they still do.

1.1.1 ONE PSALTER, TWO INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES

The Psalms are a central part of the Bible and through the centuries the interpretation of the Bible developed into two broadly definable communities: on the one hand we find devotional readers (Brueggemann, 1984:15), which Jonker and Lawrie (2005:231) call faith communities, and on the other academic communities. Although this distinction is an oversimplification and the differences between them should not be overstated (see Brueggemann, 1984:16), it could be argued that these two communities have existed alongside each other for centuries. For the most part these two communities existed with "limited knowledge of, attention to, or impact on the other" and any overlap that do exist between them tend to be "limited, modest and too restrained" (Brueggemann, 1984:16). In an ideal world, a clear two-way communication would exist between these two communities since both communities study the Bible. Unfortunately any overlapping that does exist is limited. Faith communities and academic communities differ in approach and motivation when studying the Bible. In some cases "academic interest and ideology may be at odds with the needs of Christian communities" (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:231). Devotional readers tend to focus more on finding personal and spiritual growth in the Bible while scholars tend to focus primarily on questions related to authorship, genre, setting, composition, interpretation, and application (Walton, 2000:341). These differences in approach and motivation can cause problems when these two communities attempt to communicate with each other. Devotional readers and their interpretations tend to be pre-critical, uncomplicated and romantic while academic interpretations tend to be highly specialized, critical, and complex (Brueggemann, 1984:16). Jonker and Lawrie

(2005:2) point out that devotional readers may struggle to recognize their Bible in the critical work of the academics. Some conclusions reached by academics may even become a threat for devotional reader's understanding of the Bible and faith. On the other hand, academics are often frustrated and scornful when considering the unsophisticated methods used by some devotional readers.

Jonker & Lawrie (2005:231–232) identify at least six possible reasons for the differences in approach between the academic and faith communities: (1) Academics strive for and are rewarded for new and novel theories while faith communities strive for continuity. (2) Academics find value in creativity while faith communities need cohesion. Within the academic communities there exists a greater tolerance for clashing viewpoints, which creates a problem for faith communities because of the need and desire for a unified expression of faith in the world. (3) Academics need the freedom to be critical. Without the ability to interact critically with all authorities (texts, authors, and other scholars) the academic world would not advance. Christian communities cannot be uncritical, yet they cannot afford to open everything to critical questioning. Their calling requires a measure of unquestioning loyalty. (4) Academics speak to other scholars and experts while faith communities speak to the world. The academic context tends to be a small and highly specialized group. The highly technical language of scholars, that even tends to endanger fruitful academic debate, make effective communication with faith communities difficult. (5) Academics seek theoretical understanding that, when contested, can lead to a "spiral of theory" that gains its own momentum leading further away from practical application. Faith communities need practical answers to real-life questions so they do not focus on theoretical readings of the text. (6) Academics defer to reason while faith communities live by faith. Academics restrict themselves to rational theories, avoiding claims of divine inspiration

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or the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Faith communities live by faith. They go beyond the rational in the belief that God speaks to them through the Bible. This belief is the reason for their interest in the Bible.

The differences in approaches are more prominent when it comes to the Psalms. "The Psalms permit the faithful to enter at whatever level they are able—in ways primitive or sophisticated, limited or comprehensive, candid or guarded. The faithful of all 'sorts and conditions,' with varying skills and sensitivities, here find 'the bread of life' as abiding nourishment" (Brueggemann, 1984:16). This accessibility of the Psalms combined with its ability to merge reader and poet into a "shared reflected experience" cause devotional readers to claim the Psalms for themselves, usually without the advantages of the more structured approaches preferred by academics. Despite the honors of being a "beloved part of Scripture", most devotional readers also tend to be highly selective when choosing Psalms to read or study; focusing mostly on those Psalms that assure, affirm and strengthen believers (Brueggemann, 1984:16).

This means that devotional readers are unprepared for the full reality of the Psalms. Many pastors have experienced the reality of introducing people [i.e. the congregation or other devotional readers] to the act of praying the Psalms in pastoral settings and then needing to point out, "regretfully and with apologies, that the book of Psalms has some very real and unfortunate blemishes" (Zenger, 1996:2). These "unfortunate blemishes" are also known as "imprecatory Psalms," "cursing Psalms", or "Psalms of vengeance." For the unsuspecting reader, the shock of discovering these blemishes "… strikes us in the face like the heat from a furnace mouth" (Lewis, 1985:20). This is even more shocking when these imprecatory elements are compared with the beauty and poise of the more beloved and better-known Psalms. Phillip Yancey (1999:109) cites John Mogabgab in this regard: "if the Psalms have been a source of spiritual instruction

and consolation for many seekers, they also have filled others with discomfort and bewilderment. There is an untidiness, a turbulence, and undertow of mystery in these ancient prayers."

The biggest problem, however, arises when reading these Psalms alongside New Testament passages like Matthew 5:44. Readers are then confronted with some problematic questions, like: what should Christians do when one part of Scripture calls believers to pray for their enemies, and other parts of Scripture are "…calling for the divine judgment to fall upon the Psalmist's enemy" (Beardslee, 1897:491)? Zenger (1996:2) testifies that, on countless occasions, he has heard the question, "can a Christian pray this way?"[1] Even a cursory reading of the whole book of Psalms brings the realization that "[t]he biblical Psalms confronts us with a world full of enmity and violence" (Zenger, 1996:vii). John Day (2000:10) echoes the sentiments of many readers when he asks: "How can it be right for an Old or New Testament believer to cry out for divine vengeance and violence, as exampled in the Imprecatory Psalms?"

Attempts to reconcile these imprecatory elements with the New Testament teachings to "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matt. 5:44; ESV) are not always satisfactory. The New Testament, apparently, has a very clear attitude towards cursing: Romans 12:14 (ESV) calls on Christian to: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them" echoing the same sentiment as Luke 6:28. There is an apparent contradiction between some Psalms and some New Testament passages. It is not surprising that, for most Christians, the harshness of these Psalms "… naturally evoke a reaction of revulsion in many Christians schooled in the 'Law of Christ'" (Day,

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[1] Zenger is amused that this question is always asked if we, "as Christians", can pray these Psalms. The question is never asked: do you think, as Jews or as human beings, or as victims or rape, we can pray these Psalms?

2000:1). The natural reaction is either to overlook these Psalms in a spirit of Christian generosity or to criticize them from a Christian point of view (Zenger, 1996:3).

Another big and unfortunate problem results when the imprecatory elements are not overlooked or ignored, but used as divine justification for the personal expressions of human anger and vengeance. Anger, rage, and a desire for vengeance are an inseparable part of human beings, and anyone who has not experienced anger or rage is not human (Blumenthal, 2002:178). These Psalms were written by human beings struggling with the emotional reality of an unjust world beset with various forms of enemies and injustices. Their poems gave voice to their deepest emotions which are clear to the reader of the Psalms. The Psalms ability to create shared reflected experiences can result in the real danger that the imprecatory Psalms may serve to justify a personal desire for vengeance and vindication. In a world already brimming with violence, hatred, and enmity these words can fan the flames and be used as divine justification for more vengeance, vindication, and hatred. Thus, the question of how Christian believers should handle these passages is of great importance in our current society, especially when it is used, or rather abused, by some naïve, pre-critical faith communities.

For academic communities, the imprecatory elements are better known and, more likely, less shocking. Still, these Psalms do create problems for the academic communities (Simango, 2011:1). When compared to devotional readers, academic readers are better equipped to handle these and similar "problem texts" in the Bible. Academics strive for a more objective reading of the Bible and use well-defined methodologies like historical-grammatical, historical-literal, canonical, cultural-anthropological, socio-rhetorical, and form-critical approaches to achieve this. The Bible, and in this case the Psalms, are usually studied by academics to answer questions like authorship, genre, setting, composition, interpretation, and application (Walton,

2000:341). Even though, as Walton points out, academics do seek answers in terms of application, the theoretical focus of the academic communities can cause a "spiral of theory" that leads academics further and further from any application (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:232). For this reason, the academic tradition tends to be more critical and erudite (Brueggemann, 1984:15). Academic approaches, therefore, are seldom helpful to devotional communities when struggling to find answers to questions like: "How can it be right for an Old or New Testament believer to cry out for divine vengeance and violence, as exampled in the Imprecatory Psalms?" (Day, 2000:10) or the simpler formulated question of Erich Zenger (1996:2): "can a Christian pray this way?"

This brings us to the reason for this study. This study attempts to add to the discussions surrounding the imprecatory Psalms. It does not propose to offer a solution for this centuries-old conundrum because it is doubtful whether a singular solution will ever be found to this problem. Still, the outcome of this study hopes to offer some readers of the Psalms, especially some devotional readers, a key for unlocking answers to some of these questions.[2] Hopefully, some readers will find an agreeable answer to the questions: how can Christians read and study the passages in the Psalms that are apparently violent, vindictive, and wrathful? These Psalms need to be read and studied because of the role the whole book of the Psalms play within the broader church and the spiritual lives of believers.

1.1.2 DEFINITION OF IMPRECATORY PSALMS
1.1.2.1 CLASSIFYING THE PSALMS

The Imprecatory Psalms are often called "Cursing Psalms", "Psalms of Vengeance", "Psalms of Vindication", or "Psalms of Malediction." Even though these terms are

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[2] It is important to note that this study attempts to create a hermeneutical key for devotional readers struggling to understand the practical usage of the Imprecatory Psalms within the broader Christian viewpoints.

frequently used to identify these Psalms, they are not universally seen as a separate genre. Hermann Gunkel (1862-1932) pioneered Form-Critical studies in the Psalms. It was shortly after the 1920's that his work, together with his student Sigmund Mowinckel, started impacting the study of the Psalms. Form-criticism became the standard for classifying Psalms and identifies certain genres within the Psalter like hymns, royal, wisdom, lament and so forth. Although not as dominant today, Form Criticism is still useful to identify some Psalms based on certain similar elements. Most Imprecatory Psalms can be classified as lament Psalms.

Classifying these Psalms, however, are difficult since no single set of criteria exists that will uniformly identify imprecations in the Psalter (Simango, 2011:14). Some scholars, like J. Carl Laney, Johannes Vos, and John Day widely use the term Imprecatory Psalms in their writings. Others like Chalmers Martin, H. Peels, Erich Zenger and Angel Rodriguez argue that the term should not be used to identify any of these Psalms. Rodriguez (1994:40) argues "…since no literary type of psalm appears in the Psalter that could be called 'imprecatory," it is better to say that there are imprecatory passages in some of the psalms." Over a hundred years ago, even before Gunkel pioneered Form-Criticism, Martin (1972:113) argued that the term Imprecatory Psalms is improper since these imprecations are not a significant part of these Psalms, and in most cases it is only a single verse or line. Zenger (1996:viii) prefer not to see these psalms as curses, but rather "…they present passionate lament, petition, and desires before God." Despite these reservations among scholars the terms Imprecatory Psalms, Psalms of vengeance, cursing Psalms and Psalms of malediction will be used throughout this study since these are still the most dominant terms found in literature.

1.1.2.2 DEFINING THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS

J. Carl Laney (1981:35) defines an imprecation as "… an invocation of judgment, calamity, or curse uttered against one's enemies, or the enemies of God." Roy Zuck (1957:6) opts for a simpler definition, calling them simply"…prayers for the destruction of enemies." Walter Brueggemann (1986:57) see these Psalms simply as "a yearning for vengeance."[3] John Day defines these Psalms as "those psalms whose characterizing element is the impassioned plea for divine vengeance to fall upon the enemies of God and his people, including the use of what may be considered more formal curses or imprecations proper" (2000:4).

These Psalms can be identified as an invocation, a plea, or a prayer through which the psalmist asks God to judge, curse, or destroy an enemy. Finding a definition for the imprecatory Psalms is complicated because, as mentioned above, some scholars like Martin (1972:113) and Peels (2003:90) argue that no Psalm should be defined as imprecatory. Martin (1972:113) prefers to speak of "imprecations in the Psalms" since only minor parts of the Psalms are, in his view, truly imprecation.[4] Many decades ago Hammond (1876:29) proposed that a distinction should be made between imprecations and comminations. He identified comminations as the immediate or future realization of punishment, judgment, or misfortune upon a person as a result of their misdeeds. In other words, commination could be seen as one person threatening divine action against

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[3] Brueggeman's use of the word vengeance could be unfortunate due to negative connotations within our modern understanding of vengeance. "To the modern ear, the word 'vengeance' evokes images of malice and revenge; by its very nature, it bears sinful and negative connotations. Thus, in this mindset, vengeance – whether human or divine – is in no sense to be construed as virtuous. But to the ancient Israelite, and through the pages of Scripture, the concept of vengeance is tied to the requirements of justice" (Day, 2000:6–7). The question of vengeance and praying for the destruction of enemies are handled chapter 3.

[4] Chalmers Martin identifies only 18 Psalms containing imprecatory elements in the Psalter. These Psalms contain 368 verses and only 65 of them contain elements that could be classified as imprecations. According to him the imprecatory elements is just too miniscule to warrant the classification of imprecatory psalms.

the sinful acts of another. Commination carries the idea of a warning, most probably as an attempt to prevent divine action or dissuade further sinful acts. Imprecations, however, were seen as "expressions of hope, the wish, the prayer, that some judgment, some punishment, some misfortune, may befall certain persons" (Hammond, 1876:29). Unfortunately, Hammond's distinction between these two expressions does not alleviate the problem the imprecations create, because consistently distinguishing cursing expressions as either commination or imprecation is difficult.

Essentially, imprecations should be understood as any wish, desire, or prayer offered to God for divine deliverance by way of divine judgment and action. However, managing an acceptable definition for classifying and identifying these Psalms changes little in terms of the problems they create. The violent and graphic nature of these passages and their inclusion within the Biblical canon causes a problem for some Christians, both academic and devotional.

1.2   GENERAL ATTEMPTS AT HANDLING THIS PROBLEM

Through the years many attempts have been made to address this problem. Defining the different viewpoints that exist is daunting, if not impossible. This thesis focus on approaching the Imprecatory Psalms from 1 Corinthians 16:22 and therefore will mostly focus on the viewpoints that concern the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament.[5]

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[5] Klaus Nürnberger (2004:12) argues that most readers will fall somewhere between two extreme viewpoints: at one extreme some regard the Bible as "the inspired Word of God" and believes that it must be literally obeyed on every possible level. At the other extreme, some consider the Bible to be nothing more than "a collection of religious texts" compiled from ancient, and mostly from modern viewpoints, irrelevant ancient cultures. Most readers of the Bible will fall somewhere between these two extremes. Throughout the centuries, three major worldviews impacted on the understanding and interpretation of the Biblical text. John Goldingay (2011:31–52) identifies these worldviews as premodern, modern, and postmodern. All three still influence Biblical readers reading the Bible today.

For the purpose of this study, it is not necessary to enter this debate further. It is, however, important to acknowledge the variety of individual viewpoints. Because of these widely divergent viewpoints on the Bible, it is doubtful that any single approach will be able to alleviate this problem entirely. Still, we will consider some of the prominent approaches to the imprecatory Psalms. This is in no way a comprehensive treatment of the various approaches made to this problem. This study attempts to approach the Imprecatory Psalms from the New Testament. The purpose is not to offer a complete solution to the problem, but rather to further the debate. It is the contention of the study that approaching the Imprecatory Psalms by rethinking the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά in 1 Corinthians 16:22 could offer valuable insights to this conundrum.

1.2.1 THE IMPRECATIONS AS UTTERANCES OF THE POET'S HEART

One attempted solution is to regard these words, not as the revelation of God, but rather as the personal expressions of the poet (see Craigie, 1983:41). Accordingly, proponents of this view do not regard the inclusion of imprecations into the Biblical Psalms as enough reason to accept these words as Biblical. Despite these prayers being in the Bible, some scholars feel they could never be deemed to be "somehow good or pious" (Lewis, 1985:26). The imprecations are seen as personal vindictiveness on the part of David and the other poets (Laney, 1981:39). These words may appear righteous, expressing desires for the justice of God, but they result from a confused desire for justice and revenge (Lewis, 1985:18). Therefore, they should be regarded as "evil and not as the oracles of God" (Craigie, 1983:41). Lewis (1985:26) regards them as expressions from "ferocious, self-pitying, barbaric men." According to this viewpoint, the psalmist's cries to God for justice do not change the fact that these prayers are filled with the selfish and vengeful desire to be vindicated. Proponents claim that the poets

are so overcome by anger and the desire for vengeance that they lose focus and confuse their personal desires for God's justice. Their prayers become self-centered. It is nothing more than uncurbed emotional outbursts; therefore essentially sinful. Mickleson emphasizes this point when he claims that the imprecations are:

> … poetic expressions of individuals who were incensed at the tyranny of evil, yet whose attitude towards retribution is so colored by their sense of being wronged or of blasphemy committed that they speak out in language far removed from the teaching that one should leave judgment to God, or from Jesus' statements on the treatment of enemies (Mickelsen, 1963:643).

Lewis (1985:26) argues that "… the reactions of the Psalmist to injury, though profoundly natural, is profoundly wrong." If true, Christians should not emulate these prayers, nor consider them for edification or study. For this reason, many proponents of this view would prefer to remove, or at least ignore, these passages in the Psalms. John Wesley, for example, forbade his followers to from singing the imprecatory parts of the Psalms. Many modern versions of the Psalms, especially those intended to be used during worship, remove these passages (Lucas, 2003:60). Holladay (1996:304–314) devotes an entire chapter, appropriately named "Censored Texts," discussing the church's attempts at removing or silencing these passages from worship and modern lectionaries. In essence, this approach regards these passages as unacceptable for Christians and would prefer that Christian readers be shielded from the harshness and shock of these passages. Cross (1932:28–29), for example, claim that "… keeping these material that breathes a spirit of aggression, self-assertion, and vengeance as part of our Christian worship is contradicting our faith." These Psalms should be ignored and

rejected by Christians, especially because they "… always were and will be sinful" (Vreeland, 2008:380).

Eliminating or disregarding these passages from the Biblical texts does circumvent the problem, but at a cost. It leads to a Marcionistic approach to the Bible, thereby dismissing important elements in the Biblical text. Further, the choice of dismissing these passages relies more on the interpreter's judgment of the imprecatory language than on Scriptural judgment (see Luc, 1999:397–398).

Further, ignoring or rejecting these Psalms misses some important facets. The Psalms had been an integral part of both Jewish and Christian worship for centuries. The Psalms were used within the context of worship. Some Psalms, also some of the Imprecatory Psalms like Psalms 55, 58, 59, 109, and 139, contain headings like "for the choirmaster" which clearly indicates a public worship settings. The original setting and context of the different Psalms are mostly unknown, but their inclusion in the collection show that they were given a new context, which may differ from the original context (Braulik, 2003:312). Although the collections of Psalms were, for the biggest part of its history, almost universally seen as a haphazard and disjointed collection (Howard jr., 2004:24), the work of scholars like Gerald Wilson[6] argues for a purposefully organized collection of finely crafted poems. Recent studies indicate that the structure of the Psalter was indeed carefully planned. This implies that the inclusion of the Imprecatory Psalms was part of this conscious planning and selection. The 150 Psalms of the Psalter is only a small collection of Psalms available to Israel (Vos, 2005:56). Discoveries at Qumran indicated that Israel had many more Psalms than those finally collected in the Bible.

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[6] For more information see "The Shape of the Psalter" by Gerald Wilson (2007:29–142). In an article The Shape of the Book of Psalms, he starts with these words: "Let us begin with the fact that the Psalter does have a shape. The one hundred fifty canonical psalms come down to us in a particular arrangement that is traditional, if nothing else" (Wilson, 1992:129).

Holladay (1996:102) indicates that most of the discovered non-biblical Psalms at Qumran were not created by the Qumran community, but were existing Psalms only copied and preserved by the community. Also, the 18 "Psalms of Solomon", which are found in certain editions of the Septuagint, bear a close resemblance to the Biblical Psalms, but are not included in the Biblical canon (Holladay, 1996:97). There are indications that these Psalms were originally written in Hebrew and later translated into Greek (Milazzo, 1999:330). According to Vos (2005:41), some New Testament passages, like Luke 1:46-55 and 68-79, implies that "the treasury of the Jewish Psalms were more comprehensive than the biblical Psalter" suggests. Considering how easy it would have been for the compilers of the Psalter to simply reject all these troubling elements and passages, if they had any qualms about their content, it is noteworthy that they were still included in the final version of the Psalter. This could indicate that the compilers chose these Psalms for a reason. It should also be noted that when the canon was finally completed, the Early Church accepted the complete Psalter as part of their Bible.

The Psalms contain an abundance of poetical devices like chiasms, merisms, hyperboles, parallelisms, and many other features. The time needed to construct these devices also argues against the idea that these Psalms are the mere product of emotional outbursts or the words of vengeful persons. This is especially relevant in terms of David. Although, traditionally, David was seen as the author of all the Psalms that were attributed to him, scholarship during the Nineteenth century and later questioned the authorship and early dating of the Psalm and today it is accepted that, even though David could have written some of the Psalms, he was not the author of all Psalms credited to him (see Eaton, 1999:326; Holladay, 1996:17; Vos, 2005:47). Despite modern scholarship rejecting the universal authorship of David, it is important to note

that for many centuries the Psalms were ascribed to David. If the imprecatory elements in these Psalms were the mere result of sinful expressions, it would make a caricature of David.[7] During his lifetime David had many enemies and, taken at face value, he would have had enough reason to use imprecations. As Martin (1972:116) states: *"… of all people, David was certainly treated falsely, betrayed, and lied about. To be betrayed into occasional outbursts of fierce desire for vengeance, while wrong, is certainly understandable."* It would be quite probable to imagine these harsh words expressed by David. However, his life, as revealed by the Bible, contradicts the allegation that he was motivated by personal vengeance (Surburg, 1975:96). Even if, as could be argued, David was forced to lapse into vindictiveness, it should be seen as just that; a lapse and not as personality trait (Kidner, 1973:41). The Biblical portrait of David shows a man of compassion and patience. Even during the time when King Saul ceaselessly hunted him, David refused to capitalize on two perfect opportunities to rid himself of his tenacious enemy. Both times, he could have killed Saul with relative ease, but he refused "… to put out his hand against the Lord's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:5-8 and 26:7-12). On another occasion, after David was crowned king, a man called Shimei repeatedly cursed David (2 Samuel 16:5-12). Abishai, one of David's men, wanted to kill Shimei for his misbehavior towards new the king of Israel. David ordered his men to let Shimei be and leave the situation in God's hands. Interestingly, a few years later, David did order his son Solomon to have Shimei and Joab sentenced to death (1 Kings 2:1-9). Montgomery (1951:90) argues that this should not be seen as vindictiveness by

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[7] It is not necessary to consider the debate about authorship of the Psalms in more detail. Some proponents of this view saw David as the author of the Psalms and they describe his words as vengeful and hateful. The purpose of this part is simply show that David's character is revealed differently in the Biblical text and not to argue the authorship of the Psalms.

David, but rather as a removal of the potency of the curse from the reign of Solomon. The Biblical portrait of David paints a vivid picture of a man struggling with realities of sin and wrong judgments,[8] but even with these shortcomings, David is not a person who habitually or easily cursed his enemies. Rather, Psalms 35:15 and 109:4-5, two of the harshest Imprecatory Psalms, are attributed to David and show the psalmist as a person who frequently prayed for his enemies, even in times when they fell ill.

Whether the imprecations are desirable or not, they are part of the Biblical canon. During the formation of the Biblical canon various opportunities existed for these elements to be from the canon. Through the whole process of canon formation they were deemed worthy enough to remain part of the canon. The history of the formation and collection of these Psalms argues against simply dismissing them as emotional outburst from vindictive and spiteful hearts. They were written by people who took the time to clothe them in poetical devices, they survived the collection and redaction of the Psalter, and they were used for centuries by both Jews and Christians in personal and communal worship. Further, if the imprecations were limited to just the Psalter it would have been easier, according to this approach, to remove them from the text. However, as will be indicated later, imprecatory elements are found throughout the whole Bible: Old and New Testament.[9] Even though these expressions create difficult problems, it is not acceptable the simply ignore or remove them. These Psalms should be studied and not ignored (Zenger, 1996:100).

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[8] Foremost of these are probably his indiscretion with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah.

[9] For examples of imprecations in the Old Testament see Numbers 10:35-36, Judges 5:31, Jeremiah 11:20, 15:15, 17:18, and 18:19-32. For examples of imprecations in the New Testament see Acts 8:20-21, Acts 13:10-11, Acts 23:3, 1 Corinthians 16:22, Galatians 5:12, 2 Timothy 4:14, and Revelation 6:10).

1.2.2   IMPRECATIONS AS COVENANTAL EXPRESSIONS

Scholars like J. Carl Laney, Allan Harman, and John Day seek to find a solution within the covenantal framework. The covenant can be seen as a "fundamental ground on which one may justify the imprecations in the Psalms" (Laney, 1981:41). The idea of blessings and curses are found very early on in the covenant agreement between God and Abraham. God said to Abraham:

> I will make you into a great nation
> and I will bless you;
> I will make your name great,
> and you will be a blessing.
> I will bless those who bless you,
> and whoever curses you I will curse;
> and all peoples on earth
> will be blessed through you. (Genesis 12:2-3 - NIV)

Ronald Fung (1988:177–178) states that those who are in Christ become recipients of the same covenantal blessings given to Abraham.[10] By implication, it should also include the curses; cursing those who curse the covenant people.

The Imprecatory Psalms are not only based in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:2-3). They are also connected to the concept of divine vengeance expressed in the Song of Moses (Deut. 32:1-43) (Day, 2000:98–99). The Imprecatory Psalms allude to the whole Torah (Day, 2000:98). Harman (1995:66–72) also argues for covenantal terminology in the Psalms. In Psalm 5, for example, Harman identifies particular covenantal elements: the relationship between God and his people (vv. 2, 6, 8, 12), the law (vv. 4-

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[10] It should be pointed out that although Laney bases the imprecations within the Abraham covenant, he still argues that Christians should not pray these Psalms. The Abrahamic covenant is only applicable to the Jews and not to Christians.

6), the blessings (vv. 7, 11-12), and the curses (vv. 9-10). Longman (1988:57) also strongly argues that the covenant is important to understand the basic theology of the Psalms. Within this covenantal framework the enemies of the psalmist, due to their excessive wickedness, becomes the enemies of God. The attack on the psalmist is also an attack on God.[11] The promises made to Abraham, and his descendants are extended to include the psalmist, therefore the covenantal promise of blessing and curse generates the basis for the psalmists' imprecations. Although the wicked people affect the righteous directly, their actions are not only directed at the psalmist, but also indirectly at God, which makes them the enemies of God. The imprecations are "… prayers for the eternal doom of the wicked and they may also be regarded as prayers for severe, temporary judgments on the enemies of God" (Vos, 1942:137). The harshness and the desperation expressed within these please would be better understood when considering that there was a lack of future judgment in Israel's understanding of God. Israel had a limited understanding of a future eschatological day of vindication. For Israel God needed to act in their lifetime. Deliverance needed to be experience in the present (Harrison, 1969:1000). Vindication after death had little or no value for the Israelites. The imprecations voice the desire and longing of the psalmist to experience the vindication of God's righteousness (Martin, 1972:121). This desire is built on the belief that God is active in the lives of believers, also during the trials of men; punishing the wicked and restoring the righteous (Eichrodt, 1961:180). The covenantal framework does not allow the psalmist to execute judgment on his enemies. The curse must be executed by Yahweh Himself (Cheong, 1987:4). In this regard, the prayers should be

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[11] This relationship will be explained later while discussing the parallels between the covenant and the treaties of the Ancient Near East in chapter 5.

seen as prayers of zeal grounded in the conviction that God is working according to the covenantal promises: blessing and cursing when necessary.

The psalmist, struggling with the reality of enemies, takes one axiomatic truth for granted: God is righteous (Oesterly, 1937:223). For Israel, anyone who breaks the covenant is an enemy, and any enemy is a covenant breaker. Within God's covenantal promises they were justified to curse their enemies (Beisner, 1988:168). Based on these factors, David could justifiably call down terrible curses upon those who had malevolently treated him (Day, 2000:138–139). David, as the representative of Israel, also had the right to pronounce these curses on Israel's enemies (Laney, 1981:41–42). It is important to note here that within the broader context of the curse, Israel believed God[12] determined if, when, and how the curses will be executed. Even if Israel could justifiably pronounce the curse, the execution of the curses were never in their hands. If the actions of the enemies implicated. God's name, He will vindicate Himself when necessary. Of course, God's restorative judgment had the advantage that when God vindicates Himself He also, in effect, vindicated the believer (Payne, 1975:202). However, even though the covenantal framework do offer some form of justification for imprecations, the psalmist unselfishness could still be questioned. Because there is a vested interest in the actions of God, there is no guarantee that the psalmist's motives would remain pure. The psalmist's were acutely aware of this. Selfish imprecations could turn the curse on oneself. An example is the psalmist of Psalm 7 proclaiming a self-curse if he is not innocent (Psalm 7:3-5).

Closely related to this approach is the argument that the imprecations are predictions (Lockyer, 1993:446–447). This is an old attempt to alleviate this problem. Augustine

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[12] See chapter 5 on the "Context of the Curse" for more details.

(1991:537) argued that the imprecations are "…in the mode of predicting the future under the appearance of wishing evil." A prediction changes the imprecations from personal statements to divine announcements (Luc, 1999:398). The moral dilemma of believers uttering the harsh words are lessened because the psalmist is merely announcing the judgment of God (Oehler, 1962:558). Luc (1999:400) argues that the "language and content of these imprecations are not very different from the direct or indirect judgment speeches of the prophets." He argues further that a sharp distinction between imprecations and judgment predictions should not be made, because there are striking similarities between the two (Luc, 1999:402). The psalmists should also be seen as more than just poets; they should be seen as prophets (Luc, 1999:400). Luc quotes Tournay (1991:31–32) who said that "… the prophetic dimension has been neglected in modern studies." The prophetic nature of the Psalms was recognized in the New Testament as can be seen in Matthew 26:23-24, John 13:8, and John 15:25 (Luc, 1999:401).

Day (2000:106) argues that the promise of divine vengeance is central to the theology and hope of Scripture. From the Law, the Prophets, and the Psalms it extends right through the New Testament into the book of Revelation. There is a certain continuity that can be found between the issues identified in the Old Testament and issues still dominant in the New Testament times. Luc (1999:405) argues that the concerns expressed by the Imprecatory Psalms, like social justice and the destiny of Israel amongst other nations, are also found in the Pentateuch and the Prophets. A concern for social justice is still a high priority in the New Testament. When these concerns are broken, the justice of God comes into focus. Wickedness do exist on earth, and when social justice is broken the plea for Gods justice is more than expressions for personal vengeance. It is a desire to see the restorative justice of God activated. Although the

imprecations are an extreme expression of this desire, it is important to note that it is not limited to the Old Testament. Romans 8 shows that not only the believers, but the whole of creation groan in the hope of the revelation of God's justice appearing soon.

Most devotional readers have a basic understanding of God's covenant. Even though, there is no consensus among academics regarding the nature, number or continuity of the covenant between the two Testaments, it still offers an efficient general framework for approaching the Imprecatory Psalms. This thesis will built on the general framework of the covenant in an attempt to create a bridge between the imprecations of the Old Testament and the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά of 1 Corinthians 16:22. Hopefully, it will offer a simple, yet effective key for reinterpreting the Imprecatory Psalms from a devotional view.

1.2.3 THE IMPRECATIONS AS A RESULT FROM A LOWER ETHICAL STANDARD

Considering the Imprecatory Psalms as the product of a lower ethical standard, relates to the previous view, but instead of rejecting the words as evil, vindictive and not inspired by God, it accepts these words as part of the Biblical text. Whereas the previous solution prefers to reject or remove only the imprecations, this solution tends to discard the whole Old Testament. The Old Testament forms part of an older, lower dispensation and should, therefore, be dismissed as irrelevant for New Testament believers. This is a very old viewpoint. At the end of the 19th century, Davies (1892:158), argued that the imprecations, as part of the Old Testament, should be interpreted from an older, less ethical dispensation. The Old Testament is a stern, harsh, semi-barbarous, and antiquated, if not entirely obsolete, teaching (Reed, 1907:313). Kittel (1910:143) devalues the imprecations to a primitive stage in the evolution of religious knowledge. For him, condoning these expressions are an offence against the Bible (Kittel, 1910:195). Some scholars identify a progressive revelation from God (Laney, 1981:39).

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As time progressed from the Old Testament times to the New Testament, God is revealed more fully and clearly (Reed, 1907:302). The curses found in the Psalms are due to a lack of better understanding. The psalmists did not know better as the New Testament ethical concepts, like praying for the enemy, were not yet revealed in Old Testament times. The Old Testament is antiquated and obsolete, implying that the whole Old Testament, and the Imprecatory Psalms, are essentially useless for the Christian reader. At best, the Imprecatory Psalms "… should only be preserved in ancient record, as evidence of the pit from whence we have been dug as Christians" (Cross, 1932:28–29). Cross (1932:28–29) goes even further by claiming that "… keeping these material that breathes a spirit of aggression, self-assertion, and vengeance as part of our Christian worship is contradicting our faith." So, these Psalms should be ignored and rejected by Christians, especially because they "… always were and will be sinful" (Vreeland, 2008:380).

For proponents of this view Psalm 35 could be a good example for showing the underdeveloped view of God by the psalmist (Oesterly, 1937:128). This view posits that a Christian should not be surprised or shocked when discovering these expressions in the Old Testament. It is part of a primitive and evil period of humankind, but fortunately Christians have moved past that worldview of retribution and hatred wrapped up in the Old Testament Law (Lehman, 1971:439). One should not expect Christian religious and moral perfection from Israelites (Kittel, 1910:285). Even though these imprecations are found in Scripture, Christians should not repeat them (Westermann, 1980:65–66).

When studying the Old Testament from the viewpoint of progressive revelation, the problem created by the Imprecatory Psalms becomes irrelevant. The high ethical commands in regards to enemies found in the New Testament, do not apply to the Old

Testament psalmists who lived under a barbaric morality and limited revelation. Their curses may be acceptable in such an era, but they are unacceptable in the New Testament era which means the Psalms are rejected because they are part of the Old Testament which, as a whole, is seen as a lesser part in relation to the New Testament. It might be acceptable for the Old Testament authors to invoke judgment upon enemies (Vos, 1942:125), but not for post-New Testament believers. Zenger (1996:13), who is not a proponent of this viewpoint, argues that:

> [t]he problem is most harsh when they [Imprecatory Psalms] are interpreted as texts created in pre-Christian Judaism and when a strong emphasis is laid on the discontinuity between Judaism and Christianity. Then the Psalter stand before the judgment seat of the New Testament Christology and ecclesiology, either to be 'Christianized' or rejected as partly 'unchristian' (Zenger, 1996:13).

Opponents of this view declare this a "…mischievous conclusion that the two Testaments contain different codes of Christian ethics" (Dabney, 1967:706). While some scholars easily work with the concept of a progressive revelation where the mind of God is more fully and clearly revealed (Reed, 1907:302), it is difficult for devotional readers to understand this concept. Of course, not all scholars see the Old Testament as a lesser part of the Biblical text. Brug (2001:11–12) argues that seeing these prayers as remnants of a less developed stage of religion - that have been outgrown and no longer valid for New Testament times - are not supported by careful study of Scripture.

A case can be made for the continuity from the Old Testament to the New Testament. Jesus told his disciples that He did not come to abolish the Law or the prophets, but to fulfill them (Matt. 5:17). Jesus did condemn certain teachings from the Old Testament, but He was arguing the unbiblical traditions of the Inter-testamental Judaism, and not

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the Old Testament in itself (Payne, 1975:939). Kaiser (1983:350) argues that "… even in the Old Testament, love for one's enemy was not an optional feature of the covenant community of faith." France (1985:133) states that the concept of hating an enemy could rather be traced to the Qumran community and not the Old Testament era.

A study of passages like Exodus 23:4-5,[13] Leviticus 19:17-18[14] and Proverbs 25:21-22[15] indicates that simply claiming that the Old and New Testament contain opposite ethical codes is not easily sustained. Romans 12:19 quotes directly from Deuteronomy 32:35 when asking the readers not to take vengeance into their hands. Both Old and New Testament clearly states that vengeance belongs to God, not humans. Interestingly, from the Psalms quoted in the New Testament, the Imprecatory Psalms are quoted at a rate of twice the average for the Psalms as a whole (Wenham, 1994:172–173). Some of the harshest Psalms, like Psalm 35, 69 and 109, are quoted in the New Testament (Luc, 1999:397–398). Not all these quotations contain the imprecatory elements. However, the ancient readers would know these Psalms in their entirety, and quoting even a small part from any of these Psalms would lead to the overall context of the Psalm being called to mind (Kidner, 1973:44). It is also doubtful that Jesus and the other apostles would highlight certain arguments in the New Testament by quote passages that are from a conflicting ethic, unless there was no problem perceived in terms of ethics. "Had they been alien to the spirit of the New Testament, one might have expected to have

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[13] **4**"If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. **5** If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him (Exodus 23:4-5; ESV).

[14] **17** "You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him. **18** You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:17-18; ESV).

[15] **21** If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, **22** for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you (Proverbs 25:21-22; ESV).

found them tacitly shunned by its writers. But this is not the case at all" (Wenham, 1994:172).

The New Testament itself contains passages that are imprecatory in nature. The author of Galatians condemns everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law with a curse in Galatians 3:10. Earlier in Galatians 1:8-9 a curse is pronounced against all who corrupt the message of the gospel. It is doubtful that refers to anything less than the destruction of the corruptors. Paul also uttered some intense words against Elymas in Acts 13:10-11 and Ananias, the high priest, in Acts 23:3. In 1 Corinthians 16:22 Paul curse those who do not love God. Lenski comments on this curse of Paul with the following words:

> Paul's heart still throbs with emotion which refuses to be suppressed.
> Before he adds the customary benediction as the last word (Gal.
> 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18; Philem. 25), his spirit
> and his hand almost involuntarily react to all the perversions and all
> the abuses which he is attempting to correct in Corinth by means of
> this letter, and he records his apostolic verdict regarding all those
> who may dare to remain obdurate and to continue in their evil course.
> If anyone loves not the Lord, let him be ἀνάθεμα! The words are a
> curse like the thunders of the ancient prophets. Not merely Paul and
> his indignation are behind them but the Lord himself as Jehovah is
> behind the thunders of the prophets (Lenski, 1963:785–786).

In Galatians 5:14 Paul reminds his readers that they should love their neighbor like themselves, only two verses after wishing that those who unsettle the believers would emasculate themselves (Gal. 5:12). It is clear that Paul had little patience with anyone corrupting his definition of the gospel. Romans 11:9-10 quotes Psalm 69:22-23 against

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the obstinate Jews and it appears as if the author also had no problems with using this Psalm in its original context.

2 Timothy 4:14 makes a statement that can easily be seen as a wish for vengeance: God will repay Alexander in the same way, as he has done to Paul. However, when it comes to vengeance the words of the saints under the altar of God in Revelation 6:10 is bloodthirsty, even in terms of the Old Testament Psalms. "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"(Revelation 6:10; ESV).

In Acts 1:16-20 Peter speaks to the Jews. He quotes from two harsh imprecatory Psalms (Psalms 69:25 and 109:8), and has no problem quoting them as Scripture. In Acts 8:20-21 Peter also made a chilling statement against Simon the Magician:

> May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! [21] You have no part or share in this ministry, because your heart is not right before God. [22] Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord. Perhaps he will forgive you for having such a thought in your heart (NIV).

If these harsh words were limited to the apostles only, it would be easier to dismiss them like the words of the psalmists, but Jesus also made statements that contain imprecations. His debates with the leaders of the time resulted in several harsh pronouncements. In Matthew 23:1-36 the Pharisees are called the enemies of God, and they are held responsible for the blood of all the Old Testament martyrs. Jesus calls a series of woes unto them. Garland (1979:87) argues that the woe "…connotes a powerful and denunciatory judgment akin to a curse." In Matthew 25:41, with the future judgment in mind, Jesus said, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire

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prepared for the devil and his angels" (ESV). Jesus sent a clear message to those who do not bear fruit when He cursed the barren fig tree (Matthew 21:28 and Mark 11:12). In Luke 19:44 Jesus made a comment that parallel some unsettling similarities with Psalm 137:9 – "they [the enemies] will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls" (NIV).

Differences do exist between the Old and New Testament, but these should be seen as a difference of degree and not kind (Day, 2000:3). Still, the imprecatory prayers do create a challenge because of their harshness. They were appropriate prayers when they were first uttered, and they should still be proper today (Brug, 2001:11–12). However, Christians should not pray these imprecations without careful consideration of the contexts in which these words were originally uttered. Devotional readers should still be reminded that there is a need for responsible exegesis when interpreting them in a Christian setting. Rejection by classifying them as part of an irrelevant dispensation however is not acceptable exegesis. These prayers are even given a legitimate place within the New Testament when entrusting both temporal and eschatological judgment to God (Day, 2000:4).

The above examples show that curses, similar to those in the Old Testament, do also occur in the New Testament. The imprecations of the Old Testament cannot be dismissed by delegating them to an outdated dispensation. This position offer little value for devotional readers. The question may still remain what a Christian should do with them, but to ignore them is not acceptable.

1.2.4 NOT DAVID'S WORDS, BUT THE WORDS OF HIS ENEMIES

In an article from the 19th century, Beardslee (1897:491–492) mentions the view that David was not cursing his enemies, but he simply repeated the curses his enemies

pronounced unto him. Advocates of this view tend to defend the Psalms. John Greehy is a clear example of this. "I must jump to the defense of Ps. 109, often regarded as the doyen of the Psalms of imprecations, and now smitten entirely from the breviary because of misinterpretation" (Greehy, 1978:171). Proponents of this highlight the change of pronouns in Psalm 109 between verse 5 ("they") and verses 6-19 ("he"). This change is allegedly supported by verse. 20, where the psalmist asks God to return on his "accusers" the evils spoken by them in verse 6 (Luc, 1999:396). The conclusion is that "… [t]he curses of vv. 6-19 are almost certainly those of the psalmist's enemies, and include the words with which they attack him at his trial" (Greehy, 1978:171). This viewpoint is not acceptable as it is only applicable to Psalm 109 and the text need to be amended to achieve this (see Luc, 1999:396–397).

This view should be discarded because it is a weak argument and just serves to illustrate the lengths gone to reach a desired conclusion (McFadyen, 1904:176). Kidner (1975:389) also argues that if these imprecations are the words of the enemies, it will make Peter's quotation of Psalm 109:8 in Acts 1:20 forced. Luc also remains unconvinced:

> 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 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 (Luc, 1999:396–397).

The advantage of this approach is that it offers a logical solution for these imprecations. Unfortunately, this solution is only applicable to Psalm 109.

1.2.5 SUMMARY

Through the ages, the Psalter has been regarded as the prayer book of believers. Devotional readers turn to the Psalms for inspiration and edification. The Psalms have become so ingrained in the lives of believers that the question of inspiration, authorship and origin are mostly ignored. The Psalms speak to the soul of the believer and, as the Word of God devotional readers find the power to transform their lives in these poems.

Solutions that require the removal or disregarding of these Psalms offer little help with question of Christians reading of the Imprecatory Psalms. Most devotional readers have a very high view of Scripture and tend to regard the Biblical canon as a single source of divine revelation. They have little or no knowledge of critical approaches to the Biblical text.

Some modern approaches lean towards a Marcionistic approach by removing these Psalms, or parts thereof, from the Bible. The problem is that imprecations are not limited to the Psalms. Various imprecatory passages are also found throughout the Old and New Testament. Various passages[16] contain elements that can be identified as imprecations. Removing these elements from the Psalms would also require removing them from the other parts of the Bible.

Through the ages, the Psalms did more than just express the feelings of the ancient believers. They grew over time to extend beyond cultural and socio-political differences became the expressions of the faith and the experiences of modern believers. No matter

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[16] Numbers 10:35-36, Judges 5:31, Jeremiah 11:20, 15:15, 17:18, 18:19-32, Acts 8:20-21, Acts 13:10-11, Acts 23:3, 1 Corinthians 16:22, Galatians 5:12, 2 Timothy 4:14, and Revelation 6:10

how harsh they appear, for most devotional readers these Psalms are more than just hateful and vengeful speech. They are prayers to God and carry within them the expectation of a response from God. Reducing the imprecations to "vengeful" and "spiteful" expressions of sinful people does not acknowledge the powerful role these prayers play within the lives of believers.

In this sense, they should not just be dismissed as expressions from an irrelevant period of Biblical revelation. Most devotional readers will recognize that there is a shift between the Old Testament and the New Testament. This shift does not necessarily mean that the Old Testament is completely outdated and irrelevant. The New Testament authors show an affinity to the Old Testament. Various quotes and allusion to the Old Testament are found within the New Testament. Passages like Exodus 23:4-5, Leviticus 19:17-18 and Proverbs 25:21-22 indicates that the Old Testament ethics are not so far removed from the New Testament ethics. Romans 12:19, quotes directly from Deuteronomy 32:35 when asking his readers not to take vengeance into their hands. Both Old and New Testament clearly states that vengeance belongs to God, not humans. The alleged differences between the Old Testament and New Testament is rather a difference in degree, and not kind (Day, 2000:3).

An approach is needed that attempts to reconcile the more simple and basic approach of devotional readers with the reading of these Psalms. A responsible approach will not divorce the Psalms or the New Testament from their cultural time frame. The next section will discuss the methodology to attempt and achieve this goal.

1.3 GOALS, THEORETICAL POINTS OF DEPARTURE PREMISES AND HYPOTHESIS

1.3.1 GOALS

This study will attempt to provide an alternative approach to the interesting, but perplexing problem of the relationship between the Imprecatory Psalms and the New Testament. It will be argued that, if the Aramaic word Μαράνα θά is read together with the ἀνάθεμα as some scholars have done, it could offer possibilities for building a hermeneutical bridge between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Working within the broader covenantal framework of both Testaments, ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά can become a hermeneutical key to unlock a possible viewpoint to approach these perplexing words. This study does not claim to provide a complete solution to the problems caused by the Imprecatory Psalms.

It will be argued that there are certain elements within the prayers of the psalmists that are echoed within the cry of Μαράνα θά. The implication is not that a direct link exists between the Imprecatory Psalms and the eschatological cry[17] of Μαράνα θά. The similarities are between the emotional desires expressed in the Imprecatory Psalms and the hope for Christ's return. The hopes and desires expressed within the Psalms, and the hopes and desires expressed within the Aramaic Μαράνα θά share some parallels. To highlight these parallels Μαράνα θά and ἀνάθεμα needs to be read together. Although not a well-known interpretation of ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά, a few prominent scholars have opted for this interpretation.

1 Corinthians 16 calls down a curse, or ἀνάθεμα, on those who do not love the Lord. The author uses Μαράνα θά as a plea for the παρουσία of Christ to execute judgment

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[17] There is a debate about the nature of Μαράνα θά and there is uncertainty about it being an indicative or an imperative. This will be handled at the appropriate place. It will also be argued that the imperative, which makes this an eschatological cry, is the better translation.

on those who do not love the Lord (Hughes, 1988:243). Moule (2008:223) argues that Μαράνα θά not only reinforces the ἀνάθεμα formula, but is an integral part of the ἀνάθεμα . If the ἀνάθεμα and the Μαράνα θά are read as a unit, the Μαράνα θά will function as a sanction on the curse. Μαράνα θά then expresses not only Paul's wish for the eschatological return of Christ, but also the hope that Christ would come to execute judgment on those who do not love the Lord. Μαράνα θά would then be an emotive exclamation of the desire to see God's justice revealed. Even though, judgment is not the focus of Μαράνα θά, the desired results of the coming of Christ do parallel the expressed wish of the Imprecatory Psalms: the actualization of God's righteousness and justice. For believers the coming judgment is not something to fear. Most Christian believers express the belief that Christ will return and that his return will not bring forth the final judgment, but also the actualization of salvation. The second coming is connected to the final judgment. Μαράνα θά is an imperative cry for the Lord to return. Although the focus of those calling on Christ to return is not on the final judgment, it is appropriate. No formula would lend itself more to the purpose of an imprecation or a ban (Brown, 1986:897).

By linking Μαράνα θά and ἀνάθεμα a unique opportunity for reconsidering the Imprecatory Psalms from a Christian perspective could present itself. The New Testament reveals a tension between justice and mercy. God's love and mercy for sinners is a major focal point in New Testament theology. However, amidst the love and mercy, the New Testament reveals overtones of judgment and vengeance. There is

a tension in the New Testament between violence and peace,[18] justice and mercy, and judgment and salvation. This tension offers an unusual opportunity for the Imprecatory Psalms since:

> …the love of God hates all that is opposed; and sinners – not merely sin – are opposed to God. This tension in the New Testament, part of an overarching theological tension between justice and grace, leaves room for the psalms to be heard (Allen, 2002:107).

It will be argued later that the imprecations do not primarily focus on the destruction of the wicked. The psalmists' main focus is the wish that God will vindicate them. The idea of vindication creates many problems for modern readers, mainly because the way vindication is understood today differs from the Biblical concept. And, as will be argued later, vindication is also the emotional desire behind the call of Μαράνα θά.

This study focuses on the possible connection between the desires and hopes expressed by the psalmists in their imprecations and the desires and hopes expressed by New Testament believers crying Μαράνα θά. It is within this analogous desire for the actualisation of God's justice, expressed within the both the Imprecatory Psalms and Μαράνα θά, that a hermeneutical bridge can be found between the different theological frameworks of the Old and New Testament. This hermeneutical bridge can provide unique opportunities for reinterpreting the bloodthirsty calls of the Imprecatory Psalms within a Christian framework. The bridge will be built on the similar expectations and desires expressed by Christians and psalmists: God should come soon and act and bring

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[18] Jeremy Punt (2008:18), in his paper read at a conference in Stellenbosch, argued that: "… a simple, benevolent reading of the New Testament documents as univocally dedicated to peace or non-violence is neither defendable nor responsible." He also commented on the "…tension in the Christian Scriptures - which promote peace but in which God, Jesus and his followers as agents of peace, also tolerate, accept and even promote violence."

justice through judgment.

Even after decades of academic research, there is still no simple solution to this problem, and it is doubtful if there will ever be a single solution. Bullock (1998:164) reminds us: *"At the outset we should recognize that all questions related to Scripture cannot be solved like a mathematical problem. We can profit from the attitude the apostle Peter expressed toward the epistles of Paul, "There are some things in them hard to understand"* (2 Pet. 3:16 - RSV). The hope is that this will be a complementary approach with the possibility of interacting with these perplexing Psalms.

1.3.2 AIMS

As indicated above, the aim of this study is to attempt an analogous bridge between the cries of the psalmists in the Old Testament Imprecatory Psalms and the eschatological cry Μαράνα θά in 1 Corinthians 16:22. If plausible it could offer devotional readers a possible key to interpreting the Imprecatory Psalms.

The study aims to tackle the problem on two levels. The first level focuses on the Old Testament text and attempt to:

1. Determine the motivational reasons for the psalmists to express these curses. This will be done by careful exegesis of the specific Psalms. Poetical devices will be carefully analyzed.

2. Determine, as far as is possible, the historical context and life setting of the Psalms. Understanding the historical-cultural settings of the psalmist could help in an attempt to identify the emotional turmoil that led to these expressions. It should be remembered that it is notoriously difficult to determine the historical contexts of the Psalms. Still, certain broad historical and cultural remarks can

be made in an attempt to discover how the psalmists probably related to his world and who the enemies of the psalmists were.

3. Discern the emotional experiences, hopes and desires behind the imprecations. What is the possible outcome the psalmist wished for when he asked that his enemies be put to shame (Psalm 35:4), that they are like chaff in the wind (Psalm 35:5), that their way be dark and slippery with the angel of the Lord in pursuit (Psalm 35:6)? Does the psalmist hope for the death of his enemy when he prays that God let destruction come on upon him (Psalm 35:8) and he fall to his destruction (Psalm 35:8)? Or does he only have the enemy's financial ruin in mind?

This will be done by reading the Psalms within their own cultural and canonical setting according to the Three-Dimensional reading plan (see Methodology and Approach),

The second level is working with 1 Corinthians 16:22 in the New Testament and attempting to:

1. Argue that Μαράνα θά is an imperative and therefore an eschatological cry for the παρουσία of Christ. Also, it will be argued that the Christians who cried for the return of Christ had a very real understanding of the implications regarding judgment and mercy this will entail.[19]

2. Argue for a connection between ἀνάθεμα and Μαράνα θά. This connection is important for using Μαράνα θά as a hermeneutical bridge for the Imprecatory

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[19] This study is attempting to develop a hermeneutical key based on what is implied in the text to help devotional readers understand the curses found in the Old and New Testament in a larger context. Systematic theological and philological questions regarding God/YHWH/Lord or the curse fall outside the scope of this study. This study is interested in the analogy(-ies) between the imprecatory Psalms and 1 Cor 16, and on whether or how notions of the divine (image) are developed or deployed across time.

Psalms. If there is no potential connection between these two, the last point will not be possible.

3. Attempt to show that behind the imperative Μαράνα θά is desires and hopes that are analogous with the Imprecatory Psalms.

These findings will be combined to offer a key in the analogy between the hopes and desires of those calling for Christ's and the psalmist's hopes and desires for God's actions called for in the Psalms.

I am not aware of any studies attempting to link the Imprecatory Psalms with Μαράνα θά. Although the idea may seem strange, I do believe it is possible. C.F.D. Moule (2008:222–226), argued in an article, "*A Reconsideration of the context of maranatha,*" published in 1960, that the Μαράνα θά not only sanctions the ἀνάθεμα but also forms an integral part of the ἀνάθεμα in 1 Corinthians. Moule's thesis will play a significant role in arguing the central thesis of this study. Although Μαράνα θά forms a central part of the argument of this thesis, it should be noted that Μαράνα θά only offers one possible pole of the overall message of the New Testament concept of justice. Judgment in the New Testament is more nuanced and complex.

Still, Christians should not simply reject the Imprecatory Psalms since *"*no other Psalms have been so largely quoted by our Lord and His apostles as these 'imprecatory psalms'" (Martin, 1972:131). Out of all the Psalms quoted in the New Testament, the Imprecatory Psalms are quoted at a rate of twice the average for other Psalms (Wenham, 1994:172–173). Students of the New Testament will realize that the challenges of facing the idea of divine curse is not as foreign to the New Testament framework as most think (Wenham, 1994:169). Looking at the New Testament imprecations, it can be argued that the Old Testament imprecations appear more severe than those in the

New Testament; but it is mostly owing to the harsh language employed by the Old Testament imprecations. Day (2000:168) argues that despite the language used by the Old Testament curses might be gruesomely vivid, the New Testament imprecations are actually more severe than those found in the Psalms. Both the Old and New Testament curses have the destruction of the enemies in mind, but the calls for judgment in the Psalms are temporal and immediate; asking God to act as soon as possible, while the curse in 1 Corinthians is eschatological – finding its locus more in the eternal judgment of God (Day, 2000:168). Despite the differences in language employed, the curses in both Old and New Testament focus on justice and judgment. Day (2000:9) argues that the "difference is one of eschatology, not essence." So the argument will be that the difference between the ἀνάθεμα found in 1 Corinthians 16:22 and the curses found in the Psalms is essentially on the same outcome and therefore shares an essence. "The occurrence of Maranatha in 1 Corinthians 16:22, certainly derives its idea from the judgment implicit in v.21, which is closely linked with the idea of the second coming" (Birdsall, 1996:726). If it is possible to connect the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά as a single unit, it will strengthen this idea further.

The desire for "immediate" action from God expressed in the Psalms must be considered within the Old Testament context. Christians are influenced by a more eternal dimension unknown to Old Testament times. Within a Christian context most believers can understand the message to wait for an eschatological day of judgment. However, for Israelite believers God's justice had to be condensed into their short lifetimes if it was to be meaningful (Allen, 2002:106). The Psalms have no concept of judgment in an eschatological sense. The psalmists were set in a historical period in which little was known of a future life and future justice. They lived in a reality where human systems of justice frequently failed (Wilson, 2007:102). With a more limited

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perspective on a future judgment than their Christian counterparts, the psalmists had a stronger reason to pray for immediate action. It will be later indicated that the enemies were tenacious in their attacks and the only way for justice to prevail would be for God to stop the enemies.

These differences between the theological and hermeneutical frameworks of the Imprecatory Psalms and 1 Corinthians will be explored in more detail later. For now it will be sufficient to notice that in both 1 Corinthians and the Psalms the desire is for God to act, with the focus on some form of judgment. It is this similarity between Paul's expression of a curse and his desire for Christ to come, and the psalmists calling on God to come and act against their enemies, that will form the focus of this study. Brown (1986:898) also identify that Μαράνα θά, similarly to the imprecations, concerns the coming of the Lord in judgment to redress wrong and establish right (Brown, 1986:898).

This idea is quite central to 1 Corinthians an might also indicate that Μαράνα θά is directly related to the particular occasion and purpose of this letter (Wu, 1993:559). The pronouncement of an ἀνάθεμα, or curse, on anyone who does not love the Lord followed by the eschatological cry Μαράνα θά combine to reinforce the key messages of the letter (Wu, 1993:559) .

The basic concept of the covenant will also be considered, although an in-depth study of the covenant falls outside the scope of this study. The covenant ties together many strands of the theology of the Psalms (Longman III, 1988:57), and although the covenant is a hermeneutical category that forms only one lens, it remains a powerful heuristic tool for comprehending the large sweep of the biblical message (McKnight, 2005:142). The covenant played a major role in Israel's, as well as the Early Church's understanding of the relationship between them and God. These aspects will need to be

considered when studying the background of the imprecations in the Psalter. Wenham (1994:167) claims that these types of curses have their basis in the Pentateuch. Israel worked with the conviction that all aspects of life; even the painful, are enclosed within their covenantal relationship with God (Jones, 2007:48). This study acknowledges that the concept of the Covenant is a very difficult problem, but accepts the premise that:

> More than anything, the psalms were declarations of relationship between the people and their Lord. They assumed his covenant with them and its obligations of provision, protection, and preservation. Their songs of adoration, confessions of sin, protests of innocence, complaints about suffering, pleas for deliverance, assurances of being heard, petitions before battle, and thanksgivings afterwards were all expressions of their unique relationship to the one true God (LaSor, Hubbard, & Bush, 1996:446).

This unique relationship with God is expressed in the most basic form of the covenant. Blessings and curses are two sides of the same coin and can only be understood within the broader covenantal framework because:

> [b]lessings and curses flow from the laws of the covenant. If one disobeyed the laws, he (sic) would be cursed. On the other hand, if one was obedient, then blessing would come upon him (sic). From Psalm 1 there is a sharp contrast drawn between those who live under God's mercy, expressed in and through the covenant and those who do not. In the covenant relationship there were dual sanctions of blessings and curses (Harman, 1995:67–70).

1.3.3 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

It is unfeasible to consider all Psalms containing imprecatory elements. The field needs to be narrowed in some way. John Day chose three Psalms for his study: Psalms 58, 137 and 109. They contain curses against a societal enemy, a national enemy and a personal enemy (Day, 2000:14). Daniel Simango (2011:1–18) narrowed his study based on the classifications of 11 scholars. He attempted to find one imprecation in each of the five books of the Psalms. Not all scholars agree on how many Psalms are imprecatory in nature. The considerations of 17 scholars will be listed below. The Psalms that are most consistently included by these scholars will be considered further.

Walton	Laney	Vos	Bullock	Beardslee	Boice	Day	Harman	Adeyemo	VanGemeren	Luc	Strawn	Surburg	Kline	lehman	Waltner	Lessing
															3	
						5						5			5	5
												6				6
	7			7	7	7		7				7	7	7		7
																9
							10					10				10
															12	
												17			17	17
												18				
												26				
							28					28			28	28
												31			31	31
35	35		35	35	35	35		35	35	35		35	35	35	35	35
															36	
														37		
							40					40				10
														50		
														52		52
																54
		55				55	55	55				55	55	55		55
												56				56
58	58					58		58	58	58	58	58		58	58	58
	59	59	59			59	59					59	59	59	59	59
																68

69	69	69		69	69	69	69	69	69	69		69	69	69	69	69
												70			70	70
												71				71
																74
		79				79	79	79			79	79	79	79	79	79
83	83					83			83	83	83	83		83	83	83
														92		
						94					94				94	94
														101		
												104		104	104	104
109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109	109
														125		
						129						129				129
137	137	137				137	137	137		137	137	137	137	137	137	137
139	139					139		139						139	139	139
						140		140				140			140	140
												141				141
												143				143
														145		
												149				

From this table it is clear that certain Psalms (i.e. 35, 58, 109, and 137) are almost universally regarded as Imprecatory Psalms. Between the 17 scholars,[20] a total of 43 Psalms are listed as imprecatory or containing imprecatory elements. To limit this number further, only Psalms that are listed by more than half of these scholars will be considered. This leaves ten Psalms: 7 (11x), 35 (20x), 55 (11x), 58 (14x), 59 (14x), 69 (21x), 79 (12x), 83 (14x), 109 (23x), 137 (18x). Focusing on ten Psalms, however, is too ambitious for the current study.

It will be argued later that Μαράνα θά[21] is also an imperative, an eschatological wish, for the Lord to come. This does not argue that there exists a direct connection between

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[20] Limitations in space prevent the listing of more scholars.

[21] The use of a hapax legomenon to construct this hermeneutical key may appear anachronistic and precarious. However, this study does not focus on a philological or tradition-historical study of the word "curse" or argue that a direct connection between the curses in the Psalms and the anathema exists.

the Old Testament imprecations and the Aramaic Μαράνα θά found in 1 Corinthians 16, certainly not in the reverse, anachronistic order. It will be argued, however, that the basic desire expressed in the imprecations and the eschatological cry of Μαράνα θά is essentially similar.

A cursory reading of these ten Psalms reveals that three Psalms (7, 35, 59) contain the imperative forms of the verbs עור, קיץ, קום.[22] In all three God is the subject of the imperative. The psalmists of Psalms 7, 35, and 59 all call on God "to awake/arise/lift/stir" into action on behalf of the psalmist. The implication is not that Yahweh is sleeping, but rather that he is inactive (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:70), or appears to be distant or indifferent (Harman, 2011:302). The cry for God to arise, to awake, to stir is synonymous with calling for help (Waltner, 2006:58). "Words like "arise" and "awake," as elsewhere, suggest divine aid that is not automatic but comes in response to prayer. God comes to his help when he calls, like a human judge responding to pleas for justice" (Grogan, 2008:51). These terms are related to military and judicial action (Harman, 2011:127). The use of imperatives in the Psalms to call on God to become active, and the possibility that Μαράνα θά is an imperative calling for Christ to come makes these three Psalms good candidates for attempting to build a hermeneutical bridge between ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά and the Imprecatory Psalms.[23]

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[22] In these three Psalms, the verbs קום (Psalm 7:7; 35:2, 59:2) and קיץ (Psalm 35:23; 59:5) appear as Hiphil Imperatives, while עור appears as both Qal Imperatives (Psalm 7:7; 59:5) and Hiphil Imperative (Psalm 35:23).

[23] There are more vicious examples of imprecations found in the Psalms, but these 3 Psalms will indicate 1) the expressions of a curse and 2) the desire that YHWH will become active (imperatives). It will also be argued that the expression of the curse (ἀνάθεμα) in 1 Corinthians 16 is followed by a prayer (Μαράνα θά) for the Lord to come. It is this similarity between expressing a curse and wishing for divine action that creates a general framework for developing the hermeneutical key that most devotional readers will be able to associate with.

The cry of Μαράνα θά is an expression that also contains an element of justice and judgment when it wish that Jesus will return soon. This idea grew out of the Old Testament as Ciampa and Rosner indicate:

> The expectation that the Lord would come to redress wrong and establish his righteousness in the earth grew out of Old Testament prophetic and apocalyptic texts (see 13:8–12 on the day of the Lord) and is found throughout early Judaism (e.g., 1 Enoch 1:9) and the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:14–16; Jude 14–15; Rev. 6:17) (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010:866–867)

This could be a viable connection between the Imprecatory Psalms and 1 Corinthians 16:22. Harman (2011:127) comments on Psalm 7 by arguing that "he [the psalmist] pictures a judgment scene in which God has gathered the nations on earth before him, an then from on high he carries out his judgment." Remembering the differences already noted between the Old and New Testament eschatologically, this does indicate a similarity in terms of the expected judgment of God.

The argument will be that the imperative Μαράνα θά reinforces the ἀνάθεμα by calling for Jesus to come is similar to the psalmists expressing curses on their enemies and calling with imperatives for God to become active on their behalf. "The occurrence of Maranatha in 1 Corinthians 16:22, certainly derives its idea from the judgment implicit in v.21, which is closely linked with the idea of the second coming" (Birdsall, 1996:726)

Therefore, this study will focus on Psalms 7, 35, and 59 because of the consensus among scholars that they can be considered as Imprecatory Psalms, or at least containing

imprecatory elements and the presence of the imperative verbs calling on God to "awake", "arise", and "stir" on behalf of the psalmists. Detailed exegesis will be done in an attempt to identify the possible emotional motivations behind the psalmist curse and the potential outcome of the psalmist hopes. The attempt will be made to build a hypothetical bridge between the desires and wishes expressed by Christians when they pray for the Lord to come (Μαράνα θά) and the desires and wishes expressed by the psalmists.

1.4 METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH

Before the advent of the critical period, the Psalms were mostly read historically and unscientifically. The advent of the critical period gave birth to more scientific approaches to Biblical studies. During the last few decades an explosion of critical methodologies arose, to such an extent that there appears to be an almost endless list of critical approaches (Howard jr., 2004:355).[24] Some methodologies complement each other while others are wholly incompatible. This explosion of methodological approaches determines the need to define the methodology and approach that will be used in this study.

Choosing a methodology for studying the Psalms is difficult, but important since the Psalter is "a strange literature to study" (Brueggemann, 2002:vii). On face value the Psalms do not appear to be obscure, technical, or complicated. However, readers quickly discover that the Psalms contain more elements than originally considered which can make them difficult to handle (Brueggemann, 2002:vii). The Psalms are

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[24] Jonker and Lawrie (2005:27–29) identifies a list of modern methods ranging from text-critical, literary-critical, form-critical, tradition-critical, and redaction-critical studies to canonical criticism, social reconstruction, socio-historical studies, cultural-anthropological approaches, and socio-rhetorical criticism.

literary texts contained within a particular literary context (i.e. the rest of the Psalter, and the rest of the Biblical texts). The Psalms are also historical documents. The psalmists lived in a certain cultural and socio-historical context which not only differ widely from modern times, but can also vary widely among the individual Psalms. The very nature of the Psalms connects them to almost every historical period of Israel's history, as well as various cultural and faith contexts. Not only is the Psalms reflecting the diverse historical settings of Israel (Harman, 2011:28), the historical and cultural context of the Ancient Near Eastern cultures also influenced the Psalms (Schaefer, 2001:vii). The complex nature of the Psalms is underscored, not only by the normal intricate elements found in all Biblical texts, but also by a unique emotional element. Clothed within various metaphors, images, and other poetical devices we find a wide range of moods, contradictory feelings, and even angry outbursts (Waltner, 2006:18).

With the advent of the historical-critical era various methodologies and approaches were develop with the main purpose to reconstruct the historical world behind the Biblical texts. Some well-known diachronic approaches are text-critical, literary-critical, form-critical, tradition-critical, and redaction-critical studies.[25] The Biblical texts were dissected and studied diachronically. This demands highly skilled methods to dissect the text in attempts to reconstruct the different layers identified within the text. Scholars make use of critical approaches to identify any possible ancient sources the authors may have used, attempting to understand the world in which the text was developed and re-interpreted. The historical-critical methods focus essentially on trying

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[25] For a more detailed discussion of these methods, see Jonker and Lawrie (2005:27–29). It should be noted that not only historical-critical approaches are interested in the development of the Biblical texts. Modern scholars also use canonical criticism, social reconstruction, socio-historical studies, cultural-anthropological approaches, and socio-rhetorical criticism in attempts to interpret the Biblical text (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:28–29).

to understand and determine how these ancient texts came to develop into their current forms and how the worldview of Israel and the surrounding nations influenced this process. Historical-critical methods places a high importance on determining the original historical milieu in which the text developed as well as the accuracy of the historical information (Marshall, 2005:125–127). The popularity and growth of the historical-critical methodologies lead to a growing confidence in modern humanity's ability to ascertain history, both as an ideal concept and an academic discipline (Burnett, 2005:291). This created overconfidence in the abilities of historical-criticism to discover the historical contexts behind the texts. The idea grew that the Biblical text could be studied as objectively as any other object within the natural sciences. Even in the case of the Psalms, where their unique character makes it notoriously difficult to accurately determine the precise historical background of most Psalms, the historical-critical methods made bold and certain claims. Unfortunately, some modern biblical interpreters from the historical-critical school approached the texts in a "godlike fashion" somehow not realizing that their "unprejudiced, nonparticipatory observations" were often also "prejudiced, speculative, and dogmatic" (Burnett, 2005:291). This led to overconfidence among certain scholars in their abilities, or the abilities of their methods. The difficulty in determining the historical contexts of the Biblical texts led to some scholars being guilty of using hypothetical-constructed historical data (Prinsloo, 1988:5). In some cases it appeared as if certain methodologies received more focus and status than the Biblical text it studied, with some scholars even claiming that their method is the only legitimate method to use (Barton, 1996:237).

The last few decades saw an increasing realization that the historical-critical methods were not, by themselves, able to sufficiently tackle all the questions raised by the study of the Biblical texts (Prinsloo, 1988:3). During the last few decades there is a growing

demand for a less arrogant and more humble approach to Biblical study (Prinsloo, 1988:3). Prinsloo (1988:3–6) argues that the diachronic methods tend to ignore the textual elements. There is also a marked rise in the growth of modern synchronic approaches alongside the dominant diachronic methodologies. The focus of synchronic approaches is more towards working with the texts in their current form than discovering the historical and developmental realities of the text. Ironically, proponents of the more recent methodologies, similar to proponents of historical-critical methods, tend to argue that their methods are the best or only methodology to use. One example is Prinsloo (1988:4–5) who argues that the textual aspect of the Biblical text should be the primary focus, with the historical-critical results only consulted after the synchronic aspects have been studied.[26] The rise of the historical-critical methods did lead to an explosion of published knowledge about the socio-cultural and socio-political contexts of the Bible (Prinsloo, 1988:3). Even opponents of the historical-critical methodologies would agree that no approach could afford to be a-chronic or anti-historic and that the academic results of the historical-critical methods cannot be ignored (see Prinsloo, 1988:3–6).

A growing number of scholars argued the last few decades that no single approach can be sufficient for studying the many dimensions of the Biblical text. It is important to remember that "Biblical texts are not one-dimensional or 'flat' entities" (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:241). Therefore, the call for a *multidimensional* approach to the Bible is important. A multidimensional approach is a combination of methods to help deal with the various dimensions of the text; which is not only possible but necessary (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:229). No single method could possibly answer all the questions that arise

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[26] For a more detailed discussion of the synchronic approach of W.S. Prinsloo, see Le Roux (1993:270–299).

from the Biblical text. It is important to note this call for a multidimensional approach is neither a new method nor a "super method", but rather an *attitude* towards the text (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:235). This "attitude" requires that the interpreter always remembers that the texts are complex and ancient and requires specialized methods to study (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:236), and should not be read as if they are equal to modern texts (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:107). Certain overlaps and similarities do exist between ancient and modern literature, but the marked differences should cause interpreters to be wary of directly imposing modern conventions on ancient texts (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:107).

To avoid this problem a good starting point would be if the reader gets acquainted with the textual dimension of the text (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:240). This means preferably reading the texts in their original languages. This requires a text-immanent approach which focuses on aspects like genre, semantics, composition, style, images, and other literary aspects (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:69). This is sometimes done from a synchronic perspective working with the text as it stands. In some cases it will also include narrative approaches (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:95) which help to study the plot/storyline, characters, narrator, the real and implied authors and readers, point of view among others. The textual dimension takes the texts "seriously and tries to do justice to it in the interpretation" (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:107). The interpreter should also remember that the texts are born from within a specific historical context that plays a major role in the development and the focal points of the text. The Biblical story happened in a different time, place, and culture from our current time, place, and cultures. Interpreters need to be observant of the historical dimensions of the text. So next to the textual dimension the historical dimension needs to get special attention. The sociocultural and sociopolitical milieu of the Biblical text should be considered where possible. The

results of the historical-critical approaches are valuable for this (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:237). In terms of the Psalms it should be remembered that it is difficult to always study the historical aspects of the individual Psalms.

Interpreters should remember that these texts convey the religious beliefs of ancient cultures which became the basis of the faith confessions of later generations (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:237). This means that the Biblical texts not only have textual and historical dimensions, but also theological dimensions. The Bible is conveying the faith convictions of a faith community to the next generations (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:108). Thus, correct attitude, fostered by a multidimensional approach, keeps in mind that even though the Biblical text is ancient, it still acquired a certain "present character" by and for faith communities through the centuries (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:237). This means that interpreters must be sensitive to the theological developments and intention of the texts. This can be a complex undertaking as the Biblical text grew and developed over a long period of time. A multidimensional approach asks that the interpreter remains aware that faith communities of ancient times interpreted and re-interpreted these texts as they grew in their understanding and expression of their faith. The texts reflect the "dynamic-religious discourse" within the faith communities over many centuries (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:241). The attitude asked for by a multidimensional approach asks that interpreters be sensitive for the textual, historical, and theological dimensions of the text; it asks for an awareness of the possible questions and problems experienced by the ancient faith communities, before attempting to relate it to the questions and problems faced by modern faith communities. In essence the multidimensional approach:

> …also helps us to respect to the texts themselves, the faith communities that produced the texts and interpreted them before us

and the faith communities in our time that seek to orientate their lives

and serve God according to these texts (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:242).

From the short discussion above it becomes clear that any methodology for reading the Biblical texts should take note of the multidimensional reality of the Bible. More important than a method is an attitude that guide the whole process of getting acquainted with the "**textual dimension"** and the "**intertextual dynamics"** of the texts in order to "**extrapolate** the intertextual dynamics of the biblical texts **via the traditions of interpretation** to the **contemporary contexts** of interpretation" (Jonker & Lawrie, 2005:240–241).

Recently some studies on the Psalms appeared utilizing a three-dimensional reading strategy[27] specially developed for analyzing Hebrew Poetry[28] and approach the text on three dimensions: (1) the intra-textual that focuses on the different relations that exists within the text itself, (2) the inter-textual that refers to the relationship of the text with other texts, and (3) the extra-textual which refers to the cultural-historical aspects of the author and his timeframe. This methodology offers good potential for studying the Imprecatory Psalms as the multiple dimensions of the text will be considered. The textual, the historical, and the theological elements of the text will be studied in an attempt to understand the implications of the imprecations in the ancient ear as well as the modern era. The three-dimensional approach consists of the following elements:

(1) **The intra-textual dimension**: The specific Psalm will be studied according to its textual features, including the poetic elements, syntax, morphology, structure, and

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[27] See for example the two doctoral studies: the first on the Wisdom Psalms by Yeol Kim (2008) and the second on the Imprecatory Psalms by Daniel Simango (2011), There is also a Masters study on Psalm 47 by Schäder (2008).

[28] This approach was developed by scholars like W.S. Prinsloo (1994:78–83), G.T.M. Prinsloo (1992:225–251), and I. Gräbe (1990:43–59)

genre. The focus in this part will thus be on the Psalm itself, on its structure, content and the different levels of relations that exist within the text.

(2) **The Inter-textual dimension**: The Psalm will be studied in its immediate context. This is in line with the current interest in the unity of the Psalter as a whole. "Studies now abound that consider the overall structure of the book [Psalter], the contours of the book's disparate parts and how they fit together, or the 'story line' that runs from Psalm 1 to Psalm 150*"* (Howard jr., 2004:332–333). Nowadays, attention is more towards the final form of the Psalter to determine what influence titles and the placement of individual Psalms in the Psalter can have on their meaning (McCann, 1993:18). This could also include brief discussions of the relationship between the particular Psalm and the bigger canonical context of the Bible.

(3) **The Extra-textual dimension**: The broader historical context of the psalmist and the socio-cultural world will be studied, as far as possible. This also includes fitting these Psalms into the larger Ancient Near Eastern context. For the Imprecatory Psalms studying the concepts of blessing and curse within the broader Ancient Near Eastern context, as well as the Suzerain-vassal treaties, could prove useful. Where viable this section will also include questions like the *Sitz-im-Leben*, *Gattung* and historical dating of the Psalms.

This methodology has proven very effective in studying the Psalms and is well-suited for studying the Imprecatory Psalms since it focus on the three important dimensions: (1) the intra-textual elements of the Psalms, which is important since the Imprecatory Psalms contains many poetical devices which should be studied on a textual level. (2) The extra-textual dimension takes account of the author's world (wherever this is possible in the Psalms) and attempts to define and understand the cultural and social realities in which these imprecations were spoken. This is especially important to

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understand the usage of a curse in ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East. (3) The inter-textual dimensions studies how a particular Imprecatory Psalms relate to its neighboring Psalms, especially in terms of similar form, themes, and topics. This will help to identify how these Psalms relate to other Psalms in the Psalter.

Understanding the content, context, and theological implications of the Imprecatory Psalms will help to determine the psalmist's underlying reasons for, and expectations of, the imprecations. The hopes and desires of the psalmist, while expressing these curses, need to be considered before any attempt at interpreting them. This will form the Old Testament part of finding a connection between the Imprecatory Psalms and the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά in 1 Corinthians 16:22. The New Testament part needs to consider the usage of the phrase ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά in 1 Corinthians. Any possible relationship between the two words will be studied with the purpose of building the hermeneutical bridge between 1 Corinthians and the Imprecatory Psalms. In the case of Μαράνα θά, which is a *Hapax Legomenon*, external sources will also need to be considered. The contention of this study is that there is a communal hope and desire in the expressions of the imprecations and the eschatological cry Μαράνα θά. Although 1 Corinthians will play a significant role in this dissertation, the focus is not on the New Testament and its usage of Μαράνα θά, but rather on the reinterpretation of the Imprecatory Psalms. This study will be approached from a biblical-theological standpoint. This means that my study will only be limited to the Old Testament and the New Testament as they are contained within the Protestant canon. It also implies that a direct connection between the two Testaments will be accepted and that it is believed that the God revealed in the Old Testament is the same God revealed in the New Testament.

1.5 PLAN OF RESEARCH

The further study will consist of the following chapters:

Chapter 2, 3, and 4 – **Exegesis of Psalms 7, 35, and 59**. The three Psalms will be studied according to the three-dimensional reading methodology explained above. The focus will be on studying the Psalms in their inter-textual, extra-textual, and intra-textual contexts. This approach will attempt to be multidimensional, in the sense that the knowledge base of various methodologies will be utilized to determine more about the textual, historical-cultural, and canonical dimensions of each Psalm. The focus, however, will be on discovering the motivations and hopes of the psalmist when praying these harsh words, as far as possible.

Chapter 5 – The Context of the Curse. Curses played a major role in the Ancient Near East and formed a large part of treaties, especially treaties between suzerains and vassals. The role of the covenant, especially in terms of Ancient Near Eastern treaties, should be considered here. The covenant is in itself a complicated concept, but it remains a "powerful heuristic tool for comprehending the large sweep of the biblical message" (McKnight, 2005:142). It is also an important tool in attempting to define the psalmist's understanding of blessings and curses and their motivation for and justification of praying these harsh words (Harman, 1995:67–70; LaSor *et al.*, 1996:446). Therefore, despite the complexity of the concept of the covenant, it could be advantageous to study it in its wider Biblical contexts, as well as in the context of the Ancient Near Eastern Suzerain-vassal treaties and could be important when considering the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά in 1 Corinthians 16:22. Eriksson (1998:191–193) argues for strong covenantal basis in this passage of 1 Corinthians.

Chapter 6 – The Curse (Ἀνάθεμα) and the Prayer (Μαράνα Θά) This chapter will try to combine the findings of chapters 3, 4, and 5 and integrate it into the usage of ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά in 1 Corinthians 16. The hope is that Μαράνα θά could offer a unique hermeneutical key for reinterpreting the Imprecatory Psalms from a Christian perspective.

Chapter 7 – Conclusion. This chapter will conclude by summarizing the preceding chapters with possible recommendations of future research.

CHAPTER 2 - PSALM 7

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Psalm 7 is a cry for help in times of trouble. The psalmist is experiencing oppression from some "cruel and blood-thirsty enemies" (Hengstenberg, 2010a:102). The psalmist expresses his fear and helplessness through a series of images: a lion ripping his prey apart or a hunter digging a trap. A major theme of this Psalm is the psalmist's claim that he is innocent. The psalmist is so certain about his innocence that he proclaims an imprecation on himself if he is in the wrong (7:5). The Psalm calls on God to judge both the psalmist and his enemies. Judgment should be announced on the guilty party, even if it is discovered that the psalmist is in the wrong. The psalmist is certain of his innocence, therefore he on God, to judge his enemies, who are pursuing him with no justification, an in the process vindicate him. Vindication by God will lead to the destruction of the enemies, or at least the ending their evil plans. The psalmist promised to glorify God once his names is cleared.

2.2 PSALM 7 TEXT[29]

7:1 (Title) [30]	A	a	A Shaggaion[a] of David	שִׁגָּיוֹן לְדָוִד
		b	Which he sang to the Lord,	אֲשֶׁר־שָׁר לַיהוָה
		c	Upon the words of Cush, son of Benjamin.	עַל־דִּבְרֵי־כוּשׁ בֶּן־יְמִינִי׃
7:2 (1)		a	YHWH, my God, in you I take refuge	יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי בְּךָ חָסִיתִי
		b	Save me from all those who pursue me and deliver me.	הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי מִכָּל־רֹדְפַי וְהַצִּילֵנִי׃

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[29] This translation is my own, unless otherwise indicated, and attempts to stay close to the original Hebrew.

[30] Versification follows the MT. References in brackets follow some English translations.

| 7:3 (2) | | **a** | Lest he[a] tear me[b] apart, like a lion. | פֶּן־יִטְרֹף כְּאַרְיֵה נַפְשִׁי |
| **b** | Ripping[c] me to pieces, and there is not a deliverer. | פֹּרֵק וְאֵין מַצִּיל׃ |

| 7:4 (3) | **B** | **a** | O, YHWH, My Lord, if I have done this[a] | יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי אִם־עָשִׂיתִי זֹאת |
| **b** | If there is injustice in my hand | אִם־יֶשׁ־עָוֶל בְּכַפָּי׃ |

| 7:5 (4) | | **a** | If I have rewarded evil to my friend,[a] | אִם־גָּמַלְתִּי שׁוֹלְמִי רָע |
| **b** | And I have despoiled,[b] him who is, without cause, my enemy.[c] | וָאֲחַלְּצָה צוֹרְרִי רֵיקָם׃ |

7:6 (5)		**a**	Let the hater pursue[a] my soul and let him overtake it,	יִרַדֹּף אוֹיֵב נַפְשִׁי וְיַשֵּׂג
b	And may he trample my life to the ground,	וְיִרְמֹס לָאָרֶץ חַיָּי
c	And make my honor[b] remain in the dust. Selah.	וּכְבוֹדִי לֶעָפָר יַשְׁכֵּן סֶלָה׃

7:7 (6)		**a**	Rise up in your anger, YHWH,	קוּמָה יְהוָה בְּאַפֶּךָ
b	Lift yourself against the rage of my adversaries,[a]	הִנָּשֵׂא בְּעַבְרוֹת צוֹרְרָי
c	awake unto me.[b]	וְעוּרָה אֵלַי
d	declare[c] judgment.[d]	מִשְׁפָּט צִוִּיתָ׃

| 7:8 (7) | | **a** | Let the assembly of nations gather around you[a] | וַעֲדַת לְאֻמִּים תְּסוֹבְבֶךָּ |
| **b** | and over them,[b] return on high. | וְעָלֶיהָ לַמָּרוֹם שׁוּבָה׃ |

7:9 (8)	**C**	**a**	YHWH judges nations,	יְהוָה יָדִין עַמִּים
b	Judge me, O YHWH, according to my righteousness	שָׁפְטֵנִי יְהוָה כְּצִדְקִי
c	and according to my perfection.[a]	וּכְתֻמִּי עָלָי׃

7:10 (9)	**D**	**a**	Oh, let the evil of the wicked come to an end[a]	יִגְמָר־נָא רַע רְשָׁעִים
		b	and establish the righteous,	וּתְכוֹנֵן צַדִּיק
		c	Testing hearts and kidneys,[a] Righteous God.[b]	וּבֹחֵן לִבּוֹת וּכְלָיוֹת אֱלֹהִים צַדִּיק׃
7:11 (10)		**a**	My shield is God, Most High,[a]	מָגִנִּי עַל־אֱלֹהִים
		b	Saving the upright of heart.	מוֹשִׁיעַ יִשְׁרֵי־לֵב׃
7:12 (11)	**C₁**	**a**	God is a righteous judge,	אֱלֹהִים שׁוֹפֵט צַדִּיק
		b	And God feels indignation every day.	וְאֵל זֹעֵם בְּכָל־יוֹם׃
7:13 (11)	**B₁**	**a**	If he does not repent, He will sharpen His sword;	אִם־לֹא יָשׁוּב חַרְבּוֹ יִלְטוֹשׁ
		b	He tread[a] his bow and prepared her.	קַשְׁתּוֹ דָרַךְ וַיְכוֹנְנֶהָ׃
7:14 (13)		**a**	And He prepared for Himself weapons of death;[a]	וְלוֹ הֵכִין כְּלֵי־מָוֶת
		b	He made for Him fiery arrows.	חִצָּיו לְדֹלְקִים יִפְעָל׃
7:15 (14)		**a**	Look, he travails evil	הִנֵּה יְחַבֶּל־אָוֶן
		b	and he conceives trouble,	וְהָרָה עָמָל
		c	And he gave birth to lies.[a]	וְיָלַד שָׁקֶר׃
7:16 (15)		**a**	He dug a pit, and hallowed it.[a]	בּוֹר כָּרָה וַיַּחְפְּרֵהוּ
		b	And he fell in the destruction he made.	וַיִּפֹּל בְּשַׁחַת יִפְעָל׃
7:17 (16)		**a**	His mischief will return on his own head,	יָשׁוּב עֲמָלוֹ בְרֹאשׁוֹ
		b	And his violence will descend upon his own head.	וְעַל קָדְקֳדוֹ חֲמָסוֹ יֵרֵד׃

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| 7:18 (17) | **A₁** | **a** | I will thank YHWH, according to His righteousness, | אוֹדֶה יְהוָה כְּצִדְקוֹ |
| | | **b** | And will sing praise to the Name of YHWH, Most High. | וַאֲזַמְּרָה שֵׁם־יְהוָה עֶלְיוֹן׃ |

2.3 TEXTUAL AND TRANSLATION NOTES

1a.

The exact meaning of the word Shaggaion (שִׁגָּיוֹן) is obscure (Dahood, 2008a:41). The obscureness of the word is visible in that most English translations choose to keep this as a technical term by not translating it.[31] For more see discussion below.

3a

יִטְרֹף is singular, while רֹדְפַי (verse 2) is plural. Some translations translate this as plural for uniformity with verse 2. It is however acceptable to keep the singular as it is not uncommon to see references to multiple enemies in the singular (see Psalm 17:12)[32] and here the singular could refer to multiple enemies or pursuers (Craigie, 1983:97; VanGemeren, 1991:102).

3b

נַפְשִׁי literally means "my soul", but may refer to the individual in the manner of the English pronoun (Craigie, 1983:97).

3c

פֹּרֵק can be translated as tearing or ripping. Craigie (1983:98) postulates that it can also imply "deliver", but then וְאֵין need to be moved earlier in the sentence. Jacobson

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[31] See for example the American Standard Version, the English Standard Version, the King James Version, the Lexham English Bible, the New Century Version, the New International's Readers Version, the New International Version, the New Revised Standard Version, and the Revised Standard Version.

[32] See for instance Pss 9:3, 6; 13:4; 31:4, 8; 41:6, 10–11; 42:9–10; 55:3; 64:1–2; 74:3–4; 89:22–23; 106:10–11; 143:3, 6, 9

(2014:111), referencing Psalm 136:24 and Lamentations 5:8 for support, accepts this emendation and translates "there is no rescuer, no deliverer." It is however acceptable to keep the idea of tearing or ripping as it emphasizes the image of the lion attacking the psalmist.

4a

The appearance of the pronoun זֹאת without reference to an antecedent is awkward (Leveen, 1966:440; Tesh & Zorn, 1999:125). זֹאת is singular so the expectation would be to see a plural (Tesh & Zorn, 1999:125). Buttenwieser (cited in Tesh & Zorn, 1999:125) rearranges verse 4 before verse 3 assuming that the MT version is the result of erroneous transmission. Dahood (2008a:42) argues that the substantive זֹאת could be regarded as a noun in its own right. It can then be translated as a noun, meaning insult or injustice.

5a

שׁוֹלְמִי is a participle and literally means "peaceful one of me", but carry the sense of "friend" or "ally" (Brown, Driver, & Briggs, 2000:1023). The LXX has a plural sense here with "εἰ ἀνταπέδωκα τοῖς ἀνταποδιδοῦσίν μοι", but the MT is consistently singular here.

5b

This is a difficult text and it appears as if the MT could be corrupt (Jacobson, 2014:111). וָאֲחַלְּצָה appears in Psalm 6:5 (MT) in the imperative form (חַלְּצָה) where the psalmist asks God to rescue him. Some argue that חָלַץ should be emended to לָחַץ which could be translated as "oppressed" (Waltke, Houston, & Moore, 2014:80 n.36).[33] Reading it as חָלַץ it could be translated as "And I have **rescued** my foe without reason", but it does

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[33] According to Waltke (2014:80) it is a common scribal error.

not make sense semantically (Waltke *et al.*, 2014:80 n.36). This translation follows Leveen (1966:440) and the BHS and emend וָאֲחַלְּצָה to וָאֶלְחֲצָה. See also note 5c below.

5c

Tigay (1970:181–182) suggests emending צוררי ("my enemy") to צוררו ("his enemy"). Craigie (1983:96) supports this emendation. This connects the enemy (צוֹרְרִי) with friend (שׁוֹלְמִי) in colon 5b; referring to an enemy of the psalmist's friend. Keeping צוררי ("my enemy") could be translated as "and I have despoiled him, who without is, cause my enemy." If this colon is read in connection with 5a, this translation implies that a previous friend of the psalmist turned into an enemy without cause. Leveen (1966:440) also prefers this reading accepting a synthetic rather than an antithetic pendant to the first part. To make complete sense though Leveen (1966:440) prefers to amend צוררי with a pronominal suffix to רצויי. This would translate into "if I have oppressed without cause him that was well disposed towards me" (Leveen, 1966:440). This would make sense, although the emendation to צוררי seems to be unnecessary. Therefore the MT will be retained.

6a

יְרַדֹּף offers the reader a choice since it is an attempt by the Masoretes to combine the Qal and the Pi`el (Craigie, 1983:98). The form is jussive (Jacobson, 2014:111), revealing the desire of the psalmist (Putnam, 1996:61). The next three cola imply an intensification[34] and would favor the Pi`el form as it can be used iteratively for repetition (Putnam, 1996:25).

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[34] Pursue … trample… let dwell.

6b

כְבוֹדִי can be translated as "my glory" or "my honor". Some understand this to refer to the psalmist as a person (Anderson, 1972:95). Dahood (2008a:43) argues that כְבוֹדִי ("my glory") should be emended to כְבֵדִי ("my liver") based on similar confusion between these two words in Psalm 16:9 and Genesis 49:6. Commentators like VanGemeren (1991:102–103) and Kraus (1993:171) are not convinced, preferring the sense of "my glory" or "my honor".

7a

The עֲבָרוֹת can be translated with the enemy as subjective. Then the focus is on the psalmist asks God to rise up against the anger of his enemies. It is also possible to connect it to the previous colon, connecting it to God. Then God should rise up against his enemies in anger. According to Gesenius (2003:603–604) it appears often in regards with God's anger (Job 40:11; Prov. 11:4; Zeph. 1:15). This translation opts for the first option.

7b

The LXX has "ὁ θεός μου", (Hebrew אֵלִי "my God") instead of the MT אֵלַי ("to me). Jacobson (2014:111) retains the MT.

7c

Dahood (2008a:44) and Craigie (1983:98) considers צוֹרְרָי a precative perfect. According to Craigie (1983:77–78) the precative perfect is a form of imperative, although the existence of the precative perfect is not acknowledged by all commentators. The precative perfect מִשְׁפָּט צִוִּיתָ could be translated as an imperative "declare judgment." This implies that it "expresses a matter which, it is hoped, will be fulfilled in the future. Thus this kind of perfect can be rendered as an imperative" (Marttila, 2006:92). The psalmist call on God to act is also expressing his hope that it will transpire.

7d

Following Jacobson (2014:111), מִשְׁפָּט is taken as the abstract *justice* (cf. Ps. 119:137) rather than the concrete "judgment."

8a

Regarding תְּסוֹבְבֶךָ as a jussive makes more sense in this context. The verb is commonly used in contexts of judgment: "God is urged to vindicate the psalmist by convening a court to judge his enemies" (Allen, 1997a:220). The psalmist is expressing a desire that God would act by convening all nations for judgment.

8b

שׁוּבָה does not make sense and could be emended to שֵׁבָה changing the meaning from "return" to "be seated" (Jacobson, 2014:111). This meaning does not imply that God has abandoned his sitting in judgment (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:71). This meaning links with the precative perfect in 7d, urging God to come to his aid by taking his seat of judgment. Futato (2009:49) and Waltke (2014:81 n.41), however, prefers שׁוּבָה. "Just as God must 'wake up' (never having fallen asleep), so he 'must return' (never having left his place of judgment), for it is as if he were asleep and away" (Futato, 2009:49). Harman (2011:128) also argues that שׁוּבָה should be retained, quoting Numbers 1:35-36 where "both the imperatives 'arise' (*qûmâh*) and 'return' (*shûvâh*)" appear.

9a

The Hebrew עָלַי is a preposition with the first person suffix ("upon me"), but Craigie (1983:98) argues it is "syntactically awkward and meaningless." Craigie (1983:98) sees it as עֵלִי, a divine title "Most High." Leveen (1966:441) argues that the verse is one word short. To alleviate the awkwardness of this verse, Leveen (1966:441) suggests that the word גְּמֹל be added between עָלַי and וּכְתֻמִּי which would give וּכְתֻמִּי עָלַי גְּמֹל, which he then translates as: "and requite me according to mine own integrity."

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10a

יִגְמָר־נָא is a jussive with an emphatic interjection expressing a wish (imprecation): "O, let the evil of the wicked come to an end!" Most English translations translate רַע רְשָׁעִים as the "evil of the wicked."

10b

The Hebrew לִבּוֹת וּכְלָיוֹת is plural ("hearts and kidneys"). Kidneys usually refer to a person's "innermost being" or "moral character" (Chisholm Jr., 1997:656). It could be regarded as the whole person.

11a

The Hebrew phrase מָגִנִּי עַל־אֱלֹהִים can be translated as "My shield is upon God", but it is a bit awkward. Dahood (2008a:46) argues that עַל should be considered as a divine name. Here, connected with אֱלֹהִים it can be translated as "God, Most High." This appears more acceptable and can be translated: "My shield is God Most High."

13a

The Hebrew דָּרַךְ means "to step" or "tread", but is used figuratively here: "'treading' the bow to bend it in combat" (Merril, 1980:992).

14a

וְלֹו can be translated "against him" or "for him." This is a bit unclear since the translation can either be "against him (the one who do not repent from 13a) he prepares weapons of death" or "for himself, he created weapons of death." This translation prefers that God, as the subject of the verbs, prepares his weapons against those who do not repent (see exegesis for a more detailed discussion).

16a

בּוֹר כָּרָה וַיַּחְפְּרֵהוּ ("a pit he digs and digs it") appears to be redundant, but it should be understood in terms of hunting metaphors. It could also be translated as "he digs a pit

and prepares it" implying the creating and preparation of a trap. The translation follows the metaphor of a trap being dug and prepared.

2.4   STRUCTURE OF PSALM 7

There is no agreement among scholars about the structure or unity of Psalm 7. Weiser (1962:135) argues that various changes in style and rhythm, combined with a wide range of linguistic peculiarities, are found in the Psalm. This could explain the diverse division scholars suggest for Psalm 7. Scholars divide Psalm 7 into a variety of units, ranging from 2 main units (Craigie, 1983:100; Futato, 2009:49–50), 3 strophes (Jacobson, 2014:109), 4 strophes (Ross, 2011:277–278; Schroeder, 2001:112), 5 strophes (Terrien, 2003:118; Tesh & Zorn, 1999:124–129; VanGemeren, 1991:101), 6 strophes (Steveson, 2007:30–34) and even 8 strophes (Gerstenberger, 1998:63–64). Even among the scholars who divide the Psalm into the same number of strophes, the verse division can differ widely. Still, despite the discrepancy, Weiser (1962:135) argues that Psalm 7 could be regarded as a unity.

The focal point of this Psalm is verses 10-11. It expresses the plea of the psalmist that the evil of the wicked will end and the righteous (of whom he is one) will be established. This emphasizes the main reason of the psalmist's prayer. These verses can be seen as the midpoint of the Psalm, being framed on both side by the definition YHWH/God as Judge (verses 9 and 12). It reaffirms the psalmist's claim that he is innocent of wrongdoing and expresses the certainty that he will be established by God who tests the innermost being of humans. Because God is righteous, God will protect him. In the first half of the Psalm (verse 1-9) the psalmist uses exclusively the divine name יְהוָה while in the second half (verses 10-18) he uses exclusively the divine name אֱלֹהִים. The only exceptions are verses 2 and 18 where יְהוָה and אֱלֹהִים are used in combination,

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creating an outer frame for Psalm 7. Verses 1-3 contain the title, the testimony and introductory prayer of the psalmist, while verse 18 contains a testimony and praise.

Verses 4-8 mainly concern the self-exoneration of the psalmist, which is balanced in verses 13-17 with the self-incrimination of the wicked.

For the purpose of this study, the Psalm will be structured in 7 strophes as follows:

A – Title, Testimony and Prayer 1-3

B – Self-Exoneration of psalmist 4-8

C – YHWH, the Judge 9

D – Plea: End the Wicked and establish the Righteous 10-11

C_1 – YHWH the Judge 12

B_1 – Self-incrimination of the wicked 13-17

A_1 – Testimony and praise 18

2.5 POETIC CONTENT OF PSALM 7
2.5.1 Strophe A - verses 1-3: Title, testimony and prayer

Verse 1 consists of a tri-colon. It introduces the Psalm and explains the reason for it. As noted above, the word Shaggaion (שִׁגָּיוֹן) (1a) is obscure. The LXX translates Shaggaion (שִׁגָּיוֹן) as "Psalm" (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:65). Craigie (1983:97) suggests that it could be related to the root שׁגה, which mean "to go astray, reel." The word is found in the plural form in Habakkuk 3:1 (Craigie, 1983:97). In Habakkuk 3 it begins a prayer, on behalf of the king and the people, asking God to destroy the enemy, in similar fashion to Psalm 7 (Eaton, 2003:78). It could imply that Shaggaion has some connection to certain prayers. It could refer to a certain type of Psalm, like a lament, or poem perhaps with a "wandering" style, or an uneven meter (Craigie, 1983:97). This similar to a

"*dithyramb",* a type of Ancient Greek hymn, with a wild, irregular beat (Swanson, 2001), or a wild, passionate song, with rapid changes of rhythm (Brown *et al.*, 2000:993). Whatever the original meaning of this word, the best probable solution is to consider it as a liturgical or musical term (Jacobson, 2014:111 n.6). If this is plausible, the passionate rhythm of the Psalm could mimic the emotional experience of the psalmist. It is clear from the start that this person is in dire straits, being pursued and savaged by enemies (Davidson, 1998:33–34). The images of lions and the fear of being rend or ripped apart accentuate this feeling.

The second and third colon (1b-1c) relates the Psalm to words of Cush (עַל־דִּבְרֵי־כוּשׁ – 1c), a Benjamite. Who this person was, is clothed in uncertainty. There is no Biblical mention of a person named Cush the Benjamite (VanGemeren, 1991:100). Various possibilities have been noted. Terrien (2003:119) notes that the LXX uses Χουσι, which could be the same person who brought David the message of Absalom's death in 2 Sam. 18:20-32. Kraus (1993:169), however, dismisses the idea that it is related to the story of 2 Sam. 18. There is also the possibility that this person refers to King Saul, the son of Kish (2 Samuel 20). Lane (2006:49) considers the possibility that it may refer to Saul's character "since *Cush* implies 'perfidious'." Alden (1974:22) identifies him as a possible henchman of Saul during the period when Saul attempted to kill David (see 1 Samuel 19). Others have suggested the rebel Shimei (cf. 7:16 with 1 Kings 2:8f.) (Eaton, 2003:78). Whoever this person was, the tale of Absalom's rebellion showed that the tribe of Saul, Benjamin, contained some bitter enemies of David (2 Sam. 16:5ff.; 20:1ff) (Kidner, 1973:79). The identity of this person, as well as the words he spoke that caused the psalmist to write this poem, are lost to history. Tesh (1999:122) offers another interesting proposition, claiming that the Psalm is not "concerning the words of Cush", but rather a musical reference to the tune used to sing the Psalm. It

should then be translated as "according to the words of Cush", referencing a specific tune (Tesh & Zorn, 1999:122). Difficulties in identifying this person do not diminish the danger the psalmist felt. It should be noted that despite the difficulties we have in identifying the identities of the enemies, it does not negate the very real danger the psalmist experienced.

Verse 2 consists of a bi-colon. It is clear that the psalmist is in danger; being hunted and pursued by enemies (2b). The synthetic parallelism, combined with the metaphor of a lion (verse 3), makes it clear they are out to tear him apart (3a), to rip him to pieces (3b) (see Davidson, 1998:33–34). The number of enemies is uncertain as the Psalm uses both singular and plural forms for enemy (this was already discussed in the notes). At least one enemy is pursuing the psalmist, but this singular enemy most probably has friends helping. In desperate fear, the only option available is to flee to God for refuge (verse 2). Although "seeking refuge" is usually used literally for finding refuge against natural elements, in this verse it is used figuratively (Harman, 2011:126). The preposition בְּ is connected to the pronoun אַתָּה. "The Hebrew pronominal suffix in 'God-of-me' does not presume a subjectivity of possession but points to the objectivity of direction" (Terrien, 2003:119). In this extreme time of need, it is *towards* his God that he turns for refuge.

This combination in the Hebrew (בְּךָ חָסִיתִי) implies the act of actively seeking protection and shelter with YHWH (Kraus, 1993:169) and appears with such frequency in lament psalms that it can be seen as "a formula of trust in the songs of lament" (Jenni & Westermann, 1997:464). Expressing desire to find refuge in God is especially common in "individual complaint psalms" (Terrien, 2003:119), and expresses "the closeness of his relationship with God" (VanGemeren, 1991:101). It is a metaphor of trust and is especially used in times of danger or uncertainty (Mays, 1994:63).

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It should also be noted that the Hebrew verb tense expresses certainty, since his refuge is in God (Kidner, 1973:80). The psalmist seeks out refuge with the confidence that God cares for his children, amidst their struggles on earth (VanGemeren, 1991:101). "By election and covenant the Lᴏʀᴅ has become the personal God of the psalmist (note "my God" in vv. 1, 3, and 6) and has given the psalmist the right to take refuge with him in time of trouble" (Mays, 1994:64). The certainty with which the psalmist turns to God implies that the psalmist has previous experiences of YHWH's saving actions. This person is not indifferent to God, neither is God a stranger to him; his confidence is rooted in his relationship with God, who is already central to his life (Davidson, 1998:34). יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי is found twice (v.2 and v.4) and emphasize the close relationship between the psalmist and God. The close relationship is further enhanced by אֱלֹהַי, "my God", which also expresses mutual commitment (Eaton, 2003:78). VanGemeren (1991:101) sees this as a covenantal term, since he is calling on his "covenant God" for help. יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי is used in two statements (vv. 2 and 4), both expressing trust in his God. The first expresses the psalmist's need for refuge, but also his trust that God will protect him. The second expresses his trust in the righteousness of God, and the trust that God will proclaim his innocence.

In verse 2 a direct parallel exists between הַצִּילֵנִי (2b) and הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי emphasizing the cry to YHWH for deliverance (Fisher, 1980:594). Also, the repetition of נָצַל at the end of both verses 2 and 3 underscores his fear and helplessness in this situation. Both these verbs appear in the Hiphil form. According to Jenni & Westermann (1997:761) when the Hiphil נָצַל is used with a divine subject, the combination implies a strong expectation that YHWH will free the people or individual from various types of threats. The psalmist is expressing this trust in YHWH during his desperateness and helplessness. The degree of danger is so great that the psalmist is feeling completely overwhelmed

and his expression of trust is meant to persuade YHWH to intervene on his behalf (Kraus, 1993:170). The prepositional object מִן (2b) implies a movement away from all his enemies. The psalmist expresses more than just the desire to be saved from his enemies; he also wishes that God removes him from the vicinity of these enemies. The conjunction פֶּן (3a) links verse 2 with verse 3 and introduces the reason he needs YHWH to intervene: his life is in real danger. It also adds a bit of alacrity to the wish expressed that God deliver him (2b).The psalmist's only hope is in YHWH and if YHWH does not intervene it is over for the psalmist. For Alden (1974:23) these two verses are the essential themes of this Psalm: "The Lord is my God" and "Save me from my enemies."

There is a question regarding the number of enemies (see also the textual note 3a above). In verse 2b the reference is plural, but in verse 3 the psalmist switches to the singular. The verb is also singular. Some translation relieve this problem by translating the tense in verse 3 as plural (Tesh & Zorn, 1999:124). VanGemeren (1991:102) claims this is unnecessary since using a collective singular for multiple enemies is not unusual. The multiple enemies could be seen as a unified force against the psalmist. It is also possible that a single enemy is helped by others to chase down the psalmist. There could be multiple pursuers, but only one person who is truly the enemy.

The possibility that the enemy is an ex-ally who, with the help of others, is pursuing the psalmist is accepted here and helps to explain the use of both the singular and plural for the enemy.

The preposition כְּ (3a) compares the enemy to a lion (אַרְיֵה). The danger is that the lion will catch the psalmist and tear him apart. Dahood (2008a:43) offers the possibility to translate נֶפֶשׁ (literally "my soul") with neck, which could make sense in terms of the lion metaphor. It is however better to regard נֶפֶשׁ as the English pronoun "me" (Craigie, 1983:97). This translation also agrees with the usage of נֶפֶשׁ in verse 6 (Craigie,

1983:98). The metaphor of a lion highlights the danger experienced by the psalmist and the reason for the desperate attempt to activate God (Kraus, 1993:170). If God fails to appear, the psalmist is finished. He appears to be forsaken and alone and unable to fend of the attack of his enemies. The lion is in pursuit and ready to pounce and the psalmist can see no one to help him. אֵין מַצִּיל (3b) occurs frequently in the Hebrew Bible as a phrase to "underline the finality of an act of punishment" (Reyburn, 1992:107). The psalmist is deeply aware of the finality of his life if his enemy catches up with him. He feels to be solo in his desperate reality and it appears as if there is no one to save or defend him. The psalmist is expressing his fear that, if God does not help, there is no one else that can prevent the lion from dragging him away. The end result would be final.

2.5.2   Strophe B - verses 4-8: Self-exoneration of psalmist

This strophe consists of two bicola (verses 4-5), a tricolon (verse 5) and three bicola (verses7-9). The first bicolon (4a and b) starts with the vocative יְהוָה followed by אֱלֹהַי emphasizing the psalmist's personal relationship with God. In verse 4 to 5 the psalmist starts to argue his innocence before God. The pursuit of his enemies is undeserved. Gerstenberger (2001:532) calls it an *Unschuldserklärung* (protest of innocence) and it is a "formulaic, ritual self-defense of one who has been falsely accused" (Gerstenberger, 2001:532). The psalmist is trying to exonerate himself. Before his self-exoneration starts, the psalmist made sure that his affiliation with God was clear: emphasizing his personal relationship with God by using the phrase יְהוָה אֱלֹהַי (YHWH, my God – 4a). Having secured his refuge in God, he starts to proclaim his innocence before *his* God. Kraus (1993:170; see also Waltner, 2006:57), grounding his argument in texts like Deuteronomy 17 and 1 Kings 8, argues that the psalmist went to the sanctuary for help.

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The practice of claiming an oath before the altar of God is clearly attested in1 Kings 8:31-32:

> If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and
>
> he comes and takes an oath before Your altar in this house, then hear
>
> in heaven and act and judge Your servants, condemning the wicked
>
> by bringing his way on his own head and justifying the righteous by
>
> giving him according to his righteousness (NASB).

For Kraus (1993:170) this clearly resembles the procedure of "affirmation of innocence and the self-imprecation" found in Psalm 7. Safe, for now, in the sanctuary of God, the psalmist starts to argue his case of innocence.

It should be noted that the claim is not to be sinless but, in comparison to his enemies, his life bear witness of obedience (Harman, 2011:126–127). The object of the Qal Perfect verb, עָשִׂיתִי (4a) is זֹאת and refers to completed actions. There is uncertainty to what "this" refers to exactly. It could refer to the accusation made by his pursuer, albeit in general terms (Craigie, 1983:100). It could also refer to the next verse where the psalmist ask the rhetorical question whether he, in some way, done a friend in. זֹאת displays a chiastic structure in verses 4 and 5 (Dahood, 2008a:42).

Arguing his innocence, he uses three successive conjunctions (אִם – 4a, 4b, and 5a), each one underlining his innocence and increasing in intensity. He asks rhetorical questions, expecting the answer to be no. The psalmist's plea is reminiscent of a similar plea in Job 31.

In verse 4 אִם־עָשִׂיתִי זֹאת (4a) forms a synthetic parallelism with אִם־יֶשׁ־עָוֶל בְּכַפָּי (4b) building towards the real accusation made against him (being more clearly defined in verse 5). It is clear from this context that he is accused of some misdeed used, by the

enemy, as justification for the pursuit. Although there exists no certainty regarding the nature of the accusation (Jacobson, 2014:109) it is clear that the accusation was not vague and most probably clearly expressed by his enemy before the expression of this prayer to God (Kraus, 1993:170; Weiser, 1962:136). Terrien (2003:120) speculates that the accusations remained unidentified because of the "monstrous" nature thereof; perhaps murder leaving blood on the psalmist's hands. Kraus (1993:170) argues that חלץ implies something like plunder or theft, perhaps long term embezzling. The speculation that he is accused of being unfaithful to a covenant partner, perhaps breaking a treaty of obligation could reasonably be accepted (see Craigie, 1983:99–100; Harman, 2011:127). One example of such an accusation, although not necessarily relevant to this Psalm, is found in the Bible where David was accused of traitorous conduct. In 1 Samuel 24:9 David pleads with Saul not to listen to those who say that he wants to kill Saul (Tesh & Zorn, 1999:122). Perhaps Cush (whoever he was) made a similar accusation against David, claiming that David transgressed in terms of a treaty agreement, resulting in the agreement between Cush and David being broken.

The bicolon in verse 5 is the focus of the previous verse. The translation (If I have rewarded evil to my friend, and have despoiled him, who without cause is my enemy) follows the idea that his enemy is an ex-friend who feels wronged by the psalmist. Els (1997:157) argues that in most cases where חָלַץ is used in the Pi`el form, it is used with a positive connotation, i.e. rescue or deliverance. It is interesting however that when discussing חָלַץ in regards to Psalm 7, Els (1997:157) identifies its meaning as "stripping with violence" or "despoiling in an unjust way." If a positive connotation is used, the implication would be that the psalmist helped the enemy of his friend in some way by delivering or saving the enemy. This could then refer to the "evil rewarded to my friend" (5a). Tigay (1970:182–183) argues that Ancient Near Eastern Treaties obliged parties

to regard each other's enemies as personal enemies. It even demanded that military aid should be offered when a friend is pursuing an enemy and if the enemy is captured, the enemy should be delivered to the ally or slayed. Considering the provisions found in the Ancient Near Eastern treaties "to rescue the enemy of one's ally is a serious offence" (Tigay, 1970:183). This could give the idea that it is sinful to either rescue an enemy (Tigay, 1970:179) or to show mercy to your enemy (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:68). However, if it is understood in terms of Exodus 21:25, Leviticus 24:17-22, and Deuteronomy 19:16-21, taking appropriate revenge on an enemy would not be seen as wrong, but allowing an enemy to escape could be a violation (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:68).

However, the focus of these cola appears to be on "and I have despoiled him who, without cause, is my enemy" וָאֲחַלְּצָה צוֹרְרִי רֵיקָם (5b) which forms a parallelism with "if I have rewarded evil to my friend" (אִם־גָּמַלְתִּי שׁוֹלְמִי רָע – 5a). The emphasis is on his friend that turned into an enemy without cause. This can be supported by the three conjunctions (אִם),[35] not being followed by a fourth אִם, but by a conjunction וְ (and – 5b). Also, שׁוֹלְמִי (5a) forms an antithetic parallelism with צוֹרְרִי (5b). שׁוֹלְמִי (5a) and צוֹרְרִי (5b) which implies that both refer to the same person: his friend who turned into his enemy (see also Kraus, 1993:170–171). If the focus does fall on this colon (5b), then the previous three conjunctions (4a, 4b and 5a) are used to argue "that he did not do this evil to his friend": despoiling his ally; turning his ally into his enemy. The psalmist can see no cause for this hostility since he is not guilty of giving his friend any cause to pursue him as an enemy. If, however the psalmist's ex-friend feels that the psalmist did

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[35] If I have done this (v.4), if there is injustice in my hands (v.5), If I have rewarded evil to my friend (v.5)

a wrong deed against him, the friendship would end. It it is possible that Cush accused the psalmist of violating his trust in some way,[36] destroying the friendship and turning Cush into an enemy. The psalmist claims to be innocent, so this could also explain the warnings found in 7:13-17. If this former friend keeps on hunting the psalmist despite his innocence, God will declare the psalmist righteous, which will lead to the former friend being judged for his actions.

"The three *ifs* preceding these words balance the three imprecations that follow" (Tesh & Zorn, 1999:126–127). Based on the certainty of innocence, the psalmist places himself before the Lord, in whom he seeks refuge, with a terrible self-imprecation, a conditional curse on himself (Gerstenberger, 1998:64). If there is even the smallest shred of truth in this accusation, he invites God to "punish" him by allowing his ex-friend to pursue him. The psalmist is basically cancelling his previous prayer for deliverance, but only if he is truly guilty (Craigie, 1983:101).

Verse 6 contains three imperatives. The same word for pursue (יְרַדֹּף – 6a) is used in verse 2b to describe the enemy's pursuit of the psalmist. The psalmist prays for deliverance from pursuit, but then invites pursuit if he is guilty in the slightest way (Craigie, 1983:100). He is willing to be judged by God (7:10b) in the same manner as he asks God to judge his enemy or enemies, willing to "accept the most severe consequences" (Gerstenberger, 1998:64). If he is guilty in the slightest way in terms of the accusation leveled against him, he will submit to God's judgment and allow his enemy to punish him ("And let him trample my life down to the ground and lay my glory in the dust.") Ground and dust form a synthetic parallelism. Dahood (2008a:43) understands לָאָרֶץ (6b) as "the infernal regions" and לֶעָפָר (6c) as "mud." These two

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[36] Perhaps explaining the reason for this Psalm "which he sang concerning the words of Cush, son of Benjamin"?

terms are frequently paired in parallelism (Dahood, 2008a:143) and could refer to Sheol (Dahood, 2008a:106). It is not clear whether the meaning here is literal or figurative. The noun with a suffix pronoun (כְּבוֹדִי – 6c) is translated as honour. It does have a more nuanced meaning: "*Kavod* expresses the essence of being and as such is found in parallel with such terms as *nefesh*, "person," or *ḥayyim*, "life," as here and in Psalms 7:6" (Sarna, 1989:334). Even if the enemy does not kill the psalmist, if the psalmist is wrong, the enemy could destroy his honor, his person.

It is important to note that while the psalmist would be willing to submit to punishment if judged wrong by God, the plea is that God will prevent this from happening. "The psalmist is entering a plea of 'not guilty'" (Tesh & Zorn, 1999:127) and the psalmist is not hoping for a future vindication but for an outcome in his immediate history (Craigie, 1983:101). The psalmist is not expressing self-righteousness but proclaims that, compared with his enemy, he is in the right (Jacobson, 2014:115; Mays, 1994:63–64).

In two bicola (v.7), using four imperatives (קוּמָה, הִנָּשֵׂא, עוּרָה, and צִוִּיתָ),[37] the prayer for arbitration and judgment begins (Craigie, 1983:101). The first three imperatives are synonyms (Arise… lift up… awake…) and carry the same meaning: the expectation is to move God into action. According to Harman (2011:127) the psalmist is following the example of Moses in Numbers 10:35, calling on God to arise against the enemies of Israel. This was done every time the Ark of the Covenant was moved. Kraus (1993:171) find in these images the suggestion that the ark of the covenant is the judicial throne of God.[38] This plea is regularly found in the Psalms. "It is a plea for God to act decisively and immediately" (Jacobson, 2014:129). The repetition emphasizes the

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[37] צִוִּיתָ is translated as an imperative based on it being a precative perfect. See note 7d above in section 3.

[38] See Kraus (1993:171–172) for a more detailed explanation.

desperateness and urgency of the psalmist's plea, but it also carries the voice of certainty: God will appear. The implication is not that God is asleep, but rather the psalmist either experiences some form of perceived distance between him and God (Schaefer, 2001:21) or God appears to be inactive (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:70). Grogan (2008:51) suggests that calling on God to become active implies that divine aid is not automatic but a reaction to prayer. The call for God to arise, lift himself up and awake is plea for God to "close the gap" and visibly act on behalf of the psalmist. Whenever the imperative קוּמָה ("arise!") is used in the Psalms, it expresses the confidence that victory is expected (Harman, 2011:112). The psalmist enters a double plea: first God must rise against the anger of his enemies (7b), but secondly, and more importantly, God must do this on behalf of the psalmist (7c). The psalmist needs God's protection because the anger of his enemies is "excessive and unjustified" (Davidson, 1998:34). The protection of God is again confirmed in verse 11 with the image of God as a shield.

If God rises up against the anger of his enemies (v.7) the psalmist will be exonerated. The psalmist does not just desire personal exoneration. There appears to be some form of cosmic action pleaded from God. God should assemble the nations around him (v.8) and rise above them. It implies the reassertion of God's rule over the nations. The Psalm contains an eschatological dimension; "the expectation that God will rule over the nations" (VanGemeren, 1991:100). Literally God is implored "to return on high", visibly taking his seat and resuming his role as King and Judge (Mays, 1994:73). From this position he should judge all (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:71). This refers back to verse 7c where God is asked to command judgment. The psalmist wants a public exoneration. Perhaps the accusation levelled by his enemy was public and the

psalmist wants the whole world to experience God's judgment and his personal exoneration.

The metaphor is judicial here. The background of this image is found in the Eastern practice of a king ascending the throne, surrounded by the contending parties, to give judgment (Hengstenberg, 2010a:116). God's judgment was used in the past in actions against wicked nations, to reveal himself as a means of self-disclosure (Mays, 1994:73). While God is not seated on his "seat of judgment" the evil of the wicked will continue and the psalmist must endure the injustice (Lennox, 1999:48). Everything depends on the declaration of "guilty" or "not guilty" by YHWH (Kraus, 1993:173). This underscores the desperate need for God to proclaim his judgment: the guilty will only be deemed guilty after the declaration of guilty by YHWH and the righteous will only be deemed righteous after being declared by YHWH.

2.5.3 **Strophe C - Verse 9: YHWH, the Judge**
Strophe C (Verse 9)

This verse consists of a tricolon and focus on YHWH as the judge. This is the final time that the psalmist refers to God as YHWH only. יְהוָה (YHWH) is the subject of the predicate יָדִין ("to judge" – 9a). YHWH is the One who judges all the people (עַמִּים – 9a) and will judge the psalmist as He judges all the people (9b and 9c). YHWH is the One who will judge "guilty" or "not guilty" and in the case of the psalmist his righteousness will be brought to light by YHWH (Kraus, 1993:173). Kraus (1993:173) calls this "*iustificatio iusti*" in the sense that the psalmist's declaration is formulaic and goes before YHWH's verdict is announced. YHWH judges all people and his judgment of the psalmist will be righteous. The judgment of the psalmist will actually be the vindication of the psalmist. This certainty is heightened by the chiastic structure found in verse 9:

יְהוָה ← → יָדִין עַמִּים
שָׁפְטֵנִי ← → יְהוָה
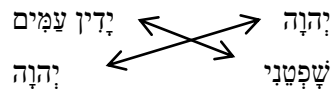
The judgment of the people will lead to the vindication of the psalmist. The reason why he will be vindicated is introduced by two prepositions (כְּ) in 7b and 7c: according to the psalmist's righteousness and according to his perfection. The word כְּצִדְקִי ("according to my righteousness" – 7b) consists of a preposition (כְּ), a noun (צֶדֶק) and a singular pronoun suffix (אֲנִי). The word וּכְתֻמִּי ("and according to my blamelessness" – 7c) consists of a conjunction (וְ), a preposition (כְּ), a noun (תֹּם – 7c) and a singular pronoun suffix (אֲנִי). The noun (תֹּם – 7c) often carries the abstract meaning of perfection in the Wisdom literature (Olivier, 1997:307–308), but here the context rather indicates blamelessness or innocence.[39] In this context his blamelessness is referring to the accusation referred to in verses 4-5 (Kidner, 1973:81). Although the psalmist is accused of wrongdoing, he is innocent and through YHWH he will be vindicated. Although he truly fears the reality of his enemies, he has no fear to stand before the judgment of YHWH. The innocent has nothing to fear before the righteous Judge (Wilson, 2002:191)

There is some debate about עָלָי (9c). Despite being pointed as a preposition, some interpret this as an alternate form of Elyon, reading it as a divine name: "Most High" (Craigie, 1983:97–98; Harman, 2011:128; VanGemeren, 1991:105). Hengstenberger (2010a:118) chooses for the more simple solution: "we may, however, simply explain, 'in me'." As stated before, the psalmist is not claiming to be perfect. In the context of Psalm 7 he is placing himself before God regarding the accusation against him, and in

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[39] Terrien (2003:121) argues that "innocence" is the best option, but does state that the word does not convey the full meaning of the Hebrew word.

that senses he is perfectly innocent. YHWH can judge him and he will find no fault in him.

2.5.4 Strophe D – Verses 10-11: End of the wicked and establishment of the righteous

Strophe D consists of a tricolon and a bicolon. The verb (גָּמַר – 10a) is connected to an emphatic נָא and functions as a jussive, expressing a deep desire of the psalmist. Harman (2011:128) regards this prayer as the center prayer of the Psalm. Dahood (2008a:45) refers to יִגְמָר־נָא (10a) as "an energetic jussive continuing the imperative שָׁפְטֵנִי of vs. 9" The direct object of the verb (גָּמַר – 10a) is רַע רְשָׁעִים ("the evil of the wicked"). The psalmist is praying that the "evil deed(s)" of the wicked shall stop. There is also the possibility that גָּמַר could mean "fail" (Gesenius, 2003:175). The desire of the psalmist is not necessarily for the destruction of the wicked; it could also imply that their false accusation against him will fail. גָּמַר forms an antithetical parallelism with תְכוֹנֵן ("end the evil of the wicked, but establish the righteous" – 10b). These two verses are the focal point of the Psalm. The ending of the evil of the wicked and the establishment of the righteous will result from the righteous judgment of God.

The object of בֹּחֵן ("test" 10c) is לִבּוֹת וּכְלָיוֹת ("heart and kidneys" – 10c) and the subject is אֱלֹהִים צַדִּיק ("righteous God" – 10c). כִּלְיָה ("kidney") is used figuratively for the "seat of one's moral character" (Chisholm Jr., 1997:656). בָּחַן is mostly used for God testing the innermost moral character and hearts of all humans. The purpose is to "learn the genuineness of an object by examination" (Swanson, 2001). The psalmist has no qualms about being examined: he knows he is innocent and therefore finds his hope in God. From verse 10 onwards the psalmist refers to God exclusively (with the exception of verse 18) as אֱלֹהִים. Colon 7b reaffirms the certainty the psalmist feels in the Righteous God's judgment. This certainty is enforced by calling God "his shield" (מָגְנִי – 11a). Dahood (2008a:45) argues that it could also be translated as "my Suzerain" (Smith,

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1980:169) Craigie (1983:98) prefers מָגִנִּי, based on the other references to instruments of war in verses 13-14. Still, no matter which option is chosen, the translation remains problematic because of עַל־אֱלֹהִים (11a). Dahood (2008a:45) takes עַל as an abbreviated form of עֶלְיוֹן ("most High"), translating this whole phrase as "My Suzerain is the Most High God" (Dahood, 2008a:45). It is interesting that Craigie (1983:98) argues in verse 9 that עֲלֵי is a divine title, "Most High" but here he retains the idea of "upon" (Craigie, 1983:98–99). Waltke *et al* (2014:81 n.47) interprets the use of the preposition עַל as indicating that God has taken upon himself the burden of the psalmist's shield. God is holding the psalmist's shield, which by implication means that God is protecting him (Gesenius, 2003:448). If the עַל is taken as a divine epithet, as Dahood argues and which, for Harman (2011:128) is "the best explanation for a difficult expression", it still makes sense. The NIV translates this difficult part as: "My shield is God most High." If this is acceptable it could connect with 7:8 where God rules over the nations from high. The psalmist is expressing certain trust here: the same God who rules from high (i.e. the most High God) is the One who is the psalmist's shield. The object of the verb מוֹשִׁיעַ ("save") is the construct יִשְׁרֵי־לֵב ("straight of heart"). It is God who saves those who are upright in heart. Since the psalmist is certain about his innocence, he has no doubt that he will be declared innocent by God and thus saved. And the reason for his certainty is revealed in the next strophe.

2.5.5 Strophe C1 – Verse 12: YHWH the Judge

This verse begins with a declaration of God's attribute: אֱלֹהִים שׁוֹפֵט צַדִּיק ("God is a righteous judge" – 12a). אֱלֹהִים צַדִּיק is an "emphatic designation" emphasizing God's healing activity (Kraus, 1993:173). It is a difficult text to translate and Tesh & Zorn (1999:127) follows McIntosh's (1982:481–490) proposal by translating this verse as "God vindicates the righteous, but God denounces every day the unrepentant."

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The subject of the verb זֹעֵם ("scold", "indignation", "anger" or "curse" – 7b) is אֵל, the short version for God. This verb is mainly used with God as subject and the object is usually personal (Gordon, 1997:1129). Even though the object is not named, the sense will probably be that God is feeling anger or displeasure against those who are not upright in heart (11b). "The verb is used to indicate both the state of being indignant and the activity giving expression to that state" (Wood, 1980:247). In other words, this verb can express both God's feelings regarding the evils of the wicked, as well as his actions against them. God's indignation should be seen as an extension of his righteousness. Because God is righteous, he will feel indignation for the evil deeds of the wicked, but he will not always act immediately because of his indignation. This explains the perpetuity of God's indignation ("every day" – 12b), but also the seemingly inactivity of God which forces the psalmist to call on God to awake, lift himself and arise against the enemies (v.7). The noun construct, בְּכָל־יוֹם (12b) consists of a preposition (בְּ), a collective noun (כָל) and a common indefinite singular noun (יוֹם). Literally it means "in all day", but the sense here is "every day" (see Brown *et al.*, 2000; Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:289). Although the psalmist calls on God to act (v.7), God is indignant of the wicked every day. Although he has not acted yet, he will act decisively. The basic thought is that the wicked will not go unpunished (Tesh & Zorn, 1999:128). As Mays (1994:64) remarks, "Apart from the righteousness of the Lord this prayer could not even be thought, let alone said."

2.5.6 Strophe B1 – verses 13-17: Self-incrimination of the wicked

This strophe contains very strong military images ("sword", "bow", "fiery arrows"). There is a question about who the subject of the verbs is. The Hebrew text does not clearly identify the subject. There is, however, almost unanimous agreement that the first verb, contained in the phrase אִם־לֹא יָשׁוּב (10a), has the "wicked" (see strophe D) in

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mind. The verb יָשׁוּב is imperfect, implying that the action of the wicked is still on-going. The wicked still continues on a course that is leading away from God and their actions are causing God's indignation (v.12b).

This still leaves the question as to who is the subject of the remaining verbs. Some scholars like Weiser (1962:137) and Kraus (1993:174) translate the wicked as the subject of the verbs. In Psalm 37:14-15 almost identical images are used with the wicked as subject. Similar to the implication of this strophe, the weapons of the wicked is turned against them in Psalm 37. Other scholars like Dahood (2008a:46–47), Mandolfo (2002b:36), Craigie (1983:97) and Terrien (2003:117) prefer to translate God as the subject. Both options are possible. In the first option, the implications is that the wicked, who refuses to repent, keeps on with evil deeds ("sharpening his sword", "preparing his bow", and "making his arrows fiery shafts"). His wickedness will end when the violence of his own weapons will return on him (see v. 16-17) and he creates his own downfall. The second option connects with verses 11-12. The constant evil of the wicked brings God's indignation into action. Because the wicked refuse to repent, God prepares judgment on the wicked. The wicked enemy prepares himself to destroy the psalmist. He is bent on continuing his evil deeds. Therefore God prepares to respond with fierce and deadly actions. God does not act yet, but prepares his weapons for what will eventually happen if the wicked do not repent (Craigie, 1983:102). It is, however, better to read the entire section (vv.13-17) with the wicked as subject (Waltner, 2006:58).

The verb, יִלְטוֹשׁ ("will sharpen"), with the object חַרְבּוֹ ("his sword"), implies preparations beforehand. This is followed, without any conjunction, by the verb דָּרַךְ ("tread", "press", or "bend") with the object קַשְׁתּוֹ ("bow"). The image calls to mind an archer "stepping on one end of the bow in order to bend it into a position for stringing"

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(Steveson, 2007:33). A conjunction (וְ) connects "the bending of the bow" to the next verb containing a feminine singular pronoun suffix, יְכוֹנְנֶהָ ("making her ready").

Although the focus of these verses appears to be on God, who is declaring war on the wicked, it is rather on the acts of the wicked and the way they are actually preparing their own punishment (Mays, 1994:64). The wicked is acting in ways that leave God no alternative but to express his indignation. God is not preparing to act against the wicked based on a misunderstanding or a small slipup. Evil is ingrained into the wicked and the Psalm uses unexpected images to impress this. The metaphors of birth (verse 15) come abruptly and unexpectedly, nestled between metaphors of war and hunting (Grohmann, 2005:440). In verse 15 the subject of the verbs are the wicked. The verse starts with a participle הִנֵּה emphasizing what is to follow. Three verbs appear in parallelism to impress that the evil of the wicked is deeply ingrained in their personalities. The object of the imperfect verb, חַבֵּל ("pregnant" – 15a), is אָוֶן ("evil" or "wickedness" – 15a). This is followed by a perfect verb, הָרָה (15b), meaning "to conceive" or "become pregnant." The object of this verb, עָמָל (15b), carries various negative meanings, ranging from "mischief", "wickedness", "trouble" and "toil." It signifies a completed action whereby the wicked already conceived evil. This is linked with a conjunction (וְ) to the next perfect verb יָלַד ("gives birth" – 15c) with the object שָׁקֶר ("lies" or "falsehood" – 15c). Together they form a *parallelismus membrorum*" meaning three near-synonymous words describing the same event, but in such a way that the different sides of a bigger pictures emerges and gives the impression of the sequence of the birth process (Grohmann, 2005:440).[40]

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[40] For a more detailed discussion on the usage and implications of the birthing metaphor of Psalm 7, see Grohmann (2005:440–449).

The lies could reference the false accusation made against the psalmist (verse 4). Together these three perfect verbs form a parallelism emphasizing the depth of the evil. There is a tension between the positive and constructive image portrayed by the metaphor of birth, and the destructive reality of what is born from the wicked (Grohmann, 2005:448). Perhaps for this reason some experience this metaphor as unsettling, but it "is forceful, particularly when used in the masculine form" (Craigie, 1983:102).[41] "As a woman labors painfully, yet lovingly, with the child soon to be delivered, so too does the unrepentant sinner with his iniquity" (Craigie, 1983:102–103). This implies a process. The evil of the wickedness is not a spur-of-the-moment act. It is not the result of emotional outbursts. The process of insemination of the idea, the growth and nurturing thereof and finally the birth of "falsehood," namely false accusations (Craigie, 1983:101–102). Clearly indicates that it was premeditated and calls to mind the words of the prophet Micah in chapter 2:1.

God's preparatory actions, which may appear overly aggressive to modern readers, are the direct result of this prolonged and completed process in the wicked. God is ready, but he has not yet acted, not before he is called into action by the continuance of the evil (Craigie, 1983:102). And it is this continuance of evil that eventually leads to their downfall. The idea of the wicked working their own downfall is quite prevalent in the Psalms (see for example Psalms 9:16; 35:7–8; 57:6; 73:17-20; 141:10).

The metaphors shift from war and birth to hunting. The object of the verb, כָּרָה ("dig" - 16a) is בּוֹר ("pit" - 16a). The wicked is digging a pit, like a hunter attempting to trap an animal (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:94), and although not mentioned, the context implies that the wicked is digging a put for the righteous. This is followed by the

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[41] For more on male birth-giving see Grohmann (2005:442–443)

synonymous verb חָפַר ("dig" - 16a) with a suffix (הוּא). The suffix references the pit named in verse 16a and marks the pit as the result of his handiwork. It forms a synthetic parallelism, implying not simply digging a pit, but carefully preparing it. The conjunction (וַ) is a waw consecutive with an imperfect and connects colon 16a with colon 16b as a sequence of events. The subject of the verb יִפֹּל ("he fell" – 16b) is not identified in this verse, but it references the person who dug the pit, in this case the enemy already mentioned previously. The preposition (בְּ) connects to the verb יִפֹּל ("fell" – 16b) and introduces an ironic twist: the wicked fell into the very pit (שַׁחַת) they created for the righteous. The noun שַׁחַת ("pit" – 16b) is used as a synonym for בּוֹר ("pit" – 16a) (Merril, 1997:93). Digging and preparing a trap requires planning and forethought and are perhaps the result of the evil born from the wicked (see verse 15). Fortunately for the psalmist, the plan of the wicked turns against him. The "boomerang effect" is a frequent theme in the Old Testament.[42]

The bicolon in verse 17 reinforces the idea introduced in verse 16 that the plan of the wicked will not come to fruition. The verb יָשׁוּב ("return" – 17a) appeared in verse 13. There it refers to the wicked not repenting, not returning to God. Because of the failure of the wicked to return/repent to God (v.13) the result is that his toil (עֲמָלוֹ), with which he is pregnant (see v. 15b), will return onto his head (בְרֹאשׁוֹ). The word בְרֹאשׁוֹ, consisting of the noun רֹאשׁ ("head" – 17a), a preposition (בְּ) and the 3 masculine singular suffix, emphasizes that it is his *own actions* that return on *his own* head. His deeds will not only return to him, they will descend on his head. The subject of the verb יֵרֵד ("descend" – 167) is the noun חָמָס ("violence" – 17b) with the 3 masculine singular suffix, emphasizing that it is the doings of the wicked self that returns on him. It is clear from

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[42] see Ps. 9:15, 57:6; 119:86, Prov. 26:27, 28:10, Eccl. 10:8.

the noun חָמָס ("violence" – 17b) that the deadly possibility introduced in this verse is very real, but the violence will return and descend on the wicked. The deeds of the wicked is, in the words of Craigie (1983:101), like a boomerang, returning on the wicked the evil plans they had for others. The basic conclusion of verses 13 to 17 is that the wicked shall not prevail, but be judged by God and the evil they planned will be returned on them. Finding similar ideas in Proverbs 26:27, Gerstenberger (1998:65) identifies a proverbial character in verses 16-17which are used in Psalm 7 in imprecative form.

2.5.7   Strophe A1 – verse 18 – Testimony and praise

The final strophe contains two cola. Verse 18a starts with a Hiphil imperfect jussive (אוֹדֶה). YHWH is the direct object of the verb. The psalmist vows to thank the Lord, confident that God has answered his prayer and will prove his innocence (Bratcher, 1987:75).

The prepositional object כְּצִדְקוֹ contains a preposition (כְּ), the noun צֶדֶק and the 3 masculine singular pronominal suffix. The psalmist will give thanks to YHWH due to his righteousness, which will also result in the vindication of the psalmist. Righteousness is an important theme in the Psalm. "Earlier, the psalmist pleaded with God to "judge me according to my righteousness." The psalmist also prayed "may you establish the righteous" and confessed trust that God is a righteous judge. The psalmist thus ends his poem on the same note, expressing trust in the Lord's character" (Jacobson, 2014:117). "Apart from the righteousness of the LORD this prayer could not even be thought, let alone said" (Mays, 2006:64).

The second colon (18b) forms a synthetic parallelism with 18a. עֶלְיוֹן is a liturgical title, based on El, the Canaanite supreme god of the pantheon (Davidson, 1998:36). It is

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frequently found in the Psalms where the focus is on the power of God over all opposing forces (Davidson, 1998:36) . It describes God as the greatest and the most powerful of all gods, and can be translated as "God who is above all gods" (Bratcher, 1987:75). This title is usually used when universal claims about the greatness of God is made (Harman, 2011:130). The verb אֲזַמְּרָה ("sing praise"), is a cohortative with "the name of YHWH, most High" (שֵׁם־יְהוָה עֶלְיוֹן) as object. זמר is the verb from which the word 'Psalm' is derived, carrying the core meaning of playing a musical instrument in praise (Waltke *et al.*, 2014:96). The certainty with which the psalmist proclaims that he will praise God echoes the certainty of his innocence and his reliance on the righteousness of God.

2.6 *LITERARY GENRE AND 'SITZ IM LEBEN'*

In total 13 Psalm headings refer to historical incidents from David's life (Mays, 1994:64–65). Although attempts have been made to connect this Psalm to specific experiences from David's life, it is not possible to connect the Psalm with certainty to David. Even the title is of no assistance since it refers to an experience from David's life that is no longer known (Weiser, 1962:135). Gerstenberger (1998:64) argues against this Psalm having any historical roots: "Rather, the complaint represents an accumulation of the agonies of generations of supplicants facing unfounded charges of various types." At best this Psalm may represent any individual who is falsely accused. The reference to Cush the Benjamite is obscure. It is always possible, even though the story was not recorded in the Biblical account, that the historical incident might have been known to the psalmist (Mays, 1994:65). Even though it is not possible to link this Psalm with any certainty to an experience of David, it is quite acceptable to suppose that the Psalm eventually passed into the realm of worship, as the use of Shelah suggests (Craigie, 1983:99; Waltner, 2006:57). The themes of the Psalm could make it the appropriate candidate for use during the feast of Purim (Craigie, 1983:100). Within the

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faith community of Israel a wide range of individual and communal Psalms were used in special, or ad hoc, services that occurred either before or after important events (Gerstenberger, 1998:9–10). It cannot be determined with any degree of certainty whether Psalm 7, in its original usage, reflects a cultic context (Craigie, 1983:99). These Psalms include complaints, laments, and of Psalms of thanksgiving. Psalms of complaint, both individual and collective, were used while the danger was still looming. Before the final blow, YHWH is petitioned and the case argued in an attempt to prevent the calamity (Gerstenberger, 1998:11). Calamities could include any negative experience by individuals or communities ranging from illness, bad luck, aggressive enemies, realities of war, to false accusations (Mays, 1994:27).

Form critical studies have dominated scholarly approaches to the Psalms during the last century (Miller, 1986:3). Scholars attempt to classify Psalms according to certain discernible patterns. The usefulness of this approach is well-known, but there are also limitations. Some Psalms refuse to fit into the form critical patterns and Weiser (1962:197) is a good example of someone who, because of the mixture of genres found for example in Psalm 19, split the Psalm arguing that why these "…dissimilar psalms were united in one single Psalm cannot any longer be established with any degree of certainty." Gunkel (1967:7) pioneered this approach in the belief that certain regular life-settings in Israel led to the development of certain Psalm types that can be identified due to their patterns and identifying these forms can help the scholar get a better understanding of the life-setting of the Psalms.

According to the form-critical definition Psalm 7 is a lament of an individual,[43] or an individual Psalm of complaint, from someone who is proclaiming his innocence after being wrongfully accused (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:65; Gerstenberger, 1998:10). The psalmist is accused of treachery, most probably a breach of covenant or treaty obligations (Craigie, 1983:99). It is quite clear from the context that the psalmist in Psalm 7 should be considered guiltless beyond doubt (Gerstenberger, 1998:65). The Psalm contains a formulaic appeal to God which is typical of the lament psalms (Mays, 1994:63), and which Gerstenberger (1998:65) calls a "protestation of innocence."

Most laments contain the following basic elements (see Gerstenberger, 1998:12; Mays, 1994:21–22; Mowinckel, 2004:9–11; Westermann, 1981:64):

- Invocation (plea or petition)

- Complaint (descriptive, reproachful, petitionary

- Confession of sin or assertion of innocence

- Affirmation of confidence

- Plea or petition for help

- Imprecation against enemies

- Vow or pledge

- Hymnic elements, blessings

- Anticipated thanksgiving

Mandolfo (2002b:36) identifies the following lament elements in Psalm 7 as follows:

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[43] The negative connotation to the word 'lament' cause many to prefer alternative terms (Mays, 1994:21). Mandolfo (2002a:27) would prefer to rather use the term "grievance psalms" or "protest psalms" over the designation lament psalms. Despite this preference Mandolfo admits that the term lament is just too common and also continues using lament. Gerstenberger (1998:10) prefers to call Psalms 7 an "Individual Psalm of Complaint."

2–3	invocation and petition
4–6	assertion of innocence
7–8	petition
9a	*description of YHWH*
9b–10a	petition (response to v. 9a)
10b	*description of YHWH (response to v. 10a)*
11	assertion of confidence
12–14	*description of YHWH*
15–17	*description of wicked*
18	vow of praise

2.7 CANONICAL CONTEXT OF PSALM 7

Traditionally, scholars divide the Psalter into five books Psalms 1–41; 42–72; 73–89;

90–106 and 107–150. Psalm 7 falls into the first collection containing Psalm 1-41. This

collection is called Book I. Book I consists mainly of Psalms by individual authors and

pleas for deliverance which means it is regarded as being part of a collection (McCann,

1996:657; Wilson, 2002:89). Most Psalms in Book I is known as 'I' Psalms and

considered the words of an individual, although there is no certain way to determine if

these Psalms were originally intended for the individual or the group (Miller, 1989:216–

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Psalm 7 contains the phrase לְדָוִד ("of David") and scholars consider these Psalms as

being part of a collection associated with David. Since Psalms 1 and 2 do not contain

the phrase לְדָוִד, some scholars consider them to be the introduction to the Psalter (see

Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:14; Wilson, 2002:89).[44] Most Psalms containing the phrase לְדָוִד are found in Books I and II of the Psalter. Book I consists mainly of individual Psalms with a predisposition to pleas of deliverance (Wilson, 2002:90). It appears as if there was some form of organizing and structuring to the Psalms.

Some scholars find smaller collections within the five bigger books of the Psalter. Some have argued that Psalms 3-8 form a coherent group of its own (see Lucas, 2003:32–33; Smith & Domeris, 2010:367), although some prefer to regard Psalms 3-7 as a collection of "laments of the individual" and it is the dominating element in the first books of the Psalms (see Day, 1999:19; Futato, 2009:48; Gerstenberger, 1998:10–14; Limburg, 1992:526, 532; Smith, 2012:472; Wilson, 2002:21). For Futato (2009:47) Psalm 3-7 form a group that is bounded by Psalms 1-2 on the one side and Psalm 8 on the other.

Smith & Domeris comes to a similar conclusion:

> [w]hile juxtaposing psalms with link words as their chief organizing criterion, the editors may have inserted Psalms 4-6 between Psalms 3 and 7, which were neighbouring hymns in an earlier collection and appended Psalm 8 as a conclusion to the collection (Smith & Domeris, 2010:367).

Grogan (2008:52) argues that Psalm 8 is a sudden and major change from the themes and emotional tone of the series formed by Psalms 3-7. Psalm 3 and 7 contains certain major elements and shared words connecting them to each other. Both Psalms reference a historical experience of David while he fled enemies. In the case of Psalm 3 it is his

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[44] In total four Psalms (1, 2, 10, and 33) in Book I do not contain the phrase "of David." The rest of the Psalms in Book I contain this phrase.

son Absalom and in the case of Psalm 7 it is Cush, the Benjamite. Smith & Domeris (2010:371) identifies a very nice chiastic structure in this group of Psalms:

Ps 3 – Historical Psalm, regarding Absalom

Ps 4 - music director's, with stringed instruments

Ps 5 - Music director's, for flutes

Ps 6 - Music director's, with stringed instruments

Ps 7 – Historical Psalm, regarding Cush.

From the discussion above it is clear that Psalm 7 should be read together with Psalm 3-6.

2.8   IMPLICATIONS OF PSALM 7

It is clear from this Psalm that the psalmist is in a powerless position. Enemies have hunted him and his only refuge is God. The three imperatives, calling on God to rise, awake and lift himself on behalf of the psalmist have some echo, as will be discussed in more detail later, with the Aramaic cry Μαράνα θά. It is important to see that there is no sense of vengeance in the psalmist. He knows that he is not in a position to declare judgment on his enemies. Rather, he calls on God to do the judgment. Interestingly, the psalmist not only asks God to judge his enemies, but also to judge himself. He places himself before the judgment seat of God, just as he placed the enemy before God's judgment. He knows the dire results when found guilty by God, but he is certain of his innocence. He is not proclaiming his innocence in general terms, but in terms of the accusations levelled against him.

For the purpose of this study it will be important to note the wish expressed by the psalmist that God will rise to help him by expressing judgment. Also, the

acknowledgement of the psalmist through the images of war, that if God do judge the results will be catastrophic for anyone found guilty.

CHAPTER 3 – PSALM 35

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Scholars disagree about the number of Imprecatory Psalms in the Psalter, but Psalm 35 appears in all the lists. Psalm 35 is a prayer of deliverance from dangerous and aggressive enemies. The Psalm is a "long and complex prayer for help in a first person singular style" (Mays, 1994:154). The psalmist calls down imprecations on his enemies for their treachery and malice against him. This Psalm will resonate with any person who had to experience false or slanderous accusations (Lennox, 1999:109), but if read properly it will give pause to anyone who desire vindication. Even though the psalmist is expressing fierce imprecations on his enemies, the reader will notice that he is careful to leave these wishes in the hand of YHWH. It is important to realise that Imprecatory Psalms always have the righteousness and glory of YHWH in mind. They never involve personal issues or vindictiveness (Barrett, 2006:160–170). "To pray for God to execute His righteous judgment upon the wicked is equivalent to praying for the advancement and extension of His kingdom" (Barrett, 2006:170).

Important elements in Psalm 35 is the psalmist's dependency on YHWH's actions and the implication that when YHWH acts it would lead to the realization of YHWH's righteousness and the psalmist's vindication. It does not appear as if the psalmist is currently in a near-death situation, but YHWH's delay still increases the psalmist's distress (Broyles, 1989:194). The Psalter contains strong elements of both lament and praise, but the element of praise is the dominant element of the Psalter. In essence the Psalms are a call to praise YHWH (see Wilson, 1992:138–139) and the psalmist expresses a clear desire and wish to praise YHWH. Psalm 35 clearly moves towards this goal: YHWH will be praised, but at this moment the psalmist is not in a position to express his praise.

3.2 PSALM 35 - TEXT[45]

35:1	**I**		Of David[a]		לְדָוִד
	A	1a	O YHWH, contend[a] with those who contend with me.		רִיבָה יְהוָה אֶת־יְרִיבַי
		1b	Fight those who fight me.		לְחַם אֶת־לֹחֲמָי׃
35:2		2a	Take up the shield and buckler		הַחֲזֵק מָגֵן וְצִנָּה
		2b	And arise in my support.		וְקוּמָה בְּעֶזְרָתִי׃
35:3		3a	And draw out[a] the spear and javelin[b] to meet my pursuers.		וְהָרֵק חֲנִית וּסְגֹר לִקְרַאת רֹדְפָי
		3b	Say to my soul:[c] "Your deliverance am I."		אֱמֹר לְנַפְשִׁי יְשֻׁעָתֵךְ אָנִי׃
35:4	**B**	4a	Let them be ashamed and humiliated;		יֵבֹשׁוּ וְיִכָּלְמוּ
		4b	those who seek my soul.		מְבַקְשֵׁי נַפְשִׁי
		4c	Let them turn back and let them be dismayed;		יִסֹּגוּ אָחוֹר וְיַחְפְּרוּ
		4d	Those who devise evil against me.		חֹשְׁבֵי רָעָתִי׃
35:5		5a	Let them be like chaff in the face of the wind,		יִהְיוּ כְּמֹץ לִפְנֵי־רוּחַ
		5b	and the angel of YHWH pushing them.[a]		וּמַלְאַךְ יְהוָה דּוֹחֶה׃
35:6		6a	Let their way be dark and slippery,		יְהִי־דַרְכָּם חֹשֶׁךְ וַחֲלַקְלַקּוֹת
		6b	And the angel of YHWH pursuing them.		וּמַלְאַךְ יְהוָה רֹדְפָם׃
35:7		7a	For, without cause, they hid their net for me[a].		כִּי־חִנָּם טָמְנוּ־לִי רִשְׁתָּם

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[45] This is my own translation.

			7b	And without cause they dug a trap for my soul.	חִנָּם חָפְרוּ שַׁחַת לְנַפְשִׁי׃
35:8			8a	Let devastation come on him without knowing,	תְּבוֹאֵהוּ שׁוֹאָה לֹא־יֵדָע
			8b	and let his net, which he hid, capture him,	וְרִשְׁתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר־טָמַן תִּלְכְּדוֹ
			8c	let him fall in his own devastation.	בְּשׁוֹאָה יִפָּל־בָּהּ׃
35:9		**C**	9a	And my soul will rejoice in YHWH;	וְנַפְשִׁי תָּגִיל בַּיהוָה
			9b	it will rejoice in his deliverance.	תָּשִׂישׂ בִּישׁוּעָתוֹ׃
35:10			10a	All my bones[a] will say	כָּל עַצְמוֹתַי תֹּאמַרְנָה
			10b	"YWHW, who is like you?	יְהוָה מִי כָמוֹךָ
			10c	Deliverer of the poor from the strong,	מַצִּיל עָנִי מֵחָזָק מִמֶּנּוּ
			10d	and the weak and poor from his robber."	וְעָנִי וְאֶבְיוֹן מִגֹּזְלוֹ׃
35:11	**II**	**D**	11a	Witnesses[a] of violence arose	יְקוּמוּן עֵדֵי חָמָס
			11b	They asked of me what I did not know.[b]	אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתִּי יִשְׁאָלוּנִי׃
35:12			12a	They awarded me evil instead of good;	יְשַׁלְּמוּנִי רָעָה תַּחַת טוֹבָה
			12b	A bereavement[a] unto my soul.	שְׁכוֹל לְנַפְשִׁי׃
35:13		**E**	13a	But I, in their illness, my clothing was sackcloth	וַאֲנִי בַּחֲלוֹתָם לְבוּשִׁי שָׂק
			13b	I humbled my soul in fasting,	עִנֵּיתִי בַצּוֹם נַפְשִׁי
			13c	and my prayer returned upon my bosom.	וּתְפִלָּתִי עַל־חֵיקִי תָשׁוּב׃
35:14			14a	Like a friend, like a brother to me, I walked around	כְּרֵעַ־כְּאָח לִי הִתְהַלָּכְתִּי
			14b	like a mourner for a mother, I mournfully bowed down.	כַּאֲבֶל־אֵם קֹדֵר שַׁחוֹתִי׃

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35:15	**F**	15a	And in my stumbling,[a] they rejoiced and gathered	וּבְצַלְעִי שָׂמְחוּ וְנֶאֱסָפוּ
		15b	Smiters gathered against me and I knew not.	נֶאֶסְפוּ עָלַי נֵכִים וְלֹא יָדַעְתִּי
		15c	They tear away without ceasing.[b]	קָרְעוּ וְלֹא־דָמּוּ׃

| 35:16 | | 16a | In godless mocking they mocked,[a] | בְּחַנְפֵי לַעֲגֵי מָעוֹג |
| | | 16b | against me they gnash their teeth. | חָרֹק עָלַי שִׁנֵּימוֹ׃ |

35:17	**G**	17a	O my Lord, how long will you look on?	אֲדֹנָי כַּמָּה תִּרְאֶה
		17b	Bring back my soul from their destruction.[a]	הָשִׁיבָה נַפְשִׁי מִשֹּׁאֵיהֶם
		17c	My only from the lions.	מִכְּפִירִים יְחִידָתִי׃

| 35:18 | | 18a | I will praise you in the great assembly. | אוֹדְךָ בְּקָהָל רָב |
| | | 18b | In the mighty people I will praise you. | בְּעַם עָצוּם אֲהַלְלֶךָּ׃ |

35:19	**III**	**H**	19a	Do not let them rejoice over me,	אַל־יִשְׂמְחוּ־לִי
			19b	hating me falsely.	אֹיְבַי שֶׁקֶר
			19c	hating me without cause,	שֹׂנְאַי חִנָּם
			19d	winking their eye.	יִקְרְצוּ־עָיִן׃

| 35:20 | | 20a | For they do not speak peace, | כִּי לֹא שָׁלוֹם יְדַבֵּרוּ |
| | | 20b | and upon the peaceful ones of the land,[a] they devise words of deceit. | וְעַל רִגְעֵי־אֶרֶץ דִּבְרֵי מִרְמוֹת יַחֲשֹׁבוּן׃ |

| 35:21 | | 21a | And they opened their mouths wide against me, | וַיַּרְחִיבוּ עָלַי פִּיהֶם |
| | | 21b | they said: "Aha! Aha! Our eyes saw." | אָמְרוּ הֶאָח הֶאָח רָאֲתָה עֵינֵינוּ׃ |

| 35:22 | **I** | 22a | O YHWH, you have seen. | רָאִיתָה יְהוָה |

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		22b	Do not be silent.	אַל־תֶּחֱרַשׁ
		22c	My Lord, do not be distant from me.	אֲדֹנָי אַל־תִּרְחַק מִמֶּֽנִּי:
35:23		23a	Awake, and rise for my judgment,	הָעִירָה וְהָקִיצָה לְמִשְׁפָּטִי
		23b	O my God and my Lord, contend for me.	אֱלֹהַי וַאדֹנָי לְרִיבִֽי:
35:24		24a	Judge me according to your righteousness, o YHWH my God.	שָׁפְטֵנִי כְצִדְקְךָ יְהוָה אֱלֹהָי
		24b	And don't let them rejoice over me.	וְאַל־יִשְׂמְחוּ־לִֽי:
35:25	**J**	25a	Do not let them say in their heart: "Aha! Aha![a] Just what we wanted!"[b]	אַל־יֹאמְרוּ הֶאָח נַפְשֵׁנוּ בְלִבָּם
		25b	Let them not say: "we devoured him."	אַל־יֹאמְרוּ בִּלַּעֲנֽוּהוּ:
35:26		26a	Let them be both ashamed and humiliated;	יֵבֹשׁוּ וְיַחְפְּרוּ יַחְדָּו
		26b	Those who are joyful of my misfortune.	שְׂמֵחֵי רָעָתִי
		26c	Let them wear shame and dishonour;	יִלְבְּשׁוּ־בֹשֶׁת וּכְלִמָּה
		26d	Those who exalt[a] them over me.	הַמַּגְדִּילִים עָלָֽי:
35:27	**K**	27a	Let them shout with joy and rejoice,	יָרֹנּוּ וְיִשְׂמְחוּ
		27b	those who desire my righteousness.	חֲפֵצֵי צִדְקִי
		27c	And let them continually say: "let YHWH be exalted?"	וְיֹאמְרוּ תָמִיד יִגְדַּל יְהוָה
		27d	He who desire the peace of his servant.	הֶחָפֵץ שְׁלוֹם עַבְדּֽוֹ:
35:28		28a	And my tongue will declare your righteousness	וּלְשׁוֹנִי תֶּהְגֶּה צִדְקֶךָ
		28b	And praise you all day.	כָּל־הַיּוֹם תְּהִלָּתֶֽךָ:

3.3 TEXTUAL AND TRANSLATION NOTES

1a

The LXX adds ψαλμός ("מִזְמוֹר" – Psalm).

1b

BHS show that some manuscripts have רִיבִי instead of רִיבָה. The current translation makes sense in parallel to colon 1c.

2a

Some Greek manuscripts read לְעֶזְרָתִי (εἰς βοήθειάν μου, "for my help") instead of בְּעֶזְרָתִי (Kraus, 1993:389). Kraus (1993:389) argues that בְּעֶזְרָתִי is not a noun with a prepositional suffix, but rather that the בְּ indicates a motion towards a goal. Basson (2006:136) identifies the בְּ as a "beth essentiae" indicating the capacity in which YHWH is acting. The Beth essentiae is an old expression that may point to the function of the preposition as a link between the subject and predicate (Joüon & Muraoka, 2003:486–487).

3a

Draw out the spear: a spear connected to a chariot was kept in a sheath, so it could be correct to translate: "Draw the spear" (Dahood, 2008a:210).

3b

The exact meaning of סְגֹר is not certain although the literal meaning could mean "lock up." The MT vocalization appears to be an infinitive construct form meaning "close" (Harman, 2011:295; VanGemeren, 1991:288). Kraus (1993:389) argues that this does

not make sense, although some English Translations[46] translate סָגֹר in the sense of "blocking the way or closing the road." This verse could then be translated as "Draw the spear and block the way of my pursuers." Dahood (2008a:211) prefers to point it seger, which could be a pike or javelin, although segōr more probably refers to "the socket of the javelin" (Kidner, 1973:160; VanGemeren, 1991:288). Many English Translations follow Dahood in translating "javelin." Kraus (1993:389) prefers to adopt the pointing סָגֵר meaning "battle-ax." This could refer to a "double-edged battle-ax" (see Tanner, 2014a:332) as some English Translations prefer. Javelin is preferred here to balance the double usage of shield in the previous verse.

3c

לְנַפְשִׁי ("to my soul") has various meanings, but in this context it can refer to the whole person (Fredericks, 1997:133).

5a

Dahood (2008a:211) argues that although דֹּוחֶה contains no suffix, it should be translated with a plural suffix based on the parallelism with רֹדְפָם in vs. 6 (see also his explanation on the double-duty suffix in Psalm 3:4 (Dahood, 2008a:17)). Craigie (1986:283) and Basson (2006:137) also add a plural suffix in their translations. Tanner (2014a:332) disagrees and argues that it makes sense as it stands. Tanner prefers to attach דֹּוחֶה to the wind, implying that the angel of the Lord is pushing the wind (which in turn pushes the chaff). This translation follows Dahood, Craigie and Basson by adding a plural suffix.

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[46] See American Standard Version (1901), Bible in Basic English, Douay-Rheims, Geneva Bible, God's Word Translation and King James Version (1900) for examples of this translation.

7a

Dahood (2008a:211) argues that רִשְׁתָּם is an accusative of means preceding the verb, which is a common stylistic feature in the Psalms (see Dahood, 2008a:35 for more). The implication would then be that they hid the pit with their net. Dahood (2008a:211) also argues that חִנָּם should be translated as "stealthily", but without cause fits the context well. Dahood (2008a:211) understands חָפְרוּ as spy. He prefers the translation – "eyed my life." Tanner (2014a:332) suggests transposing שַׁחַת and רִשְׁתָּם. This could then be translated: "for without cause they hid a net for me; without cause they dug a pit for me" (Tanner, 2014a:332). Basson (2006:137) also follows a similar solution.

10a

"All my bones" should be considered idiomatic for "my whole being" (VanGemeren, 1991:288). (cf. 6:2; 51:8).

11a

Dahood (2008a:212) identifies another double-duty suffix when translating יְקוּמוּן. In this context he prefers to translate yeqūmūn as "testify against me." יִשְׁאָלוּנִי should be understood in the sense of a legal interrogation (Craigie, 1983:285; Dahood, 2008a:212).

11b

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתִּי יִשְׁאָלוּנִי appears problematic. VanGemeren (1991:289) connects

אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתִּי to the witnesses based on the parallelism with עֵדֵי חָמָס (11a) and the repetition of לֹא־יָדַעְתִּי in verse 15. This would imply that either the psalmist does not know the witnesses, or he does not recognize his former friends (VanGemeren, 1991:289). Some prefer to simply understand this that they questioned the psalmist on details he knew nothing of (Craigie, 1983:283; Harman, 2011:298; Tanner, 2014a:333).

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VanGemeren (1991:290) identifies שְׁכוֹל as childlessness, making the MT reading problematic: "childlessness of my soul." It can also carry the meaning of "bereavement" due to miscarriage or the loss of a child (Hamilton, 1997b:106). Despite some (Basson, 2006:137; 1983:283; Kraus, 1993:389) accepting the emendation of the BHS, changing שְׁכוֹל to שָׂכוּ and changing the meaning to "lie and wait", most English Translations choose to give sense to this phrase by implying that the actions of the enemies is an emotional struggle for the psalmist.

15a

The meaning of נֵכִים is uncertain. It could mean "to be struck down" or "crippled" (Van Dam, 1997:102–103). BHS amends נֵכִים to כְּנָכְרִים, which could be translated as "like foreigners" or "like strangers" (Basson, 2006:138; VanGemeren, 1991:290). Dahood (2008a:213) emends נֵכִים as נֹכִים meaning "smiters." Craigie (1983:285) follows the 4QPsa and opts to emend נֵכִים to תֹּכִים meaning "oppressors."

15b

Craigie (1983:285) chooses to understand this colon as a continuance: "They tore me apart and would not desist."

16a

The first colon of this verse in the MT is highly problematic and different solutions abound (Basson, 2006:138). The MT phrase לְעֲגֵי מָעוֹג could literally mean "mockers of cake" (Harman, 2011:299). Barnes (1983:305) understands this to imply these people are "table-buffoons", like the jesters of old to entertain guests while eating. Barnes argues that this implies that some of his friends, who previously shared his table and for whom he wept in their troubles, now turned against him (Barnes, 1983:305). The

LXX has "ἐπείρασάν με, ἐξεμυκτήρισάν με μυκτηρισμόν" which can be translated as "they tempted me. They mocked me with scorn." The BHS suggests emending בְּחַנְפֵי ("godless jesters") to בְּחַנְפִי ("when I stumbled/tripped") and, based on the Greek, emending לְעֲגֵי מָעוֹג ("mockers of cake") to לְעֲגוּ לַעַג ("taunt with taunting"). Kraus (1993:390) argues that the text of the MT "is fully acceptable if מעוג from the root ערג ("to be twisted") denotes the place to which one turns (the refuge)." Kraus (1993:390) then translates this phrase as "Like ruthless mockers of the refuge." But this doesn't make sense. If the MT לְעֲגֵי מָעוֹג is emended to לְעֲגֵי לַעַג it could become an expression of exaggeration: "like the godless jesters they mocked with scorn" or as a superlative "the worst possible mockery" (Craigie, 1983:285). Dahood (2008a:213) reads lōʿagay māʿōg for MT's laʿagē māʿōg to translate this phrase as "my encircling mockers." This translation follows the LXX by reading infinitive absolute, lāʿôg (with mockery) for māʿôg.

17a

The MT's מִשֹּׁאֵיהֶם ("from the destruction of them") is problematic. The BHS suggests emending this to מִשֹּׁאֲגִים ("from the roarers"). This creates a parallelism with מִכְּפִירִים ("young lions") in the next colon (see Basson, 2006:138; Kraus, 1993:390). מִשֹּׁאֵיהֶם could also refer back to verse 8 (בְּשׁוֹאָה) referring to the destruction of their traps. This translation follows this option.

20a

וְעַל רִגְעֵי־אֶרֶץ ("all the quiet ones of the land") is a *hapax legemenon* and is "a poetic description of the pious congregation as a whole" (Craigie, 1983:285) and is an idiomatic term to refer to those who could be described as "harmless folk", "peaceful folk" or "peacable folk" (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:338; Waltner, 2006:186).

24a

צֶדֶק occurs here and in verses 27-28. Here the meaning is "righteousness" but it could also be translated with "vindication" (see Reimer, 1997:762). For consistency it will be translated as "righteousness" throughout.

25a

The MT has only one occurrence of הֶאָח but the BHS suggests a case of haplography, thus inserting another הֶאָח. It also balances with the הֶאָח הֶאָח in verse 21.

25b

Literally נַפְשֵׁנוּ means "soul of us" but could imply a desire (Holladay & Köhler, 2000:242). When considering that הֶאָח could be understood as an "impolite utterance", especially mean spirited at times (Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:683), it would be acceptable to translate this as: "just what we wanted."

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גָּדַל with the preposition עַל produces the sense: "Do not let them gloat or exalt themselves over me" (Abegg, Jr., 1997:824).

3.4 STRUCTURE

The Psalm comprises three main units:1-10; 11-18; 19-28 (Basson, 2006:140; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:328; Broyles, 1989:195; Harman, 2011:295). Within each unit three sections can be identified: complaint, prayer and promise of praise. Since every unit contains these sections the questions could be asked if Psalm 35 is a composite of three different psalms (Tesh & Zorn, 1999:272). Each unit contains a description of the psalmist's troubles, a condemnation of the enemies rising against him, a prayer to YWHW for deliverance, and a promise of praise if vindicated (Bratcher & Reyburn,

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1991:328). The three units contain structural markers to help subdivide the Psalm. The most prominent structural markers are that each unit ends with praise (see verses 9-10, 18, 27-28). Although the praise element is the smallest element of the Psalm, ending each section in praise strengthens the underlying certainty expressed by the psalmist that YHWH will act on his behalf. The psalmist clearly vows to praise YHWH in the future because of YHWH's salvation.

Despite the possibility that Psalm 35 is a combination of three psalms into one, Harman (2011:295) finds strong connections between the three units: (1) the thoughts of verses 4 and 17 are connected, (2) the concept of ruin is expressed in verses 8 and 17, (3) The cluster of terms denoting shame (the verbal roots חפר, כלם ,בושׁ) reappear in verse 26, (4) fear for the enemy is expressed in verses 11, 15, and 20, (5) the enemies express glee over his distress in verses 15, 19, and 24-26, and (6) in both the second and third parts ferocious animal metaphors are used to identify the enemies. The roles of the enemies differ slightly in the three parts (although it is not impossible for the enemies to be cast in all three roles): in part 1 they seek his death, in part 2 they are intent on bringing about his condemnation and in part 3 they will gloat over his misfortune (Tesh & Zorn, 1999:272).

The metaphors used within the Psalm are diverse, ranging from images of war, images of a courtroom, images from hunting, and even touching on agricultural images. The dominant metaphors are war and courtroom which appear throughout the Psalm, and at times simultaneously (Boice, 1994:302; Wilson, 2002:578–579).

Despite the difficulties with the structure and flow of the Psalm, most scholars agree that Psalm 35 divides nicely into 3 Stanzas (vv.1-10, 11-18, and 19-28) (see Anderson, 1972:275; Basson, 2006:140; Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:328; Craigie, 1983:285; Davidson, 1998:119).

For the purpose of this study the structure proposed by Simango (2011:29–30) will be used as basis for the following analysis of the content of Psalm 35. Simango (2011:29–31) divides the Psalm as follows:

Stanza I (vv. 1-10) - A Military Threat

Strophe A   1a-3b   Urgent call to YHWH, the divine advocate and warrior

Strophe B   4a-8c   A series of imprecations against the enemies

Strophe C   9a-10c   A promise to rejoice and praise YHWH

Stanza II (vv. 11-18) - The Trial

Strophe D   11a-12b   The suppliant's distress

Strophe E   13a-14b   The suppliant's confession of innocence

Strophe F   15a-16b   Reiteration of his distress

Strophe G   17a-18b   Renewed appeal and vow to give thanks

Stanza III (vv. 19-28) – A Prayer for victory

Strophe H   19a-21b   Imprecation against his enemies

Strophe I   22a-24a   Renewed petition for YHWH to intervene

Strophe J   24b-26d   Further imprecation against his enemies

Strophe K   27a-28b   Call to praise YHWH and vow to proclaim his righteousness

3.5   PSALM 35 – POETIC CONTENT

3.5.1   Stanza 1 (verses 1-10) – A Military Threat

3.5.1.1 Strophe A - (verses 1-3): Urgent call to YHWH, the divine advocate and warrior

Strophe A consists of three verses containing a bi-colon each. These cola consist of an urgent call to YHWH to act on behalf of the psalmist's against his enemies. The urgency of these pleas not only convey the powerlessness of the psalmist against his enemies, but also expresses the expectation of vindication when YHWH acts (Basson, 2006:141).

Colon 1a begins with an imperative (רִיבָה) pointing to the vocative יְהוָה as subject. The psalmist is pleading YHWH to contend with אֶת־יְרִיבַי ("those who contend with me"). This phrase is a prepositional object with the object marker אֶת and a pronominal suffix indicating that "those who contend with me" is the object of the colon. The word רִיב is commonly used as a legal term (Craigie, 1983:286; Davidson, 1998:119), although the term is not common in the Psalms (Harman, 2011:296 n.1). The meaning of רִיב is varied and Tesh & Zorn (1999:275) indicate it can be translated as "plead" in a court of law (Job 9:13), "argue" as Jacob argued with Laban (Gen. 31:36) or "strive" where one man attacks another (Ex. 21:18). In Deuteronomy 19:16-17 it is used to identify a dispute between two parties that must be appealed before God (Davidson, 1998:119). In this context it would be appropriate to understand the verb in terms of Deuteronomy 19:16-17: the image of a courtroom where YHWH is the counsellor defending the psalmist (Craigie, 1983:286; Davidson, 1998:119) The image implies that the psalmist wants God to fight, on legal grounds, those who contend with him. His adversaries are identified in verse 11 as violent witnesses. The identities of the enemies remain vague, as is the exact identity of the psalmist. Scholars disagree about the identity of the enemies in the Psalms. Mowinckel (2004:4–7) identifies the enemy as workers of evil,

not always known entities by the psalmist, that through magic and curses caused havoc, especially in terms of illness. Keel (1997:78) reminds us that every community knows an enemy who represents the "antipole" (sic) of what the community regards as good and the reality of an enemy could also be a projection of the community. In other words an enemy could be anyone who is regarded as being the opposite of what a community regards as good and acceptable: "One man's terrorist is another man's heroic freedom fighter" (Hauer, 1970:41). In the Psalms it appears quite clear that the enemies are seen as those who are against the rule of God and Keel (1997:78–109) identifies enemies in two basic spheres: (1) enemies of the individual, and (2) enemies of the nation. Kraus (1992:125–137) distinguishes enemies in three major groups: (1) Enemies of the nation (which implied international enemies), (2) enemies of the individual (who usually represent godless pursuers) and (3) mythical powers (which describe the chaos powers against God and creation). The enemies of Psalm 35 appear to be primarily enemies of the individual.

The supplicant could be identified as the king of Israel, and there is a possibility that the problem at hand is related to international issues and could lead to war if not resolved (Craigie, 1983:286). Dahood (2008a:210) disagrees, stating that the martial imagery is only figurative to express the slander of the enemies.

The second colon (1b) contains the imperative verb לְחַם which forms a synthetic parallelism and introduces the metaphor of war. YHWH is implored to "contend those who contend the psalmist" and to "fight those who fight against the psalmist." The participle אֶת־לֹחֲמָי consists of the object marker and a pronominal suffix indicating the object of the colon. Colon 1a and 1b contain a clear wordplay (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:329): "contend… contend" and "fight…fight." Both these images underscore the major focus of these two cola: a strong plea for deliverance (Gerstenberger, 1998:150).

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The context indicate a wider sense than just a lawsuit: there exists a clear link with warfare (Eaton, 2003:158).

Colon 2a starts with the imperative הַחֲזֵק and in terse Hebrew the strong military image, introduced in colon 1b, is continued in the next few verses (Harman, 2011:295–296). The subject of the verb is YHWH and the object is two nouns joined by a conjunction: מָגֵן ("shield") and צִנָּה ("buckler"). The shields, depicted in God's hands, were mainly used by infantry and consists of a hand-shield and large body-shield called the buckler (Craigie, 1983:286; Harman, 2011:296). Colon 2b is joined to colon 2a with a conjunction. YHWH is still the subject of the imperative verb קוּמָה. The implication is that YHWH should first take up the shield and buckler, and then rise up. The imagery depict God as a warrior, and the psalmist pleads that God would rise up (קוּמָה – 2b) to defend him (Craigie, 1983:286). The reason for these two imperatives is explained by the prepositional object בְּעֶזְרָתִי ("in my support"). YHWH is called to action in favour of the psalmist. The shield and the buckler are defensive weapons (Simango, 2011:33). The psalmist desires God to act in his defence. Although the context here is clearly military, the verb קוּם ("arise") can be used in both military and legal contexts. Thus, even though the metaphors are predominantly military in this bi-colon, there is still a connection with the judicial imagery of cola 1ab.

Even though both verses 1 and 2 clearly imply defensive action from YHWH, colon 3a moves the imagery from defensive to offensive (Harman, 2011:296). The action of colon 3a is linked to the previous cola by a conjunction. Again an imperative, הָרֵק ("draw out") is employed and again calls on YHWH to act and draw a spear (חֲנִית) and a pike or double headed axe (סְגֹר). Eaton (2003:158) prefers "javelin" over "double headed axe." The spear was used on short to medium range attacks, while the pike or javelin functioned effectively in medium to long range attacks. חֲנִית and סְגֹר are weapons

used by infantry and YHWH is called to wield them against the enemy (Kraus, 1993:392–393). The weapons are symbols of God's readiness to defend his people (VanGemeren, 1991:287). YHWH should draw both weapons. Kraus (1993:392–393) argues, however, that the most effective aid for the psalmist is not the weapons YHWH wields, but rather the divine promise of YHWH (יְשֻׁעָתֵךְ אָנִי – "Your deliverance am I").

The use of two shields and two weapons appears improbable, but it emphasizes the powerful abilities of YHWH and the certainty of the deliverance of the psalmist (Basson, 2006:141; Goldingay, 2007:491). YHWH prepares to face the enemies on all fronts, defensive and offensive, near and far. Verses 2-3 refer to the traditional metaphor of God as warrior (Davidson, 1998:119; Eaton, 2003:158).

In colon 3a the enemies are defined with a prepositional phrase consisting of a preposition (לְ), and infinitive construct (קְרַאת) and a participle (רֹדְפָי). They are pursuing the psalmist and this prepositional construct expresses the action of YHWH desired by the psalmist: He must meet those who pursue him with drawn weapons. This further underscores the desire expressed in the previous verses: Fight those who fight me (1a), rise up in my aid (2b) and meet my pursuers (3a).

Colon 3b shifts the object of the verb from the enemies to the psalmist. YHWH is the subject of the imperative אֱמֹר (say"), but the soul of the psalmist (נַפְשִׁי) is the object of YWHW's words. The psalmist needs to hear the trust he is expressing towards YHWH reciprocated. He knows that YHWH will contend for him, will fight for him, will rise to his aid and meet his pursuers, but his soul needs to hear it from YHWH. The soul of the psalmist (נַפְשִׁי) refers to the whole person (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:35; Davidson, 1998:119).

Despite his faithful expressions, the psalmist is worried. He feels inadequate to handle his enemies. Craigie (1983:286) identifies the psalmist as the king and states that war is clearly the uppermost worry for the king at this moment. Later in the Psalm (see verses 11, 19, and 21) it becomes clear that the enemies are attacking the psalmist by witnessing against him. It is possible that the psalmist is experiencing a threat on two levels: (1) he is being attacked legally and (2) the outcome of that legal battle could turn into war. The psalmist is appealing to God's justice (VanGemeren, 1991:287) with the hope that God would fight his legal battle for him, as well as defend him in terms of possible military action (see Craigie, 1983:286; Harman, 2011:296). Colon 3c carries the meaning of reassurance (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:329). The cry "Your deliverance am I" is not an oracle nor a battle cry, as some maintain, but an expression of the anticipation of victory that would obviously follow when God rises up on behalf of the psalmist (Craigie, 1983:286). Harman (2011:296) sees it as an abbreviated form of the phrase "I, the Lord, am your saviour" found in passages like Isaiah 49:26 and 60:16. The impetus of these words of YHWH is to bring calm to the psalmist in his situation (Basson, 2006:142).

The psalmist is well aware of his desperate situation and he desires to hear YHWH's voice of reassurance. The words of YHWH are supposed to encourage the psalmist to hang on until deliverance is given (Wilson, 2002:579). The personal pronoun (אֲנִי) is most probably an abbreviation for the longer phrase "I am YHWH" which can be understood as a covenantal term (VanGemeren, 1991:287). The relationship between the psalmist and YHWH is an important element in strophe I.

The first three verses contain six imperatives, pleading with YHWH to take decisive action against the multitude of enemies who are bent on destroying the psalmist. The

first three verses are highly concerned with the fate of the psalmist as is visible in the dominant usage of the word "my" (Gerstenberger, 1998:151).

3.5.1.2 Strophe B – (veɪses 4a-8c): A series of imprecations against the enemies

The psalmist appears confident that YHWH will act and he now turns the focus towards his enemies (Basson, 2006:142). Verses 1-3, consisting of mainly imperatives, almost demands action from YHWH, but it only emphasizes his powerlessness before his enemies (Basson, 2006:140–141). In colon 4a the verbs change from imperatives to jussive expressing the desires or wishes of the psalmist (Gerstenberger, 1998:151; Wilson, 2002:579). In strong language the psalmist launches into a series of imprecations against his enemies. He expresses the hope that YHWH will act against them in a harsh manner. These imprecations are not the result of vengeance or revenge. As will become clear in verse 7, these curses are based on the actions of the enemies and not personal vengeance. These curses should not be understood as personal vindictiveness or vengeance (Harman, 2011:296). The psalmist is calling upon the Covenant God to act according to the covenant (see Bernardino, 1986:91–94; Harman, 2011:296–297). The covenantal agreement gives the psalmist the freedom to approach YWHW with the certainty that YHWH will act on his behalf.

Colon 4a starts with a Qal imperfect jussive יֵבֹשׁוּ verb. The subject is YHWH and the object is the enemies. Focusing on his enemies, he expresses the desire that YHWH will bring them to shame. The use of jussives indicates that the psalmist is aware that (1), despite the strong use of imperatives in the previous verses, he cannot demand YHWH's action, and (2) only YHWH is in the position to shame the enemies. The degree of the psalmist's desire is expressed by the use of synonymous lexemes. The resultant shame of his enemies should be comprehensive: Shame alone is not enough.

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The Qal imperfect יֵבֹשׁוּ ("let them be ashamed") is connected via a conjunction to another jussive: יִכָּלְמוּ ("let them be humiliated"). The verbs יֵבֹשׁוּ ("disgraced") and יִכָּלְמוּ ("humiliated") are frequently linked together in Hebrew (Harman, 2011:297). The linking of the two synonymous verbs emphasizes the severity of the psalmist's desire for vindication.

The object of these imprecations is defined by a participial phrase: מְבַקְשֵׁי נַפְשִׁי ("those who seek my soul"). נַפְשִׁי is repeated from 3b and in this context it refers to the psalmist's life or person. The enemies are seeking the psalmist's life, but YHWH will speak to the soul of the psalmist to calm him by declaring יְשֻׁעָתֵךְ אָנִי ("Your deliverance am I.").

Colon 4c contains another Nifal jussive with God as the subject. The verb יִסֹּגוּ ("let them turn") is joined to an adverb אָחוֹר ("back"). The literal meaning of the Nifal verb יִסֹּגוּ is "draw back", "to shrink", or to "recoil" and combined with the adverb the expression should be understood as a military expression referencing the power of an invading army (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:330). If the psalmist still has the military images in mind, it will enforce the meaning of יֵבֹשׁוּ ("let them be ashamed") and יִכָּלְמוּ ("let them be humiliated"). Falling back on a battlefield implies that the power of the enemy is too strong. Even though a temporary fall back could be a tactical move from a commander, turning around and running away from the battlefield are usually seen as something to be ashamed of. This idea is strengthened by linking 4b and 4c by a conjunction and the use of yet another jussive יַחְפְּרוּ ("let them be dismayed"). The verb can also be translated as "let them be ashamed" but the translation "let them be dismayed" fits better. Nel (1997:236) indicates that YHWH's judgment can cause feelings of disappointment, failure, and dismay in the enemies. This is precisely what the psalmist is praying for: that the actions of YHWH will cause deep feelings of shame, humiliation

and dismay in his enemies. The participial phrase חֹשְׁבֵי רָעָתִי ("those who devise evil against me") defines the enemies negatively. They are not only seeking the soul of the psalmist (4b), they are actively plotting evil against him (4d), hence his desperate call to YHWH. This is strengthened by the effective use of a parallelism between cola 4ab and 4ac.

4a - Let them be ashamed and humiliated;	4c - Let them turn back and let them be dismayed;
4b - those who seek my soul.	4d - those who devise evil against me.

It is important to note that the psalmist appears powerless against his enemies. He can do nothing against them. Despite his innocence he appears guilty due to false witnesses (see vv. 7, 11-16, and 19-21). The only way to prove his innocence is through YHWH's righteousness (see v.17, and 22-24). YHWH's righteousness will lead to the psalmist vindication and the enemies' shame and humiliation. It is only through the disgrace and shame of his enemies that the help of YWHW will be revealed (Kraus, 1993:393). This is similar to the disgrace encountered in Psalm 31 (Wilson, 2002:580).

Colon 5a turns the tide on the enemies. Until now they were the pursuers, the people with power, but now they are reduced to chaff (כְּמֹץ). The verb is jussive and the enemies are the subject. The chaff is the useless remnants of the grain as it is winnowed in the wind. Grain is scooped up and thrown into the wind so that the wind would remove the useless and lighter chaff while the grain fell back down (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:20; Wilson, 2002:580). The wish expressed by the psalmist is that the enemies will be like chaff: useless and, more importantly, powerless before the wind (לִפְנֵי־רוּחַ). This powerful metaphor is common in the Bible to describe the wicked (McCann, 1996:819).

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It not only expresses the psalmist's feelings about his enemies, their worthlessness (Harman, 2011:297), but more importantly it defines their powerlessness" (Basson, 2006:142).

The powerlessness of the enemies is emphasized by the synthetic parallelism between colon 5a and colon 5b. Colon 5b builds on the theme of colon 5a.This time the driving force is not the wind, but the angel of the Lord (מַלְאַךְ יְהוָה). The angel is the subject of דּוֹחֶה ("pushing them") emphasizing the power of the Lord's offensive actions. Harman (2011:297) finds the "angel of the Lord" as a continuation of the theme introduced in Psalm 34:8. This is the only two places in the psalms where the "angel of the Lord" appears (Gerstenberger, 1998:151). Why the reference to an angel appears here and in Psalm 34 is not known: either the psalmists are drawing on a similar tradition, or they are just using well-known images (Tanner, 2014a:335–336). Although the identity of the angel is debated (see Boice, 1994:303; Jenni & Westermann, 1997:671), I agree with Simango (2011:38) that there is no interpretive value for this study to pursue this further. Introducing the "angel of the Lord" is an extension of the military images in the previous verses (Tanner, 2014a:336) but combines with an agricultural metaphor (Wilson, 2002:580). This further emphasizes the actual powerlessness of the enemies. Like chaff in the wind, the enemies will be driven back by the angel of the Lord.

Verse 6 forms a parallelism with verse 5, further emphasizing the imprecatory nature of the psalmist's prayer.

5a - Let them be like chaff	6a - Let their way be
in the face of the wind,	dark and slippery,
5b - And the angel of	6b - And the angel of
YHWH pushing them	YHWH pursuing them.

The jussive verb יְהִי־דַרְכָּם ("let their way be") in colon 6a is directly connected חֹשֶׁךְ
וַחֲלַקְלַקּוֹת ("dark and slippery"). The adjectives "dark and slippery" together indicate a
dangerous place (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:331). Where the first two images of cola
4c and 5a implied powerlessness and shame, the images now turns more serious and
even deadly. Dahood (2008a:211) identifies the word pair as the underworld ("sheol").
The insinuation is more than just the wish for powerlessness: it now turns deadly. The
role of the angel of the Lord subtly changes.

Now, in colon 6b, the angel of the Lord is not simply "pushing them" (דּוֹחֶה); he is
"pursuing them" (רֹדְפָם). Although angels are usually portrayed as messengers of the
Lord, they are also agents that execute the will of God (Futato, 2009:138). In a sense of
poetic justice there is a turn of events: the pursuers (רֹדְפָי) of the psalmist (v. 3a) will be
pursued (רֹדְפָם) by the angel of the Lord (Futato, 2009:138). The same verb is also used
in Psalm 7 to describe the actions of the enemies, but now the tides will change. This is
called the "boomerang effect" (see Craigie, 1983:120, 281; Spender, 2005:90;
VanGemeren, 1991:391). The "boomerang effect" is again visible in relation to traps
and the nets employed by the enemies in verses 7-8.

Colon 7a begins with a conjunction (כִּי) and introduces the justification for the
preceding imprecations. Combined with the adverb חִנָּם the psalmist expresses his
innocence: כִּי־חִנָּם "for without reason." The force of the plea of innocence is heightened

by repeating הֵנָּם in colon 7b. If the psalmist did something to justify the acts of the enemies he would have expected some form of retaliation. The verb טָמַן ("they hid") is connected to a preposition (לְ) which carries a 1st person singular suffix and emphasizes the unawareness of the psalmist regarding the enemies' actions and introduces the change to hunting metaphors. The seekers of the psalmist's soul (נֶפֶשׁ – verse 4b) now become the hunters of his soul (נֶפֶשׁ – verse 7). They laid a trap for him and they are waiting for him to step into their trap. He claims that he did nothing to warrant their hunting him. The hunting metaphors also imply deviousness and guile of their actions; they are not truthful in their actions. The synonymous parallelism between 7a and 7b further focusses on their deceitful actions and, by implication, the innocence of the psalmist.

In colon 8a the deviousness of the enemies is forcing the psalmist to call down these wishes on them. These words are more than just wishes; they are imprecations or curses. The imprecations are not just a wish for the destruction of the wicked, expressed in a vengeful outburst, but rather the desire that God would allow their actions to return onto them and that their punishment would be equivalent to the offense committed (Wilson, 2002:580) – the so-called "boomerang effect" referred to above. This is further underscored by the psalmist's wish that ruin will come on them without "knowing it" (לֹא־יֵדָע).

The verb תְּבוֹאֵהוּ ("let it come on him") is jussive and the subject of the verb is defined by שׁוֹאָה ("ruin") while the object is defined by the suffix pronoun הוּא ("him"). There is a sudden shift from plural to singular. A similar shift is seen in Psalm 7:3 and it is a common occurrence in the Psalms (see note on 7:3 for more).

The psalmist nestles his protestation of innocence (v.7) between four imprecations in verses 4-6 and three imprecations in verse 8 (VanGemeren, 1991:287). He is not just

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expressing imprecations because he feels insulted or pursued. He finds sanction for his curses in the wickedness of their "hiding their nets" and "digging traps for his soul. Their unfounded desire to seek his soul is forcing the psalmist to call for the judgmental intervention of YHWH (Kraus, 1993:393). This correlates with the psalmist's motivation for his imprecations in Psalm 7.

8b is joined to 8a by a conjunction. This colon starts with the noun רִשְׁתּוֹ ("his net") with pronominal suffix as the subject. It refers back to 7a and combined with the jussive verb תִּלְכְּדוֹ ("let it catch him") the psalmist wishes that his enemy would be ensnared by his very own net. The relative clause אֲשֶׁר־טָמַן ("which he hid") identifies the net as the same one which the enemy attempted to hide for the psalmist. The net was hidden in a trap the enemy dug for the psalmist (verse 7). A similar image is used in Psalm 7 and now the psalmist wishes that what the enemy attempted to do to him, should happen to the enemy. It is important to note that the psalmist is not the one causing the enemy to fall into the trap. The wish is expressed that YWHW, who is carrying the shields and the weapons on behalf of the psalmist, would let this happen. It is not in the psalmist's power, but YHWH is the just judge (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:94).

Colon 8c connects to colon 8b and again the psalmist uses a jussive verb expressing his wish that the enemy will fall into his (יִפָּל־בָּהּ) own destruction (בְּשׁוֹאָה). The preposition (בְּ) clearly indicates that the psalmist wants the enemy to be completely ensnared by his very own plan (indicated by the suffix הִיא). There is a clear chiastic pattern between verses 7 and 8. A chiastic pattern is used for emphasis and here it emphasizes that the desire of the psalmist to see the wicked fall into the trap is not based on his own vengeful desires, but the result of the enemies' actions against him.

3.5.1.3 Strophe C – (verses 9a-10c): A Promise to Rejoice and Praise YHWH

Colon 9a expresses the hope of the psalmist that YHWH will answer his wishes. Verse 9 begins with a resultative waw and should be seen as the resulting focus of all the jussives in verses 4–6, and 8 (VanGemeren, 1991:287). The traditional word order of the Hebrew is reversed. The subject of the colon נַפְשִׁי ("my soul") is placed before the verb תָּגִיל ("shall rejoice"). The most probable explanation for this is that the subject is being emphasized. The psalmist's נַפְשִׁי ("soul"), which is pursued by the wicked who dug a trap for it, shall rejoice in YWHW. The preposition בְּ indicates that YHWH will be the reason for the psalmist's joy. The psalmist may appear to be premature with his rejoicing since the enemy still has to step into his own trap. Verse 9 expresses the faith and hope of the psalmist in the One who will rise up for him with shields and weapons. The imperfect verb תָּגִיל ("shall rejoice") implies that the action, which will happen in the future, will probably be continuous.

The verb in colon 9b, תָּשִׂישׂ ("will rejoice") also refers to the subject of 9a (נַפְשִׁי) and is a synonym for rejoice (תָּגִיל). 9b clarifies the reason for rejoicing in YHWH. The construct noun בִּישׁוּעָתוֹ ("in his salvation") in 9b is the object of the colon and consists of the noun יְשׁוּעָה ("salvation"), the preposition (בְּ), and a pronominal suffix הוא. The pronominal suffix refers to YWHW and clarifies the reason for rejoicing. It is when the justice of the Lord is expressed against the wicked that the righteous can praise the Lord (VanGemeren, 1991:287). Colon 9b clearly alludes back to the wish expressed in colon 3b. Both cola 3b and 9b contain the nouns נַפְשִׁי ("my soul") and יְשׁוּעָה ("salvation"). The mention of rejoicing in YHWH appears to be sudden after the intensity of the imprecations in the previous verses. It does serve a purpose: (1) it contrasts the acts of the psalmist and the acts of the enemies pursuing him, (2) it also further motivates God

to save the one who has trusted in God's power and grace, and (3) it is a natural way humans under stress acts (Tanner, 2014a:334).

The rhetorical question is a standard part of victory songs and it may echo the victory song of Exodus 15:11 (Harman, 2011:298), although Kraus (1993:393) feels that the focus is not on an old song sung long ago, but rather on the certainty that the prayer has been heard. It expresses the issue that is really at stake here: not simply the personal vindication of the psalmist, but rather the character of the divine judge to whom he brought his case (Davidson, 1998:119). God is the unattested and incomparable defender of those who are defenceless; those who are oppressed, helpless and poor (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:333; Futato, 2009:138). In the sense of YHWH's protection and concern for the poor and needy no one is like God (Wilson, 2002:581).

Colon 10a starts with the subject of the colon כָּל עַצְמוֹתַי ("all my bones") and combined with נַפְשִׁי ("my soul") in 9a, it expresses the totality of the psalmist's being (see Goldingay, 2007:494). The psalmist will express his wonder and his awe because of the salvation YWHW brought (or will bring). The mere presence of YHWH symbolises victory (Basson, 2006:144). This trust leads to the psalmist's wonder and awe which finds expression in the rhetorical question יְהוָה מִי כָמוֹךָ ("YHWH who is like you?") in colon 10b. The adverb (מִי) is followed by the preposition (כְּ) with a pronominal suffix (אַתָּה). The question forms the direct object of the phrase כָּל עַצְמוֹתַי תֹּאמַרְנָה ("all my bones will say"). This is not a question but rather a statement of faith. It also sets God against all other gods (Simango, 2011:41). There is no one who delivers vindication like YHWH. The psalmist's expressions of joy will be in a public setting (Wilson, 2002:581). The expression יהוה מי כמוך ("YHWH who is like you?") has all the marks of being a hymn, sung by a whole congregation (Kraus, 1993:393).

Cola 10c and 10d further expound the reason for the psalmist's wonder: YHWH rescues the עָנִי ("poor") and the אֶבְיוֹן ("needy") from the חָזָק ("strong") and the גֹּזֵל ("robber"). For Goldingay (2007:494) rhetorical questions, like this one, are usually found when YHWH answered the prayers of his people. Gerstenberger (1998:151) identifies this expression as a liturgical expression to declare the incomparability of YHWH. The verb מַצִּיל ("delivering") recalls יְשׁוּעָה ("salvation"), but this time it references a wider subject group. Although the psalmist will rejoice in the salvation of his soul, there is a bigger reason for rejoicing: YHWH has proven himself as the Deliverer of many, especially those oppressed. There is a parallelism in cola 9c and 9d: חָזָק ("strong") is connected to גֹּזֵל ("robber") and stand over against עָנִי ("poor") and אֶבְיוֹן ("needy"). The focus is on the powerlessness of the poor and needy. They are in the same situation as the psalmist: powerless before stronger enemies. But there is hope: YHWH is capable of delivering (מַצִּיל) them from their enemies.

3.5.2   Stanza II (verses 11-18): The Trial
3.5.2.1 Strophe D – (verses 11a-12b): The suppliant's distress

In verse 11 the psalmist moves away from the future and returns to his reality. Although he will rejoice in YHWH, he is currently still in trouble and waiting for YWHW's salvation. His enemies (again plural after the singular of verse 8) are identified as עֵדֵי חָמָס ("witnesses of violence") in colon 11a and they arose against him (יְקוּמוּן). The noun חָמָס identifies the moral character of the witnesses (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:332) as well as "their predisposition towards violence and destruction" (Basson, 2006:144). The rising of his enemies recalls the imperative קוּמָה ("arise") in verse 2b. The violence of the witnesses rising up against the psalmist explains the desperate plea for both defensive and offensive actions by YHWH. The phrase עֵדֵי חָמָס ("witnesses of violence") confirms their aggression towards the psalmist and implies that they are giving false testimony (see Eaton, 2003:159; Simango, 2011:41). The witnesses were

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giving false testimony against the psalmist in the hope that he would be destroyed (see Goldingay, 2007:495; Wilson, 2002:581). Verse 11 returns to the judicial metaphors although the verb יְקוּמוּן ("they arose") keep the military metaphors in the background.

Colon 11b could be seen as an extension of 11a. The violent nature of the witnesses is becoming visible through their questions. It appears as if they are out to get the psalmist and their questions are taking on the nature of an interrogation (Beck, 1997:8). The adverbial clause אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יָדַעְתִּי ("what I did not know") reaffirms the psalmist's claim that he is innocent. It is quite possible that the false witness of the enemies is the trap referenced in verses 7-8. Their questions and accusations are meant to trip him up and cause him to incriminate himself. His plea that they will fall into their own trap is the hope that they will incriminate themselves via their false witness. The Hebrew law was very strict and the penalty for false witnessing was severe, mainly resulting in the punishment being transferred to the false witnesses (Wilson, 2002:581). The final Hebrew word in verse 11 יִשְׁאָלוּנִי "what I did not know") forms a sonorous internal rhyme with the first word in verse 12 יְשַׁלְּמוּנִי ("they repay me") and illustrates the escalation of the enemy (Basson, 2006:144).

Colon 12a starts with the verb יְשַׁלְּמוּנִי ("they repay me") implying that they are not unknown to him. There exists a previous history between the psalmist and the enemies. It is very probable that his current enemies were friends of his at one stage. Repayment implies that the psalmist did something for them. The enemies repay him with evil (רָעָה) and the subject of the verb is the false witness of the enemies. Giving false witness in a case was forbidden by law (Simango, 2011:43). These acts of the enemies are devastating to the psalmist. The psalmist contrasts his previous actions, which were good (טוֹבָה), against those of his enemies, which are evil (רָעָה).

Colon 12b further illuminates the devastation caused by his enemies. His unawareness is not only limited to the questions asked by his enemies, but also extend into the motivations behind their actions. He has no idea why they are doing this, and their evil actions are causing "bereavement to his soul" (שְׁכוֹל לְנַפְשִׁי). His whole being is disturbed and saddened by these acts. שְׁכַל ("bereavement") is mostly used for the devastating loss of a child or a miscarriage (Shepherd, 1997:105). It expresses deep emotional pain (Simango, 2011:43).

3.5.2.2 Strophe E - (verses 13a-14b): The suppliant's confession of innocence

In this context the conjunction (וְ) should rather be translated with "but" to contrast his actions against those of the enemies (Simango, 2011:44). The infinitive construct בַּחֲלוֹתָם ("in their illness") refers to a certain time period, which is not conclusively identified, when the enemies of the psalmist were ill. Against the evil actions of the enemies he acted with empathy. The phrase לְבוּשִׁי שָׂק ("my clothing was sackcloth") is strange. Sackcloth is usually worn in times of mourning or distress. It seems improbable that the psalmist would do this for an enemy, unless the enemy was not originally regarded as an enemy. Cola 13b and 13c continues the depth of the psalmist's concern for his enemies in their times of distress. The verb עִנֵּיתִי ("I humbled") is in the perfect tense, implying completed action. The psalmist already did this, perhaps on more than one occasion. The object of the verb עִנֵּיתִי ("humbled") is נַפְשִׁי ("my soul"), but refers to the whole person. The psalmist humbled himself by fasting. Fasting were part of religious observance by abstaining from food and drink for a certain period of time, mostly as a plea to God (Hartley, 1980:758; Way, 1997:780).

Colon 13c is connected to 13b with a conjunction. The subject of the colon is תְפִלָּתִי and the suffix אֲנִי identifies the prayer (תְּפִלָּה) as the product of the psalmist. The meaning of

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the phrase וּתְפִלָּתִי עַל־חֵיקִי תָשׁוּב ("and my prayer returned on my bosom") is open to debate. It consists of the noun תְּפִלָּה ("prayer"), a pronominal suffix אֲנִי, the noun חֵיק ("bosom") with the pronominal suffix אֲנִי, the preposition עַל ("upon") and the verb תָשׁוּב ("it will return"). Despite the uncertainty of the phrase the context implies that the psalmist prayed on behalf of his enemies (Simango, 2011:45) but it was useless. It is also unclear whether the psalmist's prayer should be regarded literally (as if all his enemies were ill at once) or metaphorically (reflecting his attitude towards them) (Wilson, 2002:582).

Colon 14 continues to illustrate the compassionate actions of the psalmist on behalf of his enemies. He uses three metaphors to indicate that he did not consider his enemies as enemies: friend (רֵעַ -14a), brother (אָח – 14a), and mother (אֵם – 14b). These metaphors indicate closeness and familiarity. 14a contains a parallelism building in intensity. The preposition (כְּ) introduces both the friend (רֵעַ) and the brother (אָח). Although the enemies were not really his friend or his brother, he acted towards them like they were. The noun אָח ("brother") contains a pronominal suffix, emphasizing the altruistic attitude of the psalmist towards his enemies. The verb הִתְהַלָּכְתִּי ("I walked around") is a Hitpael perfect and shows a completed action in the past. "Walked around" could refer to the state of restless pacing. The psalmist walked up and down due to worry about the welfare of his enemies. Colon 14b uses the metaphor of a mother mourning, perhaps the loss of a child. The phrase כַּאֲבֶל־אֵם ("like a mourner for a mother") consists of the preposition כְּ, an adjective אָבֵל ("in mourning"), and the noun אֵם ("mother"). It could be translated as "like a mother mourning." The subject of the colon is the participle קֹדֵר ("be gloomy") and it modifies the verb שַׁחוֹתִי ("bowed"). The implication is that the psalmist "bowed down gloomily," or more befitting the context, he "bowed down in mourning" for his enemies. Goldingay (2007:497) argues that the

phrase קֹדֵר שַׁחוֹתִי ("bowed down in mourning") answers the question of "how?" asked in colon 14b by the verb הִתְהַלָּכְתִּי ("walked about").

3.5.2.3 Strophe F – (verses 15a-16b): Reiteration of his distress

Verses 15-16 turn the focus from the actions of the psalmist back to those of the enemies. There is a clear contrast between the psalmist's actions towards the misfortune of his enemies in verses 13-14 and the actions of the enemies towards the misfortune of the psalmist in verses 15-16. Verses 15-16 are connected with verses 13-14 with the conjunction (וְ).

Colon 15a starts with בְּצַלְעִי ("in my stumbling") consisting of a preposition (בְּ), the noun צֶלַע ("stumbling"), and a 1st person singular pronominal suffix. This indicates the reason for the enemies' joy (שָׂמְחוּ). The verb נֶאֶסְפוּ ("and they gathered") is connected to the verb שָׂמְחוּ ("they rejoiced") with a conjunction. It appears as if the enemies not only rejoiced in his misfortune, but they also gathered around to witness it more closely.

Colon 15b starts with the verb נֶאֶסְפוּ ("they gathered") and repeats the gathering of the enemies against the psalmist. The indirect object of the verb is עָלַי ("against me"), a preposition with a pronominal suffix. The enemies gathered upon him and they struck him down (נָכָה). The verb נָכָה means to strike down, batter or ruin (Van Dam, 1997:102). נֵכִים is a masculine plural noun indicating multiple strikes. All those who gathered (נֶאֶסְפוּ) around him, also struck him down. This supports the translation of נֵכִים as "smiters." The noun נֵכִים ("smiters") is joined through a conjunction to the verb with a negative לֹא יָדָעְתִּי ("I knew not"). It appears strange that the psalmist refers to his enemies as "unknown" when he clearly indicated his benevolent actions towards them in past times of trouble. It is probable that the psalmist knew the "smiters" gathered around him but he did not know "why" they are doing this (Simango, 2011:48).

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Colon 15c the subject of the verb קָרְעוּ ("they tore") are the enemies. Despite Kraus's (1993:391) feeling that "tore" is too strong, it is acceptable to see it as a figure of speech (Dahood, 2008a:214). The verb קָרְעוּ ("they tore"), referring to the actions of the enemies, could refer to lions in colon 17c. Although the metaphor of a lion is not used here yet, the same concept is used in Psalm 7 for enemies.

The object of the verb קָרְעוּ ("they tore") is not named, but it is most likely the psalmist. The enemies tore the psalmist with their accusations. The verb דָמוּ ("to be silent") is translated as "without ceasing" and most probably refers to their "false witnessing" in verse 7. דָמַם can have two meanings: silence or inactivity (Oswalt, 1997:972–973). In this context the second connotation appears preferable. The negative participle לֹא indicates that the enemies would not remain inactive: they kept on "tearing" him with their false accusations. The object of the phrase לֹא־דָמוּ ("without ceasing") could also refer to בְּחַנְפֵי לַעֲגֵי מָעוֹג ("in godless mocking they mocked") in verse 16a.

Colon 16a starts with the phrase בְּחַנְפֵי לַעֲגֵי מָעוֹג ("in godless mocking they mock") and is difficult to translate. Literally it means "mockers of cake" but the intensity of their words are expressed with the translation "in godless mocking they mock" (see translation note for more information).

In colon 16b the imagery takes on a new note of aggression. Wilson (2002:583) argues that the phrase חָרֹק עָלַי שִׁנֵּימוֹ (literally "and upon me gnash the teeth of them") has the same meaning as baring fangs like a beast of prey. There is strong image of wild animals here and Simango (2011:48) refers to wild animals, perhaps wild dogs, circling and attacking a confused and wounded animal. This imagery strengthens the possibility that קָרְעוּ ("they tore") 15c could already refer to the metaphors of the lions in colon 17c. These images heighten the feeling that the psalmist is in danger of, metaphorically speaking, being torn apart.

3.5.2.4 Strophe G – (verses 17a-18b): Renewed Appeal and Vow to give Thanks

The dangerous situation of the psalmist is clear and in verse 17 he again appeals to YHWH for help. Verse 17 consists of a tri-colon and the vocative אֲדֹנָי ("O, my Lord") in colon 17a should be regarded as a synonym for YHWH. This implies that the suffix might be "a normative affirmative rather than a suffix" (Fretheim, 1997a:275). Could it be that there is a bit of accusation in the psalmist's words? His sorrow must have gone on for some time, and yet YHWH has not acted. אֲדֹנָי כַּמָּה תִּרְאֶה implies the question: "O Lord, how long will you look on" (see Davidson, 1902:170). The danger of his situation is highlighting the apparent silence and inactivity of YHWH. For Broyles (1989:195) this question is the actual complaint of the Psalm: YWHW's silence. YHWH's silence is actually increasing the anxiety of the psalmist. It appears as if the accusations of his enemies are not his biggest concern. It is being accused while YHWH remains silent.

Colon 17b starts with an imperative verb הָשִׁיבָה ("bring back") and the subject of the imperative is YHWH and the psalmist pleads for his soul (נַפְשִׁי). The word נַפְשִׁי ("my soul") refers to the psalmist self; his life. There is desperateness to this plea. The psalmist fears that his life will be finished if YHWH does not act quickly. He is already, metaphorically speaking, caught in the jaws of the young lions (17c). He is utterly powerless and his only hope is YHWH to bring back his soul, his life (הָשִׁיבָה נַפְשִׁי). The preposition מִן indicates movement. מִן appears two times in verse 17 and emphasizes the desire of the psalmist that YHWH not only saves him, but completely removes him from the jaws of his enemies. Being close to them will lead to him ending up שֹׁאֵיהֶם ("their destruction). The Nifal verb could carry the meaning "to roar" (Domeris, 1997b:4–5) and some interpreters choose this option. In this context however, it could also connect with colon 8c (שׁוֹאָה – "destruction") and it is unnecessary to amend the

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word for roaring (Konkel, 1997b:3). The psalmist fears he is about to fall into their trap. His only hope is that YWHW would let them fall into their own trap (8c).

In colon 17c the direct object is יְחִידָתִי which consists of an adjective יָחִיד ("only") and a pronominal suffix. Literally it means "only of me", but again the psalmist is referring to himself as a whole. He is pleading for his life (17b) and the danger is heightened with the introduction of the metaphor of young lions (מִכְּפִירִים). "The aim is to illustrate that the threatening associations of lions allow for the metaphorical mapping onto any aggressive human being who threatens to separate the supplicant from Yahweh" (Basson, 2008:10). In the Hebrew Bible whenever the metaphor of lion is used for a human entity, the clear preference is to associate it with an enemy (Strawn, 2005:274). The duplication of the preposition מִן (17b and 17c) heightens the need that YHWH acts quickly and brings the psalmist back from the reach of his enemies. The plea is that YHWH will "'bring him back' from the jaws of death and restore his life" (Basson, 2005:16). The threat of the enemies extends beyond the mere possibility of death. The enemies also threaten to separate him from YHWH and are therefore a threat to a meaningful existence (Basson, 2008:13).

Colon 18a begins with אוֹדְךָ ("I will give thanks"), an imperfect verb, which is joined to a 2nd person masculine singular suffix which refers to YHWH. The psalmist is directly addressing YWHW and promises to praise him. This is both an expression of hope and a vow: the psalmist is certain that he will have reason to praise YHWH because YHWH will save him (hope) and he promises that he will bring praises to YHWH for his salvation (vow). בְּקָהָל רָב ("in the great assembly") indicates that the psalmist will offer his praise publicly. The preposition בְּ shows where he will praise YWHW: in the assembly (קָהָל). The assembly may refer to any gathering of people, ranging from good

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or evil to military or civil (see Gen. 49:6; Ps. 26:5; 1 Kings 2:3; Jud. 20:2; Gen. 35:11), but it is especially used for religious gatherings

(Carpenter, 1997:890–891; Lewis, 1980:790). The adjective רָב ("great") further underscores that he will do it among fellow worshippers, perhaps in the temple during a festival (Goldingay, 2007:498; Mowinckel, 2004:87; Wilson, 2002:584).

Colon18b forms a clear chiasm with 18a. The phrase בְּעַם עָצוּם ("in the mighty people") is a synonym for בְּקָהָל רָב ("in the large crowd" - 18a), while אֲהַלְלֶךָ ("praise") is a synonym for אוֹדְךָ ("give thanks"). The chiasm emphasizes the hope and the vow of the psalmist: he will be saved and he will give thanks to YHWH among other worshippers. There is a role reversal here: the psalmist was publicly accused in a court (see verses 11-12, 15-16, 21) but now he publicly praises YWHW for his deliverance (Simango, 2011:51). This will also serve as the public exoneration of the psalmist. The mere fact that he, after being saved from his enemies, can give thanks to YHWH in the temple will prove his innocence to the community, and will heighten his vindication and enforce the humiliation of his enemies.

3.5.3 Stanza III (verses 19-28): A Prayer for Victory

3.5.3.1 Strophe H – (verses 19a-21b): Imprecation against his enemies

Colon 19a starts with a negative (אַל) linked to the jussive Qal verb יִשְׂמְחוּ־לִי with a preposition and prenominal suffix ("let them not rejoice over me"). This is in contrast to the praise he will give YHWH in verse 17. The psalmist is begging YHWH that his enemies will not prevail and have reason to rejoice over his downfall, for if they do, he will not have the joy of rejoicing in the midst of the great assembly (verse 18). "The nature of this negative wish is not to do the enemies harm, but that their evil plans may be frustrated" (Simango, 2011:53).

Colon 19b contains the phrase אֹיְבַי שֶׁקֶר ("who are wrongfully my haters"). This phrase consists of a Qal participle of the verb אָיַב ("to be hostile") connected to a pronominal suffix. The psalmist is the direct object of the hostility. The noun שֶׁקֶר ("lies") indicates falsehood or deception. In this context it indicates that the hostility and joy of the enemies are "fraudulent and unfounded" (Foulkes, 1997:248). Again the psalmist is claiming to be innocent. His vindication will be when his enemies are exposed as liars, although they are clearly more than just false witnesses.

Colon 19c heightens the depth of his enemies falseness: they hate him (שֹׂנְאַי) "without cause" or "compensation" (Fretheim, 1997b:203). The subject is defined as "those, who without reason, hates me" and clearly refers to his enemies.

The verb in colon 19d is a jussive קָרַץ and has the basic meaning "to pinch" although it is mostly used in reference to the wicked or the fool and means "to wink maliciously" (Harman, 1997:994). "To wink" is clearly the intended meaning since the object is עַיִן ("eye"). The "malicious winking" is connected to the "rejoicing" of his enemies in 18a and it may mean ""to gloat gleefully" (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:337). The psalmist is asking God to prevent them from gloating and winking maliciously at his misfortune. Kotzé (2010:140–148) argues that this action is connected to the "evil eye" that is very prominent in ancient forms of witchcraft. Although it may be a metaphorical action, the desired implication was to cause harm to another, especially if this deed was done by the correct person (i.e. someone who is able of witchcraft) (Kotzé, 2010:141, 143). Kotzé (2010:145) argues that the main focus of יִקְרְצוּ־עָיִן ("winking their eye") is physical injury even though it is a metaphorical deed. Still, there is no consensus among scholars about the exact meaning of this expression (Kotzé, 2010:140). The focus of verse 19 is on physical harm of emotional mocking, the focus is on cola b and c: "without cause." There is a clear chiastic pattern in 19ab and 19cd (Goldingay, 2007:53;

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Simango, 2011:53). Although it appears less so, the psalmist is expressing an imprecation in verse 19. Vindication of the innocent means the judgment of the wicked.

Colon 20a reaffirms the rationale behind the imprecations in verse 19 with the conjunction כִּי. Again the actions of the enemies are referred to in the negative לֹא. The object of the verb יְדַבֵּרוּ ("they speak") is the noun שָׁלוֹם ("peace"). The wickedness of the enemies' words ("not speaking peace") is demonstrated by linking colon 20a with colon 20b through a conjunction. Together they form a synonymous parallelism with each other. Colon 20b starts with the phrase וְעַל רִגְעֵי־אֶרֶץ ("and upon the quiet ones of the land") indicating that the enemies did not only target the psalmist, but their wickedness stretched even further. The preposition עַל is linked to the construct רִגְעֵי־אֶרֶץ ("the quiet ones of the land") which functions as the indirect object of the colon. The direct object of the verb יַחֲשֹׁבוּן ("they devised") is דִּבְרֵי מִרְמוֹת ("words of deceit"). The phrase רִגְעֵי־אֶרֶץ ("the quiet ones of the land") is uncommon and appears only here in the Hebrew text. It is possible that it is an idiom meaning "people whose hearts sit quietly" (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:338). Mowinckel (2004:87) understands it as a poetical term referring to the congregation, the people who want to live in peace with others, rather than to a special social milieu. There passivity increases the emphasis on the wickedness of the enemies. They truly target the innocent.

Colon 21a continues to reveal the deeds of the wicked. A conjunction (וְ) joins this colon with the preceding. The wicked continue their wicked deeds: after they have devised deceitful words against the quiet ones of the land, they "open wide their mouths against me" (Simango, 2011:54). This shows a pattern: the wicked are not only targeting the psalmist, but before they targeted him, they also spoke deceitful words to the quiet ones. The subject of the verb יַרְחִיבוּ ("make wide") is the enemies of the psalmist. The verb is an imperfect Hiphil which implies that the actions of the enemies are still ongoing. The

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preposition contains a pronominal suffix (עָלַי) which shows the target of the enemies'
"open mouths" is the psalmist. The noun פֶּה ("mouth") is singular while the pronominal
suffix is plural. This could imply that the enemies are speaking as "if from one mouth."
The exact meaning of the phrase וַיַּרְחִיבוּ עָלַי פִּיהֶם ("and they opened their mouths wide
against me") is not clear. It is possible that they are shouting or that they appear to the
psalmist like ravaging monsters ready to devour him (Dahood, 2008a:215). Wilson
(2002:584) offers perhaps a better option: the phrase describes the wide stretching of
their mouths indicating a public display of pretended astonishment with the intent to
ridicule the psalmist. This fits well with the contexts of the previous verses. The
enemies were waiting for a precise moment to openly ridicule the psalmist, while
pretending to be astonished by his misfortune.

Colon 21b starts with a Qal perfect verb אָמְרוּ ("they said"), indicating completed
activity from the enemies. The direct object of this verb is the phrase הֶאָח הֶאָח רָאֲתָה עֵינֵינוּ
("Aha! Aha! Our eyes saw"). The repeating interjections הֶאָח הֶאָח ("Aha! Aha!") imply
that the enemies were waiting for something that finally happened. The concluding
phrase of colon 21b, רָאֲתָה עֵינֵינוּ ("our eyes have seen"), probably refers back to their
false witness and incessant verbal attacks (15c). Verses 15-16 and 19b-21b justifies the
psalmist's cry for help. The actions of the enemies are unprovoked and false. They
claim to have seen the guilt of the psalmist, but against their false witnessing the
psalmist again calls on YHWH's righteousness.

3.5.3.2 Strophe I – (verses 22a-24a): Renewed Petition for YHWH to intervene

YHWH is called to be a witness; for he has also seen (רָאִיתָה – 22a) and therefore the
psalmist pleads that YWHW will not remain silent (22b). There is wordplay between
רָאֲתָה עֵינֵינוּ ("our eyes have seen" - 21b) and רָאִיתָה יְהוָה ("O YHWH, you have seen" -

22a) enhancing the contrast between what they claim to have seen and what is true. YHWH as witness, who is currently silent, is contrasted with the loud and incessant lies of the hostile witnesses.

Colon 22b starts with a subjective negative אַל connected to the jussive verb תֶּחֱרַשׁ ("to be silent"). תֶּחֱרַשׁ has various meanings and could mean "to be deaf" or "to be silent." In this context it appears better to choose "to be silent." Against the hostile witnesses YWHW is called to speak out in defence of the psalmist.

Colon 22c starts with a vocative אֲדֹנָי ("O, my Lord") and consists of a noun אָדוֹן ("Lord") and a 1st personal singular pronominal suffix. As in 22b, the subjective negative אַל is connected to a jussive verb תִּרְחַק ("to be distant"). The phrase מִמֶּנִּי, consisting of the preposition מִן and the 1st personal singular pronominal suffix, indicates that the psalmist is experiencing some form of personal distance from YHWH. The psalmist is pleading that YHWH will not only act in his defence, but also that YHWH will draw near him.

Colon 23a starts with two imperatives joined together by a conjunction: הָעִירָה וְהָקִיצָה ("Awake and arise"). This is a "syndetic parataxis" (Hamilton, 1997a:357) with the implication that the two verbs are placed together without one being subordinate to the other. The two actions are regarded as one movement. The verb הָעִירָה ("awake") has various translation meanings, but mostly imply "to rouse", "to awake", to stir", or "to lift". The verb הָקִיצָה ("rise") carries a similar meaning and can be translated as "to awake." When God is the object of verb "to awake" two verbs are mostly used עוּר and קַיִץ and in the imperative form they are usually found in protest passages like community and individual laments (Hamilton, 1997a:357–358). When these verbs are used, the concern is that God appears "indifferent or neglectful, or entirely too passive" (Hamilton, 1997a:358). So the imperatives express the psalmist's desire that God will

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awake and stir himself from the seemingly inactivity and come to his rescue (Miller, 1998:216–217; Wilson, 2002:584). The phrase לְמִשְׁפָּטִי ("for my judgment") consists of a preposition (לְ), the noun מִשְׁפָּט, and a pronominal suffix. This phrase is the indirect object of the colon. The psalmist is praying that YHWH will awake and rise "to his [the psalmist's] judgment." Only after YHWH judged the psalmist and declared him innocent will the psalmist's name be restored. YHWH is the divine Judge and the only one who is able to exonerate the psalmist. There is urgency in this cry. The enemies are closing in, they are mocking him and it appears as if YHWH is not coming forth. There is a challenge to the faith of the psalmist (Hamilton, 1997a:358) and the praise of YHWH is also hanging in the balance. It is as if the psalmist is reminding YHWH to act quickly: if YHWH does not save him, he will not be able to praise YHWH in the congregation. Colon 23a begins with two divine names, both containing a 2nd person singular pronominal suffix. Their usage alleviate any disrespect toward YHWH based on the use of the imperatives in 23a (Goldingay, 2007:500). The use of the pronominal suffix introduces a personal connection between YHWH and the psalmist: YHWH is not only the Judge he is also the psalmist's God and Lord. This justifies the personal wish that YHWH will contend for the psalmist (לְרִיבִי). לְרִיבִי ("contend for me") consists of a preposition (לְ), the noun רִיב, and a pronominal suffix. It is the indirect object of this colon and it forms a synonymous parallelism with the indirect object לְמִשְׁפָּטִי ("for my judgment") in 23a. "YHWH is asked to intervene and execute judgment on behalf of the suppliant" (Simango, 2011:57).

The object of colon 24a is the psalmist (אֲנִי - "me") and he is pleading to YHWH to judge (שָׁפְטֵנִי) him. The imperative שָׁפְטֵנִי ("judge") is directed at יְהוָה אֱלֹהָי ("O YHWH, my God) which is vocative. The pronominal suffix which is attached to אֱלֹהָי ("my God") reaffirms the personal connection the psalmist feels with God. The psalmist is appealing

to God to save him by judging him "according to YHWH's righteousness." When the psalmist is appealing to God's justice he is asking for much more than mere pronouncements: the salvation brought through the righteousness of God means retribution on his enemies (Seifrid, 2000:13–14). By being judged by YHWH, the psalmist will be exonerated and his enemies' lies and falsehoods will be exposed. By being judged, according to God's righteousness, his enemies will eventually be judged and he will be vindicated.

3.5.3.3 Strophe J – (verses 24b-26d): Further imprecation against the enemies

Colon 24b explains the rationale behind the psalmist's plea: so that his enemies will not rejoice over him. Colon 24b consists of the phrase וְאַל־יִשְׂמְחוּ־לִי ("and let not them rejoice over me") comprising of a conjunction (וְ), the Qal 3rd person masculine verb (שָׂמַח), functioning as a jussive, the preposition (לְ), and a 1st person singular pronominal suffix. The subject of the verb שָׂמַח ("rejoice") is the enemies and, combined with the negative אַל, the jussive is expressing the wish that they will not rejoice over him. This is a repeat of colon 24b.

Colon 25a defines the enemies as the subject of the jussive verb יֹאמְרוּ ("let them say") connected to a negative אַל. The object of the verb is הֶאָח נַפְשֵׁנוּ ("aha, our soul"). YHWH must prevent them from saying this. The phrase בְלִבָּם ("in their hearts") consists of a preposition (בְּ), the noun לֵב ("heart") and a prenominal 3rd person masculine plural suffix. This phrase is a Hebrew way of saying "think" (Simango, 2011:58). It is acceptable to translate אַל־יֹאמְרוּ בְלִבָּם as "Let them not think in their hearts." The phrase הֶאָח נַפְשֵׁנוּ ("aha, our soul") is difficult to translate. The expression can imply that they achieved what they wanted, as some English translations opt for (Simango, 2011:58–59), and which is also the chosen translation for this study.

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The negative wishes are continued in colon 25b starting with the exact same phrase as 25a אַל־יֹאמְרוּ ("let them not say"). The direct object of the colon is בִּלַּעֲנוּהוּ ("we have swallowed him up"). Simango (2011:59) argues that this is "another way of saying that they have ruined him completely (cf. Ps. 124:3; Prov. 1:12; Jer. 30:16; Lam. 2:16)."

Colon 26a starts with two Qal 3rd person masculine verbs functioning as jussives and joined by a conjunction: יֵבֹשׁוּ וְיַחְפְּרוּ ("let them be ashamed and let them be humiliated"). These two words are very closely linked in the Psalms (Nel, 1997:236). The pairing of these two is strengthened by the adverb יַחְדָּו ("together").

The subject of colon 26b is שְׂמֵחֵי רָעָתִי ("those who rejoice at my evil"). The noun רָעָתִי ("misfortune") appears in colon 4d (translated there as "evil") and emphasizes the desire of his enemies to see him experience misfortune. The psalmist is expressing the wish that YHWH will cause those who rejoice at his misfortune to be ashamed and humiliated.

The sentiments of colon 26a are continued in 26c. Together they form a synonymous parallelism by expressing a similar idea. "Let them be ashamed and ashamed together" and "let them wear shame and insult."

The idea that the enemies must wear (לָבֵשׁ) shame and dishonor gives an ironic twist. Clothing usually hides shame and gives honor, but here it inverts (Simango, 2011:60). The shame and dishonor would be fitting since the enemies "enlarged (magnified) themselves over the psalmist." It is clear that they are boastful, proud, and arrogant (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:340).

In colon 26d הַמַּגְדִּילִים עָלָי ("those that magnified themselves above me") is a participle phrase and the subject of the colon. They have elevated themselves above the psalmist, as if they are on a pedestal above him. The psalmist is asking YHWH to remove them

from their self-appointed pedestal by shaming them. In this context it signifies that the psalmist is wishing for a dishonorable fate of the enemy (VanGemeren, 1991:626).

3.5.3.4 Strophe K – (verses 27a-28b): Call to praise YHWH and vow to proclaim his righteousness

27a contains two jussives joined by a conjunction expressing a double wish, with a hint of trust and hope, that YHWH will cause "those who desire my righteousness" (חֲפֵצֵי צִדְקִי) to sing (יָרֹנּוּ) and rejoice (יִשְׂמְחוּ). The usage of two verbs with similar meaning, emphasize the jubilation when YHWH finally acts against the enemies. The joy will not only be limited to the psalmist, but will also include "those who desire my righteousness" (חֲפֵצֵי צִדְקִי), or the psalmist's friends.

Colon 27b builds upon the wishes expressed in 27a with two more jussives indicating that the focus of the psalmist's wishes is not only on his personal vindication, but also on the glory of YHWH. The psalmist's wish is that his friends, חֲפֵצֵי צִדְקִי (27c), would have reason to express their joy by saying "Let YHWH be exalted" (תָּמִיד יִגְדַּל יְהוָה). When the psalmist is vindicated his friends will continually shout with joy and praise YHWH for his salvation. The object of the verb חָפֵץ is שְׁלוֹם עַבְדּוֹ ("the peace of his servant") and the subject is YHWH. This phrase acts as an attributive description of YHWH's character. The enemies' greatness are revealed in their malicious harassment of the psalmist, while YHWH's greatness is revealed in his desire to act for the sake of his servant's peace (Goldingay, 2007:502; McCann, 1996:820; Simango, 2011:61).

The Psalm ends with a bicolon. The psalmist is expressing a vow which concludes the third stanza (verses 19-28) (Simango, 2011:61). The psalmist continues the idea of 27c, "let them regularly say: let YHWH become big", by expressing the vow to praise YHWH all day long. The conjunction is connected to the noun (לְשׁוֹנִי – "my tongue")

and not the verb (תֶּהְגֶּה – "let it ponder"), letting the emphasis fall on the noun. The object of the verb is צִדְקֶךָ ("your righteousness") which refers to YHWH's righteousness, which will be proven when YHWH vindicates the psalmist. This is important since, as Simango (2011:62) argues: "YHWH's righteousness is a key topic of YHWH's praise and also the whole psalm." The phrase תְּהִלָּתֶךָ (28b) also functions as a direct object of the verb תֶּהְגֶּה (28a). The two phrases function in parallel to each other. The psalmist is claiming that "his tongue will ponder YHWH's righteousness and his tongue will praise YHWH." The phrase כָּל־הַיּוֹם ("all day") underscores the continual praise of his friends (27c).

3.6   LITERARY GENRE AND LIFE SETTING
3.6.1   Literary Genre

Psalm 35 can be described as both an individual lament and a prayer for deliverance. It is not easy to describe the full reality of the Psalm (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:328; Craigie, 1983:285; Wilson, 2002:578). Firth (2005:69) identifies the Psalm as a "prayer for protection." Dahood (2008a:210) identifies the Psalm as an individual lament where the psalmist prays for deliverance from personal enemies. Bratcher & Reyburn (1991:328) come to a similar conclusion. Eaton (1976:41–42) interprets the military metaphors of the Psalm literally and argues that Psalm 35 is a royal Psalm that functioned within an international context giving the Psalm a wider usage than just a personal prayer. Harman (2011:295) identifies it as a Psalm sung by the king, as a result of some treaty partners being disloyal to their commitment. It leaves open the possibility that the treaty partners may be international partners who no longer show loyalty to the treaty, which could explain the military and judicial metaphors: If legal deliberation fails it could lead to war. For Wilson (2002:578) the predominantly singular voice of the Psalm indicates the possibility that the speaker might be the king, but he leaves open

the possibility that the Psalm could be applicable to include the worshiping community (see verses 18 and 27). Croft (1987:142) agrees that the Psalm is from an individual, but disagree that it is a royal Psalm. His main premise is that the judicial language should take precedence over the military language (1987:142).

Limburg (2000:114) argues that although the Psalm contains all the typical elements of a lament (request, complaint, vow of praise), these elements are not balanced. The primary element in the Psalm is the "request" element (vv. 1-6, 8, 17b, 19 and 22-27), followed by the "complaint" element (vv. 7, 11-12a, 15-16, 20-21) as the secondary element, while the "vow of praise" element (vv. 9-10, 18, and 28) is the tertiary element (Limburg, 2000:114). For Limburg the primary focus of the Psalm is the "desperate nature of the psalmist's situation" with 24 of the 28 verses consisting of either request or complaint (Limburg, 2000:114). The psalmist is in danger and his primary focus is calling on YHWH for help.

This contributes to the complex composition of Psalm 35 where the psalmist moves from petition to complaint to thanks repeatedly (Gerstenberger, 1998:150), or as Villanueva (2008:171) points out: Psalm 35 contains three movements from "despair to hope." The repeated, and metaphorically mixed details of enemies' attacks are interrupted by desperate pleas for deliverance interposed by expressions of the hopefulness that the psalmist will have opportunity to praise God for vindication (Wilson, 2002:578). Grogan (2008:88) describes it as "an outpouring rather than a coherent organized poem" while Kraus (1993:392) calls the composition of the Psalm "severely damaged." Despite the haphazard appearance of Psalm 35, most scholars do manage to identify a logical structure.

3.6.2 Life setting

As with most Psalms it is difficult to determine the exact historical setting of this Psalm. It is very similar to the shorter Psalm 20 which have historical roots in the story of 1 Samuel 24:15 (Harman, 2011:295; Mays, 1994:154). Craigie (1983:285–286) argues that the psalmist, the king, is accused (falsely according to the Psalm) of breaking a treaty and that foreign powers are using this as an excuse to declare war on Israel. The battle metaphors could thus imply the possibility of literal war, while the courtroom metaphors could refer to the trial where the king must defend himself against the accusation of the foreign powers. Eaton (1976:41) also argues that the Psalm is a royal Psalm, preferring to understand the Psalm's metaphors literally. It is difficult to determine which of the metaphors are literal and which are figuratively and using a literal treaty background to explain the various episodes of the Psalm is strained (Broyles, 1989:193).

It is, however, not possible to identify the specific circumstances of the Psalm (Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:328; Brueggemann & Bellinger jr., 2014:174). Gerstenberger (1998:150) prefers to understand this Psalm as a private cultic Psalm, thereby negating the problem of determining the historical basis of the Psalm. Firth (2005:70–71) argues for a personal Psalm of prayer requesting protection from enemies, who used to be former friends of the palmist. Irrespective of the life setting of the Psalm, it is clear that the psalmist feels threatened by enemies (Broyles, 1989:193).

3.7 CANONICAL CONTEXT OF PSALM 35

Psalm 35 is part of a smaller collection (35-41) of Psalms within the larger collection of Book I (Psalms 1-41). Psalms 3-41, with the exception of Psalms 10 and 33, are seen as a collection of David, containing the words לְדָוִד (see Bratcher & Reyburn, 1991:14;

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Wilson, 2002:89). לְדָוִד can be translated as "for David", "to David", "of David", or "about David." The consensus of most critical scholarship is that the titles are inauthentic and late (see Childs, 1979:495), but some scholars do defend their authenticity and antiquity (see Kidner, 1973:32–33). Psalms 1 and 2 are sometimes seen as the introduction to the Psalter and they do not contain the words לְדָוִד ("of David"). The first collection of the Psalter (Psalms 3-41) is further divided and Psalm 35 falls in the subdivision of Psalms 35-41 (Jüngling, 1998:783–784; Simango, 2011:67). All the Psalms in this subgroup (35-41) are individual prayers (see Waltner, 2006:789–790) and form part of the Davidic Psalms (McCann, 1996:657).

For this study Psalm 34 will also be included for the following reasons: it is adjacent to Psalm 35, it is also an Individual prayer, it shares certain themes with Psalm 35, and Psalm 34 and 35 are the only Psalms that contain the words "angel of the Lord." Of these, Psalms 34, 40, and 41 are regarded as Individual Thanksgiving prayers while Psalms 35, 36, 37, 38, and 39 are individual Laments (Waltner, 2006:789–790). Psalm 35 will thus be studied within the canonical context of Psalms 34-41.

Psalm 34 is an acrostic Psalm and the theme of the Psalm could be "The Lord provides for his people." Psalm 34 can be seen as thanks to YHWH for deliverance. This Psalm is widely connected to the story of 1 Samuel 21:10-22:1. The Psalm revels in the glory of God's faithfulness and the psalmist has no option than to declare it to all (34:2-11). The psalmist declares that those who praise God find life (34:12-15). No matter how many bad things happen, the Lord will guide them through (34:20-23). In this Psalm the angel of the Lord is protecting the people of YHWH (v8). The shared themes and vocabulary do show that Psalm 34 and 35 are opposites in certain respects. In Psalm 34 life is enjoyed and experienced in God, while in Psalm 35 it is the exact life of the believer that is threatened. In Psalm 34 YHWH is praised for the goodness of life, while

in Psalm 35 YHWH is requested to save the life of the psalmist threatened by enemies. Both Psalms refers to YHWH helping the afflicted in times of need. Psalm 34:2, 6, 19 declares that YHWH helps those who are afflicted as do Psalm 35:9-10. Both Psalms refer to the angel of the Lord. Psalm 34 is declaring the realities of the angel of the Lord protecting God's people, while Psalm 35 is praying for the angel to appear and pursue his enemies. Psalm 34:18 is expressing that YHWH is close, while Psalm 35:22 is begging YHWH to come near. In Psalm 34:14 the faithful is reminded to turn from evil and do good, while the psalmist of Psalm 35:12 experiences the realities of people doing the opposite, despite him doing good to his enemies (35:12-14). Psalm 34 declares the reality that YHWH hears when the righteous cry (34:17) while Psalm 35 implies that YHWH has seen his trouble (35:17, 22) and heard his cries, but remains silent and inactive (35:22).

In Psalm 35 the psalmist is attacked by enemies. The psalmist is claiming to be innocent, implying that his enemies are deceitful. Psalm 36 expands on the deceitful character of the enemies. Psalm 35 describes the deceit as planned beforehand. The enemies devise evil (35:4) against the psalmist. The wickedness of their plans is described in images of nets being hidden and traps being dug in secret (Psalm 35:7). Psalm 36 echoes this reality. The enemy is devising his evil while relaxing on his bed (36:4), even worse; he revels in it (36:2). Both Psalms indicate that the enemies are characterised by doing bad deeds (35:12-16; 36:4) as well as speaking deceit (35:20; 36:4). Both Psalms also indicate some form of gloating. In Psalm 35 the enemies are gloating over the misfortune of the psalmist (35:15, 24-25), while Psalm 36 indicates that the enemy finds delight in his devious plans (36:2-3). Opposite the deviousness of the enemies both Psalms expound YHWH's righteousness. In Psalm 35 the psalmist is calling on God to reveal his righteousness by judging the psalmist (35:24), but in Psalm

36 the psalmist is already experiencing the greatness of YHWH's righteousness (36:6), therefore the psalmist prays that YHWH will continue his righteousness (36:10).

Psalm 37 continues the theme of righteousness from both Psalm 35 and 36. YHWH will let the righteousness of the righteous shine through (37:6) and it underscores the desire expressed by the psalmist in Psalm 35:24. Again the reality of the deviousness of the wicked is expressed: he plots against the righteous and gnashes at him with his teeth (37:12). This is similar to the wicked devising evil against the psalmist in Psalm 35:4 and gnashing their teeth (35:16). The righteous is called not to follow the ways of the wicked. Psalm 35 prays to YHWH to save the psalmist from the wicked. The psalmist calls imprecatory curses on them, hoping that YHWH will hear and act. In Psalm 37 the righteous is called to "rest in the Lord and wait for him" (37:7) because those who wait in the Lord will inherit the land (37:9). In Psalm 35 the wicked are also targeting the "peaceful ones of the land." Like Psalm 35, Psalm 37 contains various images of war (37:12-15). The wicked aim their weapons at the innocent, but YHWH will foil their plans. Both Psalms express the certainty that YHWH will foil the plans of the wicked. In Psalm 37 it is stated as a fact (see 37:17, 20, and 22). The psalmist in Psalm 35, however, is praying for this to happen (35:4-6, 8). The Psalm reveals that a righteous person is not sinless (Psalm 38:3), but considered to be good when following "the good" (Psalm 38:20). Psalm 35 and 38 both express the realities of suffering. In the case of Psalm 35 the suffering is caused by enemies attacking the psalmist without cause (35:7, 12) and gloating at the psalmist troubles (35:15) and, even though Psalm 38 also refers to enemies trying to trap the psalmist (38:12, 16) and gloating over his stumbling (38:16), the reason for the psalmist's misfortune is not the attack of his enemies, but rather the results of his own sin (38:4, 5). The wicked do as they please while the righteous struggles against sin (see also Psalm 39:1). Still, in his time of trouble the

enemies take advantage and attack him with deceitful words (38:12) which echoes the realities of Psalm 35:20-21. Also, similar to Psalm 35, the enemies repay him evil over good (35:12; 38:20). In both Psalms the psalmists fear the abandonment of YHWH and plead that YHWH will not remain far (35:22-23; 38:21). It is only in YHWH, the deliverer, that salvation is possible (35:3, 9; 38:16, 22).

The theme of deliverance is continued in Psalm 39. Like Psalm 35:19 and 24 the psalmist prays that he will not be the focus of mockery (39:8). As in Psalm 38 the reason for the misery is not the enemies, but rather the reality of his own sin (39:11). Still the psalmist finds his hope and deliverance in YHWH (39:7-8). He acknowledges his dependence on YHWH (39:12) and although the psalmist in Psalm 35 never explicitly states this, the same dependency is experienced: without YHWH's help the psalmist is lost (35:17, 22-23).

Psalms 35 and 40 share the interesting words הֶאָח הֶאָח ("Aha! Aha!") appearing in three Psalms in the Psalter: Psalms 35, 40, and 70. In Psalm 35:21, 25 and Psalm 40:15. In the cases of Psalms 35 and 40 the enemies are mocking the righteous. In both cases the psalmist responds by imploring YHWH to put the enemies to shame (35:4, 26; 40:14, 15). The righteous will rejoice and be happy when YHWH responds to their pleas (35:18, 27-28; 40:16). YHWH is the only one who is able to deliver the psalmist (35:3, 10; 40:17). Both Psalms refer to the great congregation. In Psalm 35 the psalmist promises to praise YHWH in the great congregation (35:18), while the psalmist in Psalm 40 reminds that he never failed to praise YHWH in the great congregation (40:10-11).

Psalm 41 shares certain common themes with Psalm 35. The psalmist in Psalm 41 also struggles with enemies who speak ill of him (41:5, 6, 7, and 8) and they plan ways to harm him (40:6, 7). An interesting difference is that in Psalm 35 the psalmist is using

jussives to place his wishes for vindication in the hands of YHWH (35:4-8, 24-26). When God acts against his enemies it will prove that he is truly innocent. The psalmist in Psalm 41, however, pleads with YHWH for the opportunity to pay his enemies back personally (41:10). In Psalm 35 the enemies repay the psalmist for the good he did to them in times of illness (35:13-14) but he experienced their deviousness when he was in trouble (35:15-16). The psalmist in Psalm 41 experienced a similar deviousness in his enemies when he was ill. They gave the appearance of supportive friends (41:6), but all the while they planned evil for him (41:6).

Both Psalms call on YHWH for help (35:17; 41:10) against the enemies and declare that YHWH deserves to be praised (35:27-28; 41:13). While Psalm 35 declares that YHWH will be praised in a mighty congregation (35:18), Psalm 41:13 does not say where YHWH deserves to be praised, but the אָמֵן וְאָמֵן ("amen and amen") implies that it is done in a larger group.

From this short comparison it should be clear that Psalm 35 shares common themes with Psalms 34, and 36-41. A common theme in these Psalms is the reality of enemies targeting the psalmists. In all these Psalms the psalmists' only option is to turn to YHWH for deliverance. The psalmists call on YHWH's righteousness for vindication and when YHWH acts, it will become clear that the psalmists' are righteous and the enemies are not. By virtue this will vindicate the psalmists completely. All these Psalms also indicate that the righteousness of YHWH will not only lead to the vindication of the psalmists, but also to the recognition of the greatness of YHWH and his praise in public.

3.8   IMPLICATIONS OF PSALM 35

Psalm 35 tells of a person who is targeted by enemies. They are actively plotting against him (verse 4) and they are accusing him falsely (verses 11, 21) and mocking him in public (verses 18-21). They are like hunters, laying hidden traps and nets (verses 7-8), like lions encircling their prey (verses 17). The psalmist appears baffled and bereaved by their attacks (verse 12). He gave them no reason to hate him. Instead, he acted with grace towards them. When his enemies were in trouble he prayed for them (verse 13) and he even wore sackcloth and fasted on their behalf (verse 13). But they are doing the opposite. They are enjoying his misfortune (verse 15) and they are gathering forces against him (verse 15). He fears for his life (verse 17). In his time of need, the psalmist is turning to YHWH for help (verse 2); calling on YHWH to rise up in his defence (verses 1-3, 23). He calls on YHWH's righteousness to judge him (verse 24), not only because he is innocent (verses 7, 13-14, 19) but also YHWH's glory is at risk (verses 9-10, 27-28).

The psalmist's vindication will be found in YHWH's judgment. Despite his troubling situation, the psalmist is confident that YHWH will act and declare him innocent while judging his enemies. It is part of YHWH's nature (verses 10, 22-24) and therefore the psalmist calls on YHWH to fight for him (verses 1-10). Not only are the enemies acting in unacceptable ways toward the psalmists (verses 3, 4, 7, 11, 12, 15, 16, 19, 21, 25); they are also devising deceit against "the peaceful ones of the land" (v.20). YHWH has seen this (verse 22) and, together with the pleas of the psalmist, this should stir him into action (verse 23). YHWH is the righteous judge (verse 24) and he will act decisively against the wicked. Through a number of imprecations the psalmist calls on YHWH to stop the enemies (verses 4, 5, 6, 8, 26). These are expressed as a series of wishes ("let them…"). It is important to note that most of these wishes are simply asking that the

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enemies' deeds should return unto them, the so called "boomerang effect." These are not vengeful or vindictive prayers. The psalmist already showed that he is not selfish or vindictive towards those who are his enemies (verses 13-14). Although the psalmist is not calling down a self-imprecation, like the psalmist in Psalm 7:5, the implication here is basically the same: he is calling on YHWH to declare him innocent. If he is not, in any way, the righteousness of YHWH will turn against his prayers. YHWH will not act against the enemies if they are not wicked, and their actions clearly show this. The psalmist realise that their actions are so driven by their hatred (verse 19) that they will not stop until he is finished (verse 17). It appears as if the psalmist is powerless against these enemies and his only hope is found in YHWH (verses 1-3, 9-10, and 22-23). YHWH is the righteous Judge and he will not act against the enemies without just cause. The psalmist prayers appear to be vengeful and vindictive, but they are surrendering control over to YHWH. He is praying for the downfall of his enemies, but the Righteous Judge should declare the judgment. Interestingly, the focus of this prayer is not on the vindication of the psalmist (although it does form a large element of the Psalm), but rather it is on the praise of YHWH. If YHWH acts against the enemies his true nature will be revealed anew. It will be known that no one is like YHWH (verse 10), the Deliverer of the weak and the afflicted (verse 10). The psalmist is certain about his innocence (verses 7, 12) and that it will be announced by YHWH. When YHWH acts in defence of the psalmist, he will be magnified and praised (verses 27-28).

The spirit of Psalm 35 is closer to the spirit of the New Testament ideal of loving one's enemies (see Matthew 5:43-44). The psalmist went beyond the call of duty when his enemies were ill (verses 13-14), showing love and empathy. This is in line with the demands of the New Testament ethic. The trouble is that the enemies are relentless and they are actively plotting evil against the psalmist. YHWH is the only one who can truly

handle this situation. The situation is turning into a battle and YHWH is called upon to rise as a warrior on behalf of the psalmist. The psalmist's innocence must be proven and again YHWH is called upon to declare judgment. The purity of the psalmist's intentions is visible when he places himself before YHWH to be judged according to the same righteousness he asks for the enemies (verse 24). Vindication will be found in YHWH's judgment and it will lead to a reversal process. The psalmist was pursued by his enemies (verse 3), but they will be pursued by the angel of the Lord (verse 6). The enemies dug a pit for the psalmist and hid their nets (verses 7), but they will fall into their own traps (verse 8). They are rejoicing over the misfortunes of the psalmist, but he will rejoice in his Deliverer (verse 18). They are trying to shame him, but they will be shamed (verse 26). This whole reversal process will not only indicate the innocence of the psalmist, but more importantly: it will lead to the magnification of the glory of YHWH, not just by the psalmist, but by the larger congregation (verses 18, 27).

We find echoes to the later Μαράνα θά invocation when the psalmist asks YHWH to rise up (verse 2) and awake (verse 23). The psalmist is asking YHWH to come and to act and end the realities of the enemies, even if it means acting with violent force against them (verses 1-3). As in Psalm 7 the psalmist is not acting out vengeance but relinquishing it into YHWH's hands and judgment. There is a real expression of hope in the promise that YHWH will set things right.

CHAPTER 4 - PSALM 59

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Psalm 59 describes the dangerous situation of a man being pursued by various enemies. Various images are used to portray this situation of danger and fear. The imagery helps the reader to experience the continuing tenacity of the enemies in their attempts to catch the psalmist. The psalmist is scared, but also perplexed. He can see no reason for the actions of the enemies. He has done nothing wrong to justify their actions against him. For this reason he identifies them as evil. The psalmist identifies multiple enemies, and it appears as if he has both local and foreign enemies in mind.

Important elements in this Psalm include the psalmist's dependency on YHWH. He is powerless against numerous enemies. As the Psalm progresses the psalmist's certainty increases. He is certain that YHWH will come to his aid, and that YHWH's aid will be known by all. The psalmist contrasts YHWH to the enemies and the power of YHWH is expounded. The Psalm ends on a high note of hope.

4.2   TEXT

1a	To the music director. Do not destroy.[a]	לַמְנַצֵּחַ אַל־תַּשְׁחֵת
1b	To David. A Miktam.[b]	לְדָוִד מִכְתָּם
1c	When Saul sent [men]	בִּשְׁלֹחַ שָׁאוּל
1d	and they watched the house to kill him	וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ אֶת־הַבַּיִת לַהֲמִיתוֹ׃
2a	Deliver me from my enemies, my God![a]	הַצִּילֵנִי מֵאֹיְבַי אֱלֹהָי
2b	From those who rise up[b] against me, set me on high,[c d]	מִמִּתְקוֹמְמַי תְּשַׂגְּבֵנִי׃
3a	Deliver me from those who do evil,	הַצִּילֵנִי מִפֹּעֲלֵי אָוֶן
3b	and from men of bloodshed,[a] save me.[b]	וּמֵאַנְשֵׁי דָמִים הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי׃
4a	For look, they lie in ambush for me,[a]	כִּי הִנֵּה אָרְבוּ לְנַפְשִׁי
4b	they attack[b] me, strong (men).[c]	יָגוּרוּ עָלַי עַזִים

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4c	No transgression of me, and no sin of mine, o YHWH.[d]	לֹא־פִשְׁעִי וְלֹא־חַטָּאתִי יְהוָה:
5a	In no iniquity[a] [of me], they run and make ready.	בְּלִי־עָוֹן יְרוּצוּן וְיִכּוֹנָנוּ
5b	Rise up to meet and see.	עוּרָה לִקְרָאתִי וּרְאֵה:
6a	For you are YHWH, God of hosts, God of Israel.	וְאַתָּה יְהוָה־אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל
6b	Awake to punish[a] all nations.	הָקִיצָה לִפְקֹד כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם
6c	Show no mercy to all [who] treacherously [act] evil.[b] Selah.	אַל־תָּחֹן כָּל־בֹּגְדֵי אָוֶן סֶלָה:
7a	They return[a] at evening,[b]	יָשׁוּבוּ לָעֶרֶב
7b	they growl like dogs,[c]	יֶהֱמוּ כַכָּלֶב
7c	and they prowl around[d] [the] city.	וִיסוֹבְבוּ עִיר:
8a	Look! They foam[a] from[b] the mouth,	הִנֵּה יַבִּיעוּן בְּפִיהֶם
8b	swords[c] are on their lips.	חֲרָבוֹת בְּשִׂפְתוֹתֵיהֶם
8c	For: who will hear?	כִּי־מִי שֹׁמֵעַ:
9a	But You, YHWH, will laugh at them.	וְאַתָּה יְהוָה תִּשְׂחַק־לָמוֹ
9b	You will mock all nations.	תִּלְעַג לְכָל־גּוֹיִם:
10a	My strength,[a] for you I will watch[b]	עֻזּוֹ אֵלֶיךָ אֶשְׁמֹרָה
10b	for God is my high refuge.[c]	כִּי־אֱלֹהִים מִשְׂגַּבִּי:
11a	My gracious[a] God will meet me.	אֱלֹהֵי חַסְדִּי יְקַדְּמֵנִי
11b	God will let me look (in triumph)[c] on my adversaries.	אֱלֹהִים יַרְאֵנִי בְשֹׁרְרָי:
12a	Do not[a] kill them, lest my people will forget.	אַל־תַּהַרְגֵם פֶּן־יִשְׁכְּחוּ עַמִּי
12b	Scatter[b] them with your power[c] and bring them down.	הֲנִיעֵמוֹ בְחֵילְךָ וְהוֹרִידֵמוֹ
12c	Our shield,[d] O Lord!	מָגִנֵּנוּ אֲדֹנָי:
13a	(For) the sin of his mouths;	חַטַּאת־פִּימוֹ
13b	(and) the word of his lips;	דְּבַר־שְׂפָתֵימוֹ
13c	let them be trapped in their pride;	וְיִלָּכְדוּ בִגְאוֹנָם
13d	And for[a] the curse and the deceit they speak,	וּמֵאָלָה וּמִכַּחַשׁ יְסַפֵּרוּ:
14a	destroy[a] [them] in wrath.	כַּלֵּה בְחֵמָה

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14b	Destroy [them] so that[b] they do not exist.	כַּלֵּה וְאֵינֵמוֹ
14c	And let them know that God rules in Jacob	וְיֵדְעוּ כִּי־אֱלֹהִים מֹשֵׁל בְּיַעֲקֹב
14d	to the ends of the earth.[c] Selah.	לְאַפְסֵי הָאָרֶץ סֶלָה׃

15a	And they return in the evening,	וְיָשׁוּבוּ לָעֶרֶב
15b	they growl like dogs.	יֶהֱמוּ כַכָּלֶב
15c	And they prowl around[a] the city.	וִיסוֹבְבוּ עִיר׃

| 16a | They, they wander[a] for food (to eat). | הֵמָּה יְנִיעוּן לֶאֱכֹל |
| 16b | If they do not get their fill (are not sated), they lodge (refuse to sleep/they spend the night).[b] | אִם־לֹא יִשְׂבְּעוּ וַיָּלִינוּ׃ |

17a	And I, I will sing of your strength.	וַאֲנִי אָשִׁיר עֻזֶּךָ
17b	And I will rejoice to the morning of your loyalty.	וַאֲרַנֵּן לַבֹּקֶר חַסְדֶּךָ
17c	For you has been a fortress to me	כִּי־הָיִיתָ מִשְׂגָּב לִי
17d	And a refuge in the day of my distress.	וּמָנוֹס בְּיוֹם צַר־לִי׃

18a	O my strength, to you I will sing praises.	עֻזִּי אֵלֶיךָ אֲזַמֵּרָה
18b	For God (is) my refuge,	כִּי־אֱלֹהִים מִשְׂגַּבִּי
18c	My gracious God.[a]	אֱלֹהֵי חַסְדִּי׃

4.3   TEXTUAL AND TRANSLATION NOTES

1a

אַל־תַּשְׁחֵת appears in four Lament Psalms (Psalms 57-59, and 74). The term is not fully understood, but it most likely refers to a specific tune (VanGemeren, 1991:93). Most English translations translate it as "Do Not Destroy"[47] but some translations keep it untranslated.[48]

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[47] See for example Douay-Rheims, English Standard Version, Holman Christian Standard Bible, New International Version, International Standard Version, Lexham English Bible, New Century Version, New Jerusalem Bible, New Living Translation, and the Revised Standard Version.

[48] See for example American Standard Version, King James Version, NET Bible, New American Bible, and New American Standard Bible 1995 Update.

1b

מִכְתָּם appears in six Psalms (Psalms 16, 56, 57, 58, 59, and 60) and all six are ascribed to David. With the exception of Psalm 16, all these Psalms could be classified as Lament Psalms even though discerning common features remain difficult (see Tate, 2002:66; Wolf, 1980:459). It is possible that מִכְתָּם relates to a small collection of Psalms that could broadly be identified as Psalms of distress (see Tate, 2002:66; Wilson, 1984:342–343). The uncertainty of its precise meaning has led to some discussion. In his discussion of Psalm 16 Craigie (1983:154) argues that the word means "inscribed" (see also Gesenius, 2003:473). This sense is also attested by the LXX which contain στηλογραφίαν ("inscription"). Leupold (1959:147) argues for a "mystery poem", while Hengstenberg (2010a:232) argues similarly for a secret that "conducts us into the mysterious depths of divine life." Some also regard it as an engraving in golden letters (Wolf, 1980:459). Despite speculation the exact meaning remains obscure. It is left untranslated here.

2a

Some Hebrew manuscripts, the LXX, and the Syriac have the vocative "O Yahweh" (יהוה) (Kraus, 1993:538 footnote 1b; Tate, 2002:93). However Kraus (1993:538 footnote 1b) argues that the preference should be the MT reading.

2b

Although קום ("arise") could carry the meaning of a judge rising in judgment, in this sense it could imply the start of a martial campaign (see Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84 footnote 2a).

2c

The literal translation is "set me up high." This relates to the metaphor of YHWH being a stronghold and is a request for YHWH to show himself as the psalmist's stronghold (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84 footnote 2b). It carries the same sense as הַצִּילֵנִי ("deliver me" – colon 2a) and implies that YHWH should rescue or save the psalmist. Dahood (2008a:69) identifies the pairing of the imperfect form תְּשַׂגְּבֵנִי ("set me on high") with the imperative הַצִּילֵנִי ("deliver me") as a Canaanite stylistic form copied by the Israelites. It forms an inclusion with מִשְׂגַּבִּי (colon 18b) and is a military expression which could be translated as "my bulwark" (see Dahood, 2008a:67). The word also appears as a noun in verses 10, 17, and 18 (Tate, 2002:93). The literal translation is acceptable as it carries the same sense: YHWH should remove the psalmist from the grasp of his enemies. His enemies are rising up (see 2c below) against him and YHWH should lift them above their grasp.

2d

The translation follows the MT arrangement of verb, noun, noun, and verb. See also note 3b and the discussion below.

3a

The sense here is of "murderers" or "killers" (see Basson, 2006:187), but the literal translation is also acceptable.

3b

The translation follows the MT arrangement of verb, noun, noun, and verb. See also note 2d and the discussion below.

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4a

לְנַפְשִׁי Literally it means "for soul of me", and it refers to the whole person.

4b

Some prefer יָגֹדוּ ("they plot") instead of יָגוּרוּ ("they attack"), as witnessed by Jerome and the Targum (Basson, 2006:187), but this change is unnecessary (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84 footnote 4c). יָגוּרוּ ("they attack") fits perfectly with the imagery of war (see note 2c above), and, as Basson (2006:187) points out "given that the attack is preceded by the lying in ambush" it is acceptable to keep יָגוּרוּ ("they attack").

4c

עַזִים ("mighty") may be translated as mighty, strong or fierce. In this sense it is used adjectively for enemies who are strong (Wakely, 1997d:370). The word "men" is added to the translation for clarification.

4d

Tate (2002:91) indicates that יהוה may be a later addition, and it "now functions as an inclusion with 'O, God of Israel' in v 6." It is translated as a vocative.

5a

בְּלִי־עָוֹן ("in no iniquity") implies the words "on my part" (see Hengstenberg, 2010b:267). The phrase "of me" is added to facilitate this implication.

6a

פָּקַד carries such a wide semantic range that it has perplexed for scholars (Williams, 1997:658). Possible translations include "to attend to", "to visit", "to observe", and "to punish." Williams (1997:660) indicates that in Psalm 59 the meaning is negative and refers to punishment. It is mostly used for punishment on Israel, but it is at times used to refer to punishment on all nations (Williams, 1997:660).

6b

The phrase כָּל־בֹּגְדֵי אָוֶן ("all of those who treacherous evil") is only found here and is a difficult construct and could perhaps be a fusion of the פעלי און in v 3 with בגדי (see Briggs & Briggs, 1906:50; Tanner, 2014b:499; Tate, 2002:93). The LXX has πάντας τοὺς ἐργαζομένους τὴν ἀνομίαν ("all who are working lawlessness", which is similar to verse 3 of the LXX τῶν ἐργαζομένων τὴν ἀνομίαν ("those who work lawlessness") (Tate, 2002:93). Wakely (1997a:584) however argues that, being a *hapax legomenon*, it is not enough reason to discard the MT for the LXX rendering. Wakely (1997a:584) rather prefers the more difficult rendering of the MT and also feels that it is unnecessary to regard this phrase as a short hand for כֹּל־בֹּגְדֵי־פֹּעֲלֵי־אָוֶן ("all the treacherous workers of evil"). Tanner (2014b:499) concurs, arguing that, while the MT is awkward, it is still readable. Tate (2002:93) argues that בגד basically means "faithlessness" or "to act treacherously." This could indicate fellow believers who wilfully act against the covenant (see discussion of verse 6 below).

7a

The root of יְשׁוּבוּ ("they return") is שׁוּב and Thompson & Martens (1997:55–59) indicate that possible translations include "turn," "return," "go back and forth," and "turn back."

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Dahood (2008a:68) argues that it does not make sense here and rather proposes that יָשׁוּבוּ is a form of ישׁב meaning "to sit" or "to wait." Therefore Dahood (2008a:65) translates it as "They wait till evening." Although this is a plausible solution, it is not necessary to emend as the sense of the enemies "returning every evening" is acceptable.

7b

The preposition לְ has a wide range of possible meanings for example "concerning, for, until, into, at, and towards" (Brown *et al.*, 2000:510). עֶרֶב means "evening," but combined with the preposition לְ its meaning becomes more complex in sense (Konkel, 1997a:712). In terms of Psalm 59 it may be understood as meaning "every evening" (Konkel, 1997a:712). It can also be translated as "evening after evening" (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84), which would imply a continuation of action. Dogs prowled in the evenings, and in Psalm 59 it indicates the way the enemies are continually prowling in pursuing the psalmist (see Konkel, 1997a:716; Tate, 2002:93).

7c

Literaly כַכָּלֶב is "like the dog", but due to the context of multiple enemies and the verb יֶהֱמוּ ("they growl") being plural, this translation opts for translating כַכָּלֶב in the plural ("like dogs").

7d

סָבַב could be translated as "turn, go round, surround" and is often used for hostile or military senses (Allen, 1997a:219). Another acceptable sense, used in this translation, understands the dogs as "prowl[ing] around or throughout" the city (see for example Basson, 2006:188; Tanner, 2014b:498; Tate, 2002:92).

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8a

Kraus (1993:541) takes the word as which indicates "inflated, egregarious talk of the slanderers" (see also Hengstenberg, 2010b:268). Dahood (2008b:69), following Psalm 94:4 and Proverbs 15:28 prefers "belch" and connects it to the swords in colon 8b. Kraus (1993:541) identifies the swords as the deadly words coming from the slanderers mouth. Some translations prefer to translate this as some sort of sound or words streaming from the pursuers lips: bellowing (ESV, NRSV), snarling (the Message), belching (NASB), and spewing (NIV). Kidner (1973:229) considers "belching" as inappropriate and indicates a more appropriate "bubbling up" or "bursting out." Beyer (1997:15) also indicates that נָבַע means "to bubble, pour forth, bubble up." In the Biblical text it is mostly used in a figurative sense for words spoken in either praise or folly (see Beyer, 1997:15). Following Kraus (1993:541) and Tate (2002:93), this translation prefers the meaning as bubble or ferment. This aligns with the imagery of dogs in colon 7b. Thus, the sense of dogs foaming at the mouth is appropriate. For more on this metaphor, see discussion of colon 8a under Poetic Content below.

8b

Although the preposition בְּ could be translated as a "motion through" (see Waltke & O'Connor, 1990:198), which would fit the idea of the enemies spewing or bellowing out words (see note 8a), Harris (1980a:87) refers to Ugaritic evidence to translate this preposition with "from." This fits the current translation "they foam from the mouth."

8c

It is not necessary to change חרבות ("swords"), to חרפות ("abuse" or "insults"). Changing חרבות to חרפות "destroys the technique of mixing metaphors that is characteristic of this

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psalm" (see Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84). Most commentators retain חרבות (see for example Dahood, 2008b:65; Eaton, 2003:224; Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84; Tate, 2002:92; Terrien, 2003:442). This translation opts for swords as it is metaphorically appropriate for "teeth."

10a

The MT has עֻזּוֹ which translates as "his strength." Reading "his strength" creates difficulties in this context. עֻזּוֹ could be a corruption of עֻזִּי ("my strength") and a number of MSS, as well as the Targum and LXX, favor עֻזִּי (VanGemeren, 1991:412). "My strength" is the preferred translation (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84), especially since the term עֻזִּי is repeated in colon18a (see Tanner, 2014b:500). Also, based on the vocative in colon 18a, some prefer to translate this as the vocative (Futato, 2009:203; Tate, 2002:92). This emendation also helps to make more sense of אֶשְׁמֹרָה ("I watch" - see note 10b).

10b

Without the emendation of עֻזּוֹ ("his strength") to עֻזִּי ("my strength" - see note 10a above) this is a difficult reading. With the emendation it carries the sense of waiting for the Lord, who is the psalmist's strength. Futato (2009:203) argues that אֵלֶיךָ אֶשְׁמֹרָה ("Over you, I will watch") should be emended to אֵלֶיךָ אֲזַמֵּרָה ("To you, I will sing praises") to form an inclusion between colon 10a and 18a. Despite this possibility, most scholars and English translations opt for the more difficult reading of the MT (Tanner, 2014b:500; Tate, 2002:94; Weiser, 1962:433).

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10c

מִשְׂגַּבִּי ("fortress") refers to God being a fortress of refuge for the psalmist in oppressive situations (Schoville, 1997:1216). שָׂגַב means high (see note 2b). This translation opts for *high refuge* to connect with colon 2b.

11a

It is possible that the MT is corrupt here (Futato, 2009:203). The Qere has אֱלֹהֵי חַסְדִּי ("God of my steadfast love/mercy" or "my gracious God" or "my God of loyal-love") while the Kethib has אֱלֹהֵי חַסְדּוֹ ("my God, his mercy" or "my God, his love") (see Basson, 2006:188; Futato, 2009:203; Tate, 2002:94). The Kethib agrees with the LXX which contain ὁ θεός μου, τὸ ἔλεος αὐτοῦ προφθάσει με ("My God, His mercy will come near me"). Following Basson (2006:188) this translation prefers the Qere and takes אֱלֹהֵי ("My God") as the subject of קדם ("to meet") as it also mirrors וַאֱלֹהֵי חַסְדּוֹ in colon 18c. Despite the many translation options, the sense of colon 11a is clearly that God will help the psalmist (see Tate, 2002:94).

11b

קָדַם ("to meet") could carry both the meanings of "meeting" or "going before" (see Basson, 2006:188; Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84; Tate, 2002:94; Terrien, 2003:442) but this translation opts for God "meeting" the psalmist (see Jenson, 1997:874).

11c

The sense of looking on is one of *triumph* (see Tanner, 2014b:500; Tate, 2002:45).

12a

The negative is retained despite the possible contradiction with colon 14ab. Some commentators prefer to change the negative to a positive (see Tate, 2002:94), bringing this in line with colon 14b and asking God to kill the enemies.

12b

נוּעַ can be translated as "to stagger, to tremble, to roam, to sway, to wander, to shake." Kaiser & Van Pelt (1997:63) prefer to use "to shake", but then in the sense to "describe the force of judgment whether concretely (Ps. 59:11[12]; Amos 9:9) or metaphorically (Nah 3:12)." In this sense YHWH's judgment will shake them. Kraus (1993:542) prefers "to scatter," while Dahood (2008b:66) prefers "to stagger." Based on the metaphor of a pack of dogs roaming the city in verses 7 and 15, this translation opts for "to scatter." The pronominal suffixes מוֹ- and מוּ-in verses 12-14 appears to be masculine singular, but in poetry these are sometimes used for the 3rd masculine plural (See Gesenius, 1910:258; Van der Merwe, Naudé, & Kroeze, 2017:97). In these verses the suffixes will be translated in the plural.

12c

בְחֵילְךָ ("in your power") has a wide range of possibilities ranging from military force or an army, power, wealth and even rampart or bastion (see Tate, 2002:94; Wakely, 1997b:116–126). Based on colon 4b where the enemy is described as "strong" and colon 10b where God is described as "my strength" this translation opts for "power." Wakely (1997b:117) identifies חַיִל as an attribute of God and not a metaphor (like rampart or bastion) which support the chosen translation. The plural is retained in this translation.

12d

MT has a plural while LXX and Syriac have a singular (Tate, 2002:94). Tanner (2014b:500) argues, in correspondence with Tate (2002:94), that it is not necessary to change to singular. "Our shield" is a figure used regularly for God (see Pss 3:3; 18:2; 28:7; 33:20; 84:9). Basson (2006:188) prefers the singular "my Shield."

13a

Tanner (2014b:501) indicates that this colon contains both a conjunction and the preposition מִן. This implies that colon 13d should be attached to the proceeding colon 14a.

14a

Some interpreters change the second imperative in colon 14b from כַּלֵּה ("destroy") to כֻּלָּם ("them all), but this emendation is not necessary (see Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84; Kraus, 1993:539). Most translations or interpreters simply add *them* after each imperative (see Basson, 2006:188; Ross, 2011:314; Tate, 2002:92).

14b

For a discussion on translating the וְ as "so that" see Davidson (1902:199) and the discussion below.

14c

Literally the text says "to the nothingness of tthe earth." The clear indication is that God rules to the ends of the earth (Hill, 1997:482).

15a

See note 7c.

16a

The Kethib Qal יְנוּעוּן is preferred to the Hiphil יְנִיעוּן of the Qere (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84; Raabe, 1990:139; Tate, 2002:94). The Hiphil is causative which does not fit the context of verses 15 and 16.

16b

LXX has ἐὰν δὲ μὴ χορτασθῶσιν, καὶ γογγύσουσιν ("if not satisfied they murmur"), which, according to Raabe (1990:139), is probably due to a hearing mistake. The MT has וַיָּלִינוּ, "they remain through the night." The MT can be emended to וְיַלִּינוּ, "they mutter," but this is unnecessary and MT is preferred (Futato, 2009:203; Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:84; Raabe, 1990:139). Kidner (1973:214) prefers to change it "to growl" or "to whine", but both are acceptable (Tate, 2002:94). Here the MT is retained.

18a

Futato (2009:203) suggests that perhaps the line יְקַדְּמֵנִי ("He will help me" - see colon 11a) had fallen away here. Both אֱלֹהֵי חַסְדִּי ("My gracious God") in colon 11a and 18c comes after the refrain. The MT is retained.

4.4   STRUCTURE

Despite the Psalm being complex and difficult (see Tate, 2002:96; VanGemeren, 1991:409), most scholars divide the Psalm into two sections (Davidson, 1998:187; Futato, 2009:204; Harman, 2011:442; Hengstenberg, 2010a:261; Hossfeld & Zenger,

2005:86; Mays, 1994:213; Terrien, 2003:443–444; Weiser, 1962:435). Some scholars, like Hossfeld and Zenger (2005:86), argue that despite a seemingly confusing structure, the Psalm does have a "well-planned and meaningful structure of a prayer of petition" consisting of a repeating movement "from petition via lament to expression of trust" occurring two times in the Psalm. Futato (2009:204) similarly states that the Psalm is "quite symmetrical." Terrien (2003:443) also identifies two sections, but identifies them as asymmetrical.

Harman (2011:442) divides the Psalm into the following structure: (1) A cry for deliverance, and a refrain (vv.1-10a – ET[49]) and (2) a description of the enemies and a refrain (vv. 10b-17 – ET). Davidson (1998:187) follows a similar structure, dividing the Psalm into two main sections (verses 1-10 and verses 11-17). Davidson (1998:187) discovers three synonymous subsections in the Psalm: (1) an appeal to God (vv. 1-5 and vv. 11-13), (2) a vivid description of the enemies as dogs (vv. 6-7 and vv. 14-15), and (3) a concluding expression of hope and confidence (vv. 8-10 and vv. 16-17). Tanner (2014b:498) identifies a repeating structure he calls "seconding."[50] In both sections the metaphorical description of the enemies as dogs (vv. 6-7) and the expression of trust in God (vv. 8-10) are "seconded" in verses 14-15 and 16-17.

Futato (2009:204) also identifies two major stanzas: "The first stanza (59:1–10) is comprised of three strophes: petition with reasons (59:1–5), the enemy as snarling dogs (59:6–7), and statement of assurance (59:8–10). The second stanza follows the same sequence: petition with reasons (59:11–13), the enemy as snarling dogs (59:14–15), and

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[49] Most English Translations (ET) differ in versification from the Hebrew Text.

[50] According to Tanner (2014b:498 n. 1) seconding is "different from repetition. The two sets of sections have much in common and even share some lines in common. However, each also adds lines so that the meaning of each section is unique."

statement of assurance (59:16–17). A refrain marks the end of each stanza and provides focus for the Psalm: "O my Strength, to you I sing praises, for you, O God, are my refuge" (59:9, 17)." Gerstenberger (1998:235) identifies nine structural elements:

I. Superscription (v.1);

II. Initial plea (vv. 2-3);

III. Complaint with declaration of innocence (vv. 4-5a);

IV. Petition with invocation (vv. 5b-6);

V. Refrain – complaint (vv. 7-8);

VI. Affirmation of confidence (vv. 9-10);

VII. Petition and imprecation (vv. 11-14);

VIII. Refrain – complaint (vv. 15-16);

IX. Thanksgiving hymn (vv. 17-18).

Boice (2005:489) divides the Psalm into six elements: "(1) David's appeal to God (vv.1-5); (2) a description of David's fierce foes (vv. 6–8); (3) a refrain (v.9); (4) David's second appeal to God (vv10-13); (5) a second description of his foes (vv. 14-16); and (6) the refrain repeated (v.17)"

Bratcher & Reyburn (1991:522) argue that the Psalm consists of a chiastic structure with verses 1-2 introducing the major theme of the Psalm. VanGemeren (1991:409–410) argues that, despite the "intertwining of various motifs" that make structural analysis difficult, the Psalm may be structured as follows:

A. Prayer for Deliverance (vv. 1–3);

B. Innocence and Protestation (vv. 4–5);

C. The Wicked and God (vv. 6–8);

C′. Hope in God (vv. 9–10a);

B′. Imprecation on the Wicked (vv. 10b–13);

A′. Confidence in God's Response (vv. 14–17).

It is clear from the short discussion above that scholars are not in agreement regarding the structure of this Psalm. There is, however, a clear tendency for scholars to divide the Psalm into two sections. Despite the differences about how these two sections should be divided, there appears to be a clear chiastic structure in the Psalm. For the purpose of this study the Psalm will be structured into two sections:

A. Introduction and an appeal to God (vv.1-6)

B. Description of enemies as dogs (vv. 7-8)

C. Refrain about hope and confidence in YHWH (vv. 9-11)

A1. An Appeal to God (vv.12-14)

B1. Description of enemies as dogs (vv. 15-16)

C1. Refrain about hope and confidence in YHWH (vv. 17-18)

4.5   PSALM 59 – POETIC CONTENT

4.5.1   Verse 1-6 Introduction and an appeal to God

There is a clear correspondence between Psalm 59 and the narrative of 1 Samuel 19:11-16 where Saul sent men to David's house with the purpose to have him killed. However, in 1 Samuel 19 David is rescued through the cleverness of his wife Michal. In this Psalm the psalmist is in grave danger and he feels powerless. In the narrative of 1 Samuel David never speaks a word. He manages to escape through the window narrowly eluding his enemies. His relief is brief. The danger is still very real and the narrative reveals that Saul repeatedly tries to capture David (1 Samuel 19:18-22). The backdrop of 1 Samuel 19 could serve as a probable context for Psalm 59. The psalmist is in real danger and he calls on YHWH for help.
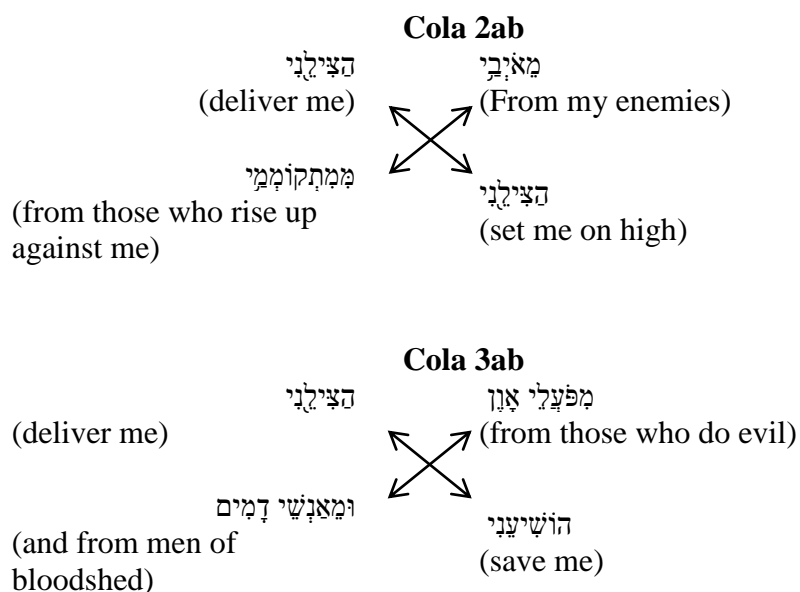
The psalmist uses imperatives to appeal to YHWH in an "artistically constructed four-part petition" (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:89). The skilful use of the verbs intensifies the feeling of danger (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:89). All four verbs also contain pronominal suffixes, adding a personal element to the petition: "deliver me" (הַצִּילֵנִי– colon 2a), "set me apart" (תְּשַׂגְּבֵנִי– colon 2b), "deliver me" (הַצִּילֵנִי– colon 3a), and "save me" (הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי– colon 3b). The cry "deliver me" (הַצִּילֵנִי– colon 2a) is frequently used in the lament Psalms and the causative form of נָצַל ("to deliver") carries the meaning of being delivered from a various number of problems (see Tate, 2002:96).

The psalmist is the direct object of all the imperatives and together all four verbs express only one wish: the desire to be saved. The preposition carries the meaning of "movement from" indicating that the psalmist is in the vicinity of his enemies (מֵאֹיְבַי– colon 2a). The enemies are described as: people who rise up against him (מִמִּתְקוֹמְמַי– colon 2b), people who are evildoers (מִפֹּעֲלֵי אָוֶן – colon 3a), and murderers, literally "men

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of blood" (מֵאַנְשֵׁי דָמִים – colon 3b). The description of the enemies' progress reveals their real intent: they are killers. They were sent with the purpose to kill him (לַהֲמִיתוֹ – 1d). The psalmist does not feel safe in his own house and he knows that outside his house the enemies are waiting. They are watching his house (וַיִּשְׁמְרוּ אֶת־הַבַּיִת– 1d), looking for an opportunity to strike. The object marker (אֶת) is attached to the definite noun (הַבַּיִת-"the house") and indicates that it is the house of the psalmist that is being watched. They are actively looking to ambush him (colon 4a).

As in Psalm 7 and Psalm 35 the enemies are after the psalmist's נֶפֶשׁ ("soul" – 4a) and here it refers to the whole being of the psalmist; his life. His whole existence is in danger near these people. His desire for YHWH to come to his aid is emphasized by the use of synonymous parallelisms between cola 2ab and cola 3ab: he asks for deliverance in cola 2ab (הַצִּילֵנִי and תְּשַׂגְּבֵנִי) and cola 3ab (הַצִּילֵנִי and הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי) from his enemies in colon 2a (וּמֵאַנְשֵׁי דָמִים and מְפֹעֲלֵי אָוֶן) and colon 3ab (מִמִּתְקוֹמְמַי and מֵאֹיְבַי).

Cola 2ab and 3ab also form chiastic structures, which further emphasize the desperateness of the psalmist.

Cola 2ab

הַצִּילֵנִי (deliver me)	מֵאֹיְבַי (From my enemies)
מִמִּתְקוֹמְמַי (from those who rise up against me)	הַצִּילֵנִי (set me on high)

Cola 3ab

הַצִּילֵנִי (deliver me)	מְפֹעֲלֵי אָוֶן (from those who do evil)
וּמֵאַנְשֵׁי דָמִים (and from men of bloodshed)	הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי (save me)

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According to Basson (2006:192) the phrase תְּשַׂגְּבֵנִי ("set me on high") could be seen as the keyword in the Psalm (see also verses 10, 17, and 18). The wish expressed by the psalmist is real and specific. The use of the preposition (מִן) in both cola 2a (מֵאֹיְבַי – "from my enemies") and 2b (מִמִּתְקוֹמְמַי – "from those who rise up against me"): he needs to be removed from the vicinity of his enemies. The psalmist's urgent appeal to YHWH is based on his innocence (Tate, 2002:96). Using terms like לֹא־פִשְׁעִי ("not my transgressions"), לֹא־חַטָּאתִי ("not my sin"), and בְּלִי־עָוֹן ("no fault of me") he compares himself to his enemies. Their acts are deliberate: they rise against him (colon 2b), they are evildoers (colon 3a), they are murderers (colon 3b), they are looking to ambush him (colon 4a), and they are attacking him (colon 4b). There is no mistaking their actions. It is deliberate and deadly (colon 1d). The desperateness of the psalmist's situation is clear in the imperatives of verses 2-3: "deliver me" (הַצִּילֵנִי), "set me apart" (תְּשַׂגְּבֵנִי), "deliver me" (הַצִּילֵנִי), and "save me" (הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי).

His desperate pleas highlight his dependence on YHWH's immediate action. The three imperatives of verses 2-3 are followed by another three imperatives calling YHWH to action: עוּרָה ("rise up" - 5b), וּרְאֵה ("and see" – 5b), and הָקִיצָה ("awake" – 6b). These are strong wishes, carrying the hope of spurring YHWH into action (Tate, 2002:97). Further, the call for YHWH "rise up" (עוּרָה– 5b) is found frequently in the Psalms (Harman, 2011:442) and is used in military context to envisage the coming victory (Harman, 2011:111). Harman (2011:116–117) further indicates that the idea that YHWH must "arise" is regularly used in the Psalms to indicate complete victory over the enemy. It points to complete confidence that YHWH will prevail.

The conjunction in colon 3b could perhaps indicate the desire to be saved on two fronts. On the first front the psalmist needs to be saved by those who are actively attacking

him ("the men of bloodshed" – 3b), but on the other front he needs to be saved by those who planned his downfall ("from those who do evil" – 3a). If 1 Samuel 19 is indeed the backdrop to this Psalm it could indicate that David is asking God to save him from Saul's henchmen and Saul himself.

In both cola 3a and 3b the direct object is indicated by the pronominal suffix (אֲנִי). The word order of verse 3 is verb (הַצִּילֵנִי – "deliver me"), noun (מִפֹּעֲלֵי אָוֶן – "from those who do evil"), noun (וּמֵאַנְשֵׁי דָמִים– "and from men of bloodshed"), and verb (הוֹשִׁיעֵנִי– "save me"). This highlights that YHWH's action should also lead to the deliverance of the psalmist.

The adverbial הִנֵּה combined with the conjunction (כִּי– colon 4a) draws attention to the reason for the psalmist's desperate pleas for YHWH to save him. This phrase introduces two reasons: firstly, he is being ambushed by strong men[51] (4b); who are running and preparing themselves (5a) for a swift attack. Secondly, he is innocent. The psalmist's innocence is expressed as a contrast to the enemies (see 2b, 3ab, 4ab). The psalmist expresses his innocence with three words: פֶּשַׁע ("transgression"), חַטָּאה ("sin"), and עָוֹן ("iniquity"). Although these words can be translated as synonyms, Luc (1997:706) argues that פֶּשַׁע ("transgression") has a narrower meaning. It is mostly used in the context of willful rebellion, in most cases a rebellion against God (see also Kraus, 1993:541). In this sense the psalmist is arguing that he did not willfully or unknowingly act in defiance of any set of rules or commandments that could justify the actions of his enemies. The use of these three synonymous terms indicates that the psalmist is certain of his complete innocence. By using the vocative יהוה ("O, YHWH" – 4c), the psalmist

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[51] See note 4b above for a discussion of יָגוּרוּ. Hossfeld & Zenger (2005:89) indicate that the additional noun עַזִים ("strong") demonstrates their power. It also serves as an opposite to the one the psalmist relies upon: YHWH, whom the psalmist calls "My Strength" (עֻזּוֹ – 10a) (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:89).

is calling on YHWH to support his claims of innocence. יהוהfits between the two synonyms and forms the center of a chiastic structure between colon 4c and colon 5a. It emphasizes the role YHWH plays in the protest of innocence. This is intensified by the psalmist calling on YHWH, in colon 4a, to witness ("see" – הֵנֵּה) the acts of the enemies, and by implication also "see" the psalmist's innocence in relation to the deeds of the enemies.

The focus on the innocence of the psalmist intensifies the wicked deeds of the enemy (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:89). The phrase בְּלִי־עָוֹן יְרוּצוּן וְיִכּוֹנָנוּ ("In no iniquity of me, they run and make ready" – 5a) is difficult. Dahood (2008b:68) and Hossfeld & Zenger (2005:89) understand this phrase within a military context: the enemy charges to take their positions in order to be ready for the attack. They are preparing to ambush the psalmist (Davidson, 1998:188). It adds to the urgency and desperateness of the psalmist's situation. The longer YHWH delays the more time the enemies have to prepare for their attack.

Despite this, the psalmist is bolstered by the certainty that YHWH will hear his pleas. Without hesitation he approaches YHWH. He prays that YHWH should match the rising of the enemies (מִמְתְקוֹמְמַי: "from those who rise up against me" - colon 2b) by rising himself (עוּרָה - colon 5b). עוּרָה is an imperative and carries a sense of insistence. The psalmist is pressing YHWH to act. עוּרָה ("Rise up" – 5b) is connected to the next verbs קְרָאתִי ("meet me") and וּרְאֵה ("and see") with a preposition and a conjunction. It could be construed as one motion: YHWH should rise up, and meet the psalmist to see for himself the dire situation faced by the psalmist. The pronominal suffix ("me") is the direct object of this colon. At this stage the psalmist wishes to be the focus of YHWH's attention. When YHWH has met the psalmist, he will see (וּרְאֵה – 5b) the danger of the

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enemies. For the psalmist עוּרָה ("rise up" – 5b) could be seen as the most important step in YHWH's action. The rising of YHWH is the direct counter to the rising of the enemies (2b). From the psalmist's perspective there is a distinct difference between the rising up of the enemies and the rising up of YHWH: "the evildoers rise to do harm; Yahweh, however, rises to save" (Basson, 2006:192).

Colon 6a serves as the motivation for YHWH's desired actions: He is YHWH, God of hosts and the God of Israel (יְהוָה־אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). This is an interesting phrase with אֱלֹהִים inserted between יְהוָה and צְבָאוֹת and results in "a powerful emphasis on the divine majesty and power" (Thompson, 1968:300).

The phrase יְהוָה־אֱלֹהִים צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל ("YHWH, God of hosts and the God of Israel") emphasizes the rule of YHWH. Although the enemies rise up against the psalmist (2b) their actions have a bigger implication. The acts of the enemies are against the rule of YHWH, and "…for the sake of justice YHWH cannot abide" (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:89). The repetitive use of names for YHWH ("YHWH, God of hosts, God of Israel") in 6a is used by the psalmist to bolster his case before YHWH and to emphasize his loyalty (Lennox, 1999:185), as well as the expression of the believe that YHWH is the "God who controls the forces of the universe" (Waltner, 2006:290). The mere fact that the psalmist dares to call on YHWH proves that there exists a strong and powerful relationship between the psalmist and YHWH (Tanner, 2014b:502).

There is a sudden shift in focus in cola 6bc from the local enemies to all nations (כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם – 6b). Some, although not all agree, argue that the reference to all nations imply that the Psalm was not written during the time Saul tried to kill David, or that the Psalm was emended during a later stage, perhaps the Babylonian exile (Barnes,

1983:147; Kraus, 1993:541; Lane, 2006:265; Ngewa, 2006:673; Terrien, 2003:444). The collective noun כָּל appears two times in cola 6bc. The first instance כָּל־הַגּוֹיִם refers to all nations, while the second instance refers to כָּל־בֹּגְדֵי אָוֶן ("all [who] treacherously [act] evil").[52] The psalmist does not have any particular nation or persons in mind. Whereas his previous focus was on specific evil persons, here he relates YHWH's actions to all nations and all who act evil. The psalmist has in mind "those who are wicked, cruel, harsh, prays that God would awake to visit them; that is, to visit them for purposes of punishment, or so to visit them as to prevent their carrying out their designs" (Barnes, 1983:148). The phrase לִפְקֹד ("to punish" – 6b) literally means "to visit" (see Jenni & Westermann, 1997:1018), but it is commonly used in the Old Testament in the sense of "Yahweh's coming to examine and to call to accountability and responsibility for transgressions and omissions" (Jenni & Westermann, 1997:1025). This could be related to the wish in the earlier expression, עוּרָה לִקְרָאתִי וּרְאֵה (5b), where the psalmist wishes that YHWH would "rise up to meet and see." It is important to realize that in regards to פָּקַד "to punish", Williams (1997:660)[53] argues "God is the only legitimate author of punishment in the OT."

Although the psalmist's focus is primarily on his immediate enemies, his expression has a much wider implication. The psalmist wishes that the enemies, not only those who turned against the psalmist but all who are against the rule of YHWH, should be called to accountability and judgment. The psalmist's desire is universal and he pleads that YHWH will not only destroy the evil around him, but evil all over. Read together with verse 12 YHWH's intervention should realize in two ways (Mays, 1994:213):

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[52] See translation note 6a for discussion on this phrase.

[53] See also Morris (1958:63).

First, the acts of YHWH should extend over a period of time so that the people can learn and not forget. Second, through YHWH's actions his rule should be visible to the ends of the world. YHWH is the "great God of the whole world" (Tanner, 2014b:502) and his rule spans "to the ends of the earth" (see 14d) and therefore it should not be strange to see the psalmist calling on God to exact his rule to the whole world (Leupold, 1959:442).

The phrase אַל־תָּחֹן ("show no mercy" – 6c) is negative, and, according to Harman (2011:443) it is strange to find תַּחֹן used in the negative. The only other place in the Psalms where תַּחֹן is used negatively is in Psalm 109:12, which is another Imprecatory Psalm (Harman, 2011:443). The expression of the psalmist appears harsh: "awake to punish the nations, show no mercy to all who treacherously act evil"[54] (cola 6bc). From this it should be clear that the psalmist is not only considering people who sin against YHWH, but also people who are actively choosing to live in contrast to YHWH's rule.

4.5.2   Verses 7-8 Description of enemies as dogs

The psalmist returns his focus to his present problem: the enemies that are trying to ambush him. The preposition כְּ is attached to the noun כָּלֶב ("dog") and likens the enemies to an animal that is mostly seen in the Old Testament as a contemptable, unclean animal (Kiuchi, 1997:640). Dogs were not just considered bad in ancient times but, at times, were worshiped and kept as companions (Tate, 2002:97). It is clear, however that the reference here is not positive, but rather derogatory (Schaefer, 2001:145). Paul uses the same metaphor when warning the believers in Philippi about their adversaries (Philippians 3:2). In Psalm 59 the enemies gang together like dogs

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[54] See note 6a above for a discussion of the phrase אַל־תָּחֹן כָּל־בֹּגְדֵי אָוֶן.

forming packs. There is no mistaking them as friendly or benign. These were feral dogs and a pack of feral dogs are dangerous.

The phrase יָשׁוּבוּ לָעֶרֶב ("they return at evening" – 7a)[55] gives the impression that they are constantly looking for the psalmist, returning to his home in the evenings when they were unable to find him during the day. It also implies that their search for him has been going on for some time (see Konkel, 1997a:716; Tate, 2002:93). The term יֶהֱמוּ ("they growl") can refer to various sounds made by dogs: howling, whining, or growling. The root of הָמָה implies uproar, noise, restlessness and could derive from an onomatopoeic nature (Domeris, 1997a:1043). The psalmist implies that the sound the dogs make is threatening and scary. These dogs are aggressive and they are out for blood. Their aggressive noises are connected to the next colon by a waw consecutive that expands colon 7a: they are returning and "they prowl around [the] city" (וִיסוֹבְבוּ עִיר). The noun סָבַב could also be translated as "surround" or "go round", but the context rather suggests that they are stalking through the city, searching for the psalmist; so "to prowl" is an acceptable translation. These people are arrogant and the psalmist later refers to their "pride" in colon 13c. They prowl around the city at night (7c), not because they are afraid of detection, but because it is essentially their nature: they are predators or perhaps more apt, they are scavengers. Although they prowl at night, they nonetheless are not afraid to noticeably move about the city (7c). Briggs & Briggs (1906:52) argue that the dogs do not prowl in the city, but rather around the surrounding areas of the city. In most cases the gates of a city are closed at night, which should prevent dangers, like these dogs, from entering the city at evening. However, the possibility that these dogs managed to enter the city after dark is a threatening reality (Hossfeld & Zenger,

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[55] See translation note 7a and 7b above for more details regarding this phrase.

2005:90). It strengthens the implication that the enemies are not outsiders, but insiders. The imagery fits: the enemies were sent to watch the house of the psalmist, which is within the city. Thus, the image of feral dogs prowling around inside the city at night heightens the sense of danger. Most likely the darkness hides them, with perhaps a fleeting glimpse of movement at times. However, they can be heard: their growling, while hidden under the cover of darkness, makes them more menacing and heightens fear. The psalmist knows they are there, he can hear them, but perhaps he cannot see them clearly.

The interjectory term הִנֵּה ("look!") is probably meant for YHWH in the same way as 4a. Following the dangerous situation described in verse 7 there is desperation in the cry of the psalmist. The imagery of dogs is continued in cola 8ab which further heightens the feeling of desperation and danger. The phrase יַבִּיעוּן בְּפִיהֶם ("they foam from the mouth") was already described in the translation note 8a. The foaming mouths further imply aggression and most probably refer, in a figurative sense, to words spoken by the enemies (see Beyer, 1997:15). Perhaps they are taunting the psalmist or boasting of what they are going to do if they finally catch the psalmist. In their aggression, and through the foaming lips, they bare their teeth at the psalmist. The metaphor of swords in the phrase חֲרָבוֹת בְּשִׂפְתוֹתֵיהֶם ("swords are on their lips") is an effective image for the exposed teeth of the growling pack of dogs. Some commentators prefer to understand this metaphor as referring to the words spoken by the enemies and therefore prefer to change חרבות ("swords"), to חרפות ("abuse" or "insults").[56] This is probably the implication of the image, but it is not necessary to change the metaphor. The psalmist

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[56] See translation note 8c.

clearly draws YHWH's attention to the high degree of aggression revealed in the enemies.

Despite preferring the darkness for roaming, the enemies are making no attempt at hiding their presence. They bare their teeth (8b), they openly roam around the city (7c), and they growl audibly (7b). Perhaps this indicates their certainty that the psalmist is defenceless. The question in colon 8c כִּי־מִי שֹׁמֵעַ ("For: who will hear?") could refer to YHWH, indicating that they do not think YHWH is able to save the psalmist, or it could indicate the isolation of the psalmist: there is no one who can help him. They are mocking the psalmist, most probably in an attempt to scare him even more, as well as ridiculing "God as the guarantor of the order of law" (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:90). The phrase כִּי־מִי ("for who?") consists of a conjunction and the interrogative personal pronoun מִי and refers to a person (Kaiser jr., 1980:503). Although it is possible that the enemies are referring to YHWH not hearing, the possibility should be retained that the enemies are not referring to anyone in particular.

4.5.3   Verses 9-11 Refrain of hope and confidence in YHWH

The aggression and arrogance of the enemies only strengthen the resolve of the psalmist. He expresses his certainty that YHWH will hear. There is a surprising confidence in the words of the psalmist. The enemies are closing in and they are mocking him (8c) but the psalmist reacts with confidence. The phrase "but you" (וְאַתָּה – 9a) should be read as a direct response to the question in colon 8c: YHWH will indeed hear. He will not only hear, but he will laugh at the palmist's enemies (תִּשְׂחַק־לָמוֹ). לָמוֹ ("at them") is the indirect object of this colon. YHWH's laughter is specifically aimed at the enemies. Not only that, YHWH is so powerful; he mocks all nations ("לְכָל־גּוֹיִם"); he will laugh at them (תִּשְׂחַק־לָמוֹ). Both verbs are Qal imperfects, which imply actions

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that are ongoing. Colon 9a forms a synonymous parallelism with colon 9b: YHWH will laugh at the enemies (וְאַתָּה יְהוָה תִּשְׂחַק־לָמֹו), he will mock all nations (תִּלְעַג לְכָל־גֹּויִם). Laughter functions in the Psalms as an expression of YHWH's complete and utter sovereignty over all, especially those who, in rebellion, do not bow down to YHWH (see Allen, 1997b:1228; Payne, 1980:763). The word לָעַג ("mock") are usually used in relation to YHWH after a rebellion against YHWH or a vicious attack on others and precedes the commencement of YHWH's wrath and retribution (Powell, 1997:803). Again we find the psalmist contrasting the enemies with YHWH. The greatness of YHWH far exceeds the local scale. YHWH is truly global and has the power to act, not only against the enemies of the psalmist, but against all nations and evil-doers. The psalmist finds hope in YHWH and he reaffirms that he is safe with YHWH, even if YHWH is still hidden (see Kraus, 1993:542). YHWH is his "strength" (עֻזֹּו – 10a)[57] and his "high refuge" (מִשְׂגַּבִּי – 10b). The word מִשְׂגַּב contrasts the rising of the enemies (2b). YHWH will keep the psalmist safe and out of reach. YHWH will lift him above the danger and from this safe vantage point he will be able to look down on his adversaries (see 11b). The verb יַרְאֵנִי ("will let me look" – 11b) implies a sense of victory over his enemies. The victory will be experienced by the psalmist, but it is solely based on the actions of YHWH. Hossfeld and Zenger (2005:85) find stability in the image of YHWH as a high refuge. The image used for YHWH is static and fixed, but then in a positive sense. The image of the enemies is fluid (roaming around). YHWH is secure, stable, and safe. The construct אֶשְׁמֹרָה ("I will watch for you" – 10a)[58] indicates that the psalmist is still waiting for YHWH to act on his behalf, but there is a certainty in the voice of

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[57] See translation note 10a for more detail on עֻזֹּו.

[58] See translation note 10b for more on אֶשְׁמֹרָה.

the psalmist. The conjunction כִּי introduces the reason for the psalmist's certainty: "For God is my high refuge" ("כִּי־אֱלֹהִים מִשְׂגַּבִּי" – 10b).

The psalmist further bases his certainty on a character trait of YHWH: his חֶסֶד ("grace").[59] Despite the obvious translation problems here the psalmist places his hope in YHWH's grace. As Kraus (1993:542) remarks: "the fact that Yahweh meets human beings benevolently is in the OT always demonstrated by victory over the enemies." The psalmist already sees the victory of YHWH, even if YHWH has not yet met him. This expression underscores the psalmist's certainty of salvation against his enemies. The Pi'el verb יְקַדְּמֵנִי ("he will meet me" – 11a) intensifies the psalmist's certainty that this meeting, when it does occur, will result in him being lifted up to a higher refuge (see 10b) and him experiencing the advantage of looking down, most probably in triumph, on his enemies (see 11b). This triumph is the work of YHWH, not the psalmist's. The verb יַרְאֵנִי ("he will let me look" – 11b) is a Hiphil with pronominal suffix indicating that YHWH is the cause of the psalmist's advantage. This is an expression of trust and the belief that through YHWH's victory over his enemies, the psalmist will find YHWH's grace.

4.5.4 Verses 12-14 - An Appeal to God

After expressing his confidence in YHWH, the psalmist now calls on YHWH to act, and act decisively. The psalmist is confident that YHWH will prevail; Colon 12a contains a negative connected to a Qal jussive 2nd person verb with a prenominal suffix (תַּהַרְגֵם – "do not kill them"). Although this phrase may seem like a command ordering YHWH, the context of the Psalm should rather indicate this as a strong wish. It does

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[59] See translation note 11a for discussion of the translation problems with אֱלֹהֵי חַסְדִּי.

appear to be a strange request, especially in relation to cola 14ab where he wishes that they be destroyed (כַּלֵּה – 14ab). The psalmist wishes that his enemies must be destroyed, but not outright (אַל־תַּהַרְגֵם – 12a). The reason for this strange request is revealed in colon 12b: the phrase פֶּן־יִשְׁכְּחוּ עַמִּי ("lest my people will forget" - 12a). The phrase consists of a conjunction followed by a Qal imperfect (יִשְׁכְּחוּ – "they will forget"). According to Hamilton (1980:726) the conjunction פֶּן is, with the exception of two occurrences (2 Sam. 20:6 and 2 Kgs. 2:16), always followed by an imperfect verb. The possibility of the people forgetting what transpired should be avoided. The downfall of the wicked should stand as a reminder for the whole community. If justice is meted out quickly, the people will also quickly forget. Therefore the process should not be swift to give the whole community chance to realise the error of evil. "Verse 11 therefore does not contain an inhumane impulse, but the urgent desire that the demonstration of God's intervention may be visible everywhere and of enduring effectiveness. If the enemy is 'scattered' and then thrown down and in wrath annihilated, the worldwide intervention of the righteousness of God will be able to be recognized*"* (Kraus, 1993:542).

Again, the contrast between YHWH and the wicked is highlighted. The wicked are dangerous because they are so powerful, but YHWH is even more dangerous: his power will scatter them and bring them down (12b). Two Hiphil imperatives with the 3rd person plural suffix are used: הֲנִיעֵמוֹ ("scatter them") and הוֹרִידֵמוֹ ("bring them down"). The Hiphil indicates that YHWH is the one acting against the enemies. He is the cause of their downfall. The psalmist is not strong enough to counter their attack. The enemies are like a pack of feral dogs (7bc and 8ab) and they are rising up against the psalmist (2b). YHWH will meet the enemies on both fronts and he will overpower them. The dangerous pack of dogs will be scattered (12b) and the power of YHWH will bring down (12b) those who rose up (2b).

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The imagery of protection is repeated from colon 10b with מָגִנֵּנוּ ("our shield" – 12c). The imagery does move from the singular in colon 10b (מִשְׂגַּבִּי – "my high refuge") to plural (מָגִנֵּנוּ "our shield"). When YHWH, their shield, acts against all forms of evil, he is able to protect not only the psalmist, but all his people against the attacks of the enemies.

Verse 13 indicates the root of the enemies' evil: their pride. The word pride is doubly framed (see Basson, 2006:196; Schaefer, 2001:145) and can be illustrated as:

A	חַטַּאת־פִּימוֹ ("the sins of their mouths")		A	וּמֵאָלָה ("and the curse")
		C בְּגְאוֹנָם ("in their pride)		
B	דְּבַר־שְׂפָתֵימוֹ ("Words of their lips")		B	וּמִכַּחַשׁ יְסַפֵּרוּ ("and the deceit they speak")

Despite the wish that YHWH will not be swift in his judgment (12a) the psalmist asks for destruction twice (כַּלֵּה). In both cases the Pi'el imperative is used to intensify the wish that they "do not exist" (אֵינֵמוֹ – 14b). Colon 14 does not contain a subject, but the 3ʳᵈ person plural pronominal suffix in 14b indicates that the psalmist has "them", the enemies, in mind. The psalmist is praying that YHWH will "destroy them in wrath" and "destroy them and they do not exist." The phrase אֵינֵמוֹ ("they do not exist") could be a hyperbole indicating that the power of the enemies should be broken (see 12bc), but the phrase בְּחֵמָה ("in wrath") perhaps indicates that the psalmist has the physical destruction of the enemies in mind. It should be noted that YHWH is the causative actor in this wish. The psalmist does not have the power to destroy his enemies, but YHWH does. According to Davidson (1902:199) the phrase כַּלֵּה וְאֵינֵמוֹ ("destroy [them] so that they do not exist") is a final or purpose sentence. This highlights the purpose of כַּלֵּה: the

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physical termination of the enemies. The verb כָּלָה is frequently used to indicate the frailty or end of human life (Domeris & Van Dam, 1997:642).

But, and this is important, the end of the enemies should only come בְחֵמָה ("in wrath" – 14a). The psalmist is still speaking to YHWH, thus the phrase בְחֵמָה refers to YHWH's wrath. The noun חֵמָה ("wrath") appears frequently in the Old Testament. In some books, like Proverbs, it is used for human anger and can indicate extreme anger which leads to a certain result, for example anger leading to acts of violence or the loss of compassion for the perpetrator (see Struthers, 1997:171). Struthers (1997:171) further indicates that in the prophetic books, like Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the word is mainly used with reference to the appearance of the wrath of YHWH, but only after numerous infringements by Israel which finally ended YHWH's patience: "Thus, the picture presented by the nom. חֵמָה is of an intense emotion that results in judgment. This emotion, stronger than anger (אַף), is displayed with the greatest force in the writings of Jeremiah and Ezekiel" (Struthers, 1997:171). Similarly Van Groningen (1980:374) indicates that the root refers to a rising in heat and is used in the Old Testament indicating an increase in a person's anger. It indicates an intense anger that can only be abated by some form of retribution, or as Van Groningen (1980:374) expresses the use in terms of YHWH: "once God is provoked to ḥēmâ, satisfaction of some kind must be made by the execution of judgment upon the cause of it." The psalmist is asking YHWH to act in much more than mere anger: YHWH should act when his patience has run out and his חֵמָה is kindled, which according to the psalmist reckoning should be about now. This indicates that the imprecation is not based on the psalmist's vengeful desires, but rather on the repeated actions chosen by the enemies. Their actions are wilful and the reason for their coming downfall. Once the patience of YHWH has ended, the resulting judgment could only result in complete destruction. But, the enemies' end should not

be swift, otherwise the people will forget. The psalmist's wish is that the destruction of the enemies should result in something more than just their end: the rule of YHWH should be revealed (cola 14bc). The power of YHWH, as was already revealed in verse 9, is extensive. Not only is he able to laugh at (9a) and mock (9b) all the nations, his rule is not limited just to the territory of Israel (14b), but to the ends of the earth (14d). The phrase לְאַפְסֵי הָאָרֶץ literally means "to the nothing of the earth" and indicates that nothing extends beyond the rule of YHWH. The limitlessness of YHWH's rule should be known (וְיֵדְעוּ – "and let them know" – 14c). This could refer to the people of YHWH (12a), the enemies, or all the nations (6b, 9a, 9b). וְיֵדְעוּ most probably refers to everyone. The main focus however is that this knowledge should be the result of the power of YHWH scattering and bringing down the enemies (12b), gradually resulting in YHWH's חֵמָה ("wrath") leading to their complete destruction (14ab).
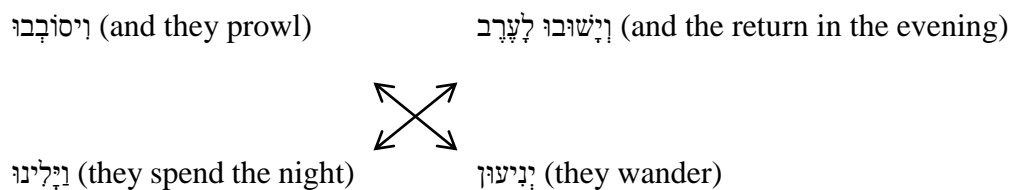
4.5.5   Verses 15-16 - Description of enemies as dogs

The psalmist returns his focus to those who are acting in ways that are testing YHWH's patience and leading to his wrath: the enemies. Verses 15-16 are a basic reiteration of verses 7-8. The enemies are likened to feral dogs. The focus on the evening activities of the dogs seems to heighten the fear factor. The quest of the dogs, roaming in search of food, is fixated and relentless (16a). Correspondingly the enemies have a singular purpose: they want to capture the psalmist and they will not rest until they do (colon 16b). Davidson (1998:189) identifies this as proof of their perverse nature and the reality of corruption: once corruption is born it becomes more and more difficult to satisfy.

The psalmist is aware of their presence (he can hear them growl and prowl around the city), but the darkness adds to the sense of danger: he can hear them, but they are not

clearly visible. The darkness further underscores the wickedness of the enemies. Darkness is used in various places in the Old Testament to hide wicked deeds. In Psalm 11:2 the wicked fires arrows at the righteous heart in darkness. In Psalm 91:5-6 two evil forces, terror and pestilence, are active at night during darkness. Proverbs 4:19 likens the way of the wicked to darkness. In the New Testament John 3:19 identifies the evil deeds of men with a love for darkness. The phrase אִם־לֹא יִשְׂבְּעוּ וַיָּלִינוּ ("if they do not get their fill they lodge") is difficult, but according to Dahood (2008b:73) it should be read as a double negative "if they are *not* sated, they do *not* retire" (emphasis his). Despite the difficulty in this phrase, the implication is clear: They are relentless and they will not cease until they have caught the psalmist.

This is highlighted by a chiastic structure found in verses 15 and 16:

וִיסוֹבְבוּ (and they prowl)　　　　　　וְיָשׁוּבוּ לָעֶרֶב (and the return in the evening)

וַיָּלִינוּ (they spend the night)　　　　　　יְנִיעוּן (they wander)

The purpose of this chiastic structure is to emphasize the danger and dire straits of the psalmist. His enemies are tenacious: even if the psalmist manages to evade his pursuers they will not cease. It will be impossible to constantly evade them.

These verses give the indication that they have been pursuing the psalmist for a certain period of time. The constant returning and roaming of the dogs indicates that they were not successful, which might have been frustrating for the psalmist's enemies. This could explain why they are forced to stay ("spend the night"). The phrase could also be translated as "whining" or "murmuring" which Kidner (1973:232) prefers because it contrasts nicely with the arrogance of the previous imagery in verses 7-8 and it also

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heightens the certainty and triumph of the psalmist in verses 17-18. The enemies went from growling and foaming at the mouth to being unable to grab their quarry and whining like dogs, while the psalmist went from being scared to being triumphant in YHWH.

4.5.6 Verses 17-18 - Refrain about hope and confidence in YHWH

The phrase וַאֲנִי ("and I" – 17a) contrasts the psalmist with the enemies in the previous cola. They appear frustrated and unable to reach their goal. The psalmist is still in very real danger but he will relax and sing of YHWH's strength (אָשִׁיר עֻזֶּךָ – 17a). As the Psalm progresses the psalmist's certainty grows. The expansive rule and power of YHWH give the psalmist enough reason to burst forth in song (אָשִׁיר). YHWH has not acted yet, but the psalmist already expresses his delight in YHWH's strength (עֻזֶּךָ – 17a). In the Old Testament YHWH exercises "his strength" (עֻזֶּךָ) on behalf of the righteous, especially against their foes, and it carries the figurative meaning to describe a sense of security and safety in the righteous (Schultz, 1980:660). The psalmist's song will be quite enthusiastic and loud. The verb רָנַן is mostly used to express happiness, joy, or relief (Longman III, 1997:1129). The verb אָשִׁיר is in the Pi'el form which indicates intense joy or relief. In this case it is fitting. The mere thought of YHWH's strength manages to calm the psalmist. Colon 17a is connected to colon 17b by a conjunction which forms a parallelism:

Colon 17a	Colon 17b
אָשִׁיר עֻזֶּךָ ("I will sing")	וַאֲרַנֵּן ("and I will rejoice")
חַסְדֶּךָ ("of your loyalty")	עֻזֶּךָ ("of your strength")

The reason for the psalmist's joyful singing is both YHWH's strength and loyalty, חֶסֶד ("loyalty") here refers to a specific situation where YHWH shows his lovingkindness by rescuing the righteous from troubles or enemies (Brown *et al.*, 2000:338). It is this constant reality of YHWH's חֶסֶד ("loyalty") that forms a motif in the Psalms where the righteous is thankful for being rescued (Bauer & Gordon, 1997:213). In rare occasions, like here in Psalm 59, it refers to the eventual salvation still to come (Bauer & Gordon, 1997:213). Even though the psalmist is still awaiting salvation, the strength and loyalty of YHWH bring relief. His experience of relief will carry him through the darkness to the morning (17b). This is an important theme in the Psalm (Schaefer, 2001:146). The coming of nighttime is a time of danger and the psalmist needs to be on the lookout. He is especially on the lookout for YHWH (v.9). This is because the enemies are freely roaming during the night, which carries the symbolic element of evil and fear. The enemies are dangerous and they hunt the psalmist in a ferocious and powerful pack. As the night progresses the certainty of the psalmist grows. The phrase לַבֹּקֶר ("to the morning") is for the psalmist the turning point: The morning is coming and when morning comes it will be shown that YHWH is loyal (חֶסֶד – 17b). Colon 18a

(עֻזִּי אֵלֶיךָ אֲזַמֵּרָה) is very similar to colon 10a (עֻזּוֹ אֵלֶיךָ אֶשְׁמֹרָה), but as Davidson (1998:190) points out, there is an important difference: the phrase "I will watch for you" (אֶשְׁמֹרָה – 10a) is replaced with אֲזַמֵּרָה ("I will sing praises to you" – 18a). The hope the psalmist expresses will be fulfilled and the psalmist's expectations will result in the singing of praises (see Davidson, 1998:190). It is important to note that YHWH has not yet acted on behalf of the psalmist. It should still occur in the future. Nonetheless, the psalmist is brimming with confidence (colon 11b).

4.6   LITERARY GENRE AND LIFE SETTING

4.6.1   Literary Genre

Psalm 59 is difficult to categorize. Briggs and Briggs (1906:50) call Psalm 59 "exceedingly difficult", while Tate (2002:95) calls the Psalm "complex." Some scholars see the need to "clean up" the Psalm and to make sense of the variety of genres found in verses 4-6 and the repetitions found in verses 15, 16, and 18 (Gerstenberger, 1998:236). "In fact, it is difficult for us to keep up with the modes of speech as they change from complaint to affirmation of innocence, petition, imprecation, and invocation. In particular, the latter is enigmatic" (Gerstenberger, 1998:236). The Psalm contains elements of both an individual and a communal lament. Although the Psalm contains some elements of a prayer of the accused, there is a lack of judicial context (Basson, 2006:189). Tate (2002:92) identifies mainly personal elements in the Psalm, but there is some communal elements in verses 6, 9, 12-14. These communal elements in the Psalm, like the nations, God's rule, and judgment over the nations do favour the classification of a national lament (VanGemeren, 1991:409). There is a hint that the psalmist is representing the larger community in prayer (Mays, 1994:213). Psalm 59 could be both, although Weiser (1962:434) argues that the Psalm could not be a communal lament. Rather, it was an individual Psalm that was later used and recited in the temple among the larger Yahweh cult (Weiser, 1962:434). Some scholars agree that this individual lament was later used within the larger community, perhaps even on a national level (Dahood, 2008a:66; Gerstenberger, 1998:238; Mays, 1994:212; Tate, 2002:94; Tesh & Zorn, 1999:405).

Dahood (2008a:66) prefers to call it a "royal lament" with the king as speaker and representative of the community. It is possible that the Psalm expresses an original

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prayer by the king while facing local and foreign enemies (Davidson, 1998:187; Tate, 2002:95). The psalmist, on behalf of himself and the community, calls on God to intervene. The Psalm gives the indication that the enemies are attacking on two fronts: both local and foreign. Tate (2002:95) also argues for a royal context, and regards the Psalm as a prayer of a king that uses traditional language, which, with the references to the nations, would become meaningful when read by later worshipers, most probably in post-exilic communities (see also Gerstenberger, 1998:238). Kraus (1993:540), however, sees no indication of the psalmist being a king and leaves open the possibility that the Psalm could have originated in pre-exilic times.

The Psalm contains "startling language in describing the judgment of the wicked" (Steveson, 2007:226–227). The desire for God's intervention is not borne from a desire of vengeance on the psalmist's part. He is asking for YHWH's intervention and judgment on the enemies. YHWH's intervention does however, within the psalmist's mind set, imply destruction. However, the intervention of YHWH is much more than just the destruction of the psalmist's enemies. The results of God's intervention carries a much more positive result, as Mays (1994:213) points out: *"God is to intervene in a way that has a twofold result. First, the punishment is to be extended over a period of time so that the community will realize that God is at work and not "forget" God (v. 11). Second, God's intervention is to be a revelation to the ends of the earth that God is ruler in and over Israel (v.13)."*

4.6.2 Life settings

The Psalm identifies its origin to a specific period in David's life (see discussion above for more detail), but despite the concrete allusions found in the Psalm, it is not possible to determine the personal circumstances of the psalmist (Tanner, 2014b:498; Weiser,

1962:434). It is however clear that the psalmist is pursued by dangerous and determined enemies. The psalmist uses many metaphors to indicate the aggression of the enemies, most notably the use of animal metaphors. Tate (2002:95–96; see also Kraus, 1993:540) states that the Psalm could be pre-exilic and the heading and title places it in David's career before he became king, but the superscription should best be understood as indicating "how the Psalm was read at one (later) stage of its history."

Kidner (1973:211) argues that the Psalm should be dated after David's coronation. It is probable that 1 Samuel 19:11 was chosen by scribes as the backdrop for this Psalm (Gerstenberger, 1998:235–236; Tanner, 2014b:498). Although it is probable that scribes composed this Psalm with David in mind, it is more probable that it was an older Psalm being understood within David's life situation (Tate, 2002:95). The particular setting in David's life would offer a perfect time when David would have called out to God for help, and the realities of the enemies sent by Saul fit the metaphor of "prowling dogs" (verses 6 and 14) quite well (see Tanner, 2014b:498). During a later stage of Israel's history enemies could have surrounded the city, like the soldiers of Saul surrounded David's house and this could have made the connection for the scribes to choose 1 Samuel 19:11 as backdrop (Gerstenberger, 1998:235–236).

4.7   CANONICAL CONTEXT OF PSALM 59

There are various elements connecting Psalm 59 with the neighbouring Psalms. Hossfeld and Zenger (2005:91–92) identify Psalm 59 as the closing Psalm in a group of individual Psalms against enemies. There is a strong correlation between the titles of Psalms 56-60. Psalms 52-58 forms a group of personal prayers while Psalms 60 is a communal Psalm leading to the next group of Psalms (61-64) that could be identified as Psalms of confidence (see Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:91–92; Tanner, 2014b:498). The

confidence expressed in Psalm 59 is carried over to the next group (Hossfeld & Zenger, 2005:91–92), thus turning Psalm 59 into a bridge; connecting the personal prayers of Psalms 52-58 with the communal prayer in Psalm 60 (Tanner, 2014:498).

However, there is a very strong connection between Psalms 52 to 60. All 5 Psalms are intended for the music director. All 5 Psalms are Miktams. Psalms 57 to 59 are all according to Al-tashheth (most probably a certain musical tune), while Psalms 56 and 60 are according to two different tunes. These Psalms appears to be structured, with Psalms 56 and 60 forming an inclusion with Psalms 57-59. Both Psalms 57 and 59 indicate an historical context regarding Saul as the background for the Psalm. Looking at the structure below it appears as if Psalm 58 could be the focal point of this structure.

Psalm	To	According to[60]	Reason	Type
56	the music director	Jonath elem rehokim	David caught by Philistines	Miktam
57	the music director	Al-tashheth	Saul trying to kill David	Miktam
58	the music director	Al-tashheth		Miktam
59	the music director	Al-tashheth	Saul sending men to kill David	Miktam
60	the music director	Shushan Eduth	Rebels trying to kill David	Miktam

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[60] Transcription according to the New American Standard Bible.

Further similarities between these Psalms also exist. Both Psalm 58 and 59 are complaints and alternate between describing the enemies and then expressing a curse, or prayer for vindication. The injustices of the powerful (58:1-2) becomes the source of the poet's suffering (59:1-4) (Schaefer, 2001:144). If Psalm 59 has been written after the exile it would also fit with Psalms 56 and 57 which, according to Wilson (2002:849) have been adapted to fit the situation of a postexilic community. Various words and themes are shared between these Psalms. The theme of harmful words spoken by the enemies in Psalm 59:8 also prominently features in Psalms 52, 55, 56, 57, 58 (see Eaton, 2003:225). Psalm 56 shares "be merciful unto me, O God" with 57:1 and "panting enemies" with 57:3. The animal imagery of "panting all day" in Psalm 56:2 is similar in sense to Psalm 59:7 "dogs foaming at the mouth." The enemies that lie in wait are also shared with Psalms 54:4 and 59:10. The end of the enemies, going down to Sheol, is shared between Psalms 56:7, 55:23 and 59:11. The "pit of destruction" is shared between Psalms 52:2 and 55:11. "Words as swords" is shared by 52:2, 55:21, and 59:7. The appearance of arrows and swords variously appears in Psalms 55:18, 56:2, 57:14 and 58:7.

Psalm 59 is part of a group of personal and communal Psalms that focus on the reality of enemies endangering the psalmist. Through the use of primarily animal imagery, the enemies are shown to be ruthless, tenacious, and dangerous. Like Psalm 59, these Psalms also express the hope and believe that YHWH will act on behalf of the psalmist against the enemies. From Psalm 59 onwards the mood of the Psalms is becoming more confident and they move from personal prayers to communal prayers.

4.8   IMPLICATIONS OF PSALM 59

The psalmist in Psalm 59 is confronted with the reality of some very dangerous enemies. The Psalmist calls them "men of bloodshed" (verse 3) and "strong men" (verse 4). They are attacking him with the purpose to kill him (verse 1). The identity of the enemies is not known, but the title of the Psalm identifies them as men sent by Saul (verse 1). These enemies rise up against him (verse 2). Similar to Psalms 7 and 35, the psalmist uses animal imagery to describe his enemies. They are like a pack of feral dogs; hunting him, roaming through the city to find him (verse 7).

He fears for his life, but he has no idea why they are attacking him. He did nothing wrong (verses 4-5) and he desperately pleads his innocence. The psalmist sees his only hope for deliverance in the presence of YHWH. YHWH is not visible yet, and he calls on YHWH to "awake" (verse 6) and "rise up" (verse 5). Against the rising enemies (verse 2), the psalmist prays that YHWH would also rise up and meet him (verse 5). He is calling on YHWH to come forward and act. He is certain that YHWH will act and lift him out of danger (verse 2). His fear is real, but even bigger than his fear is his certainty that YHWH will act (verse 10-11). The last part of the Psalm (verse 17-18) is a joyful expression of his certainty and trust in YHWH.

It is important to see that YHWH is called upon to "awake", "rise up", and "come to see." Also, judgment is linked to the rising up and awakening of YHWH. This will be linked to the call of Μαράνα θά later on. The psalmist is certain that the moment YHWH comes, the enemies will be destroyed. The psalmist hopes for the destruction of his enemies (verse 14), but interestingly he do not wants them to be destroyed outright (verse 12). Their evil deeds (see verses 3, 6, 8, and 13) should be witnessed by YHWH's people so that they could learn not to do this evil themselves (verse 12). YHWH should scatter them (verse 12) and bring down (verse 12) those who rose up (verse 2) against the psalmist.

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CHAPTER 5: THE CONTEXT OF THE CURSE

5.1 THE CURSE TRADITION IN THE PSALTER AND THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

In chapter 1 it was argued that many Psalms could be identified as imprecatory in nature, or at least as containing imprecatory elements. There is no consensus among scholars regarding the precise number, but considering the lists of the 17 scholars referred to in chapter 1, 43 Psalms were listed as containing cursing elements. That is almost a third of the Psalms. This indicates that imprecations were quite extensively part of Israel's worship. Actually, cursing was more common in Ancient Israel and the Ancient Near East than most realize. According to John Day (2000:63) cursing was "an integral part of life" for people living in the Ancient Near Eastern milieu, to such an extent that it could be "proper to speak of a common ancient Near Eastern curse tradition, from which the Psalmists of Israel drew" (Day, 2000:62). The Old Testament prophetic books also contain numerous examples of imprecations. Luc (1999:403–405) argues that these prophets parallel the Imprecatory Psalms.[61] He further argues that, based on the covenants as a general biblical basis, the imprecations indicate a concern for the social justice and destiny of Israel living in the midst of hostile nations (Luc, 1999:403–405). The large number of imprecatory passages found in the Psalter, as well as other parts of the Bible, should not be surprising. Although finding them in the Bible is shocking for most modern readers, they would not have "aroused the moral indignation of the ancient Israelite" (Day, 2000:63). Cursing played a major role in Ancient Near Eastern life, but as Fotopoulus (2014:275–278) indicates, cursing were

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[61] Luc cites Isa 26:11; Jer. 11:20-22; Jer. 19:21; Is 14:20-21; 47:3; 44:11; Jer. 50:27; Dan 4:23; Jer. 13:10 and Mal 2:12 as examples.

prominent in almost every period of humanity, through a wide geographical range, by almost every culture and religion since early times for more than a millennium. This means that the curses found within the Psalter are not to be considered strange or out of place by modern readers. It was part of life for people living in those time periods.

The previous three chapters considered only Psalms 7, 35, and 59 in more detail. These Psalms were chosen based on specific criteria, detailed in chapter 1: (1) most scholars consider them as imprecatory (or at least containing imprecatory elements) and (2) these Psalms contain the imperative forms of the words עור, קיץ, קום.[62] The verbs קום (Psalm 7:7; 35:2, 59:2) and קיץ (Psalm 35:23; 59:5) appear as Hiphil Imperatives, while עור appears as both Qal Imperatives (Psalm 7:7; 59:5) and Hiphil Imperative (Psalm 35:23). The words עור, קיץ, קום are not directly associated with curses but in all three Psalms YHWH is the subject of these imperatives. As will be indicated later, the imprecations cannot be effected unless YHWH acts. In this sense, the imperatives could be linked to the curses, albeit indirectly. The psalmists are in danger and their only salvation is YHWH. These imperatives call on YHWH to implement the imprecations and if YHWH acts, it would lead to the realization of the imprecations, which would lead to the salvation of the psalmists. Before this can happen, YHWH needs to rise, or stir, or awake. Action is needed and therefore the psalmists use imperatives to call on YHWH. There exists a connection between the imprecations spoken by the Psalmists, and the imperatives asking YHWH to act. In a similar fashion, as will be argued later, there exists a connection between the ἀνάθεμα (curse) and Μαράνα θά (imperative) in 1

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[62] In these three Psalms, the verbs קום("to awake" - Psalm 7:7; 35:2, 59:2) and קיץ("to arise" - Psalm 35:23; 59:5) appear as Hiphil Imperatives, while עור ("to lift or stir") appears as both Qal Imperatives (Psalm 7:7; 59:5) and Hiphil Imperative (Psalm 35:23).

Corinthians 16:22.[63] If Μαράνα θά is an enforcement of the ἀνάθεμα (as will be argued later) it could offer a possible key to reconsider the Imprecatory Psalms. Paul's curses are warnings for those who do not love the Lord. They could be considered as enemies of the Lord, and this could perhaps be similar to the enemies of the psalmist who are also seen as enemies of YHWH. It could be important to note here that there is no concensus among all scholars whether the Hebrew terms יהוה and אֱלֹהִים can simply be equated with the New Testatment θεός, κύριος or δεσπότης.[64] As pointed out earlier, also, this type of philological or conceptual study falls outside the scope of this thesis and the presuppotion of this study is that the deity in the Old Testament refers to the same deity as expressed in later trinitarian doctrine and confession and confirmed by most devotional readers on a weekly basis in the Apostolic Creed.

It should also be noted that the motivations behind the curses in the Psalms and 1 Corinthians do differ. In the case of the Psalms the curses are primarily rooted in the actions of the psalmists' enemies against the psalmist and therefore the enemies could be considered more personal. The curse in 1 Corinthians is not directed at personal enemies, but rather people who "do not love the Lord." Those who do not love the Lord, could however, be considered as enemies of the Lord. In the Psalms, the enemies of the psalmist are also considered to be enemies of YHWH. On face value the enemies in the

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[63] The word "curse" is not found within the 3 Psalms under consideration. The wishes expressed by the psalmists do however conform to the general definition of a curse (see chapter 1).This study does not equate the curses within the Psalms with the anathema in 1 Corinthians, but rather focuses on understanding curses within a broader context. The curse will not be considered within a philological or tradition-historical context.

[64] The purpose is not to do a literal or conceptual study of the transmission of the words יהוה, אֱלֹהִים, θεός, κύριος and δεσπότης. Most devototional readers accept the premise that the Lord God spoken about in the Old Testament is the same entity refered to in the New Testament as Theos and Kurios, of course with the added dimension of the Trinity. So for the purpose of building a hermeneutical key focused primarily on helping devotional readers to a better understanding of the usability of the curses within the Psalms from a Christian perspectives, the premise that the Old and New Testament God and Lord refers to the same divinity is accepted.

Psalms are endangering the existence of the psalmist only. Their actions are premeditated and focused on destroying, or at least causing grievous harm to the psalmists. They are ruthless and stronger than the psalmist, and they will, by all probability, continue to seek his destruction until they succeed. But, considering the covenantal framework, which will be discussed in more detail below, the enemies can be considered as more than mere personal enemies.

The Psalms distinguish two types of people: the righteous and the wicked (Mays, 1994:35; Wenham, 2005:188–189). The wicked are against all that the righteous stands for. They exploit those weaker than them, they do not bother with living according to YHWH's law and if they do worship at all, it is a false "lips service to God but they do not practice it" (Wenham, 2005:190). Within the covenantal framework the actions of the enemies not only pit them against the psalmists, but also against the rule of YHWH. The psalmist identifies his enemies as people who are bent on seeking his destruction and ruin, in most cases without due course. Actions like these are hated by YHWH, as Proverbs 16:16-19 (ESV) indicates; expounding seven things that are hated by the Lord: "haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers." Reading the complaints of the psalmists, it is clear that their enemies' actions include a number of those listed in Proverbs. These actions of the enemies set them against YHWH's rule. It is important to realize that the enemies referred to by the psalmists are not mere individuals who slighted the psalmist, or who caused him some problems or pain either by accident or on purpose. The enemies are determined to kill the psalmist. They are literally actively and purposefully seeking every opportunity to cause the psalmist's demise. The three Psalms use very strong metaphors for the enemies. All three metaphors are quite commonly used in the

Psalms to depict enemies. The enemies are depicted as 1) hunters or trappers trying to catch their prey (67:5; 35:7-8; 59:7), 2) attacking militias (59:4) and 3) attacking animals (7:2; 35:21). The metaphors depict the enemies as devious, cunning and persistent. Their focus is on destroying the psalmist and it is their wicked persistence that also pits them against YHWH rule.

In the case of 1 Corinthians those who are ἀνάθεμα is setting themselves against the Lord by not loving him. For the psalmists the enemies, through their conduct, were also acting against YHWH's rule, thus the hostility of the enemies in the Psalms "is set within the context of the reign of the Lord" (Mays, 1994:35). The enemies in the Psalms are taking deliberate action that is in violation of YHWH's rule. These actions of the enemies made them the enemies of YHWH as well. And God takes vengeance on his enemies (see Nahum 1:2). From the psalmists' viewpoint they cannot be stopped easily and the only option left is YHWH. For the psalmist to be saved YHWH should actively come to his aid. YHWH should act and declare judgment, even if judgment means destruction of the enemies. Since these enemies are acting against YHWH's rule, the psalmist's call on God to punish and judge the enemies in accordance with God's very own covenant curses upon the godless (Peels, 1995:240).

All three Psalms focus on expressing the hope that YHWH would act decisively against the enemies. The uses of the imperative forms of קום, קיץ, עור show desperateness: time is limited and the enemies are closing in. These imperative verbs ask YHWH to act quickly. The desires expressed are harsh, but these expressions are born out of a very desperate situation. As John Day argues "the Psalmist views his enemy as having grossly violated the covenant, and consequently, as deserving the covenant's curses" (2000:69).

In Psalm 7 the psalmist asks YHWH to end the wickedness of his enemies (7:10). The references to YHWH sharpening his sword, threading his bow, preparing weapons of death, and making fiery arrows (7:13-14) imply a deadly reaction is expected from YHWH. But YHWH appears to be inactive. Therefore the expressed desire that YHWH should rise in anger and lift himself against the rage of his adversaries and awake to declare judgment (7:7-8). In this reference, judgment should be declared both upon the righteous and the wicked. However, the judgment of YHWH will lead to the end of the enemies and the establishment of the righteous (7:10). The implication of Psalm 7 is that YHWH should come and avenge the righteous by passing judgment on the wicked.

Similarly, Psalm 35 use strong military images against the enemies. YHWH is called to take up shield, buckler, spear and javelin in pursuit of the enemies (35:2-3). YHWH's actions should lead to the enemies being ashamed and humiliated (35:4), they should be like chaff in the wind with the angel of YHWH pushing them (35:5), their way should be dark and slippery with the angel of YHWH pursuing them (35:6), devastation should come upon the enemy without knowing and he should fall in his own devastation (35:8), and they should be ashamed and humiliated; wearing shame and dishonor (35:26). The psalmist calls on YHWH to contend against his enemies, to fight those who fight him, arise to his support, to meet his pursuers with spear and javelin (35:1-3), and to awake and rise in judgment (35:23). Again, like in Psalm 7, the realization of the psalmist salvation through the destruction of the enemies can only happen if YHWH becomes active.

In Psalm 59 the psalmist calls on YHWH to show no mercy to evildoers (59:6) and although he apparently does not want YHWH to kill them at first (35:12) it becomes clear that he does have their complete destruction in mind (35:14). The enemies are

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described in vivid metaphorical details and against these odds the psalmist knows he can't prevail. Therefore, the psalmist calls on YHWH to deliver him from his enemies (59:2-3), to rise up and see (59:5), to awake and punish all nations, showing no mercy (59:6), and to meet the psalmist (59:11). The psalmist is certain that the moment YHWH acts, he will be saved. But, in order to be saved the psalmist calls on YHWH to show no mercy to all the treacherous enemies (v.6), and while he asks that they not be killed outright, but rather scattered and brought down (v.12), it becomes clear that this reprieve is only to make an example of them. The desired outcome for the psalmist is when they are utterly destroyed in YHWH's wrath and they no longer exist (v.14).

It is these dark wishes for the destruction of enemies that make some readers uneasy. It should be remembered, however, that "in almost all the Imprecatory Psalms the context is one of judgment. The appeal is to God to act as judge, and to be the vindicator of his people" (Harman, 2011:82). And although this appeal is clothed in harsh and aggressive terms, it was a normal part of curses within the Ancient Near Eastern milieu. It is therefore now necessary to turn our study to the concept of the curse in the Ancient Near East.

5.2 THE CONCEPT OF THE CURSE AND TREATIES IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN MILIEU

As stated earlier, curses were part of the everyday life of people in the Ancient Near East. Blessings and curses frequently appear in ancient treaties and covenants. Baker (1988:9) refers to Victor Korosec (1931) who, almost a century ago, published a seminal study on Hittite treaties and covenants. He distinguishes between two types of treaties: (1) Parity treaties, which were between equal parties and (2) suzerain-vassal

treaties which were between unequal partners: the suzerain and the vassal (see Baker, 1988:9). Some scholars identify a similar structure within the covenant between YHWH and Israel at Sinai and the suzerain-vassal treaties. Webber (1993:246) argues that "[t]his treaty structure is evident in the covenant of Mount Sinai and in its renewal in Moses' final address in Deuteronomy, where Yahweh is in the place of the "great King" and all Israel is the vassal or servant." The Biblical covenant also includes the presence of blessings and curses found in most Ancient treaties (Webber, 1993:246).

Day (2000:64–65) identifies a six part pattern within most ancient Near Eastern treaties: (1) the preamble introduces the setting and the identities of the suzerain and the vassal; (2) the historical prologue which explains the past relationship between the suzerain and the vassal; (3) the core of the treaty which stipulates the obligations imposed upon the vassal. These stipulations must be accepted by the vassal; (4) a statement concerning the storage and transmission of the treaty document; (5) the list of witnesses, principally divine, who would be invoked to enact due punishment should the covenant be broken; and (6) the blessings and curses – blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. The blessings and curses were mostly standard practice in treaties, and it ensured "…the vassal's loyalty to the sovereign and to the covenant" (Day, 2000:65). The blessings and the curses are supposed to keep the vassal loyal to the suzerain, either through appreciation or fear. Although the treaty terms could be beneficial to both the suzerain and the vassal, it is usually the vassal that is the most dependent on the treaty. The largest responsibility was therefore upon the vassal and, with no legal claim on the suzerain, the vassal's only hope was to trust in the benevolence of the suzerain (Baker, 1988:10). The suzerain offers protection for the vassal against enemies, and in return for the pledge of loyalty and obedience to the suzerain the treaty also included certain advantages, or blessings, for the vassal. As long as the vassal remained loyal to the

agreements of the treaty, the suzerain will ensure these blessings. However, if the vassal's commitment to the treaty is broken, the suzerain will enact punishment, described as curses, on the vassal. In most ancient treaties, as well as in the Old Testament, curses tend to be more numerous than the blessings. "The vassal then, is expected both to be grateful in his acceptance of the treaty terms as well as fearful of violating them" (Day, 2000:66, footnote 10). As Baker (1988:13) writes: "The structure of covenant in both Asia Minor and Israel shows that it is not the carrot on a stick which is most effective in producing the desired response, but the use of the stick itself." The function of the curses was primarily to keep the vassal from breaking the agreement. It is possible that the imprecations in the Psalms fulfilled this function within the worship of Israel; reminding them that breaking the covenant agreement could have dire consequences, even for the people of YHWH. As in the case of most Ancient Treaties, any disobedience against the agreement could result in the curses being enacted.

In the past some scholars identified these curses as magical spells. This could mean that the Imprecatory Psalms could be considered as "effective magical spells and that the mention of the curse directly brought about the outcome" (Vela, 2015:9). Mowinckel (2004:4–7) argues that the enemies might be workers of evil who, through magic and curses, cause havoc in the life of the psalmist. Curses were executed through workers of magic using various methods including spells, rituals, incantations, and tablets with written curses. Magical incantations, rituals and spells were predominantly used by surrounding nations in the Ancient Near East and even Israel. Vela (2015:9), however indicates that incantations and spells by magic users were not the primary method used by Israel. Althann (1992:3) argues that a divine element was introduced into curse formulas and the enforcement of curses and blessings "became very closely link to divinity." Despite the fact that on occasion Israelites may have used magical

incantations, and rituals, it never became the norm in Israel. This is basically because YHWH played an integral part in Israel's understanding of reality. Within the covenantal framework of Israel the curse "therefore entirely loses its magical character" (Althann, 1992:4) leading to the realization that the enforcement of a curse was not reliant on the power of the person expressing the curse or on the magic employed, but rather dependent on YHWH's enforcement of the curse. This was not limited to Israel. Day (2000:66) argues that in most ancient treaties, between a suzerain and the vassal, the enforcement of both blessings and curses was mostly left to divine agencies. In Ancient treaties gods acted as witnesses to the agreement, but also functioned to "enforce the terms of the treaty if need arose" (Walton, 1989:104). If the agreement was broken, the suzerain would call on the divine to execute the curse. Even if the suzerain is the one actively enforcing the blessings or the curses, it would be regarded as divinely executed. Israel also understood the realization of these curses as divine intervention, but with YHWH acting in the place of the various pagan deities (see Lopez, 2004:71). Within the covenant YHWH functions as the suzerain and have the power and the right to enact blessings or curses. Walton (1989:105) points to Deuteronomy 32:39-43 as especially relevant: YHWH "takes an oath to exact vengeance on behalf of his people." In other words, as suzerain YHWH emphatically places upon himself the prerogative to enforce the curses (Day, 2000:84). YHWH created order and will bless those who submit to his rule, but those who violate this order will be cursed (see Keel, 1997:99–100).

It is important to note that no matter who expressed the curse, the realization or non-realization of the curse was the sole-domain of YHWH. Within the covenant YHWH is called upon to declare the evildoers guilty and vindicate his children (Harman, 1995:67). The psalmists knew all too well that they were not able to execute a curse or

have the right to take vengeance themselves. Despite the gruesome language employed, the imprecations are actually a declaration of dependence on b and is borne out of desperate inability. From the psalmists' viewpoint the curses are basically pleas to YHWH to save them. As Firth (2005:137) states "it is something that is given for Yahweh to do as the one who is fit to act rather than being something that the psalmist personally seeks to enact." For Israel then, blessings and curses were the sole domain of YHWH. No curse could transpire unless YHWH ordains it. Proverbs 26:2 states that a curse without a real cause will not transpire. Genesis 12:3 expresses this when God said: *"I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonor you I will curse"* (ESV). This statement of YHWH forms the covenantal context within which all curses are grounded (Day, 2000:84). There is no example in the Psalms of anyone asking permission to take revenge on the enemies; the imprecations are always appeals to YHWH to avenge the psalmists (Laney, 1981:42). YHWH is the active agent in vengeance while Israel is always the passive agent. Lessing (2006:369) argues this point further when he considers that the verb אָאֹר ("I will curse") is always used in the imperfect Qal form for YHWH, but when used in the context of Israel's curses it always appears as a Qal, passive participle. Israel does not consider themselves as able to execute the curses they pray. They can only call on YHWH and wait for him to execute the curse or not.

The imprecations must be seen as the extreme expressions of people living in a hostile world. A world where they are mostly powerless to change the reality they experience. Their only option for help is to call to their Suzerain to uphold his part of the covenant and bring vindication and justice for his people. The Imprecatory Psalms actually focus on God and not on the supplicant. The imprecations argues that these Psalms "affirm God by surrendering the last word *to God.* They give *to God* not only their lament about

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their desperate situation, but also the right to judge the originator of that situation. They leave *everything* in God's hands, even feelings of hatred and aggression" (Zenger, 1996:79). This is an important aspect of the Imprecatory Psalms: the imprecations are always born in a desperate situation where the psalmist is completely powerless to stop the enemies. Imprecations in the Old Testament are mostly "directed against powerful or not convictable transgressors" (Althann, 1992:4). Their final recourse is to call on YHWH, but the psalmists are waiting on YHWH to act. They may express their desires for vengeance and/or vindication, but the realization of these desires is not up to them. They are powerless both in saving themselves from the threat of the enemies, or from the realization of the curses upon their enemies. Brueggemann argues this point as well when considering the harshness of the curses:

> It is important to recognize that these verbal assaults of imagination and hyperbole are verbal. They speak wishes and prayers. But the speaker does not do anything beyond speak. So far as we know, even in the most violent cries for vengeance, no action is taken (Brueggemann, 1986:67)

This required a large amount of faith and trust from the psalmists. To be confronted by such dire realities and still wait on YHWH to act must be difficult, but it argues the point that the psalmists understood the fact that as vassals of YHWH, the suzerain, they were limited by the covenant agreement to enact vengeance personally. To be able to leave vengeance to YHWH it is needed that Israel experiences a close and personal relationship with YHWH and a firm belief in the reality that YHWH is just and righteous. The enactment of the curses can never flow from vindictive hatred or personal vengeance. There is more to the imprecations in the Psalms than mere

expressions of hatred and vengeance. As LeMon writes

> [r]ather than portraying a picture of Israel's God as a vindictive deity, the psalmists picture God as profoundly and unflinchingly just, a status that necessitates some form of punishment for those who upset the right order that God has established. Thus pleas for God to act violently are essentially faithful statements about the ultimate outcomes of God's righteousness (LeMon, 2011:101).

The psalmists leave the judgment up to God, putting down the swords, nets, and clubs and lifting up their voices in prayer." Within the treaty concept of the Ancient Near East, the psalmist has no other option but to turn to Yahweh. *"*This lays the groundwork in the mind of the faithful Israelite that the fulfilment of the curse must be left up to God. It is out of this understanding that the Imprecatory Psalm is uttered" (Day, 2000:66). God clearly states that vengeance is his alone.[65] No one should take vengeance on themselves. Curses could not be enacted unless God allows them.

This reality finds expression in the *Lex Talionis* (expressed in passages like Exodus 21:22-25; Leviticus 24:17-22; and Deuteronomy 19:16-21). The idea of an "eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" may appear as a carte blanche for wreaking equal vengeance on anyone that causes damage is erroneous. The whole purpose of the *Lex Talionis* is aimed at protecting "against the excesses of revenge" (Day, 2000:117). To argue this point further Day (2000:117) refers to Deuteronomy 19:16-21 that deals with the actions that should be taken when people are trying to abuse the *Lex Talionis*. For the concept of *Lex Talionis* to achieve the desired results the curses should be considered

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[65] See for example Lev. 19:18, Deut. 32:35, Jos. 22:23, Mic. 5:15, Romans 12:19, and Heb. 10:30.

within the covenantal relationship between YHWH and Israel. On this point Harman (2011:83) argues that the "concept of the curse was central to the whole idea of covenant, both within and without the Bible"; so we need to turn to the concept of the covenantal framework of the Imprecatory Psalms.

5.3   COVENANTAL FRAMEWORK

It should be remembered that the covenant expresses a complex but dynamic relationship between YHWH and Israel. Israel saw themselves as the people of God, bound to Him through his loving-kindness (חֶסֶד). This loving-kindness of YHWH found expression in the moment when YHWH had identified himself as Israel's God and called Israel to be his people. This simple statement can be seen as "one of the most central statements in the Old Testament" (Rendtorff, 1998:11). The term חֶסֶד (hesed) is perhaps most often used to define YHWH's covenant love in the Hebrew Bible.[66] It appears about 264 times in the Old Testament,[67] and it is mostly used to describe the disposition and beneficent actions of YHWH, primarily towards his people, also called the righteous, but also towards humanity in general (Bauer & Gordon, 1997:211). Bauer & Gordon (1997:211) quote Glueck (1967:55, 102) stating that the divine exercise of חֶסֶד is based on God's covenantal relationship with Israel and חֶסֶד is the essence of the covenantal relationship. YHWH's loving-kindness found expression in the fact that he chose to develop a relationship with Israel. YHWH took the initiative and reached out to humankind and the consequent establishment of the covenant can be seen as the

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[66] Bellinger (1984:60–61) warns though that even if the term does seems to indicate a special relationship between YHWH and Israel, it would be unwise to limit חֶסֶד (hesed) to only a covenantal framework. This is due to the fact that it is difficult to date the beginnings of the covenant as a religious concept.

[67] Of these, about half appear in the Psalms alone, and for example חֶסֶד (hesed) appears 3 times in Psalm 59 (see Grogan, 2008:279).

starting point of the relationship between God and Israel (Day, 2000:62). Rendtorff (1998:15) agrees, identifying YHWH as the God of Israel and Israel as the people of YHWH as the substance of the covenant relationship. This could also be seen as Israel's starting point for identifying themselves as a nation. As Cheong describes it:

> Israel was God's covenant people. God, in sheer grace, displayed many mighty acts of deliverance on her behalf and took her into covenant. In gratitude Israel accepted His invitation. It was her covenant with Yahweh which created meaning to her nationhood. The only way for Israel to live her peculiar life was to remain in fellowship with Yahweh. In that fellowship lay her whole "peace" (šalôm), i.e., the totality of her well-being. Out of fellowship with Yahweh she was cut off from life. Her choice was essentially one between blessing of life and curse of death (Deut. 30:15-20) (Cheong, 1987:23).

Through generations YHWH proved himself capable of protecting and caring for his people. The history of Israel recounts many of YHWH's might deeds and it is precisely these "many mighty acts" (Cheong, 1987:23) that became the basis for future generations to call on YHWH to repeat these "mighty acts" in times of need. YHWH's prolific savings acts resulted in Israel having a firm believe that part of the covenant was the promise that YHWH will always protect and care for his people. Whenever Israel called on YHWH these historical acts were the basis for their pleas. In this sense the covenant was more than just an agreement; it was also an expression of YHWH's faithful acts in history. This is a process which "… never merely describes an existing condition, but always a process through which Yhwh becomes, or has become, Israel's

God, and Israel becomes, or has become, Yhwh's people, whether in the past, present or future" (Rendtorff, 1998:13). Even though there is little agreement among scholars regarding the nature, number and continuity between the covenants in the Old and New Testament, this study accepts the fundamental principle that the covenant refers to the special relationship YHWH created, and recreated, between himself and his people. Despite the difficulties and disagreements in defining and identifying the covenant (or covenants) in the Bible, it should be acceptable to see the covenant broadly as expressing a special relationship between YHWH and his people. Even if this broad definition does not do justice to the complicated nature of the Biblical covenant(s), it remains a "powerful heuristic tool for comprehending the large sweep of the biblical message" (McKnight, 2005:142). As Craigie argues:

> [Israel] responds to God in prayer, in praise, or in particular life situations because of an already existing covenant relationship which makes such response possible. Because the covenant dominated all aspects of human life for the Hebrews, to a greater or lesser extent, there is no aspect of life which may not appear in the psalms (Craigie, 1983:40).

This covenantal relationship underlies the book of the Psalms and ties together many strands of the theology of the Psalms (Longman III, 1988:57). The fundamental covenantal relationship offers a workable general framework for approaching the Imprecatory Psalms and arguing that the curses found within the Psalter, and the rest of the Bible, are grounded within this basic understanding of the relationship between God and Israel. Ridderbos and Craigie (1986:1037) go one step further when arguing that "there is more to the harsh language of the psalmists that at first appears on the surface;

their background is to be found in the context of covenant or treaty." Anderson (1972:506) adds that "the very covenant of God sets before the people both blessings and curses (Josh. 8:34), and the psalmist simply uses the conventional terminology for depicting the inescapable fate of the godless (Deut. 27:15-26; 28:16-68; Lev 26:14-39)."

The covenant is first introduced in Genesis where YHWH gave an unconditional promise to Abraham and his descendants: He will be their God and they will be his people. "Because of the unconditional nature of the covenant, its promises and provisions remain in force throughout Israel's existence as a nation" (Laney, 1981:42). Even in this early indication of a covenant agreement, clear mention is made of blessings and curses. YHWH promised to bless Abraham and his descendants, and to curse anyone who curses Abraham or his descendants. It should be noted that at this stage the Abrahamic covenant limits the blessings primarily to Abraham and his descendants and the curses are a threat only to those who curse Abraham and his descendants. However, when the covenant was re-established at Sinai, the curses expand to include Israel as well.[68] Those of Israel who live within the parameters of the covenant will be blessed, but those wandering outside will experience divine judgment and curses. Deuteronomy 27 lists several activities that will result in Israel being cursed themselves, like, moving a neighbour's boundary (v.17), distorting justice against a widow or orphan (v. 19), striking a neighbour in secret (v.24), accepting a bribe to strike down another (v. 25), not doing the law (v.26). The Israelites responsibilities are not only to Yahweh, as Suzerain, but according to the covenant agreement, they are also responsible for each other. The covenant not only bound Israel to YHWH, but it also

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[68] Ex. 20:5-7, 11-12; Ex. 23:30-33, Lev. 26 and Deut. 27.

binds people to one another. "Covenant becomes a basis of social ethics of Israel's community" (Levenson, 1985:54) and the blessings and curses played an important role in the community. YHWH and Israel are placed in a triangular relationship with Yahweh at the top, and Israel at both sides of the base (Levenson, 1985:53).

It is not surprising to discover that the concept of cursing is found early in the Biblical story.[69] The concept of blessings and curses are so fundamental to the covenant that it could safely be said that the curses found "in the Psalms and prophets have their basis in the Pentateuch" (Wenham, 1994:167). Harman (2011:84) argues that the word "'curse' could be employed as a virtual synonym for 'covenant' (Deut. 29:14, 18)." Already discernible in the stories of Adam and Eve and the story of Noah, the idea of the curse becomes more prominent in the covenant with Abraham (Gen. 12:3, 27:29). The concept of blessings and curses in relation to the covenant is introduced in the story of Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3) and become part of Israel's understanding of the covenant between YHWH and themselves.

Anderson (1972:506) argues that since the concept of blessings and curses was introduced through the covenant itself, the psalmist uses the conventional terminology for depicting the inescapable fate of the godless. The psalmists of Israel not only drew on the ancient tradition of treaties, including the blessings and curses, but used this ancient tradition to form an integral part of Israel's understanding of the role of YHWH within the covenant. Although the word covenant (בְּרִית) is not abundant in the Psalms, certain covenantal terms like "choose," "know," "law," "statutes," and "your people" are quite abundantly found (Grisanti, 2011:520). This indicates that the covenant

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[69] Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:17), Cain (Gen. 4:11), Noah cursing Canaan (Gen. 9:25), and the cursing of those against Abraham (Gen. 17).

remains a strong element throughout the Psalter. Longman (1988:57) argues that the concept of covenant ties together many strands of the theology of the Psalms. Therefore the covenant offers a good general framework for studying the curses in the Psalms. It was within this covenant that Israel experiences YHWH's compassion through his liberation of his people. Since the covenant focuses on God's loving-kindness, it may appear peculiar to use this as a framework to understand the curses (Harris, 1980b:306), but as Brueggemann argues:

> The vengeance of God is understood as the other side of his compassion—the sovereign redress of a wrong. That is, in the Old Testament, two motifs belong together. God cannot act to liberate his people without at the same time judging and punishing the oppressors who have perverted a just ordering of life (Brueggemann, 1986:70–71)

Without the covenant Israel could not appeal to YHWH for protection. It is within the Biblical covenantal framework that YHWH showed his loyalty and protection towards Israel and therefore YHWH deserves the praise of Israel. YHWH's loyalty and protection through generations lead to Israel trusting YHWH for the continued protection against enemies. YHWH is seen as the Vindicator of Israel, and they call upon him to declare the evildoers guilty (Harman, 1995:67). The harsh words of the psalmist are an expression of a special relationship between Creator and Israel:

> More than anything, the were declarations of relationship between the people and their Lord. They assumed his covenant with them and its obligations of provision, protection, and preservation. Their songs of adoration, confessions of sin, protests of innocence, complaints

about suffering, pleas for deliverance, assurances of being heard, petitions before battle, and thanksgivings afterwards were all expressions of their unique relationship to the one true God (LaSor *et al.*, 1996:446).

And, as Laney indicates:

> The key to solving this ethical problem is to understand that the imprecations are grounded in the Abrahamic covenant (Gen. 12:1-3), in which God promised to curse those who cursed Abraham's descendants. The psalmist, then, merely appealed for God to fulfil His covenant promise to Israel. It is also helpful to note that the imprecations were motivated by a desire to promote righteousness (Ps. 7:6-11), to demonstrate God's sovereignty (58:11; 59:13), to cause the wicked to seek the Lord (83:16-18), and to provide an opportunity for the righteous to praise God (7:17; 35:18, 28). Therefore out of zeal for God and abhorrence of sin the psalmist called on God to punish the wicked and to vindicate His righteousness[70] (Laney, 1981:43–44)

However, an interesting aspect of the Biblical covenant is the apparent bi-directional nature of the curses and the blessings. Anyone ignoring the laws of the covenant will discover that curses comes directy from the laws of the covenant. If you are obedient, you will be blessed, but if you are disobedient, you will be cursed (Harman, 1995:67).

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[70] Despite this argument, Laney still feels strongly that the imprecations should not be applied to church-age believers. Although the covenant do offer the key to understanding these curses, they were meant for Israel and, like the ceremonial laws of the Old Testament, they are no longer applicable for believers today. See Laney (1981:44).

Deuteronomy 27-28 is perhaps the prime example of the bi-directional nature of the curses. Standing before Mount Gerezim and Mount Ebal, the Israelites re-enacted the covenant with YHWH. The Levites had to express 12 curses on certain offences (see Deuteronomy 27:14-26) and after every curse the people exclaimed "Amen!" These twelve prohibitions were not meant to be "illustrative rather than comprehensive. Why these and not others were mentioned is not clear" (Kalland, 1976:163). This implies that Israel understood that unacceptable behavior could result in the realization of a curse, or as Thompson (1974:266) states: Israel understood that they were "calling upon themselves and their tribe a curse if they offended in reference to a particular law." These terrible announcements were balanced by the promise of blessings if Israel lived within the parameters of the covenant. The purpose of the curses and the blessings were meant to keep Israel obedient to YHWH. "Curses, confusion, and rebuke would fall on everything disobedient Israel did—until destruction and sudden ruin enveloped her. Disobeying the Lord is equated with forsaking him, because national and personal commitment to the Lord is the central command, and forsaking him is the central evil" (Kalland, 1976:171). As will become clear in the next chapter this is similar to the possible use of the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά in 1 Corinthians 16:22. Paul calls a curse (ἀνάθεμα) on anyone who does not love the Lord, in other words, who forsake him. Interestingly enough, Israel tended to forget the bi-directional character of the curse on many occasions and although Israel has proved many times that they are not obedient to the stipulations of the covenant, they tend to protest quickly if they felt YHWH was not living up to the agreement. It appears as if the covenantal framework gave them the liberty to stand on their "rights" and "…complain that God has not been faithful to the relationship and has let them down in some respect" (Wallace, 2005:41). For Israel the covenant not only placed a certain responsibility on their shoulders towards YHWH,

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but YHWH also had a responsibility towards them as a nation. Despite this, it should be clear that Israel clearly understood that the realization of curses were not limited to their enemies. If they acted outside the parameters of the covenant they risk the reality of experiencing the exact same curses they wished upon their enemies.

5.4 ISRAEL AND THE ENEMIES

The covenant not only defines the relationship between YHWH and the psalmist, but it also affects the relationship between YHWH and the enemies of the psalmist. In terms of YHWH and Israel the covenant included both blessings for faithfulness and curses for unfaithfulness. What becomes clear from various texts[71] in the Old Testament is that anyone who sins against YHWH could expect to be put under divine judgment and curse. Israel lived with the conviction that all aspects of life, even the painful, are enclosed within their covenantal relationship with God (Jones, 2007:48). Their conviction was that while they lived within the parameters of the covenant, they would experience the blessings of God. These blessings included protection, loving-kindness, mercy, justice, and provision. Living outside the covenantal parameters would mean the opposite: God's wrath, judgment, and curses. But within the context of the Imprecatory Psalms the question regarding curses for living outside the covenantal agreement were not foremost in the minds of the psalmists. Rather, the reality of vicious enemies who threatened the moral order of YHWH and even the existence of the psalmist was more relevant.

The reality of enemies in the Psalms is a major motif in the Psalms. According to Bernardino (1986:66) at least 64% of the Psalms speak about enemies directly or allude

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[71] See for example Gen. 12:3; 27:29; Ex. 20:5-7,11-12; Num. 22:12

to the presence of enemies. This is quite a theme within the Psalter as the Palms are so occupied with the reality of the enemies that it is not an exaggeration to claim that the enemies are central to the Psalms (Zenger, 1996:12). Some studies have attempted to identify the enemies referred to in the different Psalms, but there is no consensus about the success of these studies in identifying the enemies. In most cases the enemies are unknown entities. Even in the cases where the enemies are identified in the superscription of the Psalms, the historicity of the superscriptions is debated by scholars and not all scholars regard them as reliable measures for identifying the enemies.

However, important for this study is the possibility that the covenantal relationship between YHWH and Israel meant that the enemies of Israel were also seen as the enemies of YHWH. Within the covenantal framework any actions of disobedience or opposition to the rule of YHWH could be regarded as being an enemy of YHWH. "The enemies' treatment of the psalmist were not just a violation of conventional standards; it also revealed their rebellion against God" (Grisanti, 2011:520). For example, in Ps. 69 the psalmist experiences the insults of his enemies, but these insults are aimed at Yahweh (v.9). The plea for God to respond is not just for the sake of the psalmist, but also for the sake of Yahweh's name and the covenant. The activities of the enemies harm not only the psalmist, and the community of Israel, but also the Name of Yahweh since the covenant bound Israel to YHWH. According to Luc (1999:405) imprecations are frequently found when enemies have ridiculed and reviled God for not protecting Israel.[72] Since the activities of the enemies not only affect the psalmist and the community, but also the name of YHWH, the psalmists call on YHWH to act according to the covenantal promises and reveal his glory and sovereignty, for his sake as well as

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[72] e.g. Pss 28:5; 64:5; 69:6; 74:10; 79:6-10; 83:2; 109:27; 137:3.

theirs. The actions of the enemies disrupt the moral order and the imprecations call on YHWH to restore the moral order of the world and manifest his glory. Therefore the imprecations are "… frequently voiced because the psalmist views his enemy as having grossly violated the covenant, and consequently, as deserving of the covenant's curses" (Day, 2000:69).

Due to the nature of the enemies' actions the manifestation of YHWH's glory tends to appear aggressive and violent to the observer. Tremper Longman and Daniel Reid (1995:14–19) argue in their book "God is a Warrior" that God is seen as a warrior within the covenant. The strong military metaphors used in Psalms 7 and 35 highlight this. YHWH fights on behalf of Israel. De Vaux (1997:262) argues this idea quite strongly when he writes that "This is the principal fact: it was Yahweh who fought for Israel, not Israel which fought for its God." Longman and Reid (1995:14–19) identify five developmental stages in the Biblical use of this metaphor: the first two stages overlap when God fights, firstly for Israel against their enemies, and secondly, against Israel because of their disobedience. The third stage is prominent in the writings of the prophets. The prophets of Israel foresaw a coming divine warrior in the future. Stage four is ushered in with the coming of Jesus Christ, and his earthly ministry reveals the work of a conqueror. The fifth and final stage is anticipated by the church when the divine warrior will return to judge the spiritual and physical enemies of God. During the first two stages, and even during the development of the third stage, the psalmists had no other option but to call on the divine warrior to step into history and deal with any and all enemies. Since Israel had no idea of a future consummation and judgment, they felt a strong desire to experience the execution of justice in their lifetime. According to the concept of the Ancient Near Eastern treaties, discussed above, Israel had to wait on YHWH to declare judgment. YHWH, as the Righteous Judge, is the only

one who has the power to pronounce judgment on behalf of the psalmist against the enemies. This can only be done if God judges the evildoers and establishes the righteous (Laney, 1981:41). For Israel judgment had to be experienced in history and their desires are expressed with swift action from YHWH in mind. Thomson and Kidner (1996:948) define this idea further: "Behind the imprecations is a recognition of a divine moral governance in the world, a belief that right and wrong are meaningful for God, and that therefore judgment must operate in the moral world order as well as grace." This desire is also found within the New Testament and it will be argued later that it is the motivation behind the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά found in 1 Corinthians 16:22.

The psalmists sing with desire for vindication in their hearts, but only for God's justice to prevail (Broadhurst, 2004:83). The psalmist was wronged, and he desires vindication, but there is more to this than a mere personal offence. As seen in the previous chapters the actions of the enemies were evil. The enemies' deeds not only affected the psalmist and the faith community, but also the name of YHWH. Based on the covenant agreement, the psalmist is part of the vassal and he appeals to his suzerain for vindication. YHWH is the Vindicator, and since justice is in his hands now, he will determine vindication. The frustration for the psalmists can be seen in the apparent delay from YHWH in acting against the enemies. Many Psalms lament the apparent prosperity of these evil people. Their prayers express the wish that YHWH will balance the scales.

The imprecations are therefore expressions of believers who are struggling to understand the world where the enemies apparently have the upper hand. The apparent freedom of the unrighteous could lead to the concept that either YHWH does not care, or is incapable to stop them. The psalmist asks YHWH to take vengeance to show that

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YHWH is righteous. Of course, the psalmist would personally benefit through YHWH's acts against the perpetrators, but the imprecations are not spoken out of personal revenge, but out of zeal for God (Laney, 1981:42). Since the psalmist and YHWH are bound together by the covenant formula, and since YHWH revealed himself as a Warrior fighting on behalf of Israel, the psalmist does the logical thing: he beseeches YHWH to act. When Israel lamented before YHWH, the purpose was to make him aware of the problem, but also to express trust in his intervention and praise for his constant care (Carney, 1983:116).

The language used by the psalmists express a feeling of outrage. The harsh language of the Imprecatory Psalms may cloud the issue for modern readers, but the focus of these prayers is not on the destruction of the enemies for the sake of vengeance. The focus of these prayers is on the need for justice. Hebrew Poetry is expressive and evocative; filled with figurative speech like metaphors, similes and ambiguity (Waltner, 2006:752–753). The psalmists were masters of word and image, and their poetry reflects, foremost, the mosaic of Israel's faith" (Brown, 2002:15). Keel (1997:9) reminds us that the Biblical text shares the worldview of the ancient Near East and it should never be forgotten that their worldview differs widely from our modern worldview. Images that were acceptable and normal in ancient times may grate our modern sensibility.

5.5 LEGITIMATE AND ILLEGITIMATE CURSES

It is important to notice that Israel had a clear understanding of the difference between legitimate and illegitimate curses (see Day, 2002:63). Scharbert (1997:416) identifies an illegitimate curse "as a private means of revenge to smite a personal enemy" and

were often done "in secret and with the aid of magic" (Day, 2002:63) Mostly the illegitimate curses were focused on the innocent with the hope that the downfall of the innocent would lead to some personal gain (Althann, 1992:3) The curses within the Psalter however became part of public worship. The psalmists are very aware of the fine line between legitimate and illegitimate curses. YHWH is just, and illegitimate curses are sinful. If the psalmist utters illegitimate curses they could find themselves outside the covenantal framework, implying that they could be regarded as enemies of God. The psalmist of Psalm 139 even approaches Yahweh with the following plea: "[23]Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! [24]And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!" (ESV). There was a deep awareness of the possibility of "*grievous ways"* in them. In the case of Psalm 139 the psalmist even asked YHWH to know his thoughts and search his heart to see if he was in any way, not in accordance to the divine moral governance of Yahweh. This is important because the curses within the Mosaic covenant could not only be directed against any possible enemies, but also against Israel themselves. On some level, Stuart (1987:434–435) argues in his commentary on the book Jonah, this is the purpose of Jonah. It is to show that personal desires for the destruction of ones enemies are not acceptable. The message of Jonah implores the reader "Don't be like Jonah" (Stuart, 1987:434). The reality of YHWH's righteousness and mercy are clearly shown when YHWH asks Jonah "Should I not spare Nineveh?" in chapter 4:11. "But the point of the story goes somewhat beyond teaching the audience to love their enemies. It also places great emphasis upon the character of and power of God. God's servants cannot expect (1) to oppose him and get away with it; or (2) that he will somehow be unfaithful to his own character of patience, forgiveness, and an eagerness to forestay harm" (Stuart, 1987:434). In short, the Old Testament also shows that

YHWH will not be forced by any Israelite to avenge a curse on anyone without a righteous reason.

The psalmists understood this reality. In Psalm 7 the psalmist utters a self-imprecation if there is any injustice in him (see verses 4-6). In Psalm 35 the psalmist asks YHWH to judge him according to his righteousness (verse 24). Although the psalmist does not make a similar request in Psalm 59, he does claim that he made no transgression or sinful acts against his enemies (verses 4-5). Mays (1994:63) rightly points out that "[a] prayer made on the basis of one's own righteousness and integrity poses a serious question. How can anyone possibly ground prayer on such a basis with honesty?" These prayers are not simply boastings of self-centred innocence or a so called: 'butter-wouldn't-melt-in-mouth' syndrome before YHWH. The psalmist is not claiming to be without sin or blemish. Most Psalms clearly indicate that the psalmists were acutely aware of sin in their lives. It is a question of comparison: "[imprecations] were composed for a person who was in the right in comparison with an antagonist" (Mays, 1994:63).

Even with his sin, the psalmists still lives within the covenantal framework. The unrighteous, by virtue of their actions, are placing themselves outside the covenantal framework. Their actions are making them enemies of the psalmist as well as YHWH. It is important to remember that the psalmist's interpretation about the unrighteous is subjective. The final decision remains in the hands of YHWH who according to the psalmist's concession is the Vindicator. YHWH will determine if the actions of the unrighteous should be judged or not; if the psalmist should be vindicated or not.

For Israel, the realization of this special covenantal relationship between them and God implied that justice from God would emerge in their lifetime (Allen, 2002:102). The

pivotal role God played in Israel's concept of justice is lost on modern readers. Israel lived in a world where human systems of justice frequently failed (Wilson, 2007:102). The failings of the human justice systems meant that the oppressed and the poor were often left to the mercies of more powerful people, and sometimes selfish and wicked people. Israel's only appeal was to YHWH, and the more substantial the injustice against Israel the stronger the desire need for YHWH to act on behalf of the covenant people. "Divine judgment is seen as vindicating the righteous who have suffered at the hands of the wicked. It is God's saving intervention on behalf of his people" (Wenham, 2012:184).

The belief that YHWH will come to their aid and vindicate them was an important element in Israel's concept of the covenant relationship. Various Psalms express this faith in God and the hope of justice and vindication. At times, the extreme nature of the injustice and the long period of perceived silence from God came to expression in the harsh language of the Imprecatory Psalms. What sounds like bloodthirsty cries of personal vengeance, are expressions of sheer desperation of believers in dire strait; expressions of trust and the hope that God will answer the prayers of the Psalmist and come to the rescue. This desire for justice is not only limited to the Old Testament. Kidner (1973:39–40) sees an imprecation as "the plea that justice be done, and the right be vindicated." When understood within the biblical context of God's saving grace and the realization of justice, the desire for God's vengeance is also found in the New Testament. Kidner (1973:40) argues that the New Testament "warmly upholds" the concern for justice. Referring to the parable of the unjust judge in Luke 18, Kidner (1973:40) draws attention to the persistence of the widow in asking for vindication. The desire to see God's justice in action remains forceful in the New Testament texts. The difference, according to Kidner (1973:40–41), is the time frame. For New Testament

believers and modern believers today, the idea of a new age about to dawn under the rule of Christ changes the need for expediency. Christians can wait for justice at the Παρουσία for they know Christ will return to judge all, believers as well as the enemies of God. The Israelites had no such certainty. Although the timeframe for justice is different between Israel and Christians, the desire is not. Both Jews and Christians express the wish that God will act decisively in history. For Christians, this decisive act will transpire when Christ returns. This desire for Christ to return is clearly expressed in the Aramaic cry Μαράνα θά (1 Cor. 16:22) and the closing words of Revelation 22:20 "Come, Lord Jesus" (ESV). Praying for the return of Christ also implies a desire for justice and righteousness to emerge, which will result in the vindication for the children of God.

It is therefore necessary to consider the relationship between the Imprecatory Psalms and the New Testament.

5.6   IMPRECATORY PSALMS AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

The Psalms played a major part in Christian worship from the very beginning. With the exception of Isaiah, the Psalms are the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament (Grogan, 2008:261). This is not surprising since most of the New Testament writers were reared in synagogues where the Psalms were regularly and systematically used. It is important to realize that the writers of the New Testament not only knew the Psalms, but they also incorporated it into their writings. As Grogan (2008:269) puts it: "The minds of the New Testament writers were steeped in the language of the

Psalms."[73] The importance of the Psalms extended beyond the New Testament. In the Early Church, it was a common practice for believers, who were seeking to become pastors, to memorize the whole Psalter (Harman, 2011:90).

The frequent use of the Psalms highlights the importance of the Psalter for the Early Church (Waltner, 2006:25). The Psalms however is a Jewish book firmly embedded in the worship system of the people of Israel and because of this some question its use by Christians (Grogan, 2008:261). The Psalms however carry a character that makes them transcend the differences between the Jewish faith and the Christian faith. Hustad (1984:410) argues the early Christians understood themselves inside the *"*continuum of Yahweh's covenant with 'Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob'." Therefore, Hustad (1984:410) concludes that the early Christians' theology and worship continued to be closely related to their Jewish traditions. From the very beginning Christians found resonance with the Psalms in their own faith experiences. This is because of the unique nature of the Psalms within the Biblical canon. The Psalms touch on every aspect of the Old Testament thought and life, making the Psalter a compendium of Biblical theology (Dumbrell, 2002:249). Every major element of Israelite history and faith are found within the Psalms. The large number of focal points and themes expressed within the Psalms make it difficult to summarize the theology of the Psalms. Chrisholm attempts a summary as follows:

> The book's theological message may be summarized as follows: As
>
> the Creator of all things, God exercises sovereign authority over the
>
> natural order, the nations, and Israel, His unique people. In His role

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[73] See Grogan (2008:264–269) for a more detailed discussion on how the Psalms influenced the worship of the New Testament. He finds echoes of the Psalms in various New Testament passages that do not directly quote from the Psalms, i.e. a passage like Luke 1:50 echoes the words of Psalm 103:17, while anyone reading Revelation 7:15,16 will recall Psalm 121:5,6.

as universal King God assures order and justice in the world and
among His people, often by exhibiting His power as an invincible
warrior. The proper response to this sovereign King is trust and
praise (Chisholm Jr., 1991:258)

Mays (1994:232–233) and McCann (1993:41–43) argue that "The Lord as King" is the summary of the Psalms. The metaphor of God as King is widely used in both the Old and New Testament.[74] Who can miss the dramatic way Jesus is introduced at the beginning of his public ministry in the New Testament. John the Baptist bursts onto the scene in Matthew 3:2 with the words: "Repent, for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (ESV). The metaphor of God as King extends from the Old Testament into the New. The same God that revealed himself as King in the Old Testament reveals himself as King in the New Testament. This is the same God that appeared to Abraham and established an everlasting covenant with Abraham, his descendants and the descendants throughout their generations (cf. Genesis 17:7). It is not difficult to see why the Psalms were adopted in the very early stages of the Christian Church and played a significant role during the development of the New Testament and thereafter.

Even today the Psalms remain important in most Christian churches as Christians looking for spiritual growth tend to turn to the Psalter (Harman, 2011:90). For this reason, the Psalms are helpful because they are "a genuinely dialogical literature that expresses both sides of the conversation of faith" (Brueggemann, 1984:15). This dialogical character of the Psalms offers believers the opportunity to participate in the

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[74] See for example Pss 24:10; 95:3; 99:1-2; Is. 40:10-11; Is. 52:7; Rev. 15:3; and 1 Tim. 6:15 for references to God as King. The metaphor of King is also used for Jesus in Joh. 1:49; Lk. 1:32-33, Acts 2:29-36; 1 Cor. 15:25-27; Rev. 1:5; Rev. 11:15-17

dialogue. The Psalter's ability to resonate with the emotions of the reader offers the possibility for the believer to step into the written dialogue between God and psalmist and to create a new dialogue between believer and God. The Psalter offers a unique view on the expression of faith during a full range of experiences from the utmost joy to the deepest levels of anger, even towards God. Within the Psalter, the reader can find a dialogue relating to almost every aspect of faith-experience.

Despite the fact that the Psalter is a Jewish book, grounded in the faith and liturgy of Israel, many modern believers still discover that these poems contain elements that extend beyond their Jewish roots and were applicable in many life situations. Devotional readers tend to express a deep fondness for the Psalms, but they, usually, keep to the well-known Psalms. However, as some unsuspecting readers have discovered, there is another element to the Psalms that is not always well known. If readers do stumble upon the more harsh parts, they are, usually, shocked to discover them.[75] The natural reaction is to ignore these parts simply or reject them, as was shown in Chapter 1. But this is not an acceptable solution as the Psalms plays a major role within the New Testament. It was argued above that, except for Isaiah, the Psalms is the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament. But what is more interesting is that it is the Imprecatory Psalms that are the most used within the New Testament. Martin (1903:552) claims "no other Psalms have been so largely quoted by our Lord and His apostles as these 'imprecatory psalms'." Wenham (1994:172–173)

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[75] My personal experiences in a pastoral setting reflect this reality. Most of my church members are shocked to hear that the Psalms contain some truly graphic scenes. One member even vehemently disagreed with me about the final verse of Psalm 137, stating that it is "impossible that such a passage could exist within the Psalms." The shock on his face when I showed him the passage reminded me how unprepared devotional readers truly are for the realities of these passages. This study attempts to offer a hermeneutical key to better help Christian believers to read and study these Psalms in light of the New Testament.

concurs by claiming that the Imprecatory Psalms are quoted at twice the average for the Psalms as a whole. Of course, not all quotations in the New Testament from these Psalms contain the imprecatory parts. Although not the imprecatory parts, the fact that New Testament writers so frequently quoted from them indicates that these Psalms were not only well know, but also well used within New Testament times. The authors of the New Testament books had no problems to use them as support for their claims.

5.7 CURSES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament developed within a combination of different cultural and religious settings. Ferguson (2003:1) claims that the "Roman world provided the governmental, legal, and economic context. The Greek world provided the cultural, educational, and philosophical context. The Jewish world was the matrix of early Christianity, providing the immediate religious context." The New Testament was born with strong Jewish roots, and despite the complexities of later developments and the intricacies of the later relationship between Old and New Testament[76] few would disagree that the books today known as the Old Testament were largely considered Scripture in the time of the New Testament (see Bock, 2006:255; Moyise & Menken, 2004:1) and, despite the diversity of their use within the New Testament, it is especially the Psalms that were regarded with special attention (Moyise & Menken, 2004:1). Authors from the New Testament regularly made use of the Old Testament material, like the wisdom and legal passages, to support their appeals for the "practical and ethical life-style they had commended to their readers" (Kaiser jr., 2001:197)." Most New Testament books quote from or allude to the Psalms. With the New Testament having its roots firmly in the Old Testament

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[76] The relationship between the Old and New Testaments is a complex and contested field of study which falls outside the scope of this study.

and the almost universal use of curses in ancient times, it should not come as a surprise that the divine curse is not as foreign to the New Testament as many think (Wenham, 1994:169). It should be remember that the Early Christians were primarily Jews in the early stages of the movement and "the continuity between early Christianity and Judaism may be linked to the Holy Scriptures of Judaism – the Old Testament" (Hill, 1996:842). The early stages of Christianity saw them, however, developing in a world where the Hellenistic culture were very strong. "Rather, the use of the OT in the NT takes place within a clash of cultures, which was primarily between the emerging Christian culture and the Hellenistic world" (Stamps, 2006:10). As Christians moved into a world with a strong Greek influence they were confronted with various ideas and concepts that they could incorporate into their thinking. Although some thoughts of Greek culture inevitably became incorporated into Christian thought, it is important to see the role the Old Testament played while the Early Church developed. Drane (2000:345–34) refers to the difference in viewpoint between the early church and the Greek concept of in terms of the reality of evil in this world. The Greeks saw this world as evil and salvation was possible only by escaping this reality. Christians never shared this viewpoint, "[b]ut they were able to assert the basic goodness of life only because of the strong Old Testament conviction that informed their thinking" (Drane, 2000:347). This does not mean that the New Testament and the Old Testament agree on all issues, but that the Old Testament did indeed had a great influence on the way New Testament writers developed their thoughts on certain issues. As Harrison (1989:364) reminds preachers of the Word "While it is true that such materials as the Levitical rituals of the Old Covenant have been made obsolete, the fact remains that certain abiding features of the Old Testament are still mandatory for a proper Christian way of living." He argues further that "[t]he point being made is that the Old Testament

has a right to be accepted unequivocally on its own terms as Holy Scripture. It is not a "subsidiary" collection of writings that might be thought to serve as a useful appendage or enhancement of the New Testament in some manner" (Harrison, 1989:365). This does not ignore the fact that there a debate about the precise nature of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New Testament. Rather, the purpose here is to indicate that "the Jewish context of early Christianity is without question even if the nature and degree of influence of that context are debatable. (Stamps, 2006:14). The New Testament do not consider the Old Testament as "antiquated or as an antithesis" but "[t]he message of the New Testament remains grounded in the testimony of the Old Testament" (Barth, 2005:24). With the risk of oversimplifying a more complex concept, perhaps Hans Hübner (1996:339) express this complex relationship effectively:

> For the New Testament authors the Scripture of Israel was not the *Old* Testament. The correct formulation can only be: the New Testament authors were theologically dealing with the Scripture of Israel which for them *exclusively* was holy Scripture and, thus, the literal word of God announcingChrist by divine authority. The Scripture of Israel, however, became 'the Old Testament received in the New' through the process of its reception by the New Testament authors (Hübner, 1996:339). [77]

In terms of our current study this fact can be seen in the frequency with which the New Testament authors quote from the Psalter. The New Testament authors do not use the Psalms consistently (in terms of function and accuracy in quoting the original source)

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[77] Authors emphasis.

as each New Testament author had a different focus and purpose for writing (Moyise & Menken, 2004:2). Still, the connection between the Old Testament and New Testament can be seen in the use of the Psalms as part of the New Testament rhetoric. This is especially true of the Imprecatory Psalms. The Imprecatory Psalms are frequently quoted within the New Testament (Martin, 1903:552; Wenham, 1994:172–173), although the harsh elements are not always included in the quotation or allusion. Besides this, the New Testament itself contains various passages that adhere to the basic definition of a divine curse. Some of the passages in the New Testament even match the imprecations in terms of harshness. Reed (1907:299) argues "the honest reader must notice that expressions of God's wrath in the New Testament concerning sin and its punishment are more solemn and terrible than those in the Old Testament."

Referring to a few examples within the New Testament would suffice to indicate this point. Within the gospels we already find strong curses. Jesus Himself pointed to a future judgment and referred to his hearers as –hearers cursed: "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (NIV). Jesus cursed the fig tree as a symbolic lesson to all those who do not bear fruit (Matthew 21:28 and Mark 11:12). Jesus also uttered some scathing words to the Pharisees and other leaders of the Jewish people. In Matthew 23:1-36 they are called the enemies of God, and they are held responsible for the blood of all the Old Testament martyrs. Jesus calls down a series of woes upon them (France, 1985:326). *Woe* is a word not well known within contemporary English, but there is clear indication that it is the converse of blessing. Jesus told the disciples to "shake the dust of their feet" when a home or town do not welcome or listen to them. He then states that Sodom and Gomorrah will have it better on the Day of Judgment (Matthew 10:14-15). In John 8:21 and 24 Jesus

speaks to fellow Jews, and He warns them that they "will die in their sins" unless they believe in Him. Lincoln (2005:267) argues that the "die in sin" refers to a lack of faith which will lead to death (see also Beasly-Murray, 2002:130; Kruse, 2003:204).

He discount their profession that they are sons of the Father (John 8:40) and rather calls the devil their father (John 8:44). This indicates that their current actions reflects some characteristics with that of the devil (Newman & Nida, 1993:286). The implication is here that their actions are not in accordance to that which fit a "child of God." This implies that they do not really know God as they do not know Jesus. They were so furious through these insults that they attempted to stone Him (John 8:59). These words were extremely harsh as Jesus excluded a large portion of the Jewish people from the people of God based solely on their faith in Him. The New Testament is no less harsh with the enemies of God than the Old Testament, and despite them being not as graphic as the curses found in the Old Testament, the desires expressed in both Testaments for those cursed are not positive. We will look at a few more examples from the New Testament, starting at the book of Acts, which will further indicate this reality.

Another example of a harsh expression in the New Testament is found in Acts 8:20-21. Peter expressed a curse that is hard to reconcile with the New Testament's call to love your enemy:

> But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you.

> For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of
> iniquity." (Acts 8:20-21; ESV)

Although Peter's words do offer the opportunity of repentance, his wish is still in lieu with the imprecations of the Psalms. In the Pauline corpus a few more examples could be referenced. In Galatians 3:10 the author wrote: "All who rely on observing the law are under a curse for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law" (NIV). In Galatians 1:8-9, Paul exhort that those who corrupt the message of the gospel must be condemned. Paul makes no exceptions in his condemnation of anyone who are regarded as corruptors of the gospel. Corruptors are seen as the enemies of God, and they should be cursed. The same applies to certain transgressors, for example in 1 Corinthians 5:3 Paul declares judgment on the one who committed sexual immorality. In 1 Corinthians 16:22 Paul cursed those who do not love God. The translators of the NIV translated the ἀνάθεμα as "eternally condemned." Lenski comments on the ἀνάθεμα of Paul:

> Paul's heart still throbs with emotion which refuses to be suppressed. Before he adds the customary benediction as the last word (Gal. 6:18; Phil. 4:23; 1 Thess. 5:28; 2 Thess. 3:18; Philem. 25), his spirit and his hand almost involuntarily react to all the perversions and all the abuses which he is attempting to correct in Corinth by means of this letter, and he records his apostolic verdict regarding all those who may dare to remain obdurate and to continue in their evil course. **If anyone loves not the Lord, let him be *anathema*!** The words are a curse like the thunders of the ancient prophets. Not merely Paul and his indignation

> are behind them but the Lord himself as Jehovah is behind the thunders
> of the prophets (Lenski, 1963:785–786).

Day (2000:168) argues that Paul's imprecation is more severe than those found in the Psalter. Another imprecatory curse is found in Galatians 5:12 "As for those agitators, I wish they would go the whole way and emasculate themselves!" What should be noted is that Paul exhorts his readers to love their neighbours as themselves directly after this expression. In 2 Timothy 4:14 the author expresses the desire that God will repay Alexander in measure to his actions against Paul. This curse also has parallels with the Psalms.[78] The best known curse is probably Revelation 6:10 where the martyrs' souls call out: "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (ESV).[79] In 1 Thes.1:7-10 Paul paints a grim picture for those who do not know the Lord on the day the Lord comes. Destruction awaits those who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus. The language used here by Paul echoes the language of Psalm 79:6 or Jeremiah 10:25 (Bratcher, 1987:59).

These examples indicate that imprecations occur within the New Testament. In his doctoral thesis, Day asserts that the difference between the Old Testament imprecations and the New Testament imprecations are only in degree, and not in kind (Day, 2000:3). The New Testament calls for a more muted approach to the reality of evil and injustice. Still, there comes a point when justice can no longer be bypassed, and it must be enacted

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[78] The idea of repayment in measure is frequently found in the Psalms. In Psalm 7, for instance, we see the author referring to the so called boomerang effect as something that will happen to the wicked (see vv.16-17). The psalmist in Psalm 35 is humiliated by his enemies. In verse 26 he ask that they be repaid in measure ("Let them be both ashamed and humiliated…Let them wear shame and dishonour"). The "boomerang effect" is a frequent theme in the Old Testament; see Pss 9:15, 57:6; 119:86, Prov. 26:27, 28:10, Eccl. 10:8.

[79] According to Aune (1998:407) δεσπότης in Revelation 6:10 is usually used for God in the LXX, but it is also occasionally used for Christ (see 2 Peter 2:1 and Jude 4). See also footnote 64 above.

(Day, 2000:13). The return of Christ implies the enactment of justice, the destruction of the wicked and the restoration of God's children. Μαράνα θά could be interpreted as a prayer; a wish for the quick return of Christ and the restoration of the whole creation. In the desire for Christ's return an echo can be found of the desires expressed by the psalmist for YHWH to "wake up" and stir himself into action on their behalf. Like the Old Testament believers who longed for justice, but were not allowed to enact judgment and vengeance themselves, the early Jesus followers are reminded in texts like Romans 12:19 and Hebrews 20:30 that vengeance still belongs to God. Even if the judgment of the wicked is not the motivation for those crying for Christ to come, the reality of Christ's return includes the enactment of judgment. This will be considered in more detail in the next chapter.

5.8   CONCLUSION

From this discussion it should be clear that the imprecations are far more than personal desires for vengeance. Cursing was part of the everyday life of people living in the Ancient Near East, and although some cultures did consider curses to have some magical character, in Israel curses were considered as useless, unless YHWH sanctioned the curse. Ancient Israel was also very aware of the difference between legitimate and illegitimate curses. Illegitimate curses were unacceptable and could lead to the curse returning unto the speaker. Some scholars link the Imprecatory Psalms closely to the covenantal framework within which Israel not only understood her relationship with YHWH but also her own identity.

In the three Psalms studied in die previous chapters it became clear that the psalmist is calling on YHWH to act on their behalf against the onslaught of the enemies. The desperate situation implies that only YHWH is able to help. Within their understanding

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of the covenantal framework, only YHWH had the right to measure justice. The only hope the psalmists had was to call on YHWH. The desires of destruction are based in the reality that YHWH do act against those who live outside the parameters of the covenant, as the psalmists believe the enemies do. The psalmists do ask for the destruction of their enemies, but they do not take it upon themselves to enact vengeance. Israel, within the bounds of the covenant, had a clear understanding that vengeance belongs to YHWH and as suzerain of the treaty between him and Israel only he has the right to take vengeance or vindication. Salvation, for the psalmist, will realise when YHWH acts against the enemies. So the imprecations are actually calls for salvation. YHWH must act, and through their understanding of the covenantal framework, this will imply the destruction or ruin of the enemies. When YHWH acts, his mighty deeds will be recognized and the glory will be his.[80]

Cursing in the New Testament times were also quite prevelant. We find some curses in various New Testament passages like Acts. 8:30-21, Gal. 1:8-9, and 1 Cor 5:3. The ἀνάθεμα maranatha from 1 Corinthians 16:22 fits the context of the Old Testament curses on various levels. The imperative asking the Lord to act, combined with the expression of a curse indicates a similar contention to that of the Imprecatory Psalms: the ἀνάθεμα will only be executed once the Lord Jesus comes. The New Testament quotes from the Psalter frequently and the Imprecatory Psalms are quoted the most. The desire expressed by ἀνάθεμα maranatha echoes the psalmists' desire for justice. For Christians the realization of justice will be experienced when the Lord returns, which are also indicated as the Day of Judgment (see Matt 10:14-15).

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[80] Passages highlighting Jesus' return include 1 Cor. 1:7; 4:5; 15:51–52; 16:22; Phil. 3:20; 4:5; 1 Thes. 1:10; 2 Thes. 3:10–12; Tit. 2:13; Jam. 5:7–9; 1 John 2:28; and Rev. 3:11; 22:7, 12, 17, 20.[80]

CHAPTER 6 THE CURSE (ΑΝΆΘΕΜΑ) AND THE PRAYER (ΜΑΡΆΝΑ ΘΆ)

In previous chapters we looked at Psalms 7, 35, and 59. The imprecations were expressed within a specific context where it was clear that the psalmists were in grave danger of being killed by enemies and were basically powerless against the attacks of the enemies. The psalmists' last recourse was to turn to YHWH and trust that he will come to their aid. Using phrases like arise, awake, and rise up they call on YHWH to appear on their behalf against their enemies. The enemies are wicked and YHWH should judge their actions so that justice would prevail. The psalmists were certain that the judgment of YHWH will lead to the enforcement of the curses they expressed, but first YHWH needs to become "active." The realization of the salvation is linked to the arising, awakening, and rising up of YHWH. While YHWH is "inactive" no resolution to the current problem can emerge.

We also noted that these curses were seen as reciprocal: any illegitimate curse would return onto the one who cursed, so it was not pronounced lightly. The psalmist of Psalm 7 knew the dire consequences if he was found guilty before YHWH, but he is certain of his innocence in terms of the accusations his enemies level against him. Also, it was noted in the chapters considering the Psalms that the psalmists never considered enforcing these curses by taking vengeance on their pursuers themselves. In the case of Psalm 35 the psalmist even claimed that he acted gracefully towards his enemies, even while they were laying traps for him (v.7-8), accusing him falsely (v11,21), and even mocking him in public (vv.18-21). He prayed for them, wore sackcloth while fasting on their behalf (v.13). Psalm 35 also indicated that the spirit of the psalmist is in keeping with the New Testament commandment found, for example, in Matthew 5:43-44. The

psalmist has no fear that YHWH will judge him innocent and he requests YHWH to judge him (35:24).

It is important to realise that these Psalms are not vengeful prayers, despite the language used. Both psalmists in Psalm 7 and 35 understood the dangers of cursing others without good reason (7:5, 35:24a). Interestingly enough, it also became clear that the aim of the Imprecatory Psalms is not necessarily focused on the destruction of the enemies, but rather on the glorification of YHWH's name. The real hope of the psalmist is found in the wish that YHWH will set things right. Setting things right, implies quite possibly the complete destruction of the enemies if they do not cease with their wicked behaviour. This is because the enemies are so set on causing him harm. Reason would no longer suffice. Only God can set things right again. The psalmists cry to God to awake, to rise up, to stir himself into action. In other words they implore him to come quickly to their aid.

Paul's use of μαράνα θά should be seen as an eschatological imperative, wishing for the return of Christ to come and fix the world. This offers an interesting parallel between the psalmists' wish that YHWH will come to their aid and the Christian hope of a future event where Christ will come and turn things on their head. This does not ignore the obvious differences between the Psalms and the cry of Μαράνα θά, but it acknowledges the similar desire in both the psalmists' wishes and Christians praying for the return of Jesus. Finding a connection between the Imprecatory Psalms and Μαράνα θά in 1 Corinthians 16:22 is not obvious at first. However, an article written by C.F.D. Moule aptly named "*A Reconsideration of the Context of Maranatha*" was the seed that germinated this idea. Moule argues that the cry Μαράνα θά in 1 Corinthians 16:22 could be seen as an enforcement of the curse against anyone who "does not love the Lord."

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Although many scholars do not share this perspective, there are some scholars that do find it a viable interpretation (see below). Ben Witherington concedes that:

> [i]t is not clear whether *Anathema* and *maran atha* [sic] go together here. If so, then the curse formula would be followed in the worship service by the plea for the Lord to come as judge and act on the curse (Witherington III, 1995:323) (italics in original).

It is the coming of Christ that will enforce the ἀνάθεμα. The cry does carry the hope that Jesus will return shortly. In similar fashion, in chapters 2-4 of the present study, it was indicated that the psalmists call on God to "wake", arise and meet the Psalmist to enforce the curses expressed against the enemies. The cries found in the Psalms are prayers asking for God's justice and judgment. The psalmists have to wait for YHWH to actively enforce the curse. Even though the psalmists already uttered the curses, they will remain "inactive" until the time YWHW decides to either enforce them or not. In similar fashion the ἀνάθεμα from Paul will remain unanswered until Jesus' returns. So the call from the Psalmist for God to awake, arise could be read in similar fashion to Paul's Aramaic cry for Jesus to come and enforce the ἀνάθεμα. In this context Μαράνα θά could be considered an eschatological cry. This is important as Van de Beek (2008:299) argues that eschatological cries, especially the one in Revelation 6:9, creates a space where those crying for justice and the psalmists can find each other. The wish for vengeance and justice is equally strong in both the eschatological cries and the imprecatory appeals. Although Μαράνα θά has no direct connection to the Imprecatory Psalms, it does create "a space", when it is read with the ἀνάθεμα that can offer a hermeneutical key for reconsidering the Imprecatory Psalms. The psalmists wish for God to act and vindicate them with his judgment. Kreitzer (1993:260) indicates that

"Maranatha is a prayer, uttered within a liturgical context, that may call for the future Parousia of the Lord. The parallel in Revelation 22:20 would support such an interpretation." The return of Christ would indicate the restoration of all and God judging the misdoings of the wicked in this world (see 1 Cor. 1:8; 2 Cor. 5:20-28; 15:25; Phil. 1:6; 3:17-21; 1 Thes. 4:13-18 and Heb. 10:12-13). Before considering if Μαράνα θά could function as an enforcement of the ἀνάθεμα we need to consider if Μαράνα θά could function as an eschatological cry.

6.1 *MAPÁNA ΘΆ AS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL CRY*

Μαράνα θά has always been a *crux interpretum* (Black, 1973:189; Vild, 2013:99). Μαράνα θά appears only once in the Biblical text,[81] making it more challenging to determine the exact meaning. Μαράνα θά is an Aramaic phrase that appears to be used very early on by the Christians. The division of the Aramaic word is uncertain (Garland, 2003:775). The different options for division creates various translation possibilities. The two common divisions are: מָרַנָא תָא ("Our Lord, come") or מָרַן אֲתָא ("Our Lord has come") (Garland, 2003:775). Transliterated into Greek it could be: Μαράνα θά or Μαράν ἀθά. Considering various manuscript evidence, Thiselton (2000:1347) feels that μαράνα θά is probably the correct division, although it will remain uncertain.[82] Vild (2013:100) identifies three possible translations: (1) Our Lord has come, or 'Our Lord is present.' (2) 'Our Lord is coming' and (3) 'Our Lord, come!' Μαράνα θά can be translated as either a confession or an invocation (Black, 1973:189). Some commentators (Brown, 1986:896; Conzelmann, 1975:301; Garland, 2003:773; Witherington III, 1995:323) argue that the most likely interpretation is the imperative,

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[81] *Maranatha* also appears in the Didache, a 1st century document not contained in the Biblical Canon.

[82] For more on the possible spelling of the Aramaic word see Lockwood (2000:627).

making it an invocation. The argument that it should be an imperative is strengthened by the impression that the Greek ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ ("Come, Lord Jesus!") in Revelation 22:20 is most probably a Greek translation of the Aramaic Μαράνα θά (Brown, 1986; Morris, 1985:237; Orr & Walther, 2008:896). The word can also be taken as a perfect,[83] but then a future interpretation is difficult, as the only possible rendering for the perfect is "Our Lord has come (and is here)" (Conzelmann, 1975:301). It is also possible to translate it as an indicative, which will make it an indicative suitable as a liturgical formula to be expressed at the Table of the Lord; praying for Jesus to be present at the table. This could explain why Μαράνα θά has mostly been interpreted within a Eucharistic setting.[84] In the extra-Biblical text, the *Didache*, Μαράνα θά is used in a clear Eucharistic setting in conjunction with the Lord's Supper liturgy. Since the *Didache* dates to a few decades after Corinthians, it is not certain whether Μαράνα θά was used within an Eucharistic context as early as Paul's usage of the term in Corinthians (Baker, 2009:247; Moule, 2008:222–226; Witherington III, 1995:323). There is little doubt that Μαράνα θά is a prayer and most probably the earliest known prayer (Snyder, 1999:217) which implies that the word was around long before any formal Eucharistic liturgy existed. Conzelmann (1975:300) also wonders whether Μαράνα θά is Eucharistic or eschatological or whether it was originally an eschatological cry that became Eucharistic with time.

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[83] For Godet (1957:472) the use of the Perfect is not natural: "But the use of the verb in the perfect to denote a future event, outside of prophecy strictly so called, is far from natural. How can we avoid recalling here the similar saying which closes the book of the Revelation: "Come, Lord Jesus!" and asking if such is not the meaning of the word *Maranatha*?"

[84] Fee (1987:837) also questions the Eucharistic interpretation which understands this as a ban formula intended to exclude persons from the Eucharist (Fee, 1987:838). Fee argues that to interpret this as a ban formula would require several leaps with the evidence and that its setting is the "fencing of the Table" seems highly unlikely in terms of 11:17-34.

But even in a liturgical setting where Μαράνα θά is understood to invoke the presence of Jesus at the Eucharist, the expression remains "an appeal to the heavenly judge and lends a threatening emphasis to the ἀνάθεμα: it is divine judgment which will fall on the offender who participates unworthily" (Wainwright, 2003:86). Actually in Gordon Fee's (1987:839) words, the debate is "moot" since both translations are equally viable, and even within a liturgical setting, such as used in conjunction with the Eucharist, the word can have strong eschatological meaning as the concluding Eucharistic prayer.[85] However, Fee (1987:839) still concedes that, bearing in mind the use of ἀνάθεμα in the Dicache and the Greek ending in Revelations 22:20, "… it seems most likely that it is in fact an eschatological prayer."

Whether Μαράνα θά is an indicative or imperative, it is much more than just a liturgical formula.[86] As Johnson argues:

> In both cases this prayer should not be reduced here in Paul or
> Revelation 22 to a mere liturgical invocation for Jesus to be present
> at the worship service. Rather Paul uses it in its full eschatological

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[85] Wainwright (2003:87) do, however, argue that it is likely that *Maranatha* "belongs… at the opening of the eucharistic liturgy proper, it is either an acclamation of the presence of the Lord who has been in the assembly through the service of the word and who will continue to be there in the eucharist, or else (if the fifties of the first century is not too well early a date to make a distinction in the church's understanding of Christ's presence in the word-service and his presence in the eucharist) a prayer for the eucharistic presence of Christ as at least a partial anticipation of the *Parousia*."

[86] Conzelmann (1975:301) leaves open the possibility that the word could be used in both contexts: Eucharist and eschatological. "it remains an open question whether it invites the Lord to the supper, or prays for his *Parousia* – or whether a petition that was originally eschatological later became Eucharistic."

sense of the Lord's soon return to the world at 'the end' (1:8; 4:5;

11:26; 15:23) (Johnson, 2004:322).

Black (1973:196) connects the word to the return of the Lord, i.e. the παρουσία. Thiselton (2000:1352) also argues for an imperative and eschatological expression.[87] The presence of Μαράνα θά proofs that the Corinthian community was eschatological at its core (Garland, 2003:775). They were aware of the eschatological implications of the gospel. Paul clearly demonstrates in 1 Corinthians 1-3 that the 'new age' in Christ has already dawned (Dunn, 1999:105). Both Dunn (1999:105) and Eriksson (1998:295) feels that an over-emphasis of the current benefits of the 'new age' caused many problems within the Corinthian community, primarily the loss of focus.[88] Paul's emphatic expression here is to balance the reality of only focusing on the present reality of the eschatology. There is a coming future act when the return of Christ will imply blessings for some and curses for others:

Paul also emphasizes the not yet aspect of eschatology: they await

the revealing of the Lord Jesus Christ (1:7; 10:16), they are in

process of being saved (1:18; 15:2), the kingdom of God is still to be

inherited (6:9–10; 15:50), their vision and knowledge is still

imperfect (13:9–13), not forgetting the whole extensive argument of

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[87] John Calvin argues that it was part of the customary form of expression among Hebrews when they excommunicated someone (Calvin, 2010:81). In Chaldean, the ἀνάθεμα has exactly the same meaning as the *herem* in Hebrew. According to Calvin, Paul is placing a ban on those who do not love the Lord; he is excommunicating them by pronouncing a sentence of ἀνάθεμα on them (Calvin, 2010:81). The problem of interpreting these words in terms of an excommunication is that there is no history of the Church where this formula was used against heretics (Johnson, 2004:321).

[88] See Garland (2003:774) who feels that Eriksson is overreaching with his conclusion that the focus on the *Parousia* indicates that the problem throughout the whole 1 Corinthians letter was this over-emphasis on the present benefits of salvation.

ch. 15, together with the concluding 'Maranatha, Our Lord come' (16:22). Particularly important here as a warning to the Corinthians is the emphasis on the future judgment (especially 3:10–4:5) (Dunn, 1999:106).

Despite the ambiguity concerning the precise translation of Μαράνα θά, the above discussion does indicate that an eschatological interpretation of the the cry is not only possible, but actually viable. Ciampa and Rosner claim:

> The expectation that the Lord would come to redress wrong and establish his righteousness in the earth grew out of Old Testament prophetic and apocalyptic texts (see 13:8–12 on the day of the Lord) and is found throughout early Judaism (e.g., 1 Enoch 1:9) and the New Testament (e.g., Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thess. 1:10; 2:14–16; Jude 14–15; Rev. 6:17) (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010:866–867).

Birdsall (1996:726) is certain that judgment and Christ's return is the focus of Paul's use of Μαράνα θά : "The occurrence of Maranatha in 1 Corinthians 16:22, certainly derives its idea from the judgment implicit in v.21, which is closely linked with the idea of the second coming."[89] When ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά is read as a unit, as Moule implies it should be, the essence of the desire expressed in the ἀνάθεμα and the wish of the imprecations in the Psalms that God will come and execute justice, are very similar in desire. It is this shared desire for God to act against those who are deemed enemies, whether now or at the παρουσία, that could create the space to allow a hermeneutical

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[89] The Greek expression ἔρχου κύριε Ἰησοῦ Revelation 22:20 is translated as: "*Come, Lord Jesus!*" and may be the Greek equivalent of Μαράνα θά.

bridge to be built between the New Testament and the Imprecatory Psalms. Christian readers might be put off with the language employed by the psalmist, but can still understand, and even share, their fundamental desire: "Come, o Lord, and do right." Christians can share this desire because Μαράνα θά concerns the coming of the Lord in judgment to redress wrong and establish right (Brown, 1986:898).

In 1 Corinthians 16:22 Paul expresses an imprecation and couples this to a wish for the return of Christ. Paul uses the term on more than one occasion and, as Day (2000:167) indicates, "the Pauline usage of the term, likewise, refers to being brought under the divine curse – but here the curse of eternal damnation." In a footnote Day continues to argue that:

> This imprecation of Paul may be contrasted with the imprecations characteristic of the Imprecatory Psalms. There, the curses are typically temporal and often gruesomely vivid (e.g., Ps 58:7, 'Smash their teeth in their mouths!'). Paul's ἀνάθεμα is distinctly different (although later in another epistle, in Gal 5:12, Paul becomes noticeably graphic […]). Here, there is the absence of physical imagery, and its focus is eschatological—finding its locus in the eternal judgment of God. And yet, in this, Paul's imprecation is the more severe (Day, 2000:168 footnote 74).[90]

Firstly, it should be noted that Day contrasts ἀνάθεμα and the imprecations in terms of time frame and not in terms of the desired outcome and secondly in terms of imagery

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[90] It is important to remember at this point that Day (2000:168 footnote 74) reminds us that despite Paul using a singular word for a curse, "Paul's imprecation is the more severe" as it finds "its locus in the eternal judgment of God."

and not severity. To put it differently: the contrast is in terms of *eschatology*, not *essence*. Although the curses in the Psalms call for temporal judgment, hoping that God will act in their time frame, Paul's use of ἀνάθεμα is eschatological, understanding that the curse might only realize with the παρουσία. Even though there are pronounced differences between ἀνάθεμα and the curses in the Psalms, this study will focus on the unmistakably comparable desire for the realization of God's judgment found in both the Imprecatory Psalms and 1 Corinthians 16:22. But for this to be viable there need to be a strong connection between the ἀνάθεμα and Μαράνα θά.

6.2   *MAPÁNA ΘÁ AS SANCTIONING THE ANÁΘEMA*

Up until the 17ᵗʰ century Bible translators translated ἀνάθεμα and Μαράνα θά as a single unit, making Μαράνα θά part of the malediction formula (Lockwood, 2000:626). The King James Version is an example of this. In later years, this translation practice was rejected, and ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά was split and translated as two separate sentences. Archibald and Plummer (1999:400) calls the translation of the King James Version a "curious mistake" that can be traced back to the 5ᵗʰ century and remained influential till the 17ᵗʰ century. Others (Fitzmyer, 2008:630–631; MacLaren, 2009:259; Picirilli, 1987:246) also argues against translating ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά as a single unit. Splitting ἀνάθεμα and Μαράνα θά into two sentences became the translating norm during the last few centuries.[91]

Ἀνάθεμα comes from the original root meaning "to forbid" (Aust & Müller, 1986:413). It can be used in some instances to indicate an offering; "something dedicated and consecrated to the deity" (Behm, 1963:354). The most common understanding for the

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[91] Fitzmyer (2008:630–631) specifically argues that connecting the two terms stem "from a later period, when the original sense of *marana tha* was lost, and it was thought to be a foreign curse (a sort of abracadabra), supporting the immediately preceding *ētō anathema*."

word ἀνάθεμα is most probably connected to the idea of a curse. We find that the Hebrew word חֵרֶם ("ban") is mostly translated with ἀνάθεμα in the LXX (Aust & Müller, 1986:413; Behm, 1963:354). Within the Old Testament the word חֵרֶם could refer to something, either a person or thing, that is consecrated to the Lord in a religious act, or refer to something, either a person or thing, that is to be totally or utterly destroyed (Gesenius, 2003:306; Wakely, 1997c:276). "The Pauline use of ἀνάθεμα is along the lines of the LXX. For Paul the word denotes the object of a curse" (Behm, 1963:354) and in this case it refers to "eternal damnation" (Kurtaneck, 1989:19). In all the instances of ἀνάθεμα appearing in the Pauline Corpus,[92] a human is the object of the curse, but never with a human carrying out the curse (Kuhn, 1990:81). This is in keeping with the understanding of the psalmist: only YHWH may execute a curse. In similar fashion, Paul expresses a curse on those who do not love the Lord, and the realization of this curse will come at the end. "The controlling thought here is that of the delivering up to the judicial wrath of God of one who ought to be ἀνάθεμα because of his sin" (Behm, 1963:354).

Despite the number of scholars dividing the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά into two separate sentences, a few scholars still argue that these two terms could also be read together, most notably C.F.D. Moule, Matthew Black and Anders Eriksson. As already indicated, even Fee (1987:839) agrees that if the Μαράνα θά is indeed an eschatological prayer, which is quite plausible, then:

> in the present context it would seem to function as a response to the
>
> ἀνάθεμα on those who do not love the Lord, affirming that the Lord
>
> whom they reject is indeed coming, and those who do not love him

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[92] Ἀνάθεμα appears in Romans 9:3; 1 Corinthians 12:3; 16:22 and Galatians 1:8 and 9.

are under the ἀνάθεμα and in danger of being rejected by him (Fee, 1987:839).

Of course Fee's admission that Μαράνα θά could serve as a "response" to the ἀνάθεμα does not imply that Fee is arguing that the Μαράνα θά is a "sanction" of the curse, but it does support the possibility that the two words may share a connection.

Soards (1999:366) makes an interesting comment that the two words form a sound pair that contrasts spiritual discord and spiritual concord. This idea is interesting but Soards does not expand it further. Is it possible that Μαράνα θά is not translated to create a type of wordplay "ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά " and can this possibility also indicate that the two words could be connected? Baker (2009:248), while not arguing that they form a sound pair, reminds that these words were part of a liturgical formula believers uttered at the Eucharist.[93] Uttering these two parallel sounds would be striking in a congregational setting (Baker, 2009:248). If these two words were meant to be uttered together to form some sound pair, it would strengthen the idea that they could be read as a unit. Fotopoulos (2014:286–287) would rather argue that the use of Μαράνα θά here would indicate a *voces mysticae*. *Voces mysticae* are words from languages that were unknown to Greek speaking individuals and they were used to "allow communication with supernatural beings in language understandable only to those spirits" (Fotopoulos, 2014:185). Fotopoulos (2014:304–305) also argues that Paul "has combined a curse with a prayer invoking the eschatological arrival of the Lord Jesus." Leaving Μαράνα θά untranslated and transliterated in Greek makes it an effective *voces mysticae* and even have a similar sound to other Aramaic words used in ancient curses

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[93] See also Bornkamm (1969:169–179)

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(Fotopoulos, 2014:304–305). All the Aramaic words that sound similar to Μαράνα θά "seem to be derived from the Aramaic word for 'Lord'" (Fotopoulos, 2014:305). Fotopoulos (2014:306) also argues that the ἀνάθεμα leaves no question that it is a curse meant to dedicate the one cursed "to divine wrath, death, or destruction." The Μαράνα θά is clearly linked to the conditional ἀνάθεμα as a *voces mysticae* to "invoke the Lord Jesus to come and execute death and/or destruction at his imminent *parousia* on anyone in the Corinthian *ekklesia* who violates the terms of the curse" (Fotopoulos, 2014:309). In this case it is "not loving the Lord."

For Moule (2008:223), as well as Eriksson (1998:291–292) Μαράνα θά also explicitly reinforces the ἀνάθεμα. Moule (2008:224) argues that even though ἀνάθεμα is also found in Galatians 1:8-9 and 1 Corinthians 12:3 without Μαράνα θά, it does not negate the possibility that Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians 16:22 as a sanction. Moule's thesis was never widely accepted and it is perhaps because, in his own words, it is "*a less agreeable interpretation*", which he also argues should not be lightly rejected (Moule, 2008:223). Moule asks some very interesting questions about Μαράνα θά: (1) Why is there so little trace of this in other NT epistles? (2) Why does Μαράνα θά occur at this particular point in 1 Corinthians? (3) Is there enough evidence to support the idea that it is meant to lead the Eucharist proper? (4) Moreover, is there any obvious element of the Eucharist in Revelation 22:20? Moule finds very little, if any, relation between Revelation 22:20 and the Eucharist (Moule, 2008:225). This does not imply that Μαράνα θά is not suited to the Eucharist, only that Μαράνα θά should not be confined to just a Eucharist setting (Moule, 2008:226).[94] If Μαράνα θά does have a wider use

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[94] This does not exclude a Eucharistic setting since the proclamation of Christ's death in the Eucharist should continue "until He come" (Black, 1973:195).

than just the Eucharist setting another possible setting could be as an enforcement of the ἀνάθεμα. For Moule (2008:223) Μαράνα θά enforces the ban formula. He points to an inscription from Salamis where the word Μαράνα θά has more to do with eschatology and final judgment than anything remotely Eucharistic (Moule, 2008:224). Μαράνα θά is a cry of hope in the future *παρουσία*. Moule's argument implies that the ἀνάθεμα and Μαράνα θά should not be read apart but together to form a single unit.

In his article "*The Maranatha invocation and Jude 14,15 (1Enoch 1:9)*" Matthew Black builds on this argument of Moule and develops it further in regards to the possibility that the Aramaic text of Enoch contains the word Μαράνα θά. The first part of verse 9 in the Aramaic text of 1 Enoch is missing, but the Greek translation indicates that the Aramaic could read "[Hā' Mara(n) 'atha'" (Black, 1973:194–195). For Black (1973:192) it is important that C.F.D Moule traced the imprecatory usage of Μαράνα θά to the *παρουσία*. In 1 Enoch 1:9 Black finds a reference to Μαράνα θά that could indicate a further connection with the παρουσία. Jude 14-15 quotes from the extra-Biblical book 1 Enoch regarding the coming of the Lord with his angels to execute judgment upon all. It is obvious that Jude is referring to the *παρουσία* (Black, 1973:194). If the Aramaic passage in Enoch does indeed contain Μαράνα θά, Black (1973:195) argues that the original setting of Μαράνα θά in 1 Enoch 1:9 would not only support the παρουσία reference in the New Testament but also accounts for its use as a reinforcement of the ἀνάθεμα.

In his book "*Traditions as Rhetorical Proof: Pauline Argumentation in 1 Corinthians*" Anders Eriksson approached the problem of the Aramaic word Μαράνα θά from a different angle (Eriksson, 1998:279). In his opinion, many standard commentaries on 1 Corinthians move too quickly over chapter 16:13-24, focusing mostly on the diachronic

aspects of the text, like the division of the Aramaic expression and its historical context (Eriksson, 1998:279).This oversight gives the impression that these parts are not as important as the rest.[95]

Eriksson approaches 1 Corinthians from a synchronic perspective in which he combines the epistolary and rhetorical aspects. Researchers of 1 Corinthians tend to be divided into either regarding the book solely as an epistle or regarding it as a speech with epistolary openings and endings (Eriksson, 1998:281). He prefers to use both epistolographic and rhetoric to study the whole letter (Eriksson, 1998:282). This implies that the opening and the ending of 1 Corinthians play a major part in the whole argument of Paul. He identifies six themes in 1 Corinthians 16:13-24 and argues that these six themes reflect the major themes of the whole letter. Eriksson (1998:289–290) identifies verses 13-24 as the *Peroratio* of the letter that summarizes the argument of the whole letter. There are five imperatives that affirm key themes of the letter. Eriksson (1998:289–295) argues that the very first imperative of these five, γρηγορεῖτε, reinforces the eschatological theme of the believers expectation of the παρουσία as well as the strong covenantal basis found within this passage. The usage of "Love for the Lord" and curse belong to the covenantal terminology and recapitulate the covenantal relationship with God (Eriksson, 1998:191–193). As here, the covenantal relationship

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[95] Eriksson is not the only one giving *Maranatha* a more prominent place within the letter to the Corinthians. Julie Wu also remarked that *Maranatha* is directly related to the particular occasion and purpose of this letter (Wu, 1993:559). *Maranatha* not only enforces the curse, but the combination of the two enforces the central message of the letter. "The pronouncement of a curse on those who do not love the Lord and the exclamation "*Maranatha*!", a prayer for Christ's coming, together serve to reinforce the key messages of the letter" (Wu, 1993:559).

with God forms the basis for the blessings and curses found in the Old Testament, especially the Imprecatory Psalms.

This is important because the words "loving the Lord" and the curse create the covenantal context for understanding this passage. For Eriksson (1998:290–291) this is a carefully constructed passage, written in Paul's hand to authenticate his letter and give his final appeal an emphatic position. Basing his arguments on Aristotle's work on rhetorical devices, Eriksson (1998:291–295) argues that Μαράνα θά, forming the "center piece" of the carefully constructed *postscriptum*, are preceded by a conditional curse. The conditional curse can be compared to the rhetorical function of a maxim. In this case, Paul's potential cursing of Corinthian believers would not be a supportive reason, or enthymeme. The covenantal terminology, introduced by the φιλεῖ τὸν κύριον (Love the Lord) and the ἀνάθεμα (Curse), points to the covenant as the context for the enthymeme (Eriksson, 1998:292). Enthymemes are incomplete arguments that need to be completed by the reader. Introducing the covenantal terminology here provides the backdrop for completing the incomplete argument. Within the religious life of Israel, the covenantal framework for blessings and curses is well established, but also found in early Christianity (Eriksson, 1998:293). Most original readers of the letter from Paul ~~Readers~~ would probably immediately understand that Paul implies that people who break the covenant will be cursed and people who keep the covenant will be blessed. Modern readers, not familiar with the symbolic universe of Paul and his readers, will struggle to understand how a prayer for Christ's return (Μαράνα θά) can be the basis for a conditional curse (Eriksson, 1998:292). Within the covenantal framework, set out by "loving the Lord" and curse, the readers would be able to answer both these questions: "Does the Lord's return give a reason for the judgment that will come upon those who do not love the Lord? Does the Lord's return give a reason for blessings on

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those who do love the Lord?" – On both these questions Paul and the Corinthians would have answered "yes" (Eriksson, 2001:124).

Johnson also connects the ἀνάθεμα and the Μαράνα θά:

> Paul has indicated the seriousness of disrespecting Jesus by failing to respond in love to the love he has shown in giving his life for our sins (15:3); upon such persons the eschatological, judicial wrath of God will come. It will come when Jesus returns. He will judge the world with justice and truth (Jn 5:22; Acts 17:31). Jesus alone, when he comes, will effect the "curse" of God's just and true judgment of all. He will show who are his true followers, expose and judge every false system, and bring in everlasting righteousness to the world (Johnson, 2004:323).

Here the fundamental demand upon the Christian community—that which distinguishes it as a community—is to love the Lord" (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010:864). Anyone not adhering to this stands a chance to be cursed by God. In the case of 1 Corinthians the executions of this curse would only be when Christ returns.

6.3   ΑΝΆΘΕΜΑ ΜΑΡΆΝΑ ΘΆ: INVOKING HOPE AND FEAR

In an article, *Fear of Eternal Damnation,* Eriksson (2001:119–120) argues that Paul's appeal in 1 Corinthians 16:13-24 is an emotional appeal to both hope and fear. This is also consistent with the usage of curses within the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, such a curse formula was "used when the intention was to discourage someone from transgressing" (Scharbert, 1997:409). In some cases these curses were expanded with a reason for the curse (Scharbert, 1997:408). Paul, by connecting ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά to

"Love for the Lord", creates a situation where the reader could complete his incomplete argument. Conditional curses were intended to prevent certain conditions, and it only executed when the condition it tries to prevent exists (Scharbert, 1997:410). Anyone who were cursed because they transgressed in some way was excluded from the family which meant the loss of security, justice, and success (Scharbert, 1997:409).[96]

Paul is using ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά to invoke fear and hope in his readers. Fotopoulos (2014:301) indicates that Paul was very well aware of the way curses can be used to affect the decision making of people. Malcolm (2013:117) indicates that a large number of curses on tablets have been discovered in Corinth that dates to the time of Paul and many of them call on gods to execute curses upon others.The widespread fear for curses that existed in the Ancient Near East made it the perfect method for Paul to use as a "persuasive technique" to change the behaviour of the Corinthian Christians (Fotopoulos, 2014:277–278).

Those who "do not love the Lord" should know that they are standing under the curse of God. By rejecting the Lord, they are placing themselves under the ἀνάθεμα (Fee, 1987:837). Not loving the Lord could be seen as the ultimate sin (Whiterington, 1995:323). Paul's use of the conditional curse is interesting. The identity of those under the curse is unclear. Eriksson (2001:125) identifies two possibilities: (1) those who do not follow the moral obligations of the new covenant. The accursed would then be those who overemphasized freedom and slipped into moral laxity. (2) Those that have no

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[96] For Fee (1987:837), there is two clues to the meaning of the ἀνάθεμα: 1) Paul use a similar curse in Gal. 1:8-9 and the curse is called upon those who deviate from the gospel Paul preaches. 2) The same warning that moves toward exclusion in 2 Thes. 3:14-15 where the warning is clearly upon those who do not obey the instructions of the letter. Paul's final words cover the theme of the whole letter: "not loving the Lord."

personal devotion to the Lord. The accursed could then be the Corinthian pneumatics that overemphasized their spiritual endowment. The irony is that neither of these groups will think of themselves as accursed:

> The conditional curse is a very crafty way for Paul to implicate his opponents without saying more than that those who do not love the Lord is accursed. He would not have said it unless he considered there to be such people in the church, but by phrasing it as a conditional curse, he makes the opponents implicate themselves (Eriksson, 2001:125).

Within the same covenantal framework, blessings are promised to those who do "love the Lord" and live within the covenantal parameters. The coming of the Lord Jesus can be either a terrifying experience or a wonderful blessing. The prayer of Μαράνα θά following and sanctioning the ἀνάθεμα invokes both fear and hope. In the lives of those who love the Lord there is a real expectation and desire to see Christ returning for his children. For those who do not love the Lord, the thought of Christ's return will evoke fear for the very real eternal damnation of those who are against the Lord. The ἀνάθεμα stirs fear; the Μαράνα θά stirs hope.

Believers who truly love the Lord ought not to fear his return. Without a doubt, the church should be filled with a deep desire for the return of Christ. Even though this blessing is a central part of Christ's return, this is not Paul's focus in 1 Corinthians 16:22. It is possible that Paul only hinted at the blessing, but used the curse as the main focus:

Throughout this letter, he has dealt with the Corinthians' sins, so it seems logical to regard this reminder of the Lord's coming as one final warning about their sins. It is a very solemn thing to think about meeting the Lord when our lives are falling so far short of his expectations (Ellsworth, 1995:270).

6.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter indicated that the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά can be read together as a curse enforced by an eschatological prayer for the immanent return of Christ. The reality, from a Christian point of view, is that the expected return of Christ implies the execution of judgment on all people. For those who love the Lord, his return implies a glorious experience. For those who do not love the Lord, his return implies the reality of condemnation. Christians should pray for the return of Christ. Μαράνα θά expressed the wish of Christians for Christ to return quickly:

It expresses very concisely one of the deepest convictions of the primitive church from its very youngest days. It takes on even more profound meaning in the wake of Paul's magnificent tour de force in chapter 15. 'It expresses the eager longing felt by the Church in those early days for the speedy return of the Lord' (Prior, 1985:285).

The implication is, however, that praying for Christ to return means that he will judge his enemies. Even though the judgment of the wicked is not the focus when Christians pray for the Lord to return, the implication remains the same. In this way, the desire expressed in Μαράνα θά is in essence similar to the desires expressed in the Imprecatory Psalms, as Oster states:

This petition [Maranatha] indicates not only Paul's eschatological piety in his desire for the Lord to return, but also points to the eschatological condemnation that will come upon those who do not love the Lord. It would be at the risk of modernizing and distorting Paul's theology if one minimized the close connection in this verse between eschatological piety and the damnation of nonbelievers. That is; Paul's desire for the Lord's (quick) return is to bring to fruition and consummation the ἀνάθεμα he has just pronounced upon those who do not love the Lord. In the Corinthian setting the phrase "anyone who does not love the Lord" would refer to nonbelievers (Oster, 1995:411).

Lenski (1963:11) quote Zahn's formulation, "Lord, come and put an end to all strife and to all activity of hostile forces in the church!" Lenski (1963:11) expands this thought: "It appeals to the Lord to come and to visit the Anathema upon all whose hearts turn away from him." The cry for the Lord's return is similar to the psalmists' prayers for YHWH to become active on their behalf in the sense that both the Christian and the psalmist can do nothing but wait for God to hear the plea and act. Despite the fact that the psalmists are asking for immediate judgment and the Christian is not, the results will be similar. The Psalmists cried to the Lord for deliverance. They knew that they could not take matters into their hands, even if they are righteous. The decision for vengeance and vindication remained in the hands of God. Even while passionately praying for the destruction of their enemies, vengeance should be left to God, who is the suzerain of the covenant. In the same way, Christians cannot take matters into their hands. The eschatological, judicial wrath of God will come on those who do not love the Lord (Johnson, 2004:323). For Paul, anyone who does not love the Lord, place

themselves under the judicial wrath of God. The next chapter will look into the implications of crying for the return of Christ and how it can help us understand and perhaps even appreciate the bloodthirsty cries in the Imprecatory Psalms.

CHAPTER 7 – CONCLUSION

The Imprecatory Psalms are a conundrum for many readers and it can be a shock, especially for those who stumble unaware unto these passages. The primary aim of this study is to argue that Μαράνα θά, when read as the enforcement of the ἀνάθεμα, can give a hermeneutical key to interpret the Imprecatory Psalms. Chapter 1 looked at a few common methods that attempt to alleviate the problem caused by these passages. These solutions range from ignoring or censoring these parts to defending them at all cost as part of the Word of God. Most of these methodologies do not adequately handle all the complex questions and problems caused by the Imprecatory Psalms. There is probably no single method that could effectively answer all the questions or problems created by the Imprecatory Psalms. This is mostly due to the wide range of worldviews, viewpoints, and presuppositions found among the different readers. There is no consensus among scholars about the study and use of the Imprecatory Psalms, especially from a Christian perspective.

> Evangelical scholars are divided on this issue of the ethical problem of imprecatory psalms. Some regard the imprecatory prayers as irrelevant in the sense that the ethics reflected in these prayers may not be applied to New Testament believers. Others argue that the imprecatory psalms are still relevant and applicable (Simango & Krüger, 2016:593).

When attempting to seek for a solution to the problems created by die Imprecatory Psalms, it would be profitable to consider the remark made by Simango and Krüger (2016:598):

> Whether imprecatory psalms are really applicable to God's people
> of the New Testament or not, is a question that is determined to a
> large extent by extra-textual aspects such as one's view on the
> relation between the Old and New Testament and broader ethical
> considerations.

The problems created by the Imprecatory Psalms will only be an issue if the reader deems the Imprecatory Psalms important enough for consideration, or perhaps if these Psalms appear prominently within the faith community's worship. Ironically, as Krüger and Simango indicated above, this has mostly to do with the reader's presuppositions regarding the Bible, the reader's worldview, and other extra-textual aspects deemed important by the reader and, perhaps, to a lesser degree the results of exegesis. In chapter 1 it was noted that the Psalms are read by two different communities with different purposes: the academic community and the faith community. While the academic community have access to lots of different methodologies, approaches, and theories to tackle these questions, the faith communities are less prepared to effectively handle these questions. Where the academics that either ignore or shun the Imprecatory Psalms do so based on careful consideration through different methodologies and their stance on certain of the extra-textual aspects, most readers from the faith communities ignore these passage simply because they have no idea what to do with these prayers, because they prove challenging to their perceptions about God.

That said, it is the contention of this study, as argued in chapter 5 that the Imprecatory Psalms are important and part of the bigger revelation of God. As will be argued below, Imprecatory Psalms have the potential to help readers come to a deeper understanding of the reality of pain and violence in the world. People who do not struggle with the

question of the Imprecatory Psalms or dismiss them as irrelevant for today will of course find little or no value in discussing the potential of Imprecatory Psalms for modern day Christians. The contention is that Μαράνα θά, when read with the ἀνάθεμα in 1 Corinthians 16:22, could help readers of the Psalms reconsider the usage of the imprecatory Psalms.

To achieve this chapters 2 to 4 studied three specific Psalms (7, 35, and 59) within their inter-, intra- and extra-textual contexts to determine as much as possible about the social-cultural context of the psalmist, and this with the purpose to try and determine the motivations driving the psalmists as believers to express words this harsh and vengeful against other people. From chapters 2 to 4 it was determined that the psalmists did not curse because of personal and vengeful feelings. In all cases the psalmists were fearing for their lives after consistent and tenacious attacks from real-life enemies. Although the identity of the enemies were not always discernible, it is clear that the psalmists knew who they were. In the case of Psalm 35 it even appears as if the enemy might be an acquaintance (see vv.13-14). In all three Psalms the actions of the enemies left the psalmists with no doubt that they will be unable to prevent the wicked plans of the enemies to be fulfilled, unless YHWH acts on their behalf. It is in these absolute dire situations that the psalmists do curse their enemies.

The concept of curses within the Ancient Near East was therefore considered to determine their role within the Imprecatory Psalms. It became clear that cursing within the Ancient Near East were quite common and various cultures made use of magic and curses formulas against enemies and other threats. In Israel the curse were mostly connected with the divine. No curse could be fulfilled without YHWH executing the curse. This led to a deep realization that not all curses are legitimate. Israel understood

that issuing an illegitimate curse will not only be ineffective, but also place the one that expressed the curse on a possible collision course with YHWH. The study determined that at the time cursing, like those found in the Psalms, were not done lightly. In chapters 2 to 4 it was also discovered that the main purpose of the imprecations was not the destruction of the enemy but rather the glorification of YHWH. Hopefully the enemy would rather repent and share in the glory of YHWH. However, the reality is that sometimes the enemies are so wicked that the only way to stop them is to call for their complete destruction. The most important discovery in those chapters is the confirmation that YWHW will enact any curse and he will pronounce judgment when and on whom he deem appropriate. The exegesis indicated that cursing was done within a specific context in the covenantal relationship with YHWH and was never about personal sentiments but always related to a deep trust expressed in the hope that YHWH will act in favour of the supplicant and vindicate him. They are pleas placed before YHWH in dire circumstances and the outcome of these wishes are for more than the mere destruction of the enemies, even though it appears to be single-mindedly vengeful. Behind these cries is a desire to see God act in history and to change the situation, not only that of the psalmists but also that of the whole community. There is a desire for vindication, but not vindication in terms of the wrong done to the psalmist, but rather vindication of their belief in God. YHWH should act so that the name of YHWH could be glorified and the evil-doers will realise that YHWH is Lord over the whole world. There is a certain desire expressed by the psalmists that is bigger than mere vengeance, and it is this desire that can possibly built a bridge between 1 Corinthians 16:22 and the Psalms.

In chapter 5 it was argued that the eschatological cry Μαράνα θά, should be read as a sanction of the ἀνάθεμα in 1 Corinthians 16:22. This could offer a key to help readers

look past the vicious language used in the Psalms and see the common desire expressed by the psalmists and believers praying that παρουσία will take effect when Christ comes. This statement does not imply that the imprecations in the Psalms and the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά are identical, but rather that behind the curses expressed in the Psalms and the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά there is a similar desire or wish: that God would act against the realities of evil and enemies in this world. Although 1 Corinthians 16:22 is not targeted at enemies who are out for blood, like the prayers in the Psalms, the context of 1 Corinthians 16:22 and the use of ἀνάθεμα do imply that those who do not love the Lord are against the Lord. Also, while the word Μαράνα θά, as a prayer or wish, does not carry any "vengeful or bloody undertone", considering other New Testament books, especially Revelation (see below) do indicate that the second coming of the Lord is just as vicious and bloody as the wishes expressed by the psalmists. So when Μαράνα θά is considered within the broader context of the apocalyptic and eschatological context of the New Testament it becomes clear that New Testament believers believed that the return of Christ will also include the destruction of evil and enemies coupled with the salvation and vindication of God's people. This was, among other things, also argued in chapter 6 which built on the realization in chapter 5 that curses, which is so jarring to the modern mind sets, were very common in the ancient world. However, there was a clear distinction made in the ancient world between legitimate and illegitimate curses (see chapter 5). For believers, grounded in the covenant, expressing illegitimate curses could result in the curse returning on them. So despite the commonality of curses in the ancient world, chapter 5 indicated that curses were not used carte blanche among believers of either the Old or New Testament. For most believers, curses functioned within the relational milieu of the covenant with God. This is an important distinction to make: curses were only effective if they were

legitimate and when God decided to enact them. Believers were aware that God alone had the power to exact a curse. So no matter how bloodthirsty or vengeful a prayer or curse appears to be, it was useless until God decided to vindicate the person or not. To curse is to call on the Almighty God.

The Bible reveals God not only as the Creator of all, but also as the source of life.[97] Many Christians express this on a weekly basis when reciting the first article of the Apostle's creed, "I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth." Included in the idea of God as Creator and Sustainer of creation we find the belief that God is in control. He is not only the Creator of heaven and earth, but also one who sustains the whole of creation. This actually means that God has the final word in the existence of creation and history (Zenger, 1996:63). The Bible also reports that sin had a negative impact on God's creation and resulted in the whole of creation being cursed (Genesis 3) and struggling under the pains of corruption (Romans 8:18-22). Dunn (1998a:487–488) argues that Romans 8 develops the idea that God will act in history, not only to save humanity but the whole of creation. Romans 8 insists that the whole of creation groans; wishing that the end will arrive and that humankind will be restored to its original position, because once humankind is restored the restoration of creation will follow. "Paul has no doubts whatsoever that creation is involved in that eschatological glory to which he and his readers look forward" (Dunn, 1998a:487). The implication of Romans 8 is the "assurance that that result of Adam's rebellion will also be set right by God in the final transformation of reality" (Achtemeier, 1985:142). Based on these and similar texts, many Christians belief in a complete restoration of creation and humanity at a certain, but final time in history. Broadly defined the restoration will fall under the

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[97] Gen. 1, Job. 33:4; Ps. 135:6-7; 146:6; Is 42:5; Acts 17:28; 1 Cor 8:6;

doctrine of eschatology. The doctrine of eschatology varies among the different schools of thought in theology and Christian denominations. The basic idea that God will act in history to repair the brokenness and corruption of creation is voiced by many believers today. For the purpose of this study it is not necessary to delve into the differences of opinion regarding eschatological matters, but important rather to affirm that the early Christians, and many modern believers do believe that God will act in an active and decisive way at some stage in history.

7.1 *MAPʹANA ΘΆ AS A WISH FOR THE REALIZATION OF THE DAY OF THE LORD*

This basic eschatological viewpoint is especially strong in the New Testament. The New Testament story opens with a powerful display of the power of this eschatological expectation when John the Baptist arrives on the scene with the words "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matthew 3:2; ESV). The Jews had a strong expectation for the arrival of the promised Messiah (Garland, 2001:34). The expectation has its roots in Jewish Apocalyptic literature where the idea of the final judgment, not only of Israel but the whole world, is developed into the concept of the coming kingdom of God.[98] Matthew opens his chapter with the words: "in those days" which, according to Garland (2001:34) "…is laden with eschatological import (Zech 8:23; 1 Enoch 99:10). For Matthew it marks the time of the messiah" (Garland, 2001:34; see also Hagner, 1998:47). In this regard, John the Baptist is connected to Jesus and comes forth as the fulfillment of an Old Testament prophecy (Is. 40:3) (see Luz, 2007:135).

The Old Testament carries a very strong hope of God acting against its enemies and freeing the world from all evil-doers and enemies. This hope is strongly expressed in

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[98] Some examples can be found in extra-biblical texts like 1 Enoch 25:3; *Jubilees* 1:28–29; 1QS 5:20–21; and 1QM 12:7–15.

the Imprecatory Psalms where believers are struggling to understand the reality of evil in a world ruled by YHWH. Their anguish is expressed in the prayers that YHWH will act quickly and decisively against enemies. In this sense we saw that the psalmists in Psalm 7, 35, and 59 call on YHWH to awake, and arise and to come to their aid. The hope of the psalmists is intertwined with the arrival or appearance of YHWH. YWHW will judge the enemies and vindicate the righteous.

The idea of judgment is also found in the New Testament. This is especially expressed in the 7th article of the Apostle's Creed that states the belief that "He [Jesus Christ] will come again to judge the living and the dead." Despite the difficulties locked into that simple statement, which is not the focus of this study, the "return of Christ" can be considered as a central theme in the New Testament or as Wainwright (2003:75) claims, the return of Christ is "… found in every fibre of the New Testament texts." For Wainwright (2003:75), 1 Corinthians 11:26 indicates that the Eucharist has the purpose of leading believers to focus on the death of the Lord, "until he come." The notion of the return of Jesus at a future date is expressed by various New Testament passages (Matt. 24:27-31; Acts 1:11; 1 Thes. 4:16-17; Rev. 1:7). For the first Christians the hope that Christ will return was a pivotal aspect of their faith, as can be clearly seen from the Aramaic cry Μαράνα θά (van de Beek, 2008:298). The idea of Christ's return is expressed in the Greek word παρουσία, which is frequently found within the New Testament and in its basic form refers to any person arriving ("coming"), for example 1 Corinthians 16:17-18 where the author expresses his joy at the arrival of Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus. However in the New Testament παρουσία is more frequently used to convey an eschatological sense; referring to the coming of Christ at the end of

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times (Braumann, 1986:899).[99] The return of Christ is also expressed through various other words, like "appearance" (2 Thess 2:8; 1 Tim 6:14; 2 Tim 1:10), "coming" (Matt 24:30; 1 Cor 4:5; 11:26; Rev 1:6; 22:20), and "revelation" (1 Cor 1:7; 2 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 1:7; Col 3:4; 1 John 2:28). The popular term "Second coming" is not found in the Bible, but the term most probably derived from Hebrews 9:28 which states that "…so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (ESV).

Early Christians expected an imminent return of Christ, but the subsequent delay of the παρουσία caused some problems later. Some scholars argued that this caused certain early Christians to abandoned their focus on future events, to rather focus solely on the present world (see Schweitzer, 1910:330–397). Despite the possibility that some early believers lost the focus on Christ's imminent return, the Early Christians did manage to accommodate the delay and retain a tensioned balance between the hope of an imminent return and the delay (see Bauckham, 1980:3–36; Rowland, 1985:285–294). 2 Peter 3 is an indication that some believers probably questioned the return of Christ. Despite the delay of the παρουσία, most early Christians expected a sudden and unexpected arrival, "like a thief in the night" (1 Thes. 5:2). Revelation also focuses on an unexpected, but imminent appearance of Christ (Rev 1:1, 3, 7; 2:16; 3:11; 22:6–7). However, in Rev. 2:8-10 the believers in Smyrna are called upon to remain "faithful unto death" which might indicate that the author was considering the notion that the period might not be as imminent as expected.

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[99] See for example Matt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Cor 15:23; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8; Jas 5:7–8; 2 Pet 3:4, 12

In the New Testament texts Paul uses the Greek version ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου, to refer to παρουσία of Christ Jesus.[100] Paul's understanding of ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου probably found its roots in the Old Testament idea of the Day of the Lord (יוֹם יְהוָה) (Bruce, 1998:109) which figures very strongly within the Old Testament prophets and carries various meanings. The most well-known meaning, and most relevant for this study, is the idea that God would punish the enemies, vindicate and restore his people and purge the world of evil (see Isa 13:6–13; Joel 3:14–17; Amos 5:18–20; Mal 4:5–6). In similar fashion the author of Thessalonians and Romans expected the day of the Lord to include the judgment of all people (see e.g., 2 Thess 1:6–10; Rom 2:16) and, like the psalmists crying for justice, other passages in the New Testament indicate that the day of the Lord will contain vindication (see e.g., 1 Cor 3:10–15; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 2:16). Bruce (1998:109) indicates that the "day of the Lord" carries various different names like "the day of Christ (Phil 1:10; 2:16)", "the day of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6)", "the day of our Lord Jesus (2 Cor 1:14)", "the day of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:8)", or simply "the day" (Rom 13:12; 1 Cor 3:13; Heb 10:25). Regardless of how the New Testament texts refers to this specific day, the important point is that this day is "in other words, the day of Christ's revelation in glory, when he comes to vindicate his people and judge the world in righteousness (cf. Acts 17:31)" (Bruce, 1998:109). Early Christians hoped for an imminent return of Jesus. The first letter to the Thessalonians is perhaps the book in the New Testament that deals the most intensely with the hope for an imminent return. Dodd (1953:67–128) argued that the author of Thessalonians changed his mind regarding the imminent return of Christ as time went by. Not everyone agrees, and Dunn (1998b:294–315) argued that it could also indicate that the focus was more on the

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[100] See for example passages like 1 Thess 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2–3; 1 Cor 1:8, 3:13; 5:5; 2 Cor 1:14; Phil 1:6, 10; 2:16; also 2 Tim 1:12, 18, 4:8.

unexpectedness of the return than its immanence. It is indeed possible that the unexpected return of the Lord received more focus (1 Thess 5:1–4) in the early church than its immanence. It is also possible that believers considered the imminence so close that they stopped doing their daily tasks while waiting for the day of the Lord (see Bruce, 1998:xlii). Despite the possibility that early believers were uncertain about the immanence of the παρουσία, most New Testament texts make it clear that early believers were encouraged to place their hope in the return of Christ.[101]

However, this does not imply that the Old Testament and New Testament idea of the "Day of the Lord" are identical. The New Testament finds its hope completely in the παρουσία of Jesus Christ. The early Christians developed their hope for an imminent return from the teachings of Jesus. Jesus clearly identified the Kingdom of God with his present reality, but also indicated that the full reality of its coming is not yet completed. The already and not yet concept is well attested within the New Testament and extends to include the eschatological event as well as the wrath of God: both already began, but are not yet finished (Witherington III, 2006:75). Both John, in Revelation, and Paul in his letters, "present the Church as experiencing that eschatological tension between the 'already' and the 'not yet'" (Boxall, 2006:121).

The Early Church interpreted the prophets as being fulfilled in Jesus and some extraordinary experiences only heightened the hope that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah. Certain miracles of Jesus, like healing deaf and blind people and other miracles (see Matthew 21:14-16; Luke 7:18-23), further strengthened the hope that

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[101] See e.g., Rom 13:11–14; Phil 3:20–21, 4:5; Col 3:3–4; also 1 Tim 6:13–16; Titus 2:11–14

God's final plan for humanity and creation is effectively closing in, as expressed by the prophet:

> Say to those who have an anxious heart, "Be strong; fear not! Behold,
> your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He
> will come and save you." Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
> and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like
> a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. For waters break forth
> in the wilderness, and streams in the desert (Isaiah 53:4-6; ESV).

There are certain similar elements in the Old Testament יוֹם יְהוָה and the New Testament ἡ ἡμέρα κυρίου in terms of judgment and the destruction of enemies. Christ's return indicates the destruction of the "lawless one" and "all who did not believe the truth" (see 2 Thes. 2:1-12). In the same instance, those belonging to Jesus will be gathered together; both the living and the dead (1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thes.4:14-17 and 2 Thes. 2:1). This second coming will be unexpected and include an end to this world (Matt. 24:3, 27, 38-39) and the judgment of the people.

The word judgment (κρίσις) might be an ill-fated choice within our modern mind-set because modern readers tend to ascribe only a negative connotation to the word judgment. Zenger (1996:63–65) reminds us that judgment is not negative, but actually refers to the realization of justice. The idea of judgment carries a positive purpose: the wicked should consider their mistakes and repent (Zenger, 1996:64). So the purpose of judgment is actually focussed on repairing a broken system. This is strongly communicated in the Psalms as a variety of Psalms express the belief that God will act and repair the division between the righteous and the wicked (Zenger, 1996:64–65). The Psalms express passionately that God is the only One who can restore balance in a

world filled with the reality of violence (Zenger, 1996:68). This is because the flood of violence is simply too big for humanity to stop (Zenger, 1996:68). The Psalms is a cry to God: make it stop (Zenger, 1996:68). It expresses the realization and hope that the chaos will not continue without end.

The New Testament, at times, sees the παρουσία as the moment when God will punish the wicked and save the believers and bring an end to the chaos.[102] Some passages in the gospels, like Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, and Luke 20 appear to refer to the παρουσία in strong apocalyptic language. There are strong references to concepts like vindication of the righteous, judgment and punishment of the wicked, and divine actions leading to the victory of the righteous. Some scholars argue a connection between these passages in the gospels and the apocalyptic passages in Daniel 7-11, while others prefer to interpret them as metaphorical texts that refer to the vindication of Jesus in this world and not some future event (see Caird, 1980:266–268; Wright, 1996:360–367). However, similar apocalyptic language is also found in other New Testament documents like Acts 1:10–11, 1 Thessalonians 4:16–5:4, and Revelations 1:7. Also, it appears that Jesus did not have in mind vindication in this world. He prophesies the future destruction of the temple in Jerusalem but warns his listeners not to confuse that event with the παρουσία which will be more cosmic in scale (Matt. 24:30 and Mark 13:26). Jesus warned his listeners that the παρουσία will be unexpected, but decisive (e.g., Matt 24:42–44; Mark 13:35–36). Revelation also refers to the unexpected nature of the παρουσία (see e.g. Rev 3:3; 16:15) and Revelation carries a strong theme of judgment and vengeance when regarding the παρουσία (see e.g. Rev 6:16–17; 20:1–15; 22:12). Some of the images of judgment and vengeance in Revelation rival and echo

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[102] See e.g. Matt 19:28, 25:31–46; Mark 8:38. Heb. 10:35-39, James 5:7-9. 1 Pet. 1:7; 4:5, 1 John 2:28; 4:17

those in the imprecatory Psalms, especially the cry for vengeance from the martyrs in Rev. 6:10-11 (Barton, 2000:76). In the book of Revelation Jesus functions as the divine warrior, in exacting judgment on the earth (Revelation 19:11-21). Boring (1989:195) calls the image of Jesus on the horse "without parallel in the New Testament's portrayals of the παρουσία (Mark 13; Luke 17; 21; 1 Thess 4; 2 Thess 1; 1 Cor 15)." The military metaphors might seem out of place for Jesus, but in Revelation 19 Jesus is portrayed as the warrior who slaughters his enemies (see Boring, 1989:195–197).

This is intensified by the ending of the book expressing the strong hope that the Lord would come soon (Rev. 22:20), knowing full well that the coming of Jesus would result in the victory over the enemies. The cry for the Lord to come soon finds its basis in the promise of the Lord himself: "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:12; ESV). The return of the Lord not only carries the promise of "soon", but also the promise of recompense and repayment. The cry of Μαράνα θά (1 Cor. 16:22) asks the same as Rev. 22:20 – Come, Lord Jesus and combined with the ἀνάθεμα will surely carry the same hope of the realization of the promise made by the Alpha and the Omega in Revelation 22:12. It is with this in mind that Paul warns his readers in 1 Corinthians 16:22 about the curse if they do not love the Lord. The return of the Lord will be decisive and the addition of the Μαράνα θά heightens the warning. The curse, combined with Μαράνα θά, is not prediction but an "indirect command that the Lord himself anathematize nonlovers of him" (Gundry, 2010:688). Jesus is the one riding the white horse and destroying his enemies (Rev. 19). Although the indirectness softens the command into a prayer request (see Gundry, 2010:688), the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά (1 Cor 16:22) has an undertone of finality and carries the expectation of judgment. The condition is focused on loving the Lord, and

anyone who does not are in danger of standing outside the covenant. Garland (2003:774) argues that to love the Lord "is part of covenant loyalty." It is a central theme of the Bible, and Wright (2004:238) argues that this command "formed the heart and centre of the covenant, the bond of love." With the imminent return of the Lord in mind, the combination of ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά indicates the "profound seriousness with which the early church viewed faithfulness to Christ" (Blomberg, 1994:339). Those who do not love the Lord is actually located on the wrong side; they will be deemed enemies of the Lord. In Revelation 22 we see that those who are outside the city gates are those who are against the Lord; "… the dogs and sorcerers and the sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (ESV) because of the "fundamental orientation of their [one's] heart" (Boxall, 2006:317). Those who loves and practice falsehood are not part of those who love the Lord and are in effect the ones 1 Corinthians 16:22 warns. The book of Revelation ends with the imperative "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus", which expresses the hope that the promises of Revelation will come to pass: the judgment of the wicked and the salvation of "those whose names are in the book of Life" (see Revelation 20:7-21:26). In this context both Revelation 22 and I Corinthians 16 echo the imprecatory Psalms: "The Psalms assume that a proper stance in relation to wrongdoing is to want to see it punished" (Goldingay, 2009:280).

However, there should not be any personal gain in that desire. This sentiment is not only true of the Psalms but also of the New Testament. In Revelation 6:9 we find "those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they borne" (ESV) under the altar crying out: "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:10; ESV). This cry is not a desire or expression for vengeance in a personal sense, but rather it is a

prayer that touches on the reputation of God: "God will be considered unjust if he does not punish sin" (Beale, 1999:392).

7.2   THE PROBLEM OF JUDGMENT VERSUS THE NEED FOR JUDGMENT

In recent years there appears to be a decrease in interest in the final judgment. Van de Beek (2008:268–270) argues that since the influence of Humanism a shift in modern theology moved the focus more towards the all-encompassing love of God than the concept of the final judgment. There is a growing notion that hell no longer fits in with God's love leading scholars to argue that the idea of the final judgment and hell is "barbaric" and more consistent with the Old Testament image of god than the New Testament image of God (see Heering, 1952:245; van de Beek, 2008:268). Van de Beek (2008:276) questions the reason why modern theology avoids speaking about the last judgment since the Biblical text clearly does (van de Beek, 2008:276). To disregard the idea of a final judgment needs to work around various texts in the New Testament. Silva (2001:223), for example lists 9 pericopes[103] just in the gospel of Matthew that indicates the "imprecations and righteous wrath are very much part of the New Testament language" (Silva, 2001:223). The call for God to act in judgment is found in both Testaments and both "appeal for the violent power of God and an end to violence" (Zenger, 1996:80). Despite some opposition to eschatology, it does teach that God will set right what is wrong (van de Beek, 2008:277). If history proves to line up unfairly against people, God will judge over history and will set it right in future (van de Beek, 2008:277). This is the hope expressed in the Imprecatory Psalms, which is also expressed by Μαράνα θά and which forms the fundamental element that drove the hope

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[103] Matt. 10:14-15; 11:23; 15:7; 16:23; 18:6; 21:12-13; 21:18ff; 23:13ff; 25:4.

of the New Testament believers. If there is no final judgment the whole reason for Jesus' return could be questioned anew. If God does not do right, the whole eschatology evaporates (van de Beek, 2008:277).

The context of 1 Corinthians 16:22 indicates that Paul uses the curse and the imperative "in its full eschatological sense of the Lord's soon return to the world at 'the end'" and combining this with the Μαράνα θά it can only mean that "upon such persons the eschatological, judicial wrath of God will come" (Johnson, 2004:322–323). Paul's use of the word ἀνάθεμα seperates the Christian community into two groups: those who love Jesus and those who do not.[104] This is in keeping with what we find in the Psalms. The Psalms classify people into two types : the righteous and the wicked (Wenham, 2005:188). In the Psalms you are either for God, or against God. The dividing line between "the righteous" and the "wicked" is drawn between those who belief in God and those who do not. Wenham (2005:188–189) also indicates that in the Psalms the righteous may suffer temporary (as the lament Psalms indicate) but the wicked will ultimately perish (see Pss 1:6; 3:7; 9:5, 16, 17). It is important that the Psalms do not easily classify someone as wicked. The wicked is seen as those who actively oppose God; who mock him and oppress the poor and weak. Although they might appear to be righteous it is usually just a front. The righteous belong to God, and in times of need they turn to him for help.

With the current focus on the all-encompassing love of God, modern readers do have trouble with the idea of Paul calling down a curse on those who do not love the Lord. The main reason is the modern cultural preference to put "emphasis on religious

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[104] Johnson (2004:322) remarks that "[t]here does not seem to be a case of discipline in the history of the church where this formula was used against heretics." Thus ἀνάθεμα is only used to against people who are part of the Christian community.

tolerance and pluralism" (Johnson, 2004:322). However, Hays (1997:291) reminds us that the Christian return is not inclusive to an unlimited degree. The Christian understanding of the Lord's coming is similar to that of the Jewish hope of judgment (Keener, 2014:497). "The expectation that the Lord would come to redress wrong and establish his righteousness in the earth grew out of Old Testament prophetic and apocalyptic texts […] and is found throughout early Judaism (e.g. 1 Enoch 1:9) and the New Testament[105] (Ciampa & Rosner, 2010:865–866) and in this context it comes as a warning to the Corinthians that soon they "may have to answer for their shortcomings" (Taylor, 2014:435). Chapter 5 indicated that the curse had the function to warn believers to change their behaviour while there is still the chance, especially curses found in the Old Testament had the purpose "to discourage someone from transgressing" (Scharbert, 1997:409). Hays (1997:292) calls it a "thinly veiled threat" against believers who turned from the basic concepts of Christianity. The warnings expressed through curses were because of the real possibility that God will judge those who do not repent. God's judgment is final. However, the curse here in 1 Corinthians is conditional, clearly indicating that it is a warning and repentance is still an option (Harrisville, 1987:293). In this regard John Day (2002:156) refers to the curse Peter expressed towards Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:22). The curse was conditional and severe, but "[e]ven in the midst of such imprecation – whether by the psalmist or an apostle – there is implicit or explicit the hope of repentance and restoration" (Day, 2002:156). In the Biblical text the warning of the final judgment is far more than the mere destruction of enemies; it is the hope of salvation for people oppressed and vilified.

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[105] e.g. Matt. 3:7; Luke 3:7; Eph. 5:6; Col. 3:6; 1 Thes. 1:10; 2:14-16; Jude 14-15; Rev. 6:17

In this regard the Imprecatory Psalms are prayers expressing faith and hope in God (Wenham, 2005:190). Israel lived with the belief that God is in control. He rules and he is the ultimate judge (Wenham, 2005:190). The Psalms look forward to a universal judgment, but also desires a more immediate judgment of the wicked and their activities (Wenham, 2005:190). God is seen as the guarantor of judgment (Wenham, 2005:190). It is however important to realise that the New Testament clearly upholds the notion of God's wrath, judgment, and decisive acts against his enemies (Peels, 2003:101). Whoever rejects the message of salvation expressed within the gospel will be judged in the end (Peels, 2003:102–103). It is this belief that gives hope in a world filled with oppression and injustice (Zenger, 1996:63–68). The belief that history belongs to God and God has the last word about history, as its judge (Zenger, 1996:63).

7.3   THE POSSIBLE FUNCTION OF THE CURSES TODAY

With that in mind, the question can still be asked: what possible use could the Imprecatory Psalms have for modern readers? To answer this question, it should be remembered that modern society live in a world filled with violence and hatred. "Our modern justice systems, despite all the improvements through ages, are not able to constantly make things right" (van de Beek, 2008:281).[106] The problem is that in our modern Western lifestyle most readers of the Imprecatory Psalms feel no connection to the realities expressed by the psalmists and perhaps live without the real notion of the degree of hurt and violence in the world. Goldingay is correct when he claims that:

> Modern readers who are offended by these psalms are people who live
>
> in comfortable middle-class Western contexts. People who are abused
>
> do not react to them in the same way. In order to understand the place

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[106] Free translation from the original Dutch.

of such prayers, we might seek to read them from the place of the kind

of people for whom they were written, people surrounded by those

who are planning to kill them (Goldingay, 2009:282).

The people who are doing well and prosper usually have little reason to be concerned with the notion of a final judgment. The rage expressed in the Psalms might even be a bit embarrassing to them. However, there is a lot of injustice in the world and millions of people suffer as victims of a broken world and broken humanity. For those who suffer severely the idea of a final judgment with restitution is a reason to hope. For the sake of these and others who are deeply affected by violence there is hope in the final judgment (see van de Beek, 2008:278). The Imprecatory Psalms remind us that "God alone can set the not good right. And thus the psalmists can cry out to God to crush their foes, admonish their enemies, and restore the good of creation" (deClaissé-Walford, 2010:90). For this reason we need the final judgment in a "world filled with injustice and violence among men, filled with the suffering of victims and tears of mothers; we cannot live without a final judgment" (van de Beek, 2008:282).[107]

Understanding this concept is important when considering the Imprecatory Psalms. Modern people tend to miss the inherent message within the imprecatory Psalms. The harsh language found within the Psalms could lead to a shift in focus from the real issue expressed in the Psalms to the issue of language. The extreme language found within the Psalms should remind readers of the "violent wretched state of society and the world – and this situation is not created by God, nor can it be legitimated or tolerated as something God-given – not by us human beings, and certainly not by God" (Zenger, 1996:73). The Imprecatory Psalms are reminders to readers of the Psalms that the

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[107] Free translation from the original Dutch.

Biblical God is revealed as actively part of history and not standing on the side-line. The Psalms also indicate that believers are confronted with a reality that does not agree with their understanding of God (Zenger, 1996:74). These Psalms challenge readers on two levels. On the one level it is "a challenge, a calling forth of God to act against the chaos" and on the other level it is a challenge to believers as it "may become a shocking wake up call for Christians" (Zenger, 1996:74). Despite modern readers not sharing a lot of the socio-cultural concepts of the Ancient Near East, Zenger (1996:74) argues that the usefulness of these Psalms for daily life "can't be overstated."

Youngblood (2011:154) claims that: "[t]he current cultural climate of political correctness cannot abide the powerful rhetoric of imprecation." Strawn (2013:405), studying the curse within modern rap music underscores what Youngblood claims when he argues that imprecations are honest expressions and reflections on the reality of violence. The context of the Psalms may be far removed from modern times, but the reality of violence in modern times are just as real as in ancient times (Strawn, 2013:405). Imprecatory Psalms are but one response to enemies within the Psalms (Strawn, 2013:415), but they form part of "a larger liturgical and literary context of prayer, which helps to hold the violence back from one's enemies" (Strawn, 2013:414).

It is perhaps the Imprecatory Psalms that has the real power to remind humanity, especially those unaffected by the really harsh reality of violence, that even though most modern western people would prefer to live as if the world is just good and try to ignore the pain and suffering, the pain is just as real now as it was in the times of the psalmists. The Imprecatory Psalms can create an important moment where readers of the Psalms can rediscover, against a culture that tries hard to prove otherwise, that everything is not well with the world (Brueggemann, 1986:7). Living as if all is well with the world

will help most people ignore the cries of the Imprecatory Psalms, until the day fortune changes and the cries of the Imprecatory Psalms starts resonating within. It is then that most people do discover that, when they are deeply wronged, people have the capacity to wish for vengeance and vindication because "of the vengeance and hatred that lurks in our hearts" (Murphy, 1994:8). Brueggemann (1986:64–65) in similar vein argues that we are "creatures who wish for vengeance and retaliation" because within every human being "[t]he capacity for hatred belongs to the mystery of personhood."

Precisely because there is a real capacity for hatred in every human being the study of the Imprecatory Psalms might be desperately needed in modern society. Dominick Hankle (2010:275), considering the Imprecatory Psalms from a counselling background, reminds us that the Imprecatory Psalms can have a great effect on therapeutic work in that they are "an excellent vehicle for resolving emotional stress leading to psychological and spiritual benefits." But his caution should be considered with great care "Because many therapists are not theologians the need to respect certain boundaries in biblical interpretation is imperative so that scripture is not misused by either the client or the therapist" (Hankle, 2010:275). When reading the Imprecatory Psalms it should also be remembered within our human experiences of violence and emotional turmoil that the imprecations are "protests against violence, not approvals of violence" (Creach, 2013:194). Keith Ward argues this point effectively:

> Religious scriptures can be misused…. There are texts that can be
> found and used by those who are filled with rage and hatred. But they
> can be so used only by ignoring the scholarly tradition of
> interpretation in the religion, by a refusal to engage in reflective

discussion of the whole scripture, and by using a careful selection of

texts on considerations of hatred and intolerance (Ward, 2006:37–38).

So there is a place for Imprecatory Psalms in our current context, although it is possible that the viciousness of the Psalms could only resonate with those that were deeply touched by violence. Like the psalmist, many victims today are powerless against much stronger physical and emotional enemies. They have no voice, but the Psalms can give them a voice to rage against the injustice they experience. "The cries for vengeance in the Psalms are not about lesser or greater conflict that could be resolved by wise generosity on the part of the one praying, or through 'love of neighbour'" (Zenger, 1996:66). A bigger reality is sketched by these Psalms. Human courts do have their place in human history, but these "cries give voice to the painful reality that human judges and courts are insufficient to establish perfect justice" (Zenger, 1996:67). The sheer reality and magnitude of suffering and injustice in the world is the reality of these Psalms. The complaints to God are so much more than mere personal insults. These cries are born in the arena where it appears as if God is losing the battle against evil. He is the King, ruling over history, and yet, it appears as if the wicked is winning. It is born in the arena where the human justice system is not able to keep this reality at bay. For believers the rampant reality of evil is a mystery. And the Psalmists confront God with this "mystery of evil and the contradiction represented by evil persons in a world that is in the care of God" (Zenger, 1996:66). Zenger (1996:66) reminds us that there is nothing trivial about these complaints and that they are not expression of desire for personal advantage. Rather they express their passion for God to execute his right to announce judgment (Zenger, 1996:67). It is God's task to judge the living and the dead (Zenger, 1996:63), but it is this idea that have become a problem. The concept of God as judge leads to much misunderstanding, especially in the sense of God as judge and

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avenger (Zenger, 1996:64). The idea of God as avenger and judge is what leads the psalmist from a feeling of despair to a feeling of hope (Zenger, 1996:63). The Psalms have the power to merge the reality of the psalmist with the reality of the reader (see chapter 1) and the hope experienced by the psalmist can become the hope experienced by those suffering under violence. The promise of eschatology is that God will do right and not allow injustice to continue forever. He will act and set things right. That is the Biblical concept of the final judgment (van de Beek, 2008:278). The saints in Revelation 6:9 cry for this reality to become reality (van de Beek, 2008:278). Believers found joy in the knowledge that God will act and do the right thing; not allowing injustice to continue forever (van de Beek, 2008:278). Because God promises to act, vengeance should be dissuaded among men, only because God will avenge (van de Beek, 2008:280).

This makes the Imprecatory Psalms also useful for people who are less affected by violence. In her blog post Judith Valente (2015) interviews Abbot Gregory Polan about the violent, vengeful language in the Psalms. Polan made the following remark:

> Let's make sure we don't make our prayer too antiseptic … the
> violent language we pray in the Psalms becomes an important bridge
> helping us to realize we don't pray the Psalms for ourselves alone,
> but for all the people who find their world torn apart, and who can
> hardly find the words to bring before God to wrap around their pain.
> We become their voice (quoted by Valente, 2015).

It is within the words of the imprecatory Psalms that we also discover some solidarity with people from different realities than ours. Living within our own realities, especially within a western middle class situation, we can become dislocated from the realities of

people under threat. The Psalms remind us that these prayers do not simply become our prayers, but also become prayers for victims who are powerless and sometimes unable to express their pain (see Kennific, 2017:44). "Our voice is no longer simply our own. It becomes theirs" (Kennific, 2017:44). However, it should always be remembered that these voices only vent the rage of those who are suffering under violence. "…the supplicant does not expect to take action against wrongdoers; the Psalm does reckon that God should do so" (Goldingay, 2009:284). Vengeance remain the sole domain of God:

> These psalms vent the rage of saints who recognize that vengeance is exclusively God's territory, but who at the same time feel the injustices of this world very deeply and who desperately want God to correct the inequities that always seems to leave the righteous/weak at the mercy (or mercilessness) of the wicked/powerful (Youngblood, 2011:153).

Reading the Imprecatory Psalms and experiencing the depth of anguish experienced by the psalmists and realizing that the modern day reality is in essence the same for millions of people around the world, should remind believers why the return of Christ should still be a fervent wish on the lips of believers. Despite humanity's attempts to alleviate pain and suffering in the world, the reality is that the flood is just too great. No human intervention or invention will be able to effectively remove the painful and damaging effects of violence and hatred. The only hope is that the promises expressed in the Psalms and in the cry Μαράνα θά will see the Lord return to do what is right and vindicate the rigtheous. These prayers express the psalmist's conviction that God reigns. He is the ultimate judge (Wenham, 1994:190) This thought is what brings the

psalmist from despair to hope. This is the message of hope in a world of oppression and injustice (Zenger, 1996:63–68). For the psalmists, not doing anything would place them on the side of the wicked, but calling for judgment places them firmly on God's side (Wenham, 1994:191). However, "to rejoice in the judgment of God is to turn the spotlight on one's own life and behaviour: will I pass muster with God?" (Wenham, 1994:192). Zenger (1996:75–76) agrees, arguing that in a disrupted world the imprecatory Psalms can function as a "barb" against believers attempting to ignore, minimize or repress the absolute reality of violence in the world. Zenger goes further by reminding readers that it is the "concrete expressions of pain and fear" that reminds believers of the full reality and helps them "bring that pain to the centre of ordinary religious and social life" (Zenger, 1996:75). But perhaps the more important aspect of the Imprecatory Psalms is that "[p]raying these Psalms forces a person to consider the question of their own complicity in the web of violence. They avoid the fantasy of innocence."

7.4   MAPʹANA ϴʹA AS THE HERMENEUTICAL KEY FOR INTERPRETING THE IMPRECATORY PSALMS.

In the New Testament believers are called upon to bless those that curse them (see Romans 12:14) and although this call does not change the reality of final judgment and the coming of Christ, it does change the common understanding of the imprecatory prayers (Peels, 2003:102–103). In the section above it was argue that the Imprecatory Psalms can help people who are deeply hurt by violence to find a voice against the deep-seated anger and desire for vengeance within themselves. Within controlled therapeutic settings it can help victims to unload these emotions and release them into the hands of God and take a step on the road to recovery. The Imprecatory Psalms can fill a very

important gap in the counselling context. The Psalms are also effective in helping non-victims of violence to (re-)discover the painful reality of violence in our world. Christians in Western or Western-like suburbia can become complacent, believing that the world is good and that everything will be wonderful. The Imprecatory Psalms may force believers to reconsider the reality of pain that others experience because of violence in this world, and may push believers to question themselves if they are part of the system of violence (see above).

But there is a problem: The graphic words of the Psalms may fit the emotions and desires of a victim of violence. Using the words of the Imprecatory Psalms to guide victims through expressing their pain will feel natural to them, as the words resonate with their own feelings and desires of vengeance and vindication. The Psalms assist them by releasing this pain and being guided by the psalmists' to also realize that vengeance belongs to God alone and that expressing these curses should never lead to personally enact them. Ironically, it is via vengeful expressions that the violent Psalms can teach victims of violence that they should leave "redress to God rather than seeking to take it oneself" (Goldingay, 2009:283). Leaving vengeance in the hands of God is a deep act of faith. To trust that God will execute vengeance, if needed, according to his time, and to step away from any personal desires to personally take vengeance, is not easy. However, this is what the Psalms do: they bring the emotions before God, "[t]he Psalms do not repress all this; they express it before and place it in God's hands" (Zenger, 1996:79). Believers can learn to do the same. Reconsidering the Imprecatory Psalms in light of the results from this study in terms of the context of the curses in both the Old and New Testament, Jinkins (1998:98) might be right when he states that "[p]erhaps these psalms are the only things that stands between us and revenge, taking into our hands the judgment that belongs to God alone." Modern society places a large

premium on being politically correct in speech and actions. This leaves little space for victims to express themselves and the emotions they do experience, but the "[t]he tacit denial that such emotions are part of the Christian experience of faith often results in passive-aggressive behaviors and deep-seated resentments that poison relationships both in the church and the world" (Youngblood, 2011:154). It is the Imprecatory Psalms that save humanity from this by reminding them that God does not desire victims to suppress these emotions, but rather to bring them to him and hand it all over to him (deClaissé-Walford, 2010:89). Silva reminds us that there is real value in using the Imprecatory Psalms, but they need to be used properly:

> If the imprecations are used properly, recognizing that they are only
> part of the complex message of the Bible and not the last word, they
> can release an energy in the community that can give it courage in
> the midst of struggle and a sense that God understands even [our]
> darkest and most dangerous emotions – and can transform them into
> the true love of enemies in the achievement of justice (Silva,
> 2001:222).

The problem is that the words will not feel right on the lips of those that are not victims of violence. The words of the Psalms will never resonate with their emotions. Although the Psalms can be powerful in helping non-victims share in the pain of victims and help non-victims "become their voice" (see Poland in Valente, 2015), the sheer viciousness of the Imprecatory Psalms make them impractical as daily prayers on the lips of believers.

Μαράνα θά is the perfect prayer in this regard. As argued in the previous chapters, Μαράνα θά shares the essential desires expressed within the Imprecatory Psalms. It

avoids the language, but not the reality. Locked within the ἀνάθεμα Μαράνα θά is the same reality found within the Imprecatory Psalms: the expression that everything is not all right and the desire for the Lord to come and redress the wrong. The curse reminds believers to make sure they are not part of the problem, but the imperative expresses the desire for salvation. The Psalms are prayers expressing faith and hope in God (Wenham, 2005:190). Israel lived with the belief that God is in control. He rules and he is the ultimate judge (Wenham, 2005:190). The Psalms look forward to a universal judgment, but also desires a more immediate judgment of the wicked and their activities (Wenham, 2005:190). God is seen as the guarantor of judgment (Wenham, 2005:190). It is this belief that gives hope in a world filled with oppression and injustice (Zenger, 1996:63–68); the belief that history belongs to God and God has the last word about history, as its judge (Zenger, 1996:63). Μαράνα θά calls on the Lord to do what the psalmist wished: "come and make things right through judgment and vindication," but also reminds the supplicant that the judgment wished for will only come into effect when the Lord comes. It is not in the hands of the supplicant, but in the hands of God. For believers feeling a solidarity with victims of violence, Μαράνα θά offers the words to pray before God, just like the imprecations can give words to the pain experienced by victims. Christians should feel comfortable with the prayer of Μαράνα θά on their lips. "To pray for the coming of the Lord is the most natural prayer of those who love him; the fact that the church must and should pray this prayer regularly ought to serve as a warning to those whose love is growing cold" (Wright, 2004:239).

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