

## **PSALMS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

*Leader's Guide, Lesson Six*

# **PSALM 69**

## **Rejected Because of Zeal for God**

### **Lesson at a glance**

Psalm 69 is a cry from a man drowning in hostility he did not earn. After Psalm 110, no psalm is quoted more often in the New Testament, and the quotations reach across the Gospels, Acts, and Paul. The lesson walks the psalm in five movements: the drowning man, the admission of verse 5, the reproach and the sour wine, the imprecations of verses 22 to 28, and the vow of praise at the end. Then it gathers the six New Testament uses in one section. This is the lesson where the class learns, for good, the difference between a direct prophecy and a type, because Psalm 69:5 says something that could never have been said by Jesus while the surrounding verses are applied to Him repeatedly. It is also the lesson where the class faces the imprecatory psalms without flinching and without softening them.

### **Goals for this session**

First, that each person would see Jesus in this psalm as the righteous sufferer who was hated without cause, consumed by zeal, and left without a comforter.

Second, that the class would be able to explain in their own words why the New Testament can use Psalm 69 of Christ even though verse 5 could never be true of Him, and would be able to state the difference between prophecy and type.

Third, that the group would read the imprecations of verses 22 to 28 honestly, without embarrassment and without pretending they say something milder, and would see how Romans 11:9 to 10 and Acts 1:20 actually handle them.

Fourth, that each person would leave prepared to hand vengeance to God and to pray for a specific enemy by name this week.

### **Preparing to lead**

Read Psalm 69 three times before you teach it, at least once out loud and at least once including verses 22 to 28 slowly. If those verses make you uncomfortable, sit with the discomfort now rather than in front of the class. Then read Psalm 109 and Psalm 137:7 to 9 so that you know Psalm 69 is not an isolated case.

Read the six New Testament passages in full context, not just the quoted lines: John 2:13 to 22; John 15:18 to 25; John 19:28 to 30; Romans 15:1 to 7; Romans 11:1 to 32; Acts 1:15 to 26. Romans 11 in particular must be read whole. If you walk in knowing only verses 9 and 10, the lesson can go badly wrong.

Pray for anyone in your class who has been deeply and unjustly wronged and has never seen it put right, and for anyone whose family has turned cold toward them since they became a Christian. Verse 8 and verse 20 will find those people. Pray also that you would teach the hard verses without either apologizing for Scripture or feeding anyone's bitterness.

## **Sensitive topics in this lesson**

Imprecatory prayer and the desire for revenge. Someone in your room has been abused, betrayed, defrauded, or slandered, and part of them will feel relief at verses 22 to 28 and then feel guilty for the relief. Say clearly that the longing for justice is not sin; Revelation 6:9 to 10 puts the same cry in the mouths of the martyrs in heaven. Then say just as clearly what the New Testament does with it: we hand the matter to God (Romans 12:19), we refuse to repay (1 Peter 2:23), and we feed our enemy (Romans 12:20). Do not let the discussion become a session of venting about particular people. If it starts to, move to question 13.

Romans 11:9 to 10 and the danger of contempt for the Jewish people. Paul quotes an imprecation about a hardened part of Israel, and a careless reader turns that into hostility toward Jews as such. Head this off before it starts. Paul is himself an Israelite (11:1), he insists God has not rejected His people, he says the hardening is partial and not final (11:25), he warns Gentile Christians in the strongest terms against arrogance (11:18 to 21), and the argument ends in mercy for all (11:30 to 32). Also make clear, gently, that the future Paul describes is people being grafted back in through faith in the gospel, not a restored earthly kingdom in Jerusalem. Christ reigns now (Acts 2:32 to 36; Colossians 1:13), and the kingdom is His church.

Judas and Acts 1:20. Peter applies "may his camp become desolate" to a man who walked with Jesus for three years and then fell away. Someone in your class has a child, a spouse, or a lifelong friend who has left the faith. Handle it with great care. We are not given the right to pronounce anyone else's doom; Peter had apostolic authority and an inspired reading of Scripture that we do not have. What we do have is the sober warning that closeness to Jesus is not the same as faithfulness to Him, and the hope of 2 Timothy 2:25 to 26 and James 5:19 to 20.

Rejection by family. Verse 8, "a stranger to my brothers," lands hard on converts whose families have grown cold, and on parents whose adult children will not speak to them about faith. Read John 7:5 and Matthew 10:34 to 37 with them, and make sure they hear that Jesus knows this particular grief from the inside.

Suffering that has never been vindicated. Verse 3 says his eyes grow dim with waiting. The psalm ends in praise, but it does not end with the enemies defeated. Some in your class are still in verse 3. Do not rush them to verse 30. Let the psalm's own slowness do its work.

## Suggested 60- to 75-minute schedule

Five minutes: welcome.

Five minutes: open in prayer. Read Psalm 69:1 to 4 and 69:29 to 33 aloud, the drowning and the singing.

Five minutes: warm-up. Ask the class, "Have you ever been punished for doing the right thing?"

Thirty-five to forty minutes: discussion. Choose six or seven questions in advance.

Five to ten minutes: "Your response" reflection.

Five minutes: closing prayer.

## Discussion priorities

Make sure these are among the questions you discuss: 4 (verse 5 and how the New Testament still uses the psalm), 8 (the sour wine and the Gospel accounts), 9 (the imprecations), 11 (zeal and reproach), and 13 (Romans 11 and Acts 1). If time is short, do not skip 4. Everything else in this series depends on the class understanding it.

## Notes on key questions

**Question 3.** "Hated without cause" is the phrase Jesus applies to Himself in John 15:25, where He calls it a word "written in their Law," using "Law" in the broad sense of the whole Old Testament. The same phrase occurs in Psalm 35:19. The last line of verse 4, "What I did not steal must I now restore?" is legal language: he is being forced to make restitution for a theft he did not commit. Point out to the class that this is a picture, and that at the cross it became literal in the deepest sense, since Jesus paid what He did not owe.

**Question 4.** This is the most important question in the lesson. David admits in verse 5 that God knows his folly and his wrongs. That is honest and true of David. It cannot be true of Jesus (Hebrews 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22; 2 Corinthians 5:21; John 8:46), and the New Testament never applies verse 5 to Him. What the New Testament does is take the pattern in the psalm, an innocent man hated for his devotion to God, and show that Jesus fills that pattern completely in a way David never could. That is typology. Push the class until several people can state it in their own words, and give them a test case: Jonah is a type of the resurrection (Matthew 12:40) even though Jonah was running from God. A type resembles Christ at the point Scripture presses, not at every point. Head off two errors. Some will want to say verse 5 is really about Jesus bearing our sins; that is a lovely thought but it is not what the verse says and not how the New Testament uses it, so do not build on it. Others will conclude that the apostles were careless with Scripture; answer that the New Testament writers were guided by the Spirit who gave the psalm in the first place, and that they quote it with obvious care, taking the verses that fit and leaving the one that does not.

**Question 6.** "For your sake I have borne reproach" (69:7) and "zeal for your house has consumed me" (69:9) are the twin statements the New Testament reaches for. In David's setting, God's "house" was the tent where the ark rested, not Solomon's temple, and David's concern for it runs through 2 Samuel 6 and 7 and Psalm 132. The Hebrew word for zeal carries heat; it is the same root used for jealousy, a burning concern for something that belongs to God. Verse 8, "a stranger to my brothers," is worth pausing over next to John 7:1 to 5, where even Jesus' own brothers did not believe in Him. That must have been a particular loneliness, and it should give hope to the Christian in your class whose household thinks he has gone strange.

**Question 8.** Two separate offers of drink are recorded at the cross. Before the crucifixion Jesus was offered wine mixed with gall, or with myrrh, most likely a crude painkiller, and He refused it (Matthew 27:34; Mark 15:23); He would face this fully awake. Near the end He said "I thirst," and was given sour wine on a sponge, and He received it (Matthew 27:48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; John 19:28 to 30). John says explicitly that this was "to fulfill the Scripture." Psalm 69:21 has both halves: gall for food, and sour wine for thirst. Make sure the class notices that John says Jesus spoke "knowing that all was now finished." This was not a man losing control. This was the Son of God deliberately completing what was written.

**Question 9.** Do not soften these verses, and do not skip them. Several honest observations help. They are prayers, not plans; the psalmist asks God to act and never lifts his own hand. They ask for justice, not for personal satisfaction, and they are aimed at settled and unrepentant cruelty, described in verse 26 as adding pain to a man God had already wounded. They belong to a covenant under which God's justice was largely expected within this life, before the fuller New Testament revelation of judgment to come. And Scripture itself contains the same cry in the mouths of the holy martyrs in Revelation 6:9 to 10, so the longing is not sinful. Then bring the class to the New Testament answer. Vengeance belongs to God and He will repay (Romans 12:19; 2 Thessalonians 1:6 to 8). Jesus did not revile in return but entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23). And He told us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44), which He did from the cross (Luke 23:34) and Stephen did under the stones (Acts 7:60). The Christian is not given these verses as a script for anger. He is given the freedom of not having to be the judge.

**Question 11.** John 2:17 quotes the first half of Psalm 69:9, and Romans 15:3 quotes the second half; the two halves of one verse land in two very different arguments. In John, the disciples watch Jesus clear the temple and remember the line, and John writes it in the future tense, "Zeal for your house will consume me," where the psalm has the past tense. The change is deliberate and quietly ominous: this zeal is going to cost Him His life. In Romans 15, Paul is telling strong Christians to bear with the weak and not to please themselves, and his argument is that Christ did not please Himself but took on Himself the reproaches aimed at God. Draw the practical line for the class: bearing reproach for God's honor and giving up your preferences for a weaker brother are the same disposition wearing different clothes.

**Question 12.** In John 15:18 to 25 Jesus is preparing the apostles for hatred. His logic is that a servant is not greater than his master, that the world hated Him first, and that the hatred is "without a cause," which is precisely what makes it damning; they have seen the works and heard the words and hate Him

anyway. Do not let the class turn this into a general license to interpret every conflict in their lives as persecution for Christ. Ask them the sharpening question: was the reproach earned or unearned, and was it for Christ's sake or for my own personality? John 19:28 to 29 then shows how consciously Jesus went to the end, saying "I thirst" knowing that all was now finished, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled.

**Question 13.** Two uses, both instructive. In Romans 11:9 to 10 Paul quotes Psalm 69:22 to 23 about the part of Israel that had been hardened, but the quotation is one step in an argument, not the conclusion. Read the surrounding chapter with the class: God has not rejected His people (11:1 to 2), the hardening is partial (11:25), Gentile Christians are warned against arrogance (11:18 to 21), those who do not continue in unbelief can be grafted back in (11:23), and the chapter ends with mercy for all (11:30 to 32). The way into the olive tree is faith in the gospel, not ancestry and not a future earthly kingdom. In Acts 1:20 Peter quotes Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 to settle a practical question: whether to replace Judas. Notice that Peter reads "his camp" where the psalm says "their camp," applying a general principle about the enemies of God's anointed to one particular enemy. That is exactly what the apostles do throughout the New Testament, and it is exactly why this lesson spends so long on typology. Remind the class that Peter had apostolic authority we do not have, and that this passage is not a warrant for pronouncing judgment on anyone we know.

## About the Study Skills in this lesson

Two Study Skills appear in Lesson Six, and they are the two most important in the series. The Difference Between Prophecy and Type gives the class the categories they need for every remaining lesson: a prophecy predicts, a type patterns, and a type resembles Christ at the point Scripture presses rather than at every point. Reading a Quotation Back in Its Original Context is the discipline that keeps the first skill honest. Do the exercise with them out loud on Romans 11:9 to 10, reading Psalm 69:22 to 23 in its own paragraph and then Romans 11 in its own, and let them discover for themselves that Paul's conclusion is mercy. If the class walks out with these two habits, this lesson has done its work.

## A suggested closing prayer

Pray your own prayer. A sample, if you would like one:

"Father, we have read a hard psalm today, and we thank You for not giving us a Bible that hides what suffering feels like. Thank You for Your Son, who was hated without a cause, whose zeal for Your house consumed Him, who was mocked for His devotion and given vinegar when He thirsted, and who looked for comforters and found none. Thank You that He bore the reproaches that were aimed at You. Teach us to be zealous for the things You care about, even when it costs us. Where we have been wronged and no one has made it right, help us to put the whole matter in Your hands, believing that the Judge of all the earth will do what is right. And give us the grace this week to pray for those who have hurt us and to do them good. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen."

## Looking ahead to Lesson Seven

Next week is Psalm 95, "Today, If You Hear His Voice." It begins as a joyful call to worship and turns, without warning, into a warning drawn from Israel's rebellion at Meribah and Massah. Hebrews 3:7 to 4:13 then aims that warning straight at Christians. This is the perseverance lesson of the series, and it will be a searching hour. Ask the class to read Psalm 95, then Exodus 17:1 to 7 and Numbers 14, and then Hebrews 3 and 4 straight through. Tell them to pay attention to two words as they read: "today," and "rest."