

A theological study of “the enemies” in the Psalter and the Yorùbá worldview¹

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Abstract

The violent prayers in imprecatory Psalms have attracted serious criticism among Christians and Biblical scholars who find it difficult to reconcile the spirit of vengeance in the Psalms with the injunction of Jesus Christ that says, “Pray for your enemies and those who persecute you” (Mt 5:43-48). Biblical scholars have done profound research on imprecatory Psalms, but none of them has given significant attention to the activities of the enemies which motivated this present study. Therefore, this article examines the concept of enemies in the Psalter and the Yorùbá worldview to gain insight into the spiritual implications of dealing with enemies in each context. In addition to a review of the literature on the Psalter, a textual analysis of Psalms 35, 69, and 109 was carried out. Also, Yorùbá proverbs and pithy sayings lend credence to the Yorùbá perspective of the enemies. It was discovered that the enemies in each of the contexts were bent on destroying their perceived foes. Consequently, individuals in each cultural setting tried to be freed from the clutches of these enemies. The essay concludes that the Psalter and the Yorùbá worldview have brought different angles to the concept of enemies, which would help appreciate the complexities of enemies on a global scale. The article recommends that individuals should not give up in the face of challenges emanating from enemies and their activities.

Keywords

Enemies; Psalter; Yorùbá worldview; Nigeria

1 The Yoruba are an ethnic group in southern Nigeria.

Introduction

Life is precious and irreplaceable. The Hebrew word for life is *נֶפֶשׁ*-*nephesh* which is a feminine noun that means soul, living being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion, and passion (Brown, Driver, Briggs, 1979: 659). The word occurs over 780 times in the Old Testament. Brown, et.al (1979:569–661) outline the meanings of the word, some of which include the following: (a) that which breaths, the breathing substance or being as in Pss 31:10; 42:5, 7; and 131:2; (b) a living being as a result of God’s breathing into the nostrils of man (Gen 2:7 cf. Gen 1:20, 24, 30); (c) a living being whose life resides in the blood (Deut 12:23–24; Lev 17:10,11,12,14); (d) seat of the appetites-hunger (Ps 107:9; Prov 27:7), thirst (Prov 25:25; Jer 31:25; Ps 143:6); and (e) seat of emotions and passion (Deut 12:20; 14:26; and 1 Sam 2:16).

From the above explanations, life is very crucial as it is the dynamic source of every living being. The distinction between the living and the dead is life. Also, closely connected to life is the blood, as highlighted in Deut 12:23 “... for the blood is the life, and you shall not eat the life with the flesh.” Eichrodt says, “It is easily understandable that the blood should be pre-eminently the vehicle of the *נֶפֶשׁ* – *nephesh*, so that it can be stated quite categorically that the blood is the *נֶפֶשׁ*-*nephesh*. Whoever loses his blood also loses his life” (1967: 2:136). Also, the fact that life is most precious is illustrated in 2 Kings 1:13 where the captain prayed to Elijah: “O man of God, please let my life and the lives of these fifty servants of yours be precious in your sight.” Furthermore, life is closely connected with “desire” and “yearning”. In other words, it is when there is a life that one will have the desire and yearning for food (Deut 12:20; 14:26; 1 Sam 2:16), worship of God (Ps 42:1–2; 63:2), for understanding His law (Ps 119:20), salvation (Ps 119:81) and attending His courts (Ps 84:3) (Waltke 1980: 587–91). That is to say that it is when there is a life that one can eat, drink, move around, and participate in various programmes and activities (Eichrodt 1967: 138). Unfortunately, the enemy appears to be a threat to an individual’s life. The goal of the enemy is to attack life and to see that life is gone from individuals. His purpose is to seek for life to destroy (Exod 4:19), and to set ambush for the life of individuals (Ps 59:3).

In Africa, life is full of ups and downs. In other words, life is war. This phenomenon has demonstrated the African, perhaps Yorùbá, cosmological insight into mechanisms of world manipulations or orderings and agency of those who want to re-order it through their psychic powers or otherwise. It is worth mentioning that the life of interminable warfare has necessitated two ritual phenomena in the society, that is, the ritual of prayer has configured daily life around spiritual militarization, social pervasiveness, and theological culture in Africa. The enormity of ritual of sacrifice canvasses for physical security against the invasion of psychic powers or spiritual attacks. Nevertheless, the intensity of their performance and social application varies from one belief system to the other. These rituals have become imperative in contemporary society as a result of their spiritual and physical pride of place (Alamu 2020:244). It is with this background therefore that this article explores the phenomenon of enemies in the Psalter and Yorùbá worldview, with the aim of looking at the areas of common interests and points of departure.

Enemies in the Psalter

There are two key Hebrew words that are used interchangeably for enemy in the Old Testament. The first one is אֹיֵב – ‘oyeb and it is used by a hostile individual. The word אֹיֵב – ‘oyeb occurs about 282 times in the Hebrew Bible mainly in the Psalter – Pss 3:7; 6:10; 7:5; 8:2; 9:3, 6; 13: 2,4; 17:9; 25:2, 19; 27:2, 6; 30:1; 31:9; 35:19; 38:19; 41:2,5,11; 42:9; 4:254:7; 55:3, 12; 56:9; 59:2 among others (Ringgren 1974:216–7). אֹיֵב – ‘Oyeb (an enemy) is involved in oppressing and inflicting suffering on his victims (Deut 28:53, 55, 57); he is hostile to them (1 Kgs 8:37); he strikes his victim (Lev 26:17; Num 14:42; Deut 1:42; 1 Kgs 8:33); and even persecutes them (Hos 8:3; Ps 31:16) (Ringgren 1974:215).

The second Hebrew word that is used for the enemy is טָרַף – *tsar* and it means adversary, enemy, or foe. It occurs about 70 times in the Hebrew Bible, mainly in the Psalter and Lamentations (Unger & White, 1980:115). An enemy in this case is a person who hates an individual (Pss 9:13; 35:19; 38:20; 41:8; 69:5, 15). He rises against an individual (Pss 3:2; 59:2). He is a slanderer (Pss 5:9; 27:11; 54:7; 56:3; 59:11). His goal is to pursue and persecute his victims (Pss 7:2, 6; 31:16; 35:3; 69:27; 71:11; 119:84, 86, 157, 161; 143:3).

The enemies are known for their boastful words and wickedness (Pss 3:8; 7:10; 9:6; 17:9, 13; 55:4; 71:4; 119:53, 61, 95, 110, 155). They are referred to as evil doers (Pss 6:9; 59:3; 64:3), men of blood (Pss 55:24; 59:3), deceitful men (Pss 43:1; 55:24) and treacherous men (Pss 25:3; 59:6; 119:158) (Ringgren 1974:214–17).

There are two categories of enemies in the Psalter, namely national and individual. The national enemies are foreigners, that is, foreign nations (Pss 18:44; 79:1, 6, 10); foreign peoples (Ps 18:48). The national enemies do not seek God or worship Him (Pss 14:1, 4; 28:5; 44:17; 58:4; 74:10, 18; 79:6, 10, 12). They are very proud as demonstrated in their arrogant words (Pss 12:4–5; 18:28) and scoffing (Pss 44:17; 74:10, 18; 79:10, 12; 89:52). They are variously described as wicked (28:3; 58:4; 125:3); evil doers (14:4; 28:3; 125:5); men of violence (Ps 18:49); sons of injustice (Ps 89:23); and speakers of lies (Ps 58:4). Incidentally, as the national enemies oppress the people of God, they are automatically the enemies of Yahweh (Pss 74:4, 18, 22–23; 83:3, 6; 89:52). **אֹיְבֵי** – ‘*Oyeb*’ is generally used in connection with individual enemies as reflected in several Psalms. These include Psalms 3:8; 6:11; 7:6; 9:4, 7; 13:3,5; 17:9; 25:2,19; 27:2,6; 30:2; 31:9,16; 35:19; 38:20; 41:3,6,12; 42:10; 43:2; 54:9; 55:4,13; 56:10; 59:2; 64:2; 69:5,19; 71:10; 102:9; 119:98; 138:7; 143:3,9,12 (Ringgren 1974:216–17).

The presence of enemies in the Psalter is a serious concern to readers of the Bible. Zenger (1994:9) opines that “the book of Psalms as a whole appears rather unattractive because it is obsessed with enemies and violence.” He observes further that the entire book of Psalms is made up of people who are struggling with one enemy or the other and they are being attacked from time to time as inferred from the quotation below:

What is the basic model of human life that imbues the quoted examples from the Psalms, and the book of Psalms as a whole? Here the life of the individual and the people of Israel appears overwhelmingly to be a daily struggle, an ongoing battle against enemies. The people who pray the Psalms feel surrounded, threatened, and shot at by a gigantic army; or they are like an animal pursued by hunters and trappers; or they see themselves surrounded and attacked by rapacious wild beasts, trampling bulls, or poisonous snakes. Even in Psalms that express a lyrical underlying mood of

confidence and trust, or a joyous harmony with life, there are sudden eruptions of shrill disharmony, recalling enmity, persecution, and hatred (1994:9–10).

According to Zenger, even Psalm 23, the most comforting of all the Psalms, has issues with enemies. Psalm 23:4–5 says:

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil, my cup overflows (NIV).

Analysis of enemies in Psalms 35, 69 & 109

Psalms 35, 69, and 109 which are being considered here have very much to say about the activities of the enemies. These Psalms belong to the category of imprecatory Psalms that occupy a prominent place in the Psalter. Some of the “full” imprecatory Psalms are Psalms 7, 9, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 109, and others. Also, several other Psalms have imprecatory elements. Imprecatory Psalms are Psalms that invoke curses or imprecation on the enemies. These Psalms are called by different names: Kirkpatrick (1951: xxxix) refers to them as “passionate prayers for vengeance upon enemies”; Lewis (1985:29) refers to the Psalms as “devilish, diabolical, terrible or contemptible”; Adam (1991:2) calls them “puzzling prayers from the Psalms”; Zenger (1994:1–9) regards them “unpleasant and repulsive Psalms”; and Adamo (2019:939) regards them as “a cry for divine vengeance over the enemies” among others. Incidentally, the Roman Catholic Church, based on moral and religious ethics, removed part or the whole of some of the imprecatory Psalms from their daily liturgy, as observed in the *Liturgy of the Hours*. For example, while the Roman Catholics removed Psalms 58, 83, and 109 completely from their reading; parts of Psalms 35, 59, 69, 137, and 139 were removed from their reading (Holladay 1993:304–311).

Psalm 35

Psalm 35 is connected with Psalm 34 with the expression *wumali`akh Yahweh* (the angel of the LORD) in Psalms 34:8 and 35:5–6, which is found nowhere else in the Psalter. Biblical scholars have given different titles to

the Psalms. Anderson calls it a “prayer of deliverance of an accused man” (1972, 1:275); Craigie suggests “a royal Psalm for international crisis” (1983:288); while Adamo opines that “Psalm 35 is a psalm of protection, defence, and liberation or victory over enemies.” (2019:943). A careful study of the Psalm shows an individual who was violently accused of what he did not do.

The Davidic authorship of Psalm 35 is generally accepted by scholars such as Keil and Delitzsch who suggest that Psalm 35 is an expansion of what David expressed before Saul in 1 Samuel 26:15 (1867,1:416). But then, while one is not denying the Davidic authorship of the Psalm, there are at least two pieces of evidence that suggest that the date of its composition should be sometime after the Babylonian captivity. In the first instance, the experiences of the Psalmist in Psalm 35 are similar to what Jeremiah had. For instance, Ps 35:6 is similar to Jer 23:12; Ps 35:12 is similar to Jer 18:20, 22; and Ps 35:21, 25 are similar to Lam 2:16. Secondly, the reference to *wumali'akh Yahweh* (the angel of the LORD), the concept which even though was well known as early as the time of the patriarchs but became well developed after the Babylonian captivity. Structurally, Psalm 35 is divided into three parts: verses 1–10; 11–18; and 19–28. Each section opens with a cry and ends on a note of praise to God.

Psalm 35 is connected with David who had enemies within his nation, especially those that were close to him. These enemies had developed an intense enmity against him. Incidentally, some scholars have identified some individuals as ringleaders among the enemies; three of such individual ringleaders are Saul, Absalom, and Ahithophel (Keil and Delitzsch, 1867:416). Additional information that is of great help to identify the enemy or enemies is as follows:

(i) David in Ps 35:4 and 7 speaks of individual(s) who sought his life for destruction and those who hid their net without cause and dug a pit for him to fall into. These two verses are connected with I Samuel 20:1, where David was fleeing from Natioth at Ramah as Saul was attempting to kill him for no reason; I Samuel 23:15, when David was at Horesh and there he learned that Saul had come out to take his life; and 1 Samuel 24:11, where David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but he spared him.

(ii) David in Ps 35:7, 11–13 & 19 speaks of individuals who hid their net for him without cause and dug a pit for him; ruthless witnesses came forward to question him of things he did not know; and they repaid him evil for good. These verses reflect 1 Samuel 19:5, where David risked his life while confronting Goliath; 1 Sam 20:1, where David met Jonathan and asked for his offense why his father was trying to kill him; and I Sam 26:18–19, where David could not understand why Saul was bent on killing him.

(iii) David in Ps 35:1, 23 & 24 appeals to God to fight those that were fighting him, and that God should vindicate him. The thoughts in the above verses are similar to what David expressed in I Samuel 24:12–16 where David prayed to God to judge between him and Saul; and as for him his hand would not touch Saul, the anointed man of God.

The above scriptural evidence tends toward suggesting Saul as the chief enemy of David. The activities of the enemies against the Psalmist in Ps 35 are as follows:

- they sought after his life (v.4);
- devised evil schemes against him (v.4);
- dug a pit for him (v.7);
- made a malicious witness against him (v.12);
- paid him evil for good (v.12);
- gathered against him mainly to slander him (v.15);
- mocked him (v.16);
- did not speak peace about him (v.20);
- were full of deceits (v.20); and
- planned to swallow him up (v.25).

The question is what could David have done to deserve the bad treatment? The Bible is silent on this but the fact that the Psalmist was good to the people is stated in verses 12–14 where he was good to them; he took care of them when they were ill; he prayed and fasted on their behalf; and that he was so much concerned about them. David on his part addressed himself to Yahweh, asking Him to contend with those that contend with him (Psalm 35:1–3). He specifically prayed that:

- his enemies be disgraced and put to shame (v.4);

- the Angel of the LORD drive them away and pursue them (vv.5-6);
- their paths be dark and slippery (v.6);
- ruin should overtake them by surprise (v.8);
- they should fall into the pit (v.8);
- the enemies be put to shame and confusion (v.26); and
- the enemies be clothed with shame and disgrace (v.26).

It appears David was justified for his imprecation on the enemies. He was a king appointed by God to preserve order, maintain law, to dispense justice, to detect, arraign and punish the guilty (Barnes 1950: xxxvii).

Psalm 69

Psalm 69 is the petition of a helpless individual who was wrongly accused of by his enemies. Delitzsch (1867 2:275) connects the Psalm to David when he was being persecuted by Saul. Wiersbe (2004: 227) attributes Psalm 69 to David and that it has some affinities with Psalms 35, 40, and 109. He describes the Psalm as a messianic and imprecatory Psalm which is most frequently quoted in the New Testament after Psalm 22 and 110. However, some scholars like Kirkpatrick (1951: 397-8) and White (1984: 106-7) suggest Jeremiah as the author of the Psalm, that the life experience described in the Psalm, especially verses 7-9 and 34-36 is much more related to that of Jeremiah.

Psalm 69 was written under circumstances of great suffering which had started to hurt his soul as the word *נִפְשָׁה* (*nephesh*) is repeatedly used. He was almost on the verge of death as noted in various metaphors of waters, mire, and flood among others in the Psalm. He was becoming wearied and helpless as the enemies attempted to snub life out of him through the following means:

- they hated him without cause (vv.5, 15);
- planned to attack and destroy him (v.5);
- accused him falsely (v.5);
- insulted him (v.10);
- made him an object of ridicule (vv. 12-13);
- persecuted him (v.27);

- put poison in his food (v.22); and
- aimed to get rid of him.

The Psalmist on his part did not claim to be a saint as he admits his sinfulness (v.6). This shows his sincerity and humility. Again, he was involved in fasting (v. 10) and praying (v.13) for the people. In the process of pleading with Yahweh to save and rescue him from the hands of his enemies, he prayed that:

- the table before his enemies become a snare and a trap (v.22);
- their eyes be blind, and their backs bent forever (v.23);
- the wrath and anger of God overtake them (v.24);
- their place be deserted (v.25);
- God should charge them with crime (v.27); and
- the enemies be blotted out of the book of life (v.28).

Psalm 109

Psalm 109 is a lamentation of an individual who was violently accused by his enemies. The Psalmist appeals to God for help against a gang of enemies that accused him violently. The Davidic authorship of Ps 109 is generally accepted among biblical scholars (Wiersbe 2004, 2:70). Individuals like Doeg, Cush, Ahithophel, and Shimei are linked with the enemies that made life unbearable for the Psalmist. The reference to the activities of Shimei in 2 Sam 15, especially with charges against him of lying and deceit, is a piece of evidence to make him a ringleader of the enemies. The evils the Psalmist experienced in the hands of the enemies touched his soul and personality as reflected in his use of נִפְשׁוֹ (*nephesh*) in the Psalm. He was overwhelmed physically and emotionally. The activities of the enemies include the following:

- they spoke against him with a deceptive and lying tongue (v.2);
- hated and fought him without a cause (v.3);
- rewarded him with evil (v.5);
- they did not show him kindness (v.16);
- loved to curse (v.17);
- spoke evil against him (v.20); and

- mocked him (v.25).

On his part, the Psalmist took the matter to God in prayer, asking Him to do justice to the enemies. He prayed specifically that:

- the evil one be appointed over the enemies and find them guilty (v.6);
- the enemies be rewarded as they had planned for him;
- the days of the enemy be few, and another person take his place (v.8);
- his children be fatherless, and wife be a widow (v.9);
- his children be wandering beggars (v.10);
- his creditors seize all he has (v.11);
- there should be no kindness to him (v.12);
- his descendants be cut off and their names be blotted out (v.13);
- the iniquity of the father be remembered before the Lord (v.14); and
- their sins always remain before the Lord (v.15).

The Yorùbá concept of enemies (Òtá)

Òtá in the Yorùbá language means enemy, opponent, or adversary. The Yorùbá concept of òtá (enemy) is very broad as it manifests in the physical and spiritual realms (Adeyemi 2023). Human enemies are generally not happy and comfortable when individuals are succeeding and so they launch a spiritual attack to cripple the destiny of the person(s) (Adelakun 2019:3).

The belief in enemy (òtá) is very strong and widespread among the Yorùbá and it is evident in their everyday speech. The Yorùbá believe that every living human being has one type of Òtá or another as expressed in the saying that *Ènìyàn kì í wà láyè kí ó mǎà ní òtá*, meaning one cannot be alive and have no enemy (Oyetade 2004:81). The saying is expressed in another way that *Èni tí ó bá wà láyè tí ò ní òtá, eni òhùn ti kú*, meaning that whoever is on earth and has no enemy is already dead. It is believed among the Yorùbá that the more responsible a person is in society; the more enemies he/she has. Adeboye states that your enemies are few when you have nothing but when you live in a mansion and have more than one car in your house, you will need more protection (*Open Heaven* 15/5/2023).

Òtá (enemy) may be an individual that is very close to the person or family. The reality and fear of òtá are very pervasive and felt in Yorùbáland. The Yorùbá say *Èyìnkùnlé l'òtá wà, ilé laṣeni n'gbé*, meaning one's enemy is right in one's backyard; one who does evil to one life in the same house with one. Another saying is *Bíkú ilé ò pani, t'òde ò lè pani*, meaning if death is not planned for you from within the household, death from outside cannot kill you.

There are different names given to òtá by the Yorùbá and these are divided into two categories. The first group of names has 'òtá as their prefix while the second group are names that simply describe the activities of the enemies.

The first group of names are:

Òtá *ilé* (household enemy or enemy within)

Òtá *òde* (enemy from the outside or enemy without)

Òtá *idilé* (enemy in the family or the lineage)

Òtá *ibi iṣé* (enemy at the place of work)

Òtá *òrun ò gbẹbọ* (enemy believed to be from heaven, who cannot be appeased or placated by offerings or sacrifices)

Òtá *Ìkòkò tàbí òtá Ìbádà* (secret or hidden enemy).

The second group of names for òtá include:

Abínú kú ẹni (one who is angry with someone and wishes death for him)

Eléniní (bitter enemy)

A mọni ṣeni (one who knows someone well and does evil to him)

A fàimọni ṣeni (one who does not know someone too well but still does evil to him)

A ṣeni báni dárò (one who after doing evil to someone, comes to sympathize with him)

A fojú fẹni má fọkàn fẹni (someone who appears to love someone to his face but who does not love him from the heart)

A fẹ́ á jẹ́ má fẹ̀ẹ́ á yó (one who wants someone to eat but does not want him to eat his fill)

Ojú lari ọ̀rẹ́ ò dénú (one who appears superficially to be a friend but is not)

A ẹ̀kú pani (one who plans death for one)

A pani má yọ̀dà (one who kills without drawing a sword)

A daní lóró tí fagbára kóni (one who acts callously to someone and thereby toughens his attitude to life) (Oyetade 2004:81–2).

The Yorùbá believe that *ọ̀tá ilé* is the most dangerous and powerful of all the enemies because they know everything about the person (Adeyemi, 2023). *Ọ̀tá idílé* is generally associated with a polygamous situation in which case a man has more than one wife. In the process, each wife struggles to take care of her own children, issues leading to enmity in the family may arise. This is called *orogún ile*. Competition in such a home is likely to result in the services of *àjẹ́* (witch) who is known by different names such as *iyàmi*, *òṣòròngà*, *ọ̀lọ̀bẹ*, *aláṣọ pípón*, *olòògùn ikà* among others; and usually make use of evil supernatural power against his victims. Writing on the evil supernatural power of the enemy, Abimbola (1976:151–152) says:

The evil supernatural powers work against man's interest by trying to prevent the timely achievement of his destiny. The most important of the *Ajogun* is *ikú* (death) responsible for putting an end to man's life; *Àrùn* (disease) responsible for afflicting man with illness; *Ègbà* (infirmity) who brings paralysis to man and *Ofo* (loss) who destroys or carries away man's property. The *Ajogun* are man's enemies for they work against man's interest all the time. The *Ajogun* can however be appeased with sacrifices.

The *Ajogun* are the belligerent enemies of humans. Abimbola (2015:111) opines that:

The *Ajogun* and the *Àjẹ́* (witches) are believed to be the avowed enemies of man who have no other business in life apart from ruination of man's handiwork. Some of the other *Ajogun* are *àrùn* (disease), *òfò* (loss), *ẹ̀gbà* (paralysis) and *ọ̀rà̀n* (trouble).

Explaining further on the enemies associated with humans, Abimbola (1976:152) identifies the group of people called *Eníyán*. He says:

The *Eníyán* are also known as *Èlẹ̀yẹ* (birds) because they are believed to be capable of assuming the form of birds whenever they want to work against man's interest ... The witches have no other purpose in life than destruction of man and his property. They are therefore the archenemies of man. The sad thing is that against the witches, there is hardly any form of armour since sacrifice hardly helps when they are ready to strike. A man's surest protection against the witches is *orí*.

The *Eníyán* or *Èlẹ̀yẹ* are the anthropomorphized army of potential negative and fatal powers that are enemies of the people. The Yorùbá believe that these enemies are powerful, and they cause all sorts of havoc and atrocities such as poverty, sickness, miscarriage, disease, bareness, joblessness, and even sudden death to their victims.

It is important to note that the Yorùbá are very sensitive to what goes on around them, especially as it affects their lives. When all of a sudden things change negatively, the Yorùbá usually find out through divination to identify the enemy that might be at work. The purpose of finding out is to beg, appease or avoid the enemy so that he or she does not constitute a danger to the individual and family. The Yorùbá usually say *Èbè làà bẹ ọ̀sìkà kó bàlú rẹ̀ jẹ*, meaning appeasement or begging is what one should offer to a wicked person to destroy his/her town. Abimbola (2015:22) aptly says:

The *Ifá* priests and their clients see sacrifice as a means to placate the malevolent powers which they believe exist side by side with the divinities who are regarded as benevolent. The malevolent powers are collectively known as *Ajogun* and they include all the evil forces that affect human life, e.g. death, illness and loss. The *Àjẹ* (witches) are also included among the *Ajogun* ... These powers are the eternal enemies of man to whom human beings must make sacrifice so as to avoid their evil schemes.

Therefore, the first point of call-in times of crisis is the Ifa priest, who in turn prescribes specific sacrifice(s) (Awolalu & Dopamu 1979:132). According to Awolalu & Dopamu (1979:133–5) there are seven types of sacrifices which include: meal and drink offerings, thanks offering or gift offering, votive offering, propitiation or expiation sacrifice, substitutionary sacrifice,

preventive sacrifice and foundation sacrifice. Of all the sacrifices, the one that is mostly recommended against the enemy is the preventive sacrifice. It is offered to prevent disaster, misfortune, or calamity. It is to implore protection against the enemies or to guard a village or town against an impending doom (Awolalu & Dopamu 1979:135).

Another way by which the Yorùbá handle the enemies who are envious of them, is the use of *Mádàáríkàn* which literally means “do not turn your head against” or “do not knock your head against” (Dopamu, 1979:10). The purpose of *Mádàáríkàn* is to render the evil forces of the enemies powerless. Explaining *Mádàáríkàn* further, Dopamu says:

Mádàáríkàn is a magic that forbids sorcerers to think evil of one, or to do anything to harm one. *Mádàáríkàn* is believed to be so powerful that it does not only prevent one from suffering harm, but it also turns back the evil intention of the sorcery upon its author. People also believe that not only the sorcerer, but also the witch can be put at bay by the great power of a potent *mádàáríkàn*. The belief is also prevalent among the Yorùbá that if a man has a potent *mádàáríkàn*, his person is not only protected from sorcery and witchcraft attack, but also from all untoward happenings. His person is somewhat invincible (1979:10).

An appraisal of enemies in the Psalter from Yorùbá Worldview

A study of the enemies in the Psalter and the Yorùbá society shows striking similarities between the two worldviews. Firstly, life is critical to the people in Ancient Israel and contemporary Yorùbá society. Invariably, any attempt to attack life is seriously resisted. In Ancient Israel, the psalmists prayed to Yahweh to deal with the enemies, including wishing them to die as reflected in the imprecatory Psalms. Also, in the Yorùbá society, any attempt to attack an individual's life is resisted by consulting the *Ifá* priest or Onìsègùn who prescribes certain protective charms with appropriate incantations to accompany them.

Secondly, it appears that the more prominent one is in the community, the more enemies such an individual has. In the Psalter, David was the chief

among the Psalmists. He was a distinguished leader right from his youth. It was he who confronted and defeated Goliath, the archenemy of Israel. The response of the people, especially women to his victory over Goliath was the source of his enmity with Saul. So also, in the Yorùbá society, a person who is prominent is most likely to attract more enemies than an ordinary person that has little or nothing to offer.

Thirdly, in the imprecatory prayers in the Psalter, the Psalmist simply cried out to God and handed over the situation to him. It has been established at another level that imprecation is mainly an expression of displeasure against evil (Ogunkunle 2004:20). So also, the Yorùbá believe in handing over their enemies to *Olódùmarè*, the Supreme Being. The Yorùbá do say *Fijà f'Òlórùn jà; fowó lérán* meaning for any wrong done unto you, leave vengeance unto God and wait. This is what the *Odù Òwónrín Méjì* exemplifies in a short stanza as quoted by Akintola (1999:191) as follows:

O gbá mi léti
 Ng'ò gba èsan;
 O sè mí ní 'gbò,
 Ng'ò fohùn.
 Èdùmàrè yóò bèèrè
 Ohun tí mo gbà lówó rẹ.

Meaning:

You slapped me;
 I did not retaliate.
 You butted me on my head;
 I did not complain.
 God will surely put you to account;
 To explain in what I had truly offended you.

Finally, while the Psalmists generally prayed for the death of their enemies; they equally sometimes prayed and wished that their enemies would live to see the favour and blessing of God as highlighted in Psalm 23:5 which says:

“You prepare a table before me in presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.” So also, the Yorùbá do not always pray for the death of their enemies; they sometimes pray and wish that they will live long to accomplish much in life, to the astonishment of their Ọ́tá . Hence the say: *Lójú ọ́tá mi, mo sì máa kólé mólé; lójú ọ́tá mi, mo sì máa ra ilẹ̀ mọ̀ ilẹ̀; lójú ọ́tá mi, mo sì máa bímolémọ̀*, meaning in the presence of my enemy, I will build many houses; in the presence of my enemy, I will buy plenty of lands; and in the presence of my enemy, I will have many children (Oyetade 2004:84).

Points of divergence

Points of divergence are also observed.

Firstly, while the Psalmist presented his fear, anxiety and burden to Yahweh directly through violent prayers, the Yorùbá are seen to approach God through intermediaries. The Yorùbá, on suspicion of the evil machinations of the enemies, approach the Ifá priest who prescribes preventive sacrifice for them with the intention to ward off the impending misfortune. The sacrifice can be buried at the entrance of the house, compound, town or placed at a crossroad (Awolalu & Dopamu 1979:132).

Secondly, there appears to be some good things about ọ́tá among the Yorùbá as reflected in the saying: *Ọ́tá diẹ̀, ọ̀rẹ̀ diẹ̀ ló nì ilé ayé*, meaning little enemy and little friendship make one succeed in life. In other words, a strained relationship between two friends can make a lazy one put his act together to work hard so as to succeed in his endeavour. This Yorùbá perception is absent in the Psalter.

Thirdly, the Yorùbá believe that *Ọ́tá lè rí àárọ̀ sùgbón kò lè rí ojọ̀ alẹ̀*, meaning that the enemy can see what is currently happening but cannot see what is going to happen in the future. This is to say that the enemy through his witchcraft can see and know some things about his victim, but he is not powerful enough to know everything. Again, witchcraft is absent in the Psalter.

Finally, the Yorùbá believe that it is only God that can reveal one's ọ́tá as reflected in the chorus below:

Kò lè pani mọ

Kò lè pani mọ

BỌlórun bá ti fọ́tá ẹni han ni

Kò lè pani mọ

(He or she cannot kill one anymore

He or she cannot kill one anymore.

Once God has revealed one's enemy to one, he or she cannot kill one anymore).

The thought expressed in the above Yorùbá chorus is foreign to the Psalter where most of the Psalms are ascribed to David, who was clearly aware of his enemies, among whom are Saul, Absalom and Ahithophel.

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that life is critical to the people in ancient Israel and the Yorùbá society, and it is guarded jealously. Also, the enemies and their activities are real in both societies and cultures as they attempt to destroy life. Individuals in both settings and throughout the ages have responded differently to every attempt of the enemy to disrupt their well-being. The Psalmists cried to Yahweh through imprecatory prayers while the traditional Yorùbá people make a consultation to the *Ifá* priest who in turn gives a protective charm against the enemy. Crying out about the “enemies” has a way of attracting help for the victim. The help may be from the Deity or from fellow human beings. The article recommends that individuals in contemporary society, especially the Yorùbá Christians, should be conscious of the activities of the enemies and also take necessary precautions to live a meaningful and impactful life.

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