

Make haste, O God, to save me!

If you think about it, this is appropriate for any situation.

I'm struggling with sin.

Make haste, O God, to save me!

I've just been diagnosed with cancer.

Make haste, O God, to save me!

Things are going really well – but I don't want to get cocky!

Make haste, O God, to save me!

If the basic message of the Bible is found in Jonah 2:9 –

“Salvation belongs to the LORD” –

then the basic prayer of the Bible is Psalm 70:1 –

Make haste, O God, to save me!

To the choirmaster. Of David. For the Memorial Offering.

The preface calls attention to the “memorial offering” –

the portion of the grain offering in Lev 2:2 that was burned before the LORD

“as its memorial portion on the altar,

a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

But the rest of the grain offering shall be for Aaron and his sons;

it is a most holy part of the LORD's food offerings.” (Lev 2:2-3)

So Psalm 70 (together with Psalm 38) was designated to be sung with the grain offering.

So this would have been one of the Psalms sung as the grain offering was burned on the altar.

As the worshipers bring their grain offerings to the LORD in the sanctuary,

the Levites would sing Psalm 70 (among others).

It's a good choice!

No matter what situation you face in life,

you should be crying out, “Make haste, O God, to save me –

O LORD, come to my aid!”

Psalm 70 is virtually identical to Psalm 40:13-17.

The content of Psalm 70 is so important,

that it occurs almost verbatim in two different places.

And in both Psalm 40 and Psalm 70,

this place is at the end of Books One and Two of the Psalter.

I've included a side-by-side comparison as a handout,

so that you can see how closely Psalm 70 parallels Psalm 40:13-17

Psalm 70

70 **Make haste, O God**, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!
2 Let them be put to shame **and confusion**
who seek my life!
Let them be turned back and brought to dishonor
who delight in my hurt!
3 Let them **turn back** because of their shame
who say, “Aha, Aha!”
4 May all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you!
May those who love your salvation
say evermore, “**God** is great!”
5 But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not delay!

Psalm 40:13-17

40:13 **Be pleased, O LORD**, to deliver me!
O LORD, make haste to help me!
14 Let those be put to shame and **disappointed altogether**
who seek **to snatch away** my life;
let those be turned back and brought to dishonor
who delight in my hurt!
15 Let those **be appalled** because of their shame
who say **to me**, “Aha, Aha!”
16 [But] may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;
may those who love your salvation
say continually, “Great is **the LORD!**”
17 As for me, I am poor and needy;
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, **O my God!**

One of the first things you notice is that the main differences have to do with the name of God.

Psalm 40 uses “Yahweh” twice in v13, and once in v16.

Otherwise it uses Adonai and Elohim in verse 17.

Psalm 70 uses Yahweh in verses 1 and 3, and Elohim in verses 1, 4, and 5.

Many have pointed out that Book 2 of the Psalter uses Elohim much more often than Yahweh, while Book 1 uses Yahweh more often than Elohim.

Psalm 70 is a fascinating case study in this!

While there *are* two places (verses 1 and 4) where it replaces Yahweh with Elohim, and another place (verse 5) where it replaces Adonai with Elohim, in verse 5 it replaces Elohim with Yahweh!

Plainly, the authors/editors of Book 2 wanted to use Elohim more often than Yahweh, but the name of Yahweh is strategically placed to bring out the importance of the divine name.

Some have argued that Psalm 70 was written first, and that Psalm 40 came later as a compilation of two songs that were woven together.

Others argue that Psalm 40 came first, and that Psalm 70 was detached from Psalm 40 to fit in at the end of Book 2.

Since we don't exactly know how the Psalms were written or compiled, we cannot really answer this question; but either way, we should recognize that the early editors of the Psalter thought that the *content* of Psalm 70 was essential to the conclusion of each book.

Remember that Book One of the Psalter ends with Psalm 41.

Book Two ends with Psalm 72.

These two books are all about the Davidic kingship.

The Son of David is on the throne – and yet not everything is as it should be.

The Kingdom has come – and yet not everything is under his feet.

Psalm 40 had brought Book One toward its conclusion by pleading with God:

“do not delay!”

Psalm 41 then concluded Book One with a blessing on the one who considers the poor – the Davidic king – as Psalm 41 concludes:

“By this I know that you delight in me:

my enemy will not shout in triumph over me.

But you have upheld me because of my integrity,

and set me in your presence forever.

Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting!

Amen and amen.” (Ps 41:11-13)

Book One ends with the blessed man of Psalm 1 identified as the Davidic king.

The Son of David is the one who cares for the poor and triumphs over their enemies, because God delivers him from death.

Book Two then opens with the Songs of the Sons of Korah (Psalms 42-49)

as they sing about the Davidic king and the glory of God’s holy city.

This is then followed by the songs of the life and ministry of David (Psalms 51-72),

most of which are connected to various events in the life of David –

and even the untitled Psalms in this collection fit the same pattern:

the king is on the throne – but everything is not as it should be!

As Hebrews 2 puts it, we do not yet see everything under his feet –

but we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor, for the suffering of death that he endured for us.

It is really interesting to compare Psalm 70 with Psalm 40,

because in spite of the near identity of language,

the two Psalms are doing very different things.

Psalm 40 opens by clearly identifying the singer as the Davidic king.

He is the one who has come, as it is written, to delight to do God’s will.

Hebrews 10 identifies this as the Christ.

Jesus is the Son of David who fully and finally sings Psalm 40.

Psalm 40 divides neatly into two parts:

giving thanks for past deliverance (verses 1-10)
and asking God to deliver him once more (verses 11-17).

Verses 11-17 then subdivide into three parts:
confidence that God *will* deliver him from evils beyond number (v11-12);
a plea for deliverance that focuses on putting enemies to shame (v13-15);
and a call for those who love salvation to praise God,
and an acknowledgement of the Psalmist's need for God's help (v16-17).

Psalm 70 takes up only those last two parts:
A plea for deliverance, and a call to praise.

All the discussion of past deliverance is gone.

Or is it?

All you have to do is look back at Psalms 68-69 to see the same sorts of things as Psalm 40.
John Goldingay points out that the language of Psalm 69 trickles over into Psalm 70.
Psalm 69 asked that the community of faith should not be put to shame (v6-8).
Psalm 69 contained an urgent prayer for rescue (v14-21).
Psalm 69 speaks of the people who seek the LORD (v32).
Psalm 69 is the prayer of one who is weak and needy (v29).

With the pleas for deliverance in Psalms 68 and 69,
Psalm 70 takes shape as a short version of what has preceded.

In other words, if you have time to sing Psalms 68 or 69, please do.
But if you are in a hurry, Psalm 70 is a great place to start!

The first stanza focuses on the shaming of my foes.
It gives us a good example of how to sing the imprecatory psalms –
the psalms that “curse” our enemies.

1. The Shaming of My Foes: How Christians Should Sing the Imprecatory Psalms (v1-3)

<i>70 Make haste, O God, to deliver me!</i>	<i>40:13 Be pleased, O LORD, to deliver me!</i>
<i>O LORD, make haste to help me!</i>	<i>O LORD, make haste to help me!</i>
² <i>Let them be put to shame and confusion</i> <i>who seek my life!</i>	¹⁴ <i>Let those be put to shame and disappointed altogether</i> <i>who seek to snatch away my life;</i>
<i>Let them be turned back and brought to dishonor</i> <i>who delight in my hurt!</i>	<i>let those be turned back and brought to dishonor</i> <i>who delight in my hurt!</i>
³ <i>Let them turn back because of their shame</i> <i>who say, “Aha, Aha!”</i>	¹⁵ <i>Let those be appalled because of their shame</i> <i>who say to me, “Aha, Aha!”</i>

There are some minor differences between Psalms 40 and 70 in this first stanza.

Psalm 70 omits a few words:

“Be pleased” in 40:13 is deleted – leaving “make haste” as the only verb,
and so English translations repeat it in both halves of verse 1.
The change from “disappointed altogether” in 40:14 to “confusion” in 70:2,
results from the omission of the word “altogether” in v14.
“to snatch away” in 40:14 is omitted – leaving “who seek my life”
and “to me” is omitted from 40:15 – leaving “who say, ‘Aha, Aha!’”

Besides the name of God in the first verse,

the only other word change is found in 40:15 and 70:3 –

“Let them be appalled [yashommu]” in 40:15
becomes “Let them turn back [yashubu]” in 70:3.

The mem and the beth look similar enough that it could have been a scribal error
(again, depending on which was first!).

But more likely, it was an intentional change to connect with the “return” theme
in Psalms 68-72.

Each of the last five Psalms of Book Two uses this word “shub” – “turn” “return” –
whether in speaking of how God will bring back his people –
or how my enemies are turned back.

As we have seen repeatedly in Book Two,

these Psalms are songs of the kingdom – when the Son of David is on the throne;
but Book Three is the book of the Exile – when the Son of David has been cast out.

The end of Book Two begins to anticipate some of the exilic themes of Book Three.

The focus of the first half of Psalm 70 is a prayer that God would deliver the Psalmist
by putting his enemies to shame.

In Psalm 69, the king had prayed that his people would not be put to shame because of him.

Zeal for God’s house had consumed him – eaten him up –
he bore shame and disgrace for the sake of his God –
and prayed that God would deliver him and rescue him from death.

Now in Psalm 70 he turns around and asks God to put his enemies to shame.

Let them be put to shame and confusion who seek my life!

Let them be turned back and brought to dishonor who delight in my hurt!

Let them turn back because of their shame who say, ‘Aha, Aha!’

It is important to note that there are only two kinds of people who ever get cursed in the Psalms:

- 1) wicked Gentiles who are seeking to destroy God’s people;
- 2) wicked Israelites who are seeking to destroy God’s people.

The Psalms have a generally positive attitude toward the nations –
many Psalms call on all the nations to sing praise to God –
and Psalm 87 even names Babylon as being born in Zion!

But when the nations start to oppress Zion –
then Ps 137 will call for the blessed one to dash their children’s heads against the rock!

And this attitude is taken up by the Psalms against wicked Israelites as well.
Many of the imprecatory Psalms of Book Two have focused on *Israelites*
who were oppressing and destroying God’s people –
people who *ought* to know better!

As Christians, how should we sing these songs?

When I was out in Portland, I gave a seminar on the Psalms.
One minister there objected to the idea of singing the imprecatory Psalms
on the basis that Jesus commands us to love our enemies
and pray for those who persecute us.

Now, it’s true that you should love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.
I assume that Jesus did this regularly!
But Jesus also had no difficulty saying,
“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!...
You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?
Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes,
some of whom you will kill and crucify,
and some you will flog in your synagogues
and persecute from town to town,
so that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth,
from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah...”
(Matthew 23:29, 32-35).

Jesus curses the scribes and Pharisees –
he declares that those who curse the people of God –
those who persecute the righteous –
those who “seek my life” and “delight in my hurt” –
will be cursed.

This is what God had promised to Abraham:
those who bless you will be blessed – those who curse you will be cursed.
And because the scribes and Pharisees persecute the followers of Christ,
therefore the blood of all the innocent will be upon their heads.

And yet the same Jesus said from the cross:
“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34)

This raises a conundrum for us:

how is it consistent for Jesus to love his enemies *and* curse them?

I think that Augustine got this right.

It's all rooted in our love for God.

If we love God, then we must love all that reminds us of God.

We love the created world, because every tree and valley
reminds us of the one who made all things.

And we especially love all of humanity because everyone is created in the image of God.

When I see another human being, I am reminded of the God I love.

And therefore I love everyone – even my enemy!

But if we love God, then we must hate all that detracts from the one we love.

As football season rolls around again,

you will again hear people singing the praises of their teams –
and calling down curses against their foes (or the referees).

If you truly love the Michigan Wolverines,

then you must hate Ohio State and wish for their disgrace.

(This is why I suggest that Christians must always be tepid sports fans –
nothing and no one besides the Holy Trinity deserves such allegiance!)

Jesus loved the Father with a perfect love.

Therefore he hated the scribes and Pharisees with a perfect hatred –
because they sought to destroy and defame God and his people.

He could pray, “Father, forgive them,” because he loved God

and wanted God's glory revealed in them for their salvation!

But he could also curse them because he loved God

and wanted God's glory revealed in them for their destruction.

But what about us?

What does this look like for us?

Think of how Jesus says this in Matthew 10.

Jesus sends out the 12 to the house of Israel, and he says,

“if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words,

shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.

Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment

for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town.” (10:14-15)

Jesus makes it clear in the following verses that this command extends until his return,
and Paul follows his instruction in Acts 18.

After the Jewish synagogue in Corinth opposed and reviled him, Luke tells us,
Paul “shook out his garments and said to them,
‘Your blood be on your own heads! I am innocent.
From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’” (Acts 18:6)

Paul is cursing them because he loves God and seeks the Kingdom of Christ above all things.

In like manner, our love for God means that we love even the wicked –
because they are made in the image of God,
and we long for that image to be restored in them –
we love them for what they *might* become!

But our love for God also means that we curse the wicked –
because they are corrupting the image of God,
and we cannot stand to see them destroying and defacing the image of the one we love!

Their assault against the LORD and his anointed *must stop*.

They must be put to shame –
whether the shaming of Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus,
where he was put to shame and converted to Christ –
or the shaming of Simon Magus in Samaria,
where he was cast out of the church, and Peter cursed him:
“your silver perish with you.”

One young woman in Portland pointed out that the name of Saul of Tarsus
was blotted out in his conversion!
Saul of Tarsus was utterly destroyed –
and the apostle Paul was raised up to new life in his place.

Therefore, we sing Psalm 70 – we pray for the shaming of those who seek to destroy the church –
preferably through their conversion,
but if not, through their destruction –

as God said to Abraham:
Those who bless you will be blessed.
Those who curse you will be cursed.

2. The Joy of Those Who Love Salvation: How Christians Should Sing Joyful Psalms (v4-5)

But Psalm 70 does not end with cursing!

Rather, Psalm 70 ends with a prayer that those who seek the Lord might rejoice!

⁴ *May all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you!*

¹⁶ *But may all who seek you
rejoice and be glad in you;*

*May those who love your salvation
say evermore, "God is great!"
⁵ But I am poor and needy;
hasten to me, O God!
You are my help and my deliverer;
O LORD, do not delay!*

*may those who love your salvation
say continually, "Great is the LORD!"
¹⁷ As for me, I am poor and needy;
but the Lord takes thought for me.
You are my help and my deliverer;
do not delay, O my God!*

In the OT, Israel could sing Psalm 70 rejoicing that God had delivered David,
and yet still looking forward to the greater deliverance to come.

Even so, we sing Psalm 70 rejoicing that God has brought the great deliverance
in the resurrection of the Christ from the dead –
but we also have a “not yet” – as we look forward to the redemption of our bodies!

There is a tone difference, though, between the OT and the NT.
For OT Israel, the “not yet” is greater than the already.
Their greatest joy is “not yet” – as they look forward to the salvation to come.
But for us, the “already” is greater than the not yet.
Our greatest joy is that the Savior has come!
The final judgment has *already* happened in Jesus –
and since we have been united to Christ,
we have already passed from death to life!

So, it is not just that we sing the imprecatory Psalms in Christ,
we also sing the joyful Psalms in Christ!

We rejoice *now* because God *has* made haste to save us!
The eternal Son of God became a man and died in our place
so that we might have eternal life.
So in that sense, God has *already* saved us.

But of course, we still await the consummation –
we still await the resurrection of the body –
our bodies are *not yet* saved.
And so we still cry out,
“make haste, O God, to save me!”

Several months ago, we decided to work on memorizing some of the shorter Psalms,
in order to help our younger children participate in family worship.

Psalm 70 quickly became a favorite.
The choice of Munich as the tune certainly doesn't hurt.
It's familiar and catchy –

and it combines strength and confidence in the first and fourth lines,
with minor tones in the third line.

The second line is the most interesting.

The melody is the same as the first line.

[sing it]

But the harmonization switches from major to minor –
setting up the darker tones of the third line.

The result is a tune that can carry the pleading of the first stanza: God, help me! –
together with the call to rejoice in the first half of the second stanza,
and the plea for God to act quickly at the end of the second stanza.

And because we had it memorized, it was an easy Psalm to sing as we were hiking cross-country
to find our way back to a dry path in Yellowstone!
especially when we found a buffalo skull along the way –
and all of us were thinking about bears...

Psalm 69 would have been nice to sing –
with its emphasis about the waters coming up to my neck
(though the geyser overflow probably would have come up only to our ankles),
but we didn't have time.

When you need help in a hurry, sing Psalm 70!

Indeed, we weren't the first to select Psalm 70 as the starting point for prayer!
The burning of the grain offering would have come at the beginning of the temple service.
So Psalm 70 would have been one of the early Psalms in the liturgy of the temple
And John Cassian reports that the desert fathers used Psalm 70:1
as their key to continual prayer (and it was used every morning in morning prayer
in western monasticism until the 20th century).

I don't normally use long quotations,
but Cassian's report of Abba Isaac's reflections on Psalm 70
has so many solid and good applications, that I cannot resist!

And so for keeping up continual recollection of God this pious formula is to be ever set
before you. "O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me,"⁵⁹¹ for this
verse...embraces all the feelings which can be implanted in human nature, and can be
fitly and satisfactorily adapted to every condition, and all assaults. Since it contains an
invocation of God against every danger, it contains humble and pious confession, it
contains the watchfulness of anxiety and continual fear, it contains the thought of one's
own weakness, confidence in the answer, and the assurance of a present and ever ready
help.

For one who is constantly calling on his protector, is certain that He is always at hand. It contains the glow of love and charity, it contains a view of the plots, and a dread of the enemies, from which one, who sees himself day and night hemmed in by them, confesses that he cannot be set free without the aid of his defender.

This verse is an impregnable wall for all who are labouring under the attacks of demons, as well as impenetrable coat of mail and a strong shield. It does not suffer those who are in a state of moroseness and anxiety of mind, or depressed by sadness or all kinds of thoughts to despair of saving remedies, as it shows that He, who is invoked, is ever looking on at our struggles and is not far from His suppliants.

It warns us whose lot is spiritual success and delight of heart that we ought not to be at all elated or puffed up by our happy condition, which it assures us cannot last without God as our protector, while it implores Him not only always but even speedily to help us.

This verse, I say, will be found helpful and useful to every one of us in whatever condition we may be. For one who always and in all matters wants to be helped, shows that he needs the assistance of God not only in sorrowful or hard matters but also equally in prosperous and happy ones, that he may be delivered from the one and also made to continue in the other, as he knows that in both of them human weakness is unable to endure without His assistance.

I am affected by the passion of gluttony. I ask for food of which the desert knows nothing, and in the squalid desert there are wafted to me odours of royal dainties and I find that even against my will I am drawn to long for them. I must at once say: "O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me."...

When I want for the sake of steadfastness of heart to apply myself to reading a headache interferes and stops me, and at the third hour sleep glues my head to the sacred page, and I am forced either to overstep or to anticipate the time assigned to rest; and finally an overpowering desire to sleep forces me to cut short the canonical rule for service in the Psalms: in the same way I must cry out: "O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me."

Sleep is withdrawn from my eyes, and for many nights I find myself wearied out with sleeplessness caused by the devil, and all repose and rest by night is kept away from my eyelids; I must sigh and pray: "O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me."

While I am still in the midst of a struggle with sin suddenly an irritation of the flesh affects me and tries by a pleasant sensation to draw me to consent while in my sleep. In order that a raging fire from without may not burn up the fragrant blossoms of chastity, I must cry out: "O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me."

I feel that the incentive to lust is removed, and that the heat of passion has died away in my members: In order that this good condition acquired, or rather that this grace of God may continue still longer or forever with me, I must earnestly say: "O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me."

I am disturbed by the pangs of anger, covetousness, gloominess, and driven to disturb the peaceful state in which I was, and which was dear to me: In order that I may

not be carried away by raging passion into the bitterness of gall, I must cry out with deep groans: "O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me."...

Again, I feel that by the visitation of the Holy Spirit I have gained purpose of soul, steadfastness of thought, keenness of heart, together with an ineffable joy and transport of mind, and in the exuberance of spiritual feelings I have perceived by a sudden illumination from the Lord an abounding revelation of most holy ideas which were formerly altogether hidden from me: In order that it may be vouchsafed to me to linger for a longer time in them I must often and anxiously exclaim: "O God, make speed to save me: O Lord, make haste to help me."...

We must then ceaselessly and continuously pour forth the prayer of this verse, in adversity that we may be delivered, in prosperity that we may be preserved and not puffed up.... Whatever work you are doing, or office you are holding, or journey you are going, do not cease to chant this. When you are going to bed, or eating, and in the last necessities of nature, think on this. This thought in your heart may be to you a saving formula, and not only keep you unharmed by all attacks of devils, but also purify you from all faults and earthly stains, and lead you to that invisible and celestial contemplation, and carry you on to that ineffable glow of prayer, of which so few have any experience. Let sleep come upon you still considering this verse, till having been moulded by the constant use of it, you grow accustomed to repeat it even in your sleep. When you wake let it be the first thing to come into your mind, let it anticipate all your waking thoughts, let it when you rise from your bed send you down on your knees, and thence send you forth to all your work and business, and let it follow you about all day long. This you should think about, according to the Lawgiver's charge, "at home and walking forth on a journey,"⁵⁹³ sleeping and waking. This you should write on the threshold and door of your mouth, this you should place on the walls of your house and in the recesses of your heart so that when you fall on your knees in prayer this may be your chant as you kneel, and when you rise up from it to go forth to all the necessary business of life it may be your constant prayer as you stand. <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/cassian/conferences.ii.xi.x.html>

Psalm 70 is short and easy to memorize.

I urge you to memorize it and sing it regularly!