

Psalms 34-41

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Context

The first book of Psalms ends with eight Psalms that describe the Lord's delivery of the weak. In this, they correspond chiastically with the first group, Psalms 3-14 (Figure 1, chart).

Internally, they fall into two clusters, like the psalms that precede and follow Psalm 29 in the dwellingplace group. In both cases, the first cluster depicts a David who is confident in his relation to the Lord, praying for deliverance from his enemies. In the second, David emphasizes his own sin, and seeks the Lord's deliverance not only from his enemies, but from his own weakness as well. As in 26-32, it makes sense to see here the younger and older David, respectively.

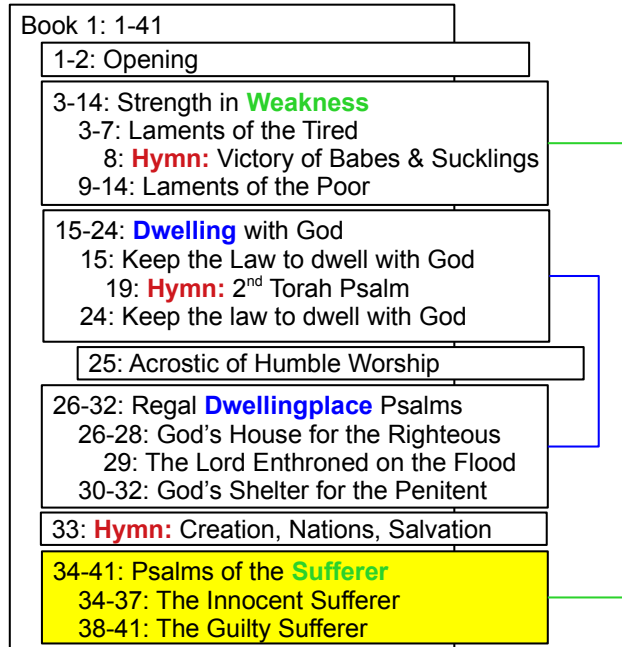


Figure 1: Structure of Book 1 (revised)

34-37, Psalms of the Innocent Sufferer

“The wicked” in this section are David's enemies. He thinks of himself and his readers as righteous (though there is a hint of repentance in Psalm 34). None of these Psalms has a title; they are simply “of David.” The section is bracketed by acrostics in 34 and 37. The first is a psalm of thanksgiving; the last, of confidence. Between, we have two laments. Only 35 is assigned to the chief musician.

Psalm 34, Thanks for Deliverance

This Psalm is a thanksgiving. Thanksgivings are related to laments: both focus on something that the Lord does for the Psalmist. In a lament, the Psalmist asks the Lord to intervene, while in a thanksgiving he recalls the Lord's past intervention, in response to his cry. For example, v. 6 “this poor man cried” refers to a past prayer for deliverance.¹

This Psalm is an acrostic: each verse begins with a successive letter of the alphabet.² As in Psalm 25, the structure of the Psalm is not constrained by this discipline, but follows its own logic.³

34:1 A Psalm of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.--The episode is recorded in 1 Sam 21:10-22:2. David, warned by Jonathan, flees from Saul, and goes to the tabernacle at Nob to seek food and a weapon. Ahimelech the priest is surprised when David arrives alone, and David lies to him (chart):

1 There are numerous verbal links with the lament in Psalm 25, and 34 may report the answer to the lament of 25. For details, see Benun, “Evil and the Disruption of Order.” *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures* 6 (2006), http://www.jhsonline.org/Articles/article_55.pdf

2 1 is lacking, and the last verse provides a second ׀.

3 Contrary to Craigie, who claims that “Given the somewhat artificial restrictions imposed on the poet by the acrostic structure, the psalm is not subdivided into thought units longer than the verse”

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1Sa 21:1 Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, **Why art thou alone**, and no man with thee? 2 And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, **The king hath commanded me a business**, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed *my* servants to such and such a place.

Then he goes to Gath. Perhaps Saul’s enemies will shelter him, and hopefully they will not recognize in this bearded man the youth who years before had slain their hero Goliath.

1Sa 21:10 And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul,⁴ and went to Achish the king of Gath. 11 And the servants of Achish said unto him, *Is* not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands? 12 And David laid up these words in his heart, and was **sore afraid** of Achish the king of Gath.

David is afraid, and pretends to be mad in order to escape, in the episode recalled by v. 1:

1Sa 21:13 And **he changed his behaviour before them**, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard.

He goes into the wilderness, where a crew of discontented people gather to him.

1Sa 22:1 David therefore departed thence, and escaped to the cave Adullam: and when his brethren and all his father's house heard *it*, they went down thither to him. 2 And every one *that was* in distress, and every one *that was* in debt, and every one *that was* discontented, gathered themselves unto him; and he became a captain over them: and there were with him about four hundred men.

This history of the anointed king anticipates our Lord. Both are rejected by both the Jewish ruler (Saul; the high priests) and the pagan power (Achish; Rome), but find a following among the poor and downtrodden. This historical context emerges at several points in the Psalm.

Psalm 34 says that David appeared before Abimelech, while in 1 Samuel, the king of Gath is Achish. “Abimelech” is probably not a personal name, but a royal title, similar to “Pharaoh” in Egypt or “Caesar” in Rome. Abraham (Genesis 20) dealt with one Abimelech about 2000 BC. Isaac engaged with another nearly 100 years (Genesis 26), and here we have a third about 1000 BC.⁵

Thanksgiving psalms, like hymns, often praise the Lord and then explain the praise (Declaration of Praise; Cause for Praise). Here (Figure 2, chart), the Cause for Praise has two sections, both marked by statements about the Lord’s deliverance. The first section is personal, describing how God has delivered David, while the second is generic, teaching that this deliverance is available to all the righteous. In between is an exhortation, fulfilling his promise in v. 2 that “the humble shall fear.”

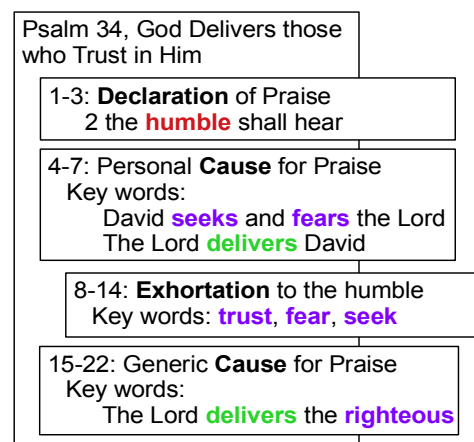


Figure 2: Structure of Psalm 34

4 Heb “from the face of Saul.” 1 Samuel never says that David feared Saul, but rather that Saul feared David (1 Sam 18:12, 29). However, in Ps 18:4, looking back to Saul’s opposition, he describes himself as terrified (בעת).
 5 Similarly, “Pharaoh” refers to three different Egyptian rulers in Genesis and Exodus (Joseph’s patron, the killer of Exodus 1, and Amenhotep II at the Exodus), and numerous others throughout the OT.

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1-3, Declaration of Praise

Thanksgiving psalms praise the Lord, but like hymns, often go on to explain the praise.

I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. 2 My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble [pl] shall hear thereof, and be glad. 3 O magnify [pl] the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.--David praises the Lord for delivering him, both from Saul and from Achish. "The humble" are his motley followers.

4-7, Personal Cause for Praise

4-7 tell why David blesses the Lord in vv. 1-2. Words for divine deliverance mark both this and 15-22. Here, the basis for this deliverance is David's trust in the Lord.

4 I sought the LORD, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.--David went to Achish to flee from Saul, but met a new set of fears (1 Sam 21:12). The deliverance for which he praises the Lord came after he turned to the Lord in prayer in a lament (perhaps Psalm 25?). He has learned that seeking refuge with an earthly king (Achish) is futile; only the Lord can deliver.

5 They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.--"They" are probably the "humble" of v. 2. Like our Lord, David finds recognition of his authority mainly among the poor and downtrodden.

6 This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.--Again he recalls his earlier lament.

7 The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.--The verb "encampeth" describes a temporary settlement, as an army would make on campaign, or as Israel made traveling through the desert. David and his followers are "encamping" at the cave of Adullam, but they are not alone. Angels encamp around him.

Contrast v. 7 with v. 4. From the fear of Saul and Achish, David has learned to fear the Lord.

8-14, Exhortation of the Humble (v. 2)

Now he fulfills his promise in v. 2 to instruct his followers out of his experience. Other than vv. 13-14, which are addressed to the hypothetical "man" of v. 12, all the imperatives here are plural.

Note the cluster of terms describing his mental attitude toward the Lord: trust (take refuge), fear, seek. We will see such clusters again in this section in Psalms 37 and 40.

8 O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth חָסָה in him.--The verb here means "take refuge." He is hiding in a cave, but his real refuge is the Lord.

9 O fear the LORD, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.--He calls his little band of followers, "Saints." This is not the usual word for "saint" in the OT, which is קֳדָשִׁים, one under covenant, but rather means "holy ones," those set apart. David applied the term to fictitious royal troops when he told Ahimelech that they were "holy," 1 Sam 21:5, in requesting the shewbread. But the real saints are his ragamuffin followers. The distinctions that matter are not in the eyes of men, but before God.

10 The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the LORD shall not want any good thing.--Perhaps he is thinking of the wild animals that surround him in the wilderness.

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11 Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the **fear of the LORD.**--David considers his followers as his children, whom he, as a father, must instruct.

12 What man *is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?*--The promise of long life contrasts with David's awareness of the shortness of his life, when he confronts his own sin in the second half of this section (chart):

Ps 39:4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it *is; that* I may know how frail I *am*. 5 Behold, thou hast made my days *as* an handbreadth; and mine age *is* as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state *is* altogether vanity. . . . 8 Deliver me from all **my transgressions**: . . . 11 When thou with rebukes dost correct man for **iniquity**, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man *is* vanity.

13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.--The condition for this blessing is avoiding verbal sin.

David is an expert on guile (deceit or treachery). First he lied to Ahimelech in Nob about his relation to Saul, representing himself as on a mission from the king, rather than fleeing from him. Then he tried to deceive Achish, presenting himself as an ally, and behaving like a madman. Those escapades did not turn out well, and he exhorts his followers to honesty.

14 Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.--But what if one has already fallen into sin? As James tells us, sins of the tongue are the hardest to avoid. In that case, we must depart from it, which is what David has done. From deceitfully claiming a sword from Ahimelech and seeking refuge with Achish, he is now trusting in the Lord.

15-22, Generic Cause for Praise

Now David generalizes from his personal experience. Like vv. 4-7, this paragraph emphasizes that the Lord delivers his people (vv. 17, 18, 19, 22). In 4-7, the basis for God's deliverance is David's trust in him (vv. 4, 6, 7). Here, it is the righteousness of his people (vv. 15, 19, 21), three times contrasted with the wicked.

15 The eyes of the LORD *are* upon the **righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their cry.**--This is the idiom for the Lord's tender care for his own that we studied in Psalm 33,

Psa 33:18 Behold, the eye of the LORD *is* upon them that fear him, upon them that hope in his mercy; 19 To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine.

16 The face of the LORD *is* against **them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.**--As we saw there, the Lord is not ignorant of the wicked, but deals with them appropriately. David draws here on the language of Lev 17:10; 20:3, 5-6; 26:17,⁶ all of which describe various sins that the people may commit, and all of which threaten being cut off. For example, if they do not do all his commandments,

Lev 26:17 I will **set my face against you**, and ye shall be **slain** before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you.

This first couplet is clear, but how can deceitful David rely on righteousness (v. 15)? He is not blameless, and he recognizes his failing (v. 13). The next couplet may help resolve this tension.

6 The language appears to be distinctive to Leviticus; it does not appear again, other than in this verse, until Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

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17 *The righteous* They cry, and the LORD heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles. 18 The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.--“The righteous” is in italics. The Hebrew simply says, “They cry,” The most natural subject for the verb is the evildoers of v. 16. Virtually no commentator or translation makes this association.⁷ They all assume he has gone back to talking about “the righteous.” But David goes on to talk about the Lord’s care for those who are penitent, anticipating Psalms 38-41, and he has just exhorted those who have fallen into evil speaking and guile to depart from their evil. Perhaps we should take the text in its most natural sense. God does set himself against the wicked, but even that opposition may drive them to recognize their sin and turn from it.⁸

Recall the origin of v. 16 in Lev 26:17. That passage goes on to promise that when Israelites confess their sin, the Lord will restore them:

Lev 26:40 If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; ... 42 Then will I remember my covenant with Jacob, and also my covenant with Isaac, and also my covenant with Abraham will I remember; and I will remember the land.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all.--After 15-18, we understand “the righteous” in a new light, not as someone who is ethically faultless, but as someone who has cast himself on the Lord. Thus the initial contrast between 4-7 and 15-22 is softened, and we are reminded of Abraham’s experience (chart),

Gen 15:6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.

20 He keepeth all his bones:⁹ not one of them is broken.--This verse is one of the prophecies fulfilled in our Lord, the ultimate example of a righteous man whom the Lord delivered:

Joh 19:36 For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken.

21 Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate. 22 The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.--This couplet returns to the contrast of 15-16. V. 22 actually stands outside of the acrostic, which gives special emphasis to the word with which it begins, פדה "redeemeth."

Psalm 34 and 1 Peter

1 Peter often cites or alludes to Psalm 34, and it has even been suggested that the book is a sermon based on this Psalm. Table 1 (chart) shows some parallels.¹⁰

A moment’s reflection suggests why Peter is so attracted to this Psalm. The believers to whom he wrote were the objects of severe persecution (chart):

1Pe 1:6 ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 Craigie allows for it, but without elaboration

8 Is צעק an echo of Judg 4:1-3, where it describes Israel’s cry to the Lord for help after their sin and discipline?

9 The expression recalls 32:3 and anticipate 38:3, where the wicked suffer in their bones.

10 For more details, see Susan A. Woan, *The Use of the Old Testament in 1 Peter, with especial focus on the role of Psalm 34*. Ph.D. thesis, Univ. of Exeter, 2008. <http://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.536656>

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1 Peter	Psalm 34
2:3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious . 4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, <i>and</i> precious,	8 O taste and see that the LORD is good [LXX gracious]: <i>blessed is</i> the man <i>that</i> trusteth in him. 5 They looked unto him [LXX came to him], and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.
2:21 For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth : 3:8 Finally, <i>be</i> ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, <i>be</i> pitiful, <i>be</i> courteous: 9 Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing ; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.	13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.
3:10 For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: 11 Let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord <i>are</i> over the righteous, and his ears <i>are open</i> unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord <i>is</i> against them that do evil.	12 What man <i>is he that</i> desireth life, <i>and</i> loveth <i>many</i> days, that he may see good? 13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile. 14 Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it. 15 The eyes of the LORD <i>are</i> upon the righteous, and his ears <i>are open</i> unto their cry. 16 The face of the LORD <i>is</i> against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

Table 1: Peter's Focus on Psalm 34

1Pe 2:19 For this *is* thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

1Pe 3:14 But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy *are ye*: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; 15 But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:

1Pe 4:12 Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: 13 But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

David was also persecuted by Saul, and fearful of Achish. He is forced to live in the rocks, like a wild animal, hated and hunted by his own people. Yet he praises God for his deliverance, and furthermore offers his experience as a template for the “humble” (v. 3), whom he encourages in their own times of suffering. Here is an example of how we may take encouragement from the Psalms in our own circumstances.

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Psalm 35, Royal Justice

We have seen isolated imprecations before,¹¹ but they dominate this Psalm. Let's first review the Psalm, then talk about the imprecations.

The Psalm

35:1 A Psalm of David.

The Psalm has three stanzas (Figure 3, chart), each ending with a promise of praise.¹² The first and third are distinct from the second:

<p>1-10: Plea for Defense against Harm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1-3, Plea: רִיב • 4-6, 8, Imprecation: Let them be confounded ... put to shame ... brought to confusion • 7, Complaint: Net, Pit, Without a Cause <p>9-10, Promise of Praise</p>	<p>11-18: Complaint and Innocence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11-12, Complaint: False Witness • 13-14, Innocence: Intercession • 15-16, Complaint: Mockery • 17, Plea: Rescue my Soul <p>18, Promise of Praise</p>	<p>19-28: Plea for Defense against Speech</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 19, Plea: Without a Cause • 20-21, Complaint: deceit, accusation • 22-25, Plea: רִיב • 26, Imprecation: Let them be ashamed ... brought to confusion ... clothed with ... dishonor <p>27-28, Promise of Praise</p>
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Figure 3: Structure of Psalm 35

- They use imprecations, unlike 11-18, where David prays for his enemies.
- They use the name יהוה (LORD, covenant God); 11-18 uses אֲדֹנָי (Lord, sovereign master).
- They complain that the enemies' persecution of David is "without cause" (7, 19).
- They describe David's situation with his enemies as a רִיב (vv. 1, 23), a covenant lawsuit. This term suggests that in these stanzas, David's focus is not personal, but in his role as king.

1-10, First Stanza: Defense against Harm

Plead רִיב my cause, O LORD, with them that strive with me: fight against them that fight against me. 2 Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up for mine help. 3 Draw out also the spear, and stop the way against them that persecute me: say unto my soul, I am thy salvation.--David asks for God's military help and physical defense.

4 Let them be confounded and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion that devise my hurt. 5 Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the LORD chase them. 6 Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the LORD persecute them.--His first imprecation recurs in v. 26.

7 For without cause have they hid for me their net in a pit, which without cause they have digged for my soul.--The complaint (the motive for his plea) is that they attack him "without cause" (again in v. 19), without any offense on his part.

8 Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall.--Each imprecation appears elsewhere in the Psalms as a statement (Table 2, chart).

¹¹ 5:10; 6:10; 9:19; 10:2; 25:3; 31:17-18

¹² Hengstenberg: "The Psalm falls into three strophes, in each of which the three elements of complaint, prayer, and promise of thanksgiving, are contained, ... each of these runs out into the vow of thanksgiving." Perhaps this common conclusion is why this Psalm, alone among those in 34-37, is assigned to the Chief Musician.

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Imprecation in Psalm 35	Indicative statement
4 Let them be confounded בּוֹשׁ and put to shame that seek after my soul: let them be turned back and brought to confusion חִפּוּר that devise my hurt.	71:24 My tongue also shall talk of thy righteousness all the day long: for they are confounded בּוֹשׁ , for they are brought unto shame חִפּוּר , that seek my hurt.
5 Let them be as chaff before the wind:	1:4 The ungodly <i>are</i> not so: but <i>are</i> like the chaff which the wind driveth away.
and let the angel of the LORD chase <i>them</i> 6b let the angel of the LORD persecute them	34:7 The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.
6 Let their way be dark and slippery:	3:18 Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.
8 Let destruction come upon him at unawares; and let his net that he hath hid catch himself: into that very destruction let him fall.	9:15 The heathen are sunk down in the pit <i>that</i> they made: in the net which they hid is their own foot taken.

Table 2: Indicative Counterparts of the Imprecations

9 And my soul shall be joyful in the LORD: it shall rejoice in his salvation. 10 All my bones shall say, LORD, who is like unto thee, which deliverest the poor from him that is too strong for him, yea, the poor and the needy from him that spoileth him?--Here is the first promise of thanksgiving, which David will give when the Lord answers his plea.

11-18, Second Stanza: David's Justification

This stanza shows why their attack is “without cause” (vv. 7, 19)

11 False witnesses did rise up; they laid to my charge things that I knew not. 12 They rewarded me evil for good to the spoiling of my soul.--Before, the attack was physical. Now it consists of slander and false charges.

13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. 14 I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.--David was first called to Saul to sooth the maddening monarch, only to be attacked repeatedly (Maclaren). David has no personal resentment against his enemies, and in fact prayed for them when they were ill.

15 But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not: 16 With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth.--But they repaid his love with hatred and abuse.

17 Lord, how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions.--He no longer calls God LORD יהוה, but Lord אֲדֹנָי, sovereign master.

18 I will give thee thanks in the great congregation: I will praise thee among much people.--Again, David promises praise to the Lord. He will fulfill this in 40:9, 10; these three and 22:25 are the only references to קהל רב in Psalms.

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19-28, Third Stanza: Defense against Speech

19 Let not them that are mine enemies wrongfully rejoice over me: *neither* let them wink with the eye that hate me **without a cause**.--Repeating from v. 7, David insists that his enemies have no reason for opposing him, a foreshadowing of our Lord:

Joh 15:25 But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause.

20 For they speak not peace: but they devise deceitful matters against *them that are quiet* in the land. 21 Yea, they opened their mouth wide against me, *and* said, **Aha, aha**, our eye hath seen *it*.--His complaint concerns their mocking.

22 *This* thou hast seen, O LORD: **keep not silence**: O Lord, **be not far** from me. 23 **Stir up** thyself, and **awake** to my judgment, *even* unto my cause ייבי, my God and my Lord.--Again David describes his relation to his adversaries in legal terms, as a covenant lawsuit.

24 **Judge me**, O LORD my God, according to thy righteousness; and let them not rejoice over me. 25 Let them not say in their hearts, **Ah**, so would we have it: let them not say, We have swallowed him up. 26 **Let them be ashamed and brought to confusion together that rejoice at mine hurt: let them be clothed with shame and dishonour that magnify themselves against me**.--In moving from plea to imprecation, he repeats v. 4 almost verbatim.

27 **Let them shout for joy, and be glad, that favour my righteous cause: yea, let them say continually, Let the LORD be magnified, which hath pleasure in the prosperity of his servant**.--This may be a request that the Lord will bring things about to the point that praise is possible, but grammatically we could also read these verbs as promises, introducing the third blessing section. "They will shout for joy" etc.

28 **And my tongue shall speak of thy righteousness and of thy praise all the day long.**

To the chief Musician

The Problem of Imprecation

This Psalm has more imprecations than those we have seen so far. Some people find these prayers for evil on David's enemies in conflict with the NT.¹³ Our Lord taught (chart),

Mat 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, **bless them that curse you**, do good to them that hate you, and **pray for them which despitefully use you**, and persecute you;

And his apostles take up the theme:

Rom 12:17 **Recompense to no man evil for evil**. ... 19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but *rather* give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance *is* mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

1Pe 2:21 **Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps**: 22 Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: 23 Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed *himself* to him that judgeth righteously:

13 Examples of this squeamishness include C.S. Lewis in his *Reflections on the Psalms* (ch. 3; p. 19 in the Fount Paperback edition of 1998), and the decision of Vatican II to omit several Psalms and portions of others from the Liturgy of the Hours because of their imprecatory nature.

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How should we view these passages? I love to sing the Psalms, and in doing so I am repeating the prayers they contain. Can I, as a follower of the Lord Jesus, really sing Psalm 35? Or should I omit these verses? If I omit them, on what authority am I laying aside a portion of the Word of God?

We must not discard the imprecations in the Psalms. But we need to understand their context, if we are to repeat them in a godly way. Three principles will help (chart).¹⁴

Distinguish the Kingdom of God from our personal comfort. In three ways, Psalm 35 reflects the focus of imprecations on offenses against God's kingdom, not personal revenge.

1. The imprecations occur in the first and last stanzas, which describe his struggle with his adversaries in terms of a רִיב, a lawsuit protesting violation of a covenant, and in his use in these stanzas of the covenant name for God, יְהוָה. In these stanzas, he speaks in an official capacity as Israel's king. In the center section, where God is "sovereign master" and there is not reference to the covenant, David speaks personally, and we find no imprecations.
2. When David does speak personally, instead of cursing the wicked, he prays for them, just as our Lord commands.
3. Even when he does curse, he does not take action himself, but commits the offenders into God's hands. In this he is following Moses' quotation of the Lord, which forms the basis for Rom 12:19,

Deu 32:35 To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.

Align with what the Lord wants.--This last verse reminds us that while vengeance is not appropriate for us, it is entirely appropriate for the Lord. We saw in Psalm 35 that the things David wishes for the wicked are elsewhere stated to be what a holy God will bring upon them. In praying for these judgments, David is aligning his will with what God elsewhere says that he will do. From this perspective, *refusing* to pray these Psalms is to suggest that God's declared purpose concerning the wicked is wrong. While we reject personal vengeance, we must agree with Paul,

2Th 1:6 **it is a righteous thing with God** to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; 7 ... when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: 9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

Follow the NT. Setting our Lord or his apostles against David is a false contrast. The Lord says to pray for our enemies, and David tells us that he did this. In addition, the NT itself contains imprecations, starting with our Lord in the very book where he tells us to pray for our enemies:

Mat 25:41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: 43 I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not.

1 Cor. 16:22 If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, **let him be Anathema** [accursed.] Maranatha.

¹⁴ I have gathered these from a number of sources, including Gordon Wenham, *Psalms as Torah*; Erich Zenger, *A God of Vengeance?*, and Chalmers Martin, "Imprecations in the Psalms" (PTR 1, 1903, 537-553).

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Gal. 1:8 But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, **let him be accursed**. 9 As we said before, so say I now again, If any *man* preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, **let him be accursed**.

2Ti 4:14 Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil: **the Lord reward him according to his works**: 15 Of whom be thou ware also; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

Rev 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: 10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, **How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?** 11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they *were*, should be fulfilled.

A Christian attitude toward wicked requires that we, like David, **pray** for our enemies; **defer** all hostility against them into God's hands; but at the same time, **recognize** their offenses against the Lord, and **agree** with the judgments that he has declared they will face if they do not repent.

Psalm 36, Focus on the Lord

This Psalm contains three sections typical of a lament: a Complaint about the opposition of the wicked, Confidence in the Lord's ability to deliver, and a Plea for deliverance (Figure 4, chart). The Complaint and the expression of Confidence describe the attributes of the wicked and the Lord, respectively, and the Plea invokes both of these characterizations.

36:1 A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD.--

This title¹⁵ indicates someone in a position of responsibility over the Lord's people, and emphasizes that David writes not as an individual, but as the anointed king of Israel. Compare 18:1, the only other instance of this expression in the Psalms, where it begins a Psalm that ends (v. 50) with a reference to God's "anointed."

The transgression פְּשָׁעוֹ of the wicked saith within my heart,--More literally, "An oracle of transgression to the wicked is within my heart." We need to unpack this:

- The phrase "oracle of xxx" elsewhere always names the speaker (elsewhere, the Lord).
- "Transgression" is personified, as though it could speak.¹⁶ In giving an oracle, it behaves like a deity.

15 If we include "my servant," the list also Job, Abraham, Jacob, Caleb, Eliakim, and Zerubabel. Exceptionally, Nebuchadnezzar is also called God's servant, Jer 25:9; 27:6; just as Cyrus is called his anointed, Isa 45:1.

16 Compare Amos 8:7, 14, where "the pride of Jacob" and "the guilt of Samaria" are personified as references to the Lord and Jeroboam's idols, respectively. The idiom is very close to Paul's personification of "sin" as an internal adversary in Romans 7.

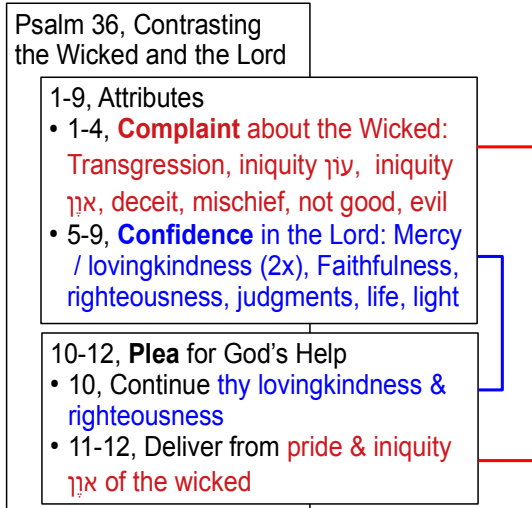


Figure 4: Structure of Psalm 36

Psalms 34-41

- It speaks “to the wicked.” Like Paul in Romans 7, the wicked is dominated by his sin.
- David is burdened “within my heart” to recognize this preoccupation of the wicked.¹⁷

that there is no fear of God before his eyes.--The wicked attends to the oracle of Transgression and ignores the Lord. For him, Transgression replaces God.

2 For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity עוֹן be found to be hateful. 3 The words of his mouth are iniquity יָאָס and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, and to do good. 4 He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil.--David heaps up descriptions of evil and wickedness to show how completely the voice of Transgression dominates the evildoer.

Many of us share David’s sorrow over the wickedness that pervades the world. Everyone listens to the voice of Transgression and turns their backs on the Lord, creating an environment that constantly threatens us. David’s response is an example for us. He takes confidence in the character of the Lord, following the principle he announced earlier, “I have set the LORD always before me” (16:8). In this, he anticipates Paul,

Phi 4:6 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. 7 And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.

5 Thy mercy חַסֵּד, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. 6 Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast.--The Lord’s attributes reach from heaven to the lowest depths.

7 How excellent is thy lovingkindness חַסֵּד, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings. 8 They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures. 9 For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.--Repeating the attribute of חַסֵּד, God’s covenant love (“mercy” in v. 5, here “lovingkindness”), David is confident that the Lord will care for those who trust in him. On this basis, he turns to his plea for help.

10 O continue thy lovingkindness חַסֵּד unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart.--חַסֵּד continues to be the basis of his confidence.

11 Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me. 12 There are the workers of iniquity יָאָס fallen: they are cast down, and shall not be able to rise.--Once more he recalls the terrifying aspect of the wicked, and asks the Lord to defend him.

¹⁷ The versions and some Hebrew mss read “his heart,” that is, the heart of the wicked, yielding a clean parallelism within the verse: the wicked has the oracle of transgression in his heart, and excludes God from his eyes. My exposition follows the received text.

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Psalm 37, Promises to the Faithful

In the first three Psalms of this section, David confronts the wicked. In 34, he thanks the Lord for past deliverances from them; in 35, he alternates between cursing them (in his role as king) and praying for them (as a private person); in 36, he confesses the burden in his own heart as he contemplates their devotion to Transgression, which they follow as a replacement for God. Together, these Psalms paint a gloomy picture of the world. We may well, like David in 36, find our hearts burdened with the wickedness we see all around us.

Psalm 37 closes this section by encouraging us not to give in to this discouragement. In genre, it is a wisdom Psalm, addressed not to the Lord (like the laments of 35 and 36 or the thanksgiving of 34), but to an idealized individual (like “my son” in Proverbs) representing all of his subjects. We might expect to find a chapter like this in Proverbs or Ecclesiastes, instruction from an older and wiser person to those at the start of their pilgrimage.

37:1 A Psalm of David.

In form, Psalm 37 is an acrostic (like 9-10, 25, and 34), with each group of verses starting with a successive letter of the alphabet. But it has a higher-level structure, marked by the distribution of several repeated expressions and grammatical features. These are (chart):

- **Moral imperatives**, exhortations concerning our relation to the Lord and to evildoers.
- **Expressions of trust** in the Lord, mostly imperatives, but indicative in v. 9 and v. 40.
- **Length or shortness of life** for the righteous (“for ever”) and the wicked (“cut off”), respectively.
- **Wicked people**
- **Righteous people**
- A repeated promise that the righteous shall “**inherit the earth/land**”

Groupings of these features reveal the structure in Figure 5.

- In 1-8, dominated by commands, David exhorts us to trust in the Lord in the face of evildoers, recognizing that they are transient. Moral imperatives and expressions of trust come together, with references to the wicked, but no names for the righteous (they are the ones being commanded).
- 9-16 shift from commands to statements organized around Deut 6:5, contrasting the righteous and the wicked, and promising that the righteous shall inherit the earth. There are no moral imperatives in this section.

Psalm 37, Two Routes to Success
1-8, Commands : • 1-2, Negative: fret not, the wicked • 3-7a, Positive: Trust, wait, rest in the Lord • 7b-8, Negative: fret not, the wicked
9-26, Statements : Cf. Deut 6:5 Contrast between the Wicked and the Righteous • 9-11, Prestige (“ Inherit the land ” 2x), “Heart” • 12-15, Physical protection, “Soul” • 16-21, Material provision, “Abundance” • Summary: 22 (Prestige, “ inherit the land ”), 23-24 (Protection), 25-26 (Provision)
27-33, Preservation of the Righteous • 27, Command : Do good (v. 3b) • 28-33, Statements : • Righteous live “for ever” 2x • “ inherit the land ”
34-40, Judgment of the Wicked • 34a, Command : Wait on the Lord, obey (v. 3a) • 28-33, Statements : • Wicked “cut off” 2x • “ inherit the land ”

Figure 5: Structure of Psalm 37

Psalms 34-41

- Each of 27-33 and 34-40 begins with a short command, then moves to statements. The commands and statements recall the longer command and statement sections at the beginning. In particular, the promise about “inherit the land” that dominates vv. 9-16 appears in the statements of each of these paragraphs. 27-33 emphasizes God’s preservation of the righteous, and 34-40 the transience of the wicked, though both themes appear throughout the Psalm.

The Psalm rests on God’s dealings with the patriarchs. v. 3 goes back to the renewal of the Abrahamic covenant with Isaac, while the phrase “inherit the earth” recalls God’s promise to Abraham and his descendants of the land, and the conquest. Abraham is an icon of faith and trust in God, and his example inspires David to encourage his readers to faith.

1-8, Exhortation to trust in the Lord in the face of evildoers

The first section of the Psalm is a simple chiasm: negative exhortations not to fret over the wicked surround positive exhortations to trust in the Lord.

⌘ **Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.**--This exhortation sets the theme of this first section. It appears two more times here (in vv. 7 and 8), and the only other place in the Bible that we find it is by Solomon, who picks up this verse and summarizes the rest of the Psalm (chart):

Pro 24:19 Fret not thyself because of evil *men*, neither be thou envious at the wicked; 20 For there shall be no reward to the evil *man*; the candle of the wicked shall be put out.

This is the overall theme of the Psalm, and explains the place of this Psalm in the Psalter. After considering “the workers of iniquity” in Psalms 34-36, David counsels his people not to worry about them.

2 For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.--Contrast Psalm 1, which describes the righteous as a tree, and contrasts the wicked, not just as grass, but as the chaff, the most worthless part of grass. The theme of the shortness of life of the wicked, and the endurance of the righteous, becomes prominent at v. 9 and runs through the end of the Psalm, but David introduces it here at the outset.

In our version, vv. 3-4 reads like two alternations of command and promise. Grammatically, it is a sequence of five commands, divided¹⁸ into two groups of two and three. More literally, “Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land, and shepherd faithfulness, and delight thyself in the LORD. Then he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.”

3a ב Trust בָּמֵהּ in the LORD, and do good—These are the first positive commands in the Psalm, and they present the key to our relation to the Lord: trust and obey. Throughout history, God’s people go astray when they ignore either half of this vital pair.¹⁹ Faith in God and obedience to him are the key to all of the blessings that he promises throughout this Psalm.

3b-4a dwell in the land, and shepherd faithfully, and delight thyself in the LORD.--This next group of commands has led to considerable discussion. Grammatically, all three are commands, but many translations (like the AV) treat the first two as promises. In addition, the phrase “verily thou shalt be fed” is ambiguous. It consists of a verb that can mean either “to graze” (thus AV “be fed”) or “to take care of sheep,” and the noun “faithfulness.”

18 By the lack of the conjunction on the third imperative וְשָׂמַח;

19 Note the relation of Eph 2:8-9 with v. 10, or Titus 3:5-7 with v. 8.

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An important clue is the initial command, “dwell in the land.” This command recurs in Psalms only in v. 27, “dwell for evermore.” There are only two instance of it elsewhere in the Bible, and only one of those is earlier than Psalms. It appears in God’s renewal of his covenant with Isaac:

Gen 26:1 And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar. 2 And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; **dwell** שָׁכַן in the land which I shall tell thee of: 3 **Sojourn** גָּר in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father; 4 **And I** will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and **will give unto thy seed all these countries**; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; 5 Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

This episode helps with both of the ambiguities about this phrase.

First, should we understand these imperative forms as commands, or as promises? In Isaac’s case, “dwell” is a command. Isaac faced famine, and might have been tempted to go down to Egypt, but God says, “Stay where you are. This is where I’ve put you; don’t let adversity scare you away.” So David encourages his readers to be steadfast in the face of opposition.

Second, what does the reference to sheep or shepherds mean? The patriarchs were all shepherds. But they did not always conduct themselves honorably. In Genesis 26, God exhorts Isaac to follow Abraham’s example of obedience. We can translate the expression, “shepherd faithfully.”²⁰ Do your work in a way that is true to your commitment to the Lord.

The final command takes us back to Psalm 16:8, illustrated in the second half of the previous Psalm: we need to delight in the Lord, fix our attention on him, and desire him above all else.

4b and he shall give thee the desires (מִשְׁאֲלוֹת requests) of thine heart.--If our devotion is centered on the Lord and we wait for his time, he will satisfy our deepest longings. But of course, if our delight is in him, that will shift our desires towards things that he can grant.

5 א Commit thy way unto the LORD; trust בָּטַח also in him; and he shall bring it to pass. 6 And he shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light, and thy judgment as the noonday.--The promise of “thy righteousness” and “thy judgment” anticipates a conflict between the wicked and the righteous that requires a judge to resolve. God promises that if the saint will trust in the Lord, the Lord will defend him.

7 ד Rest in the LORD, and wait חָלַל patiently for him:--The positive exhortations end with an encouragement not to rush ahead, but to wait for the Lord’s time.²¹

fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of **the man who bringeth wicked devices to pass.**--The patient waiting of the saint is contrasted with the wicked, who not

20 AV also takes אִמְנָה as adverbial accusative.

21 “Wait patiently” הַחֲוֹלֵל is surprising. Elsewhere this form means to writhe violently, Jb 15:20; Jr 23:19. Virtually all translations assume either derivation from another meaning of the root, “to wait,” otherwise represented by חָלַל, or emend the word to a form of חָלַל. But I wonder whether the sense of writhing is entirely absent, or whether it is the fidgeting of a well-disciplined child or animal who wants to break out into action but, in submission to the parent or master, is holding his peace. This would form a nice contrast with the following “fret not”: “I know you’re impatient and eager to get moving, but let your fidgeting result from your resolve to submit to the Lord, not from your envy of the wicked.” This waiting is not passive, but requires discipline.

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just prospers, but “makes his way to prosper,” that is, by his own efforts, which include “wicked devices.” This attitude is in direct contrast with the saint, who waits on the Lord.

8 ה Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil.--

Confronted with the prosperity of the wicked, we are tempted to deal with them out of anger and impatience, and ourselves to resort to their evil ways to survive. This would forsake the blessings that God has for us. David continues to exhort us to trusting and resting patiently in the Lord.

Once we see the connection to the patriarchs, we can align David’s exhortation with the NT observations about the patience of Abraham:

Heb 6:15 And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

9-26, The Contrast between the Wicked and the Righteous

A key phrase in this section is “inherit the earth” or “the land” (same Hebrew word, ארץ, Strong 776) which also appears in the statement sections of the two summary paragraphs. This expression appears only four other times in the Hebrew Bible,²² but the two words frequently occur in the same verse in the record of the wilderness wanderings and the conquest (Num-Judges, 66 verses) and the history of the return (Ezra-Neh, 6 verses). This expression, like the exhortation of v. 3, takes us back to God’s promise to grant the land to Abraham and his descendants. The first instance of these two words together is

Gen 15:7 I *am* the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this **land to inherit** it.

In spite of the opposition of the wicked, God will honor his promise to the fathers and give Israel possession of the land. (So “inherit the land” probably conveys the sense more accurately than “inherit the earth.”)

Almost every verse in this section contains a contrast between the righteous and the wicked, but these contrasts cluster around three themes: the prestige of possessing the earth, protection from physical harm, and material prosperity, corresponding to the three points of the Shema. A final section (22-26) summarizes these three.

9 For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait קיה upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. 10 1 For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be. 11 But the meek shall inherit the earth; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace.--Those who love the Lord with all their heart will rule, while the wicked, who proudly thought they were in control, will be removed.

12 1 The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth. 13 The Lord shall laugh at him: for he seeth that his day is coming. 14 1 The wicked have drawn out the sword, and have bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy, and to slay such as be of upright conversation. 15 Their sword shall enter into their own heart, and their bows shall be broken.--In spite of the attempts of the wicked to harm those who love the Lord with all their soul (or life-force), the plots of the wicked turn back on themselves.²³

²² Ps 25:13; 44:4 (ET 3, in reference to the conquest); Isa 14:21; 60:21

²³ Kidner: “The picture of verses 13–15 is of a defeat which the Lord *sees* coming, rather than has to intervene to send.” The *lex talionis* is bound up into the natural order of God’s universe, and will ultimately prevail.

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16 **U** A little that a **righteous** man hath *is* better than the riches of many **wicked**. 17 For the arms of the **wicked** shall be broken: but the LORD upholdeth the **righteous**. 18 **ʾ** The LORD knoweth the days of the **upright**: and their inheritance shall be **for ever**. 19 They shall not be ashamed in the evil time: and in the days of famine they shall be satisfied. 20 **כ** But the **wicked** shall **perish**, and the enemies of the LORD *shall be* as the fat of lambs: they shall **consume**; into smoke shall they consume away. 21 **ל** The **wicked** borroweth, and payeth not again: but the **righteous** sheweth mercy, and giveth.--Economically, though he may appear to be poor compared with the wicked, the one who loves the Lord with all his abundance prospers in time of famine, and in contrast with the stinginess of the wicked, shares with others.

The last paragraph of the declarative section revisits these three themes in the same order:

22 For *such as be* blessed of him shall **inherit the earth**; and *they that be* cursed of him shall be **cut off**.--Recalling the ultimate prestige of the righteous, we read again of inheriting the earth.

23 **נ** The steps of a *good* man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way. 24 Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the LORD upholdeth *him with his hand*.--Once again, the attacks of the wicked are powerless to harm the righteous.

25 **ז** I have been young, and *now* am old; yet have I not seen the **righteous** forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. 26 *He is ever* merciful, and lendeth; and his seed *is* blessed.--Finally, we return again to the theme of material prosperity and generosity.

David has presented his case. The servant of the Lord should not be disturbed about the wicked, but should trust in the Lord (vv. 1-8), because, in spite of appearances, this course of action will lead to ultimate prestige, physical protection, and prosperity for one's own needs and the needs of others (vv. 9-26). Now David offers two short summaries, each beginning with a command reflecting the core exhortation of v. 3, and each emphasizing a different facet of the theme that pervades the entire Psalm, that the wicked will be cut off but the righteous will endure. The indicative sections of both of these summaries repeat the promise about inheriting the land.

27-33, The Preservation of the Righteous

Once in vv. 9-26, David promises that something will last "for ever":

18 The LORD knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be **for ever**.

In this section, he repeats that promise three times.

27 **ד** **Depart** from evil, and **do** good; and **dwell for evermore**.--The last two imperatives echo v. 3, though there is no reference to trusting in the Lord. The focus here is on obedient conduct.

28 For the LORD loveth judgment, and forsaketh not his **saints** **הַסַּדִּיקִים**; they are preserved **for ever**: but the seed of the **wicked** shall be **cut off**. 29 The **righteous** shall **inherit the land**, and dwell **שָׁכֵן** therein **for ever**.²⁴ 30 **פ** The mouth of the **righteous** speaketh wisdom, and his tongue talketh of judgment. 31 The law of his God *is* in his heart; none of his steps shall slide. 32 **ז** The **wicked** watcheth the **righteous**, and seeketh to slay him. 33 The LORD will

24 The Hebrew expression here, unique in the Hebrew Bible, is לעד עליה, not לעולם as in the previous three instances.

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not leave him in his hand, nor condemn him when he is judged.--In connection with the long life of the righteous, we are reminded that the attacks of the wicked against him are frustrated.

34-40, The Judgment of the Wicked

Here, the emphasis is on the shortness of life of the wicked.

34 ק **Wait** **קח** **on the LORD, and keep his way,**--While this exhortation does not use any of the words in v. 3, it corresponds in meaning to the first two imperatives there, to trust and do good.

and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land: when the wicked are cut off, thou shalt see it. 35
ג **I have seen the wicked in great power, and spreading himself like a green bay tree. 36 Yet he passed away, and, lo, he was not: yea, I sought him, but he could not be found. 37 ו**
Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace. 38 But the transgressors shall be destroyed together: the end of the wicked shall be cut off. 39 ת **But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble. 40 And the LORD shall help them, and deliver them: he shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them, because they trust חסה in him.**

We have seen the expression, “inherit the land,” five times. In particular, v. 11 is the basis for our Lord’s beatitude,

Mat 5:5 Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

Sometimes we are confused by the word “meek.” It is the same word we saw repeatedly in Psalms 9-10 to describe the poor, the humble, the weak. The repetition of the promise in this Psalm gives us some other descriptions of this group of people. Let’s collect the references:

9 those that **wait קח upon the LORD**, they shall **inherit the earth**.

11 But the **meek** shall **inherit the earth**;

22 For *such as be* **blessed of him** shall **inherit the earth**;

29 The **righteous** shall **inherit the land**

34 **Wait קח on the LORD, and keep his way**, and he shall exalt thee to **inherit the land**:

Verse 9 makes waiting on the Lord, letting him do things in his time rather than taking matters into our own hands, the condition. V. 29 makes righteousness, conduct that conforms to his will, the key. V. 34 brings these two together: wait on the Lord, and keep his way. These are the two actions that David enjoins on us in v. 3, “Trust in the Lord, and do good.” Note how this picture challenges the world’s wisdom.

- The world says that blessing comes to those who take initiative and make it happen: “God helps them who help themselves.” But David insists that we must be willing to look to the Lord for blessing in his time, and like Abraham, “patiently endure.”
- The world says that the end justifies the means, and we may need to compromise occasionally to reach our objective. But David insists on righteousness, keeping God’s way, doing good. Sin in the life of a true believer invites God’s chastening hand, not the blessings of which David speaks.

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38-41, Psalms of the Guilty Sufferer

The next four Psalms continue to deal with suffering, but from a different perspective. The first four Psalms (Table 3, chart) share several teachings:

- They clearly contrast the wicked enemy and righteous David.
- God opposes the wicked.
- God blesses the righteous.

Psalm	Type	Summary
34	Thanks-giving	David thanks the Lord for delivering him personally from wicked Saul and Abimelech, and for delivering the righteous generally, and urges the humble to trust in him.
35	Lament	David as king asks for God's judgment on the wicked who unjustly oppose him, while personally he prays for them.
36	Lament	David is burdened over the devotion of the wicked to Transgression instead of God, but focuses his attention on the Lord's righteousness.
37	Wisdom (Advice)	David exhorts the weak to trust in the Lord and do good in the face of wicked opposition, because God will cut off the wicked but promote, protect, and provide for the righteous.

Table 3: Summary of the Psalms of the Innocent Sufferer

But God's people often suffer. Psalms 38-41 explain this discrepancy. God's people are not perfectly righteous, and God chastises them. Each of these Psalms is a lament in which David seeks God's restoration from divinely-imposed suffering because of David's own sin (chart):

38:3 *There is* no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither *is there any* rest in my bones because of **my sin**.

38:4 For **mine iniquities** are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me.

38:5 My wounds stink *and* are corrupt because of **my foolishness**.

38:18 For I will declare **mine iniquity**; I will be sorry for **my sin**.

39:8 Deliver me from all **my transgressions**: make me not the reproach of the foolish.

40:12 For innumerable evils have compassed me about: **mine iniquities** have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.

41:4 I said, LORD, be merciful הַנּוּן unto me: heal my soul; for **I have sinned against thee**.

Each of Psalms 38-41 is arranged for music (מִזְמוֹר), and all are assigned to the chief musician. Among the first four, none has a musical title, and only one (35) is assigned to the chief musician. The Psalms that acknowledge his sin receive more public emphasis than to those where he is presented as innocent. As we saw in Psalms 26-32, an openness to share our spiritual struggles with others is a powerful way to encourage them in their pilgrimage.

Psalm 38, A Sinner Prays for Healing and Restoration

The Psalm is a chiasmic lament (Figure 6, chart).

- It begins (1) and ends (21-22) with (A) a plea for the Lord's help.

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- There are two parts to the complaint (B): his sickness (2-10), and opposition from his friends and enemies (11-20).
- In each part, David confesses sin (C, 3-5, 18) and expresses confidence (D) in the Lord's awareness of his problem (9) and ability to help (15), but in inverse order, reinforcing the chiasm.

Both halves of the Psalm name the Lord. In the first half, he is LORD יהוה in the plea and Lord אדוני in the expression of confidence, but the second half uses both titles in both places, and adds "my God." Both the nature of his confidence (from awareness to help) and the divine titles he uses show him drawing closer to the Lord over the course of the Psalm.

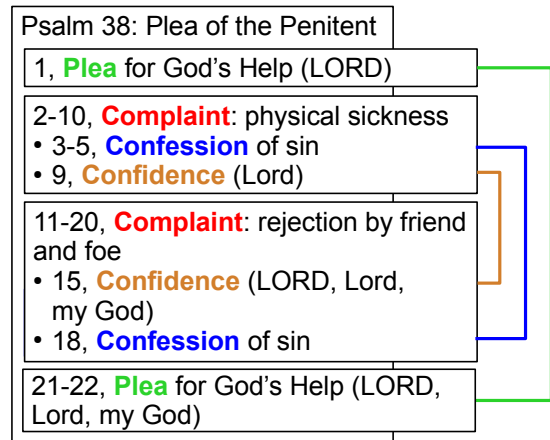


Figure 6: Structure of Psalm 38

38:1 A Psalm מזמור of David, to bring to remembrance.--The verb describes one of three distinctive forms of worship led by the Levites (chart),

1Ch 16:4 And he appointed *certain* of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and **to record**, and to thank and praise the LORD God of Israel:

Its association with this Psalm goes with the assignment to the chief musician (see notes).

A O LORD, rebuke me not in thy wrath: neither chasten me in thy hot displeasure.--this verse is almost identical with 6:1, which introduced the first Psalm in which David is aware that God is punishing him. This link reinforces the overall chiastic structure of Book 1 (Figure 1).

B 2 For thine arrows stick fast in me, and thy hand presseth me sore.--The Lord is the direct cause of his problem, which comes into focus in the next verse:

C 3 There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. 4 For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me. 5 My wounds stink and are corrupt because of my foolishness.--David's first complaint is of illness, and three times he confesses that the problem is due to his sin. In Psalm 35, he was praying for his sick enemies; here he is the one who is ill.²⁵

B 6 I am troubled; I am bowed down greatly; I go mourning all the day long. 7 For my loins are filled with a loathsome disease: and there is no soundness in my flesh. 8 I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness of my heart.--More illness.

D 9 Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee.--He is confident that the Lord knows his problem, but hesitates to use the covenant name.

B 10 My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the light of mine eyes, it also is gone from me.--He concludes his description of his physical problems.

B 11 My lovers and my friends stand aloof from my sore; and my kinsmen stand afar off. 12 They also that seek after my life lay snares for me: and they that seek my hurt speak

²⁵ This Psalm, like 51 and 32, may date to David's sin with Bathsheba, coming before Psalm 51 (Delitzsch). Here, he is preoccupied with the worldly consequences of his sin—physical debilitation, and the rumors circulating through the population. In 51, after Nathan comes, he asks for forgiveness from the offense against the Lord.

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mischievous things, and imagine deceits all the day long.--Now the complaint shifts from physical to social. Friends and enemies despise his illness, unlike his prayer for them, 35:13-14.

13 But I, as a deaf *man*, heard not; and I was as a dumb man *that* openeth not his mouth. 14 Thus I was as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth *are* no reproofs.--David does not speak in his own defense—partly because he is conscious of his sin, but also because he is resting his trust in God:

D 15 For in thee, O LORD, do I hope: thou wilt hear, O Lord my God.--The second expression of his confidence gives the main reason for his silence: he is leaving his defense to the Lord. He returns to the covenant name for God, and further claims him as “my God.”

The scenario of a penitent sinner facing an accuser but defended by the Lord is the basis of an important concept later in the OT, and in the NT. Zechariah pictures the angel of the Lord defending Joshua the High Priest against the accusations of Satan, whose very name means “Accuser, Slanderer.”

Zec 3:1 And he shewed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to resist him. 2 And the LORD said unto Satan, The LORD rebuke thee, O Satan; even the LORD that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: *is* not this a brand plucked out of the fire? 3 Now Joshua was clothed with filthy garments, and stood before the angel. 4 And he answered and spake unto those that stood before him, saying, Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.

The NT reveals the risen Christ as our advocate, defending us against the attacks of Satan.

1Jo 2:1 My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous:

Heb 7:25 Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to **make intercession for them**.

Rev 12:10 And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for **the accuser of our brethren** is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

B 16 For I said, *Hear me*, lest *otherwise* they should rejoice over me: when my foot slippeth, they magnify *themselves* against me. 17 For I *am* ready to halt, and my sorrow *is* continually before me.--David is at the limit of his strength.

C 18 For I will declare *mine iniquity*; I will be sorry for *my sin*.--As in vv. 3-5, David is fully conscious of his sin, and acknowledges it before the Lord.

B 19 But mine enemies *are* lively, *and* they are strong: and they that hate me wrongfully are multiplied. 20 They also that render evil for good are mine adversaries; because I follow *the thing that good is*.--His adversaries would not pay such attention to the sins of their companions, but they desperately want to discredit the devotion to the Lord that David shows, and that they refuse to offer. 35:12 suggests that his devotion to good has in particular showed itself in his conduct toward his enemies, a kindness that they despise.

A 21 Forsake me not, O LORD: O my God, be not far from me. 22 Make haste to help me, O Lord my salvation.--Very similar to 22:11, 19

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To the chief Musician, even to Jeduthun,--The role of this Levitical musician (see notes) was to respond to Psalms with the common refrain, "Give thanks to the Lord, because his mercy endureth for ever," and provide musical accompaniment.

Psalm 39, The Vanity of Life

As in 36 and 37, David is preoccupied with the wicked (v. 1), but with different resolutions.

- In 36, he fixed his attention on the attributes of the Lord.
- In 37, he reminded his readers that the wicked would be cut off, and the righteous would endure forever. This is the natural outcome of a conflict between the righteous Lord and wicked people, as depicted in Psalm 36.
- In this Psalm, his own suffering (the sickness of Psalm 38?) reveals his own transgressions, and he realizes that the shortness of life is a burden that he also must confront.

Psalm 39: The Vanity of Life
1-3, The Failure of Silence
4-13, The Frankness of Prayer
• 4, Plea : Teach me my transience
• 5-6, Complaint : man is vanity
• 7-10, Plea, Confidence, Confession , deliver me from my sin
• 11, Complaint : man is vanity
• 12-13, Plea : Hear me, depart from me

Figure 7: Structure of Psalm 39

39:1 A Psalm מזמור of David.

After describing his inward struggle, the Psalm alternates between appeals to the Lord and assertions about the vanity of human life (Figure 7, chart).

1-3, The Failure of Silence

I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me.--He had resolved in 38:13-14 not to complain about the wicked.

2 I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good;--See the notes. The most likely meaning (cf. ESV) is "to no avail." "I tried to be silent, but it was no good," as he goes on to say. **and my sorrow was stirred.**--He could be silent externally, but inside he was in turmoil.

3 My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue,--Finally the complaint bursts out—but it is to the Lord, not to men. If we cannot keep our peace, then at the very least let us restrict our complaints to the Lord.

4-13, The Frankness of Prayer

His pleas alternate with two very similar sections describing the vanity of the human condition.

This Psalm shares a number of themes and expressions with Job (Table 4, chart). The two poems bear common testimony to the pain and frustration of human life on the practical level.²⁶

4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am.--In grappling with the problem of the wicked, David comes face to face with his own weakness and limitation, and prays that the Lord would enable him to realize this.

²⁶ Uncertainty about the date of Job makes it tenuous to decide whether David is citing it or whether a later author has in mind Psalm 39 and others (e.g., 88).

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Job	Psalm 39
14:1 Man <i>that is</i> born of a woman <i>is</i> of few days, and full of trouble. 2 He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not.	5 Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age <i>is</i> as nothing before thee:
Job 7:16 let me alone; for my days <i>are</i> vanity .	5 verily every man at his best state <i>is</i> altogether vanity . Selah. 6 Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain
7:19 How long wilt thou not depart [שעה G] from me, nor let me alone till I swallow down my spittle? 14:6 Turn [שעה G] from him, that he may rest, till he shall accomplish, as an hireling, his day.	13a O spare me [שעע C],
10:20 <i>Are</i> not my days few? cease <i>then</i> , and let me alone, that I may take comfort [בלג C] a little, 21 Before I go <i>whence</i> I shall not return, <i>even</i> to the land of darkness and the shadow of death;	13b that I may recover strength [בלג C], before I go hence, and be no more.

Table 4: Parallels between Job and Psalm 39

Contrast his request with the attitude of the wicked. If they acknowledge the Lord at all, they demand that he exalt them. David longs to understand his own very limited condition.²⁷

5 Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee:--In stating his complaint, he begins with his personal realization of the shortness of life. Perhaps the context is illness, as in Psalm 38. This is the first point of similarity with Job.

verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity אך כלי-הבל כל-אדם נצב **Selah. 6 Surely every man איש walketh in a vain shew** בנצולם: **surely they are disquieted in vain:**--Now he generalizes beyond his personal condition, to reflect on the vanity of all human life. These verses, which are echoed very closely in v. 11, are the second point of contact with Job, and anticipate Solomon's lament in Ecclesiastes (cf. also Ps 62:9):

Ecc 1:2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity.

The word "vanity" and "vain" is הֶבֶל, Strong 1892, which literally means "breath, vapor." We do not adequately appreciate our place in the universe until we realize how insignificant we are, and illness and death drive this home (James 4:14).

he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them.--Having started with himself in v. 5a and generalizing to "every man" in 5b, he now focuses on the person who lives for his wealth, perhaps thinking of the greedy wicked in Ps 37:16, 21.

7 And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee.--For the second time, he turns to the Lord, this time in an expression of confidence. This leads him to three requests:

8 Deliver me from all my transgressions:--First, the shortness of life shows him that he is like the wicked, who shall be "cut off," and gives him a desire to be delivered from his sin. The answer to this is the Lord Jesus, who came "to save his people from their sins," Matt 1:21.

27 24 May 2018: this week is the funeral for Dean Fox, Christel's husband, and as I was preparing these notes, we learned of the unexpected death of Abe Schwartz, a dear Amish brother with whom I have often shared a word of encouragement. These events are a forceful reminder of the sober truth of David's words.

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make me not the reproach of the foolish.--Second, he fears the wicked will slander his sin.

9 I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it. 10 Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand.--Third, aware that his suffering comes as God's chastisement for sin, he prays that the Lord would remove this stroke from him.

11 When thou with rebukes dost correct man איש for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity אִךְ הֶבֶל כֹּל-אָדָם. Selah.--In words very similar to 5-6, he once again characterizes the human condition as nothingness.

His final plea, consisting of four requests, echoes the complaint of Job. The first three requests are based on his current situation; the last on his expected end.

12 Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were.--To be “a stranger ... and a sojourner” is the direct opposite of the repeated promise of Psalm 37, that the righteous would “inherit the earth.” That future expectation stands in stark contrast to the realities of daily life.

13 O spare me [שַׁעַן C], that I may recover strength [בִּלְגָּ C], before I go hence, and be no more.--As we have seen, this echoes several verses in Job. The general sense, both here and there, is, “God, enough already. Stop spanking me. Let me die in peace.” As with Job, this attitude reflects a weakness. Eliphaz rebuked Job, in words that Solomon endorses and Heb 12:5 later quotes,

Job 5:17 Behold, happy *is* the man whom God correcteth: therefore **despise not thou the chastening of the Almighty**: 18 For he maketh sore, and bindeth up: he woundeth, and his hands make whole.

Pro 3:11 My son, **despise not the chastening of the LORD; neither be weary of his correction**: 12 For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son *in whom* he delighteth.

At this point in his life, David is “despising the chastening of the Lord,” and so do we sometimes. But we have the promise of the NT,

1Co 10:13 There hath no temptation [trial] taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape [outcome], that ye may be able to bear *it*.

Our trials 1) will not exceed our individual capacity, and 2) they have an intended purpose.

Sometimes we, like David, feel at our wits' end. God will patiently listen to our complaint, even if we ask him to depart from us, but like a wise and loving parent, he will do what is best for us. Kidner compares the final request to two requests in the NT for the Lord to depart. After the miraculous draft of fishes, Peter cries to the Lord in Luke 5:8, “Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord,” a plea that the Lord did not grant. But when he heals the demoniacs, he does grant the request of the Gadarenes in Matt 8:34, “they besought *him* that he would depart out of their coasts.” which he did grant.

Psa 106:15 And he gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul.

We should be thankful when God pushes us to our limits, and seemingly ignores our plea for him to leave us alone—it is an assurance of his paternal love and his ultimate deliverance.

To the chief Musician,--Again, a very personal Psalm is dedicated to the public worship of God.

Psalms 34-41

Psalm 40, Past Deliverance gives Future Confidence

David, previously delivered by God, has now fallen into sin and resulting opposition, and prays that God would again deliver him and his people, based on the attributes that he emphasized in Psalms 25, 31, and 36.

40:1 A Psalm מזמור²⁸ of David.

The Psalm has two distinct parts, which might have originally been separate Psalms. Vv. 1-10 give thanks for a past deliverance, perhaps requested in Psalm 69. Vv. 11-17 are a lament: encouraged by God's past deliverance (reported in 1-10), David now asks for future deliverance. References to God's attributes in vv. 10-11 link the two parts (Figure 8, chart).

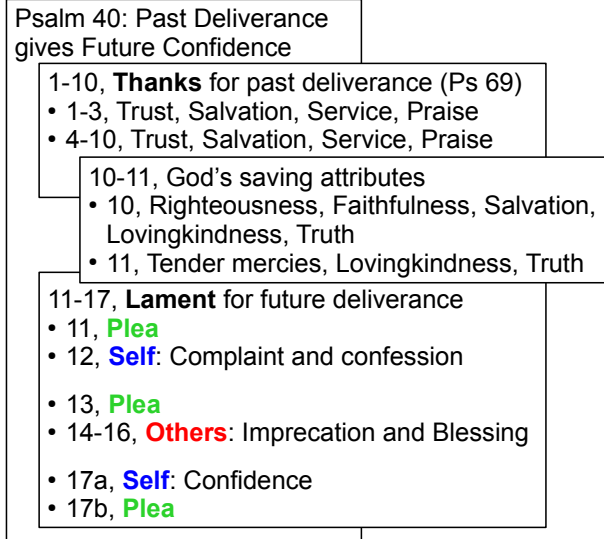


Figure 8: Structure of Psalm 40

The Psalm looks forward to the Messiah at two points. Heb 10:4-7 quotes vv. 6-8 of our Lord, and the mocking of his enemies in v. 15 recalls his mockery from the soldiers and at the cross.

1-10, Giving Thanks for Past Deliverance

This section recalls David's deliverance from a past threat in two cycles of four steps (Table 5, chart). In each, he describes his trust in the Lord, reports the deliverance, and indicates that this deliverance leads to his subsequent service and praise before the people. God does not save

Theme	vv. 1-3	vv. 4-10
Trust in time of trouble	1a I waited patiently for the LORD;	4 Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust,
The Lord delivers his saint ...	1b and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. 2a He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, ...	5 Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works <i>which</i> thou hast done, and thy thoughts <i>which are</i> to us-ward:
... to serve him ...	2b and established my goings.	6-8 (David ascends to the throne)
... and praise him.	3 And he hath put a new song in my mouth, <i>even</i> praise unto our God: many shall see ...	9-10 I have preached righteousness in the great congregation

Table 5: Two Cycles in 40:1-10

us simply for our comfort, but that we might serve and glorify him.

I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. 2 He brought me up also out of an horrible pit בּוֹר, out of the miry clay מַיִט הַיִּין, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.--The deliverance that he describes is very similar to a threat for which he offers a lament in another Psalm (chart):

Psa 69:1 Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto *my* soul. 2 I sink in deep **mire** יִין, where *there is* no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. ... 14

28 Uncharacteristically, in this heading, מזמור follows, rather than preceding, לדוד.

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Deliver me out of **the mire טיט**, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. 15 Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not **the pit בְּאֵר** shut her mouth upon me.

Ps 40:6 recalls Saul’s rejection as king, suggesting that Psalm 69 dates to David’s flight from Saul.²⁹ Psalm 69, a lament, is the second-most quoted Psalm in the NT after Psalm 22, anticipating our Lord’s sufferings for us. The first part of

	History (linear)	Prophecy (chiastic)
Ps 69, lament, prayer for delivery from the deep mire	David pursued by Saul	Our Lord's life and passion
40:1-10 thanks for delivery from mire, announcement of kingship	David ascends to the throne in 2 Samuel 2-6	Our Lord celebrates his resurrection
40:11-17 lament, prayer for delivery from treachery	David flees from Absalom	Mockery

Table 6: History and Prophecy

Psalm 40 is thanksgiving for God’s response to that prayer, and anticipates our Lord’s victory over death. But the mockery of enemies in the latter part of this Psalm takes us back to our Lord’s passion. The sequence of Psalm 69, 40a, and 40b is linear in the history of David, but chiastic in its prophetic application to our Lord (Table 6, chart).³⁰

3 And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD.--This is the second of six Psalms in which we read of the “new song,” after 33:3. (The others are 96:1; 98:1; 144:9; 149:1.)

4 Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.--Now he develops the sequence from vv. 1-3 in more detail, describing “wait[ing] for the Lord” (v. 1) as “mak[ing] the Lord his trust.”

5 Many, O LORD my God, are thy wonderful works which thou hast done, and thy thoughts which are to us-ward: they cannot be reckoned up in order unto thee: if I would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered.--He expands his appreciation for God’s help beyond his deliverance from Saul, to many other blessings.

6 Sacrifice זבחה and offering מנחה thou didst not desire; mine ears hast thou opened: burnt offering עולה and sin offering חטאת hast thou not required.--The “goings” that God “established” for David are his ascent as Israel’s king, starting with the Lord’s rejection of Saul. This verse echoes Samuel’s condemnation of Saul after he spared Agag king of the Amalekites, a sin for which he lost the kingdom, opening the way for David.

1Sa 15:22 And Samuel said, Hath the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings עולה and sacrifices זבחה, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey *is* better than sacrifice,

29 One argument against this dating is David’s reference to “my sins” in v. 5. Psalms of the period of Saul tend to emphasize his innocence. But a) he does say that his enemies hate him “without a cause” (69:4), b) his sins are a species of “foolishness,” not outright rebellion as with Bathsheba, and c) the allusion of 34:13 to the guile that characterized his interactions with Ahimelech and Achish shows that he is not ignorant of his failings during this period.

30 Some would describe the relations between these Psalms and the NT as rigidly prophetic (Gill, Payne; denying their historical relevance to David), typological (making them mere figures of speech), or instances of multiple but independent fulfillment, I prefer Beecher’s notion of manifold fulfillment that we saw throughout Isaiah and Matthew. David’s experiences were divinely ordained as part of a prophetic chain pointing to the ultimate fulfillment in our Lord.

Psalms 34-41

and to hearken than the fat of rams. 23 For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.

7 Then said I, Lo, I come: in the volume of the book *it is written of me*,--When David took the throne, he resolved to do so in keeping with the law of the king that the Lord laid down in Deut 17:14-20, commanding him not to multiply horses, wives, or riches. To reinforce this, he was to have his own copy of the law (chart):

Deu 17:18 And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: 19 And it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them:

In fact, one can translate v. 7, “Lo, I come with the scroll of the book written concerning me,” that is, with the copy commanded in Deut 17:18.

8 I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law *is within my heart*.³¹--The book of Hebrews quotes vv. 6-8 of the Lord Jesus:

Heb 10:4 For *it is* not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. 5 Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: 6 In burnt offerings and *sacrifices* for sin thou hast had no pleasure. 7 Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. 8 Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and *offering* for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure *therein*; which are offered by the law; 9 Then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second. 10 By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

Hebrews follows the LXX, which replaced “mine ears hast thou opened” in v. 6 with “a body hast thou prepared me.” The Hebrew text indicates that God gave him the means of hearing God’s commands, and the LXX makes this more concrete by referring to the body, the instrument with which he obeyed God, but this allows the writer to the Hebrews to emphasize the particular act of obedience in which the Lord Jesus offered up his body (and blood) as a sacrifice for us, fulfilling the OT sacrificial emblems.

9 I have preached righteousness in the **great congregation: lo, I have not refrained my lips, O LORD, thou knowest.**--Finally, he develops the “praise” from v. 3. The references to “the great congregation” here and at the end of v. 10 are the last of four such references in Psalms.³² The first two promised to praise God publicly:

31 This remarkable claim anticipates the effect of the New Covenant (Jer 31:33), as Delitzsch recognized: “That the Tora is to be written upon the tables of the heart is even indicated by the Deuteronomion, Deut. vi. 6, cf. Prov. iii. 3, vii. 3. This reception of the Tora into the inward parts among the people hitherto estranged from God is, according to Jer. xxxi. 33, the characteristic of the new covenant. But even in the Old Testament there is among the masses of Israel “a people with My law in their heart” (Isa. li. 7), and even in the Old Testament, “he who bath the law of his God in his heart” is called righteous (Ps. xxxvii. 31). As such an one who has the Tora within him, not merely beside him, David presents himself on the way to the throne of God.”

32 Other instances are all later, in 2 Chr 30 (Hezekiah’s great passover), Ezr 10:1, and Ezekiel (always of an opposing military force).

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Psa 22:25 My praise *shall be* of thee in the **great congregation**: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

Psa 35:18 I will give thee thanks in the **great congregation**: I will praise thee among much people.

Here David fulfills those promises. Given the Messianic connection of both this Psalm and Psalm 22, we should recognize this as part of our Savior's ministry in our midst. George Goodman captures this in his hymn, "The Bread and Wine":

Here in our midst art Thou, O risen Lord;
Worthy, O Lamb once slain, to be adored;
Here in our midst to lead Thy people's praise,
And incense sweet unto the Father raise.

10 I have not hid thy righteousness within my heart; I have declared thy faithfulness and thy salvation: I have not concealed thy lovingkindness and thy truth from the great congregation.--In Psalms 25 and 31, divine attributes were the basis for his appeals; now he declares them to the people.

11-17, Lament for Future Deliverance

vv. 13-17 appear as a separate Psalm, Psalm 70 (the other *hazkir* Psalm, like Psalm 38). The structure here is chiasmic, punctuated by three pleas. The first and last are associated with statements about himself, while the center one is associated with prayers concerning others.

11 Withhold not thou thy tender mercies from me, O LORD: let thy lovingkindness and thy truth continually preserve me.--He begins his plea by recalling God's attributes, which have been the basis for his deliverance in the past.

12 For innumerable evils have compassed me about: mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up; they are more than the hairs of mine head: therefore my heart faileth me.--Complaint merges with confession; his troubles stem from his iniquities.

13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me: O LORD, make haste to help me.--A second plea urges the Lord to move quickly.

Next he offers an imprecation for his enemies, and a blessing on the Lord's people.

14 Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it; let them be driven backward and put to shame that wish me evil. 15 Let them be desolate for a reward of their shame that say unto me, Aha, aha.--The expression recalls 35:21, 25; otherwise it appears only in 70:4, which is parallel to this instance. The LXX regularly translates this expression with εὖγε "well done," showing that they understand it as the gloating of his enemies when they see his suffering. The anointed king must deal with this *lèse-majesté*, which our Lord experienced before the soldiers and on the cross.

16 Let all those that seek thee rejoice and be glad in thee: let such as love thy salvation say continually, The LORD be magnified.--At the same time, he prays God's blessing on those who support the Lord's rule.

17 But I am poor and needy; yet the Lord thinketh upon me: thou art my help and my deliverer; make no tarrying, O my God.--The third plea includes an expression of confidence.

Psalms 34-41

To the chief Musician,

Psalm 41 A Sinner Claims God's Blessing

41:1 A Psalm מְזוֹמֵר of David.--This Psalm is a lament. As in Psalm 38, David is ill, and prays for the Lord to raise him up. We'll see clear examples of his Assertion of (past) innocence, Plea to the Lord, Confession of sin, Complaint against his enemies, and Confidence in the Lord's blessing. These are organized in a way that recalls Psalm 1 (Table 7, chart),³³ providing an elegant closure to Book 1. The one exception to the parallel is 41:4, his confession, which

	Psalm 1	Psalm 41
Condition for blessing	1 Blessed is the man that walketh not ... 2 but his delight ...	1a Blessed is he that considereth the poor:
Promise to the blessed	3 And he shall be like a tree ...	1b-3 The Lord will deliver him ... preserve him ... strengthen him
Description of the ungodly	4 The ungodly are not so ...	4, 10 Lord, be merciful unto me ...
Consequences for the ungodly	5 Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment	5 Mine enemies speak evil of me ... 10 raise me up, that I may requite them.
Summary of God's dealing with the wicked and the righteous	6 For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous : but the way of the ungodly shall perish.	11 By this I know that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. 12 And as for me , thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever.

Table 7: Psalm 41 as an Echo of Psalm 1

receives special emphasis by the very fact that it breaks the pattern of Psalm 1. In doing so, it emphasizes the twice-repeated plea for God's grace חַן, unmerited favor, as well as recalling the repentance to which Psalm 2 invites the wicked.

Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the LORD will deliver him in time of trouble. 2 The LORD will preserve him, and keep him alive; and he shall be blessed upon the earth: and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his enemies. 3 The LORD will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing: thou wilt make all his bed in his sickness.--Book 1 ends, as it begins, with a blessing on the person who lives according to the will of the Lord. In writing these words, David almost certainly has in mind the history he earlier mentioned in 35:13-14, referring to his kind care for Saul in 1 Samuel 16 (chart).

Psa 35:13 But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth: I humbled my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into mine own bosom. 14 I behaved myself as though he had been my friend or brother: I bowed down heavily, as one that mourneth for his mother.

These verses serve two functions in the context:

- they argue that his past kindness to the poor (v. 1) should qualify him for the Lord's restoration now (vv. 2, 3), and

³³ Delitzsch recognizes the initial אֲשֶׁרִי as an echo 1:1, but does not draw on the further structural parallel between the two Psalms.

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- they condemn his enemies, who are not treating him the way they should.

4 I said, LORD, be merciful רחם unto me: heal my soul; for I have sinned against thee.--The initial Plea is followed by Confession. The plea here and in v. 10, and the confession, have no parallels in Psalm 1, but this is reflected in the verb “be merciful.” The noun associated with this verb is the most common source for LXX uses of *χαρις*, meaning “grace,” emphasizing favor that is given without being deserved.

Verses 5-9, the Complaint, are parallel to the description of the ungodly in Psalm 1.

5 Mine enemies speak evil of me, When shall he die, and his name perish? 6 And if he come to see me, he speaketh vanity: his heart gathereth iniquity to itself; when he goeth abroad, he telleth it. 7 All that hate me whisper together against me: against me do they devise my hurt. 8 An evil disease, say they, cleaveth fast unto him: and now that he lieth he shall rise up no more.--Contrast David’s care for the illness of his adversaries in 35:13-14

9 Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me.--Our Savior quoted this verse at the Last Supper, in reference to Judas:

Joh 13:18 I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me.

Historically, David’s “Judas” was Ahithophel, a longtime counselor of David, but also the grandfather of Bathsheba who joined Absalom’s rebellion against David, presumably to seek revenge for the dishonor done to his daughter.

10 But thou, O LORD, be merciful רחם unto me, and raise me up, that I may requite them.--David repeats his plea for undeserved mercy, and promises to judge the evildoers, which is the destiny promised to the ungodly in Ps 1:5.

11 By this I know³⁴ that thou favourest me, because mine enemy doth not triumph over me. 12 And as for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face for ever.--This final expression of Confidence describes both God’s judgment on David’s enemies and his abiding blessing on David, ending just as does Psalm 1.

In light of v. 4, v. 12 cannot mean “because of mine integrity” (most commentators, as in 26:1, 11), but must indicate that he is trusting God to *enable* him to live a righteous life (cf. 17:5; Matthew Henry; see note). Before, his life was pleasing to God (vv. 1-3), who will once more restore him to that condition. Recall the triple emphasis in Psalm 25 on the Lord’s teaching and leading him in the right way.

13 Blessed be the LORD God of Israel from everlasting, and to everlasting. Amen, and Amen.--This verse is not properly a part of the Psalm, but rather serves as the concluding doxology for all of Book 1. Similar doxologies conclude Books 2 (72:18-19), 3 (89:52), and 4 (106:48), while Psalm 150 is a doxology for the entire book of Psalms.

To the chief Musician—The appearance of this title after the book-level doxology suggests that the designations for the chief musician were added relatively late, after the books (or at least the first book) were codified.

34 This idiom always points to evidence that follows, not precedes (Gen. 42:33; Exod. 7:17; Num. 16:28; Jos. 3:10). Ignorance of this, and neglect of the historicity of the title, has led Craigie (and others) to assume an intervening priestly oracle, and reconstruct a liturgy of healing that completely distorts the rhetoric of the Psalm.

Psalms 34-41

Notes

Expressions of Trust in the Lord.

Verse numbers are in MT.

	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41
ירא, יראה	8, 10, 12						4	
יחל, תוחלת					16	8		
בטח				3, 5			4	10
חסה	9, 23		8	40				
קוה				9, 34		8	2	
דרש	5, 11							

The Lord Delivers David: ישע, נצל, חלץ in Psalms

Figure 9 shows the distribution of these words for deliverance. They are especially prominent in 7 (associated with “Cush,” whom we have identified with Saul), and 34 (whose heading puts it in this same era), but also peak in 18 and 20, which correspond in our analysis of 15-24.

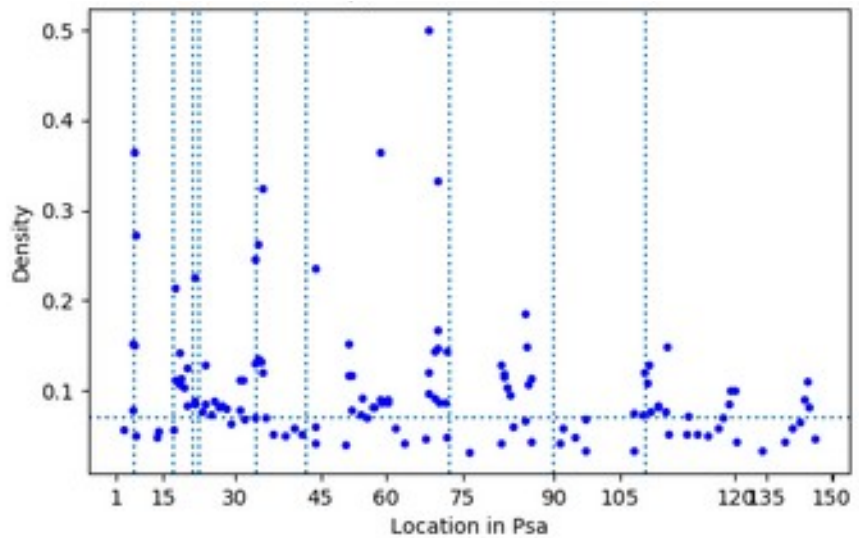


Figure 9: ישע, נצל, חלץ in Psalm. Lines within first book mark starts of 7, 18, 20, 22, and 34.

36:5, 6, The Ladder of Divine Attributes

The comparison of mercy, faithfulness, righteousness, and judgments with elements of creation (heavens, clouds, mountains, and the deep) certainly emphasizes their majesty and greatness. But we should note the also the descending order: from high heaven, to the clouds that are in heaven,³⁵ to the mountains, and then to the deep that lies

³⁵ שמים and שחקים often appear as poetic parallels, and one could argue that it is artificial to distinguish their degree of elevation. But David writes, unusually, not בשמים, but בהשמים, emphasizing with the article that this is not simply “the heavens” as a part of creation, but the heaven of heavens where God dwells, far above all. The

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between the mountains. That suggests that these attributes form a ladder reaching from God down to us, with the attributes reflecting successively increasing involvement with us as we get lower.

“The heavens” in this case are not just the firmament, but the dwelling place of God. Moses recognized it as such:

Deu 26:15 Look down from thy holy habitation, from heaven,

no doubt the source of the seven-times repeated phrase in Solomon’s dedication of the temple, “Hear thou in heaven,” in 1 Kings 8:30-45 (3x supplemented by “thy dwelling place,” מִכּוֹן rather than מַעֲוֵן as in Deuteronomy). The attribute of these four that is closest to the person and character of God is his covenant love. His essence is to live in a relation of sworn devotion to others. John captures this in his insight, “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16). The centrality of this characteristic is bound up in the eternal nature of the relation among the Father, the Son, and the Spirit. Before there were any other sentient beings, there was love. And in that love, we were “chosen in him before the foundation of the world,” Eph 1:4.

The first manifestation of God’s love is what he says, reflected in the second attribute, his faithfulness. This characteristic means that what he says, he will do. We see it in the very first verses of the Bible, where the Lord speaks the world into existence. He distinguishes humans from his other creatures by giving them language so that they can speak, and throughout the Bible he is engaged in speaking faithful words to his creatures. His faithfulness is in the clouds, almost as high as his heavenly dwelling, but a step closer to us. When he comes into the world to redeem us, the name he gives his messenger is “the Word” (John 1). John describes his ministry to us in its broadest sense as a verbal one,

Joh 1:18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*.

“Declared” ἐξηγεομαι elsewhere in the NT means “to narrate, to tell a story.” Jesus comes from heaven to earth to tell us about God.

The pairing of God’s mercy and truth is pervasive in the OT. These are the “goodness and truth” that culminate his description of himself to Moses on Sinai in Exod 34:6, and parallels to this list in Ps 57:10; 108:4 both give “mercy and truth” in this order, associated with the heavens and the clouds, respectively.³⁶

But God is more than words. He is also action, and that is the burden of the third attribute, his righteousness. This attribute deals not just with words, but with actions:

Psa 145:17 The LORD *is* righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works.

Actions involve the Lord for the first time in the physical world that he has created, and this attribute is thus compared to “great mountains,” literally “mountains of God.” In pagan religions, the gods dwelt on high mountains—Baal on Tsaphon, Zeus on Olympus. Our God is higher than they are, but he does act on earth, and when he does, his actions are righteous, consistent with his character.

ambition of the human ruler of Babylon in Isa 14:13 was to “ascend above the heights of the clouds [אֲב]” in order to “be like the most high.” In the parallel 108:4, God’s חסד is not just in, but above שָׁמַיִם, which in this case lacks the article. (57:10 simply says that it reaches to שָׁמַיִם.)

36 These other passages speak of אֲמִתּוֹת rather than אֲמִתּוֹתָהּ as does our verse, but the two terms come from the same root and are semantically very close to one another.

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Paul tells us that “the righteousness of God” is revealed in the gospel (Rom 1:16, 17), the good news about the coming of our Lord Jesus. The NT insists that our Savior was free from sin, always doing the Father’s will. He demonstrates the righteousness of God in his actions, and when we are united to him in salvation, we are made “the righteousness of God in him” (2 Cor 5:21).

God’s righteousness concerns how his actions relate to his own character. The fourth attribute, his judgments, again concerns his actions, but this time they are characterized in terms of their relation to *our* character. His judgments are the actions he conducts in response to the experiences and actions of his creatures, delivering the righteous from the oppression of the wicked, and holding the wicked accountable for their conduct. His judgments are compared to the “deep,” the ocean, the source of the springs that flooded the earth in Genesis, the force that overwhelmed the army of Egypt at the Red Sea.³⁷

Once more, these attributes find their expression in our Lord. At his first advent, indeed,

Joh 3:17 God sent not his Son into the world to condemn [κρίνω judge] the world; but that the world through him might be saved.

But as we read in Matthew 25, when he returns, it will be to judge the world.

This cline should be compared with another verse that mentions these four attributes together,

Psa 89:14 Justice and judgment are the habitation of thy throne: mercy and truth shall go before thy face.

This invokes a different illustrative context to describe the relation among these four, the structure of the royal court rather than the levels of creation. We will explore that verse in its context.

37:3 רעה אמונה

Numerous possible renderings; the main differences are a) whether רעה is an active duty or a description of our enjoyment of what someone gives us, and b) whether אמונה refers to God’s faithfulness in which we are to trust, or to our own faithfulness that we are to cultivate.

Delitzsch: to shepherd faithfulness; give attention to it as a shepherd would to his sheep.

Pulpit: Feed on faithfulness (רעה in the sense of graze, as a sheep), that is, God’s faithfulness.

Kidner: רעה II to busy oneself with, be a friend of. Be occupied with faithfulness (close to Delitzsch)

Kselman: feed on a reliable food supply (אמונה as abstract for concrete); Craigie “find safe pasture”

Given the allusion to Isaac in Genesis, and the pastoral context there, perhaps we should translate “shepherd faithfully.” Manage your affairs faithfully.

37 Though there, the word is always plural.

Psalms 34-41

Overlaps among הלל, הודה, הזכיר

Psalm 38 is designated להזכיר. Delitzsch sees this as one of three categories of Psalms mentioned in 1 Chr 16:4: *hazkir, hodot, hallelujah*.

1Ch 16:4 And he appointed *certain* of the Levites to minister before the ark of the LORD, and to record להזכיר, and to thank להודות and praise להלל the LORD God of Israel:

We have two of the first category (38, 70) and numerous of the third. ידה appears in 44 Psalms; זכר C in the body of five others, plus these two headings.

As a *heading*, this appears elsewhere only in Psalm 70, another lament. But in the body of the Psalm, 20:8 (ET 7) and 71:16 are promises of praise in a lament, 45 is a wedding Psalm praising the king, 77:12 is in the midst of a thanksgiving Psalm, in 87 the object of the verb is other nations, not the Lord. In general, it is associated with laments as a promise to give thanks after the trouble is past.

Psalms using הזכיר appear throughout the Psalter. הזכיר Psalms are only in the first three books, and appear in the same Psalm as הודה in 45 (v. 18) and 71. הללויה Psalms are only in the last two books, and appear in the same Psalm as הודה in 105, 106 (v. 1), and 111 (v. 1).

הזכיר: Ps. 20:8; 38:1; **45:18**; 70:1; **71:16**; 77:12; 87:4

הודה: Ps. 6:6; 7:18; 9:2; 18:50; 28:7; 30:5, 10, 13; 32:5; 33:2; 35:18; 42:6, 12; 43:4-5; 44:9; **45:18**; 49:19; 52:11; 54:8; 57:10; 67:4, 6; **71:22**; 75:2; 76:11; 79:13; 86:12; 88:11; 89:6; 92:2; 97:12; 99:3; 100:4; **105:1**; **106:1**, 47; 107:1, 8, 15, 21, 31; 108:4; 109:30; **111:1**; 118:1, 19, 21, 28-29; 119:7, 62; 122:4; 136:1-3, 26; 138:1-2, 4; 139:14; 140:14; 142:8; 145:10

הללויה: Ps. 102:19; 104:35; **105:45**; **106:1**, 48; **111:1**; 112:1; 113:1, 9; 115:17-18; 116:19; 117:2; 135:1, 3, 21; 146:1, 10; 147:1, 20; 148:1, 14; 149:1, 9; 150:1, 6

38 end, Jeduthun

Jeduthun appears at the end of 1 Chronicles 16, the chapter that gives us the clue to “remembrance” in v. 4, in the role of a leader of the accompanists of the worship:

1Ch 16:41 And with them Heman and Jeduthun, and the rest that were chosen, who were expressed by name, to give thanks to the LORD, because his mercy *endureth* for ever; 42 And with them, Heman and Jeduthun, ~~with~~ trumpets and cymbals for those that should make a sound, and with musical instruments of God. And the sons of Jeduthun *were* porters.

The refrain mentioned in v. 41 was a common one in the temple ceremonies (cf. 2 Chr 5:13; 7:3; 20:21; Jer 33:11; Ezra 3:11), and Jeduthun was responsible for leading in this refrain and for directing the instruments. His sons were originally designated as doorkeepers in the temple (1 Chr 16:38, 42b), but later took over the instrumental ministry (1 Chr 25:1, 3, 6; 2 Chr 5:12). This latter ministry focused on *hodot* and *hallel* worship (1 Chr 25:3, like Psalm 76, cf. v. 10), not the *hazkir* worship designated for Psalm 38. Psalms 38 and 61 no doubt name him because of his roles in 1 Chr 16:41-42.

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39:2 (MT 3) החשיתי מטוב

Verbs of silence followed by מן : being silent so as to ignore something, Ps 28:1; 1 Sam 7:8.

Delitzsch: he was silent מטוב, turned away from (*vid.* xxviii. 1, 1 Sam. vii. 8, and frequently) prosperity, *i.e.* from that in which he saw the evil-doer rejoicing; he sought to silence for ever the perplexing contradiction between this prosperity and the righteousness of God. [But the psalm says nothing about the prosperity of the wicked, and would be a reference to the object of his speech, which Hengstenberg denies, see below. More generally, he does address prosperity, in vv. 6, 11.]

Perowne: מן, after the verb of silence, can only allow, as Hupfeld rightly maintains, of one of two interpretations, either, (1) "far from good," *i.e.* without comfort, joy, or the like, comp. Job xxviii. 4; or, (2) as the negative consequence of the silence (טוב being an infin. for לי מטוב, "so that it was not well with me," or, "without its being well with me," parallel with what follows, "and my sorrow was stirred."

Hengstenberg: The unpleasant consequences of silence are first expressed negatively, מטוב, far from good, without its having produced any good effect; then positively: and my pain was stirred, quickened. מטוב has been subjected to many false interpretations. The most general is that which regards the expression: from good, as an abbreviation for: from good even to evil, in Gen. xxxi. 24, 29; 2 Sam. xiii. 22, q.d. I kept silence from all. But such an abbreviation can the less be thought of since the manner of speech was no vulgar one, as its occurring in these single places shews. The silence of the Psalmist can refer only to the evil, and the phrase, from good even to evil would be unsuitable. In the passages referred to, there is indeed the expression, not to speak, but not, as here, to be silent, from good even to evil.³⁸ Others: I was silent about prosperity, not demanding this loudly and imperiously, renouncing in a spirit of resignation my pretensions to it. But this unsuitable meaning is verbally quite inadmissible; the מן after the verb of silence never marks the object regarding which it is kept. Others again: I was perfectly silent of good, although my sufferings violently drove me to a loud lamentation. But the bono orbus [good bereavement?] is tame, and not suitable to the connection.

41:12 (MT 13) ואני בתמי תמכת בי

The reference to David's integrity is striking, after his confession of sin in v. 4. ESV and NET follow the LXX in interpreting "because of mine integrity," without addressing the contradiction. The solutions that have been proposed include:

Gill takes the psalm as prophetic, not merely typological. The integrity then is the sinlessness of the Messiah:

In the innocence of his nature, being free from sin, original and actual; in the uprightness of his life and conversation before God and men; and in the perfection of his obedience and sacrifice, whereby he brought in a perfect righteousness, made complete atonement, and obtained full salvation and redemption for his people; and, because of all this, Jehovah the Father upheld him in his sufferings, as man and Mediator, that he failed not, and was not discouraged ...

38 My observation: the negation applies to the entire phrase, not just to the verb: it is "not (speak anything)", not "(not speak) anything"

Psalms 34-41

V. 4 must then be understood of our Lord's sin-bearing work:

not that any sin was committed by him in his own person, but he having all the sins of his people on him, which he calls his own, Psa 40:12; he was treated as a sinner, and as guilty before God, Isa 53:12; and so the words may be read, "for I am a sinner unto thee"; I am counted as one by thee, having the sins of my people imputed to me; and am bound unto thee, or under obligation to bear the punishment of sin; or thus, "for I have made an offering for sin unto thee" (w), so the word is used, Lev 6:26.

This claim is problematic grammatically. The translation "be a sinner unto thee" is unlikely, because לִי הִטָּאָה is the standard idiom for "sin against." Lev 6:26 uses the Piel, rather than the Qal.

Calvin recognizes the problem:

Some expound the clause thus: That, as David followed after uprightness, God had stretched out the hand to him. But this interpretation does not agree very well with a preceding sentence, in which he acknowledged that he had been justly punished by God.

He understands "integrity" to refer to health and security:

The Hebrew word which we have rendered integrity might be referred to the body as well as the mind, thus: I shall continue sound, because thou wilt preserve and establish me. He seems, however, to extend the favor of God still farther; as if he had said, that he had been assisted not only once by his hand, but that, during the whole course of the period he had enjoyed prosperity, he had always been upheld in safety by the power of God.

But it is widely agreed that the word is overwhelmingly moral in its implications.

Matthew Henry takes v. 12 as referring to the Lord's enabling David to maintain his integrity in the future, rather than his past integrity as the cause for God's favor.

"As for me, forasmuch as thou favourest me, as a fruit of that favour, and to qualify me for the continuance of it, thou upholdest me in my integrity, and, in order to that, settest me before thy face, hast thy eye always upon me for good;" or, "Because thou dost, by thy grace, uphold me in my integrity, I know that thou wilt, in thy glory, set me for ever before thy face." Note, (1.) When at any time we suffer in our reputation our chief concern should be about our integrity, and then we may cheerfully leave it to God to secure our reputation. David knows that, if he can but persevere in his integrity, he needs not fear his enemies' triumphs over him. (2.) The best man in the world holds his integrity no longer than God upholds him in it; for by his grace we are what we are; if we be left to ourselves, we shall not only fall, but fall away. (3.) It is a great comfort to us that, however weak we are, God is able to uphold us in our integrity, and will do it if we commit the keeping of it to him. (4.) If the grace of God did not take a constant care of us, we should not be upheld in our integrity; his eye is always upon us, else we should soon start aside from him. (5.) Those whom God now upholds in their integrity he will set before his face for ever, and make happy in the vision and fruition of himself. He that endures to the end shall be saved.

Henry's understanding seems the most satisfactory.