

# A Whale of a Story *or* Consider the Lilies

## *Psalm 69 and the Second Baptism of Jesus*

**Psalm 68:1** *To the choirmaster: according to Lilies. Of David.*

Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck.

<sup>2</sup> **I sink in deep mire**, where there is no foothold; **I have come into deep waters**, and the flood sweeps over me.

<sup>3</sup> I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.

<sup>4</sup> More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal must I now restore?

<sup>5</sup> O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you.

<sup>6</sup> Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord GOD of hosts; let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel.

<sup>7</sup> For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered my face.

<sup>8</sup> I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother's sons.

<sup>9</sup> For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me.

<sup>10</sup> When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting, it became my reproach.

<sup>11</sup> When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them.

<sup>12</sup> I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me.

<sup>13</sup> But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness.

<sup>14</sup> **Deliver me from sinking in the mire; let me be delivered from my enemies and from the deep waters.**

<sup>15</sup> Let not the flood sweep over me, or the deep swallow me up, or the pit close its mouth over me.

<sup>16</sup> Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me.

<sup>17</sup> Hide not your face from your servant, for I am in distress; make haste to answer me.

<sup>18</sup> Draw near to my soul, redeem me; ransom me because of my enemies!

<sup>19</sup> You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor; my foes are all known to you.

<sup>20</sup> Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none.

<sup>21</sup> They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink.

<sup>22</sup> Let their own table before them become a snare; and when they are at peace, let it become a trap.

<sup>23</sup> Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually.

<sup>24</sup> Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them.

<sup>25</sup> May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents.

<sup>26</sup> For they persecute him whom you have struck down, and they recount the pain of those you have wounded.

<sup>27</sup> Add to them punishment upon punishment; may they have no acquittal from you.

<sup>28</sup> Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous.

<sup>29</sup> But I am afflicted and in pain; let your salvation, O God, set me on high!

<sup>30</sup> I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.

<sup>31</sup> This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs.

<sup>32</sup> When the humble see it they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive.

<sup>33</sup> For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.

<sup>34</sup> Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them.

<sup>35</sup> For God will save Zion and build up the cities of Judah, and people shall dwell there and possess it;

<sup>36</sup> the offspring of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall dwell in it."

## Psalm 69

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# A Whale of a Story

“WHAT DID THEY TELL YOU ABOUT HIM? Say that!”

“They didn't tell much of anything about him; only I've heard that he's a good whale-hunter, and a good captain to his crew.”

“That's true, that's true— yes, both true enough. But you must jump when he gives an order. Step and growl; growl and go— that's the word with Captain Ahab. But nothing

about that thing that happened to him off Cape Horn, long ago, when he lay like dead for three days and nights; nothing about that deadly skirmish with the Spaniard afore the altar in Santa?— heard nothing about that, eh? Nothing about the silver calabash he spat into? And nothing about his losing his leg last voyage, according to the prophecy.”<sup>1</sup>

**Captain Ahab.** *Anti-type* (as in the opposite) of the prophet **Jonah**. But call me Ishmael. “If I remember right,” the only survivor of the Pequod muses in Ch. 83 of *Moby Dick*, “Jonah was swallowed by the whale in the Mediterranean Sea, and after three days he was vomited up somewhere within three days’ journey of Nineveh, a city on the Tigris, very much more than three days’ journey across from the nearest point of the Mediterranean coast. How is that?”<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, Ishmael’s memories are cloudy, and his reflections are hit and miss.



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<sup>1</sup> **Herman Melville**, *Moby Dick: or, the White Whale* (p. 86). Kindle Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Melville, 346.

Baptism. It's a sign that everyone has heard of, but few have thought long and hard over. What is its meaning? What is its purpose? Why do we do it? Most Christians simply inherit a tradition and go with what they know. There are multiple answers to those questions and to talk about them all would be impossible today. Nor is it our purpose. But there is one aspect of this doctrine that is at the heart of our Psalm today. So much so that I would call this a baptismal psalm.

Psalm 69 begins the step of taking us to the end of **Book Two** of the Psalter (**Ps 42-72**). Along with 68, 70, and 72, it is a Psalm of David, thus, these five psalms for the last unit of Book Two.<sup>3</sup> It is “**To the Choirmaster**” (“**For the End**”),<sup>4</sup> and as we saw with Psalm 68 which also had this designation, its content points forward far beyond its author. But its ending (esp. **vv. 30-36**) has puzzled commentators such that it seems likely that David's original psalm was expanded, perhaps by Hezekiah or Jeremiah or someone who lived through one of the wars that left Judah in ruins.

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<sup>3</sup> See **Frank-Lothar Hossfeld** and Erich Zenger, *Psalms 2: A Commentary on Psalms 51-100*, ed. Klaus Baltzer, trans. Linda M. Maloney, Hermeneia—a Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 167-68 for more on their relationship.

<sup>4</sup> “According to the Lilies” is a phrase we have only seen once before (Ps 45:1). The word (*shoshanim*) is uncertain in meaning.

Like most of the Psalms of David, it forms a chiasm:

- 1a) [Psa 69:1-2](#), Plea for **salvation**;
- 1b) [Psa 69:3](#), I am weary with my crying;
- 1c) [Psa 69:4](#), They are mighty who would destroy me;
- 1d) [Psa 69:5-6](#), My own foolishness, shame, and reproach;
- 1e) [Psa 69:7-12](#), For Your sake I have borne reproach;
- 1f) [Psa 69:13](#), Hear my prayer in the multitude of Your mercy;
- central axis) [Psa 69:14-15](#), “Deliver me.”**
- 2f) [Psa 69:16-18](#), Hear me and turn to me in the multitude of Your mercy;
- 2e) [Psa 69:19-21](#), You know my reproach, shame, and dishonor;
- 2d) [Psa 69:22-28](#), The LORD brings enemies and adversaries to shame and reproach;
- 2c) [Psa 69:29-32](#), The LORD is mighty who saves me;
- 2b) [Psa 69:33](#), The LORD hears and does not despise the crying of the poor;
- 2a) [Psa 69:34-36](#), Praise for **salvation**.<sup>5</sup>

The center of the poem, and thus the main idea is **Psalm 69:14-15**. The theme is deliverance from some kind of drowning. It is in a 3|3 pattern which forms its own smaller chiasm:

<sup>5</sup> This is *ALittlePerspective* blog’s attempt. The *Literarystructure* site has a much simpler attempt, but the same center:

P (69:1) 69:1 For the leader; according to "Lilies." Of David. (69:1)

A (69:2-5) "69:2 Save me, God" (הושיעני)

B (69:6-13) "69:8 For your sake I bear insult, shame covers my face. (69:8)" (כלמה)

**C (69:14-19) 69:14 But I pray to you, LORD, for the time of your favor. God, in your great kindness answer me with your constant help. (69:14)**

B' (69:20-30) "69:20 You know my reproach, my shame, my disgrace" (וכלמתי)

A' (69:31-37) "69:36 God will rescue Zion, rebuild the cities of Judah"

- A. Deliver me from sinking in the mire;
- B. let me be delivered from my enemies
- C. and from the deep waters.
- C<sup>1</sup>. Let not the flood sweep over me,
- B<sup>1</sup>. or the deep swallow me up,
- A<sup>1</sup>. or the pit close its mouth over me.

The Deep is where God cast the Egyptians. “The floods covered them; they went down into the deep like a stone” (Ex 15:5). The deep is where Jonah was hurtled, “For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me” (Jonah 2:3).<sup>6</sup> Being *swallowed up* (by the ground to Sheol) is what happened to Korah and his band of rebellious priests (Num 16:30). The pit is where the evil locust of Revelation 9:1-2 arise out of. In other words, what is in mind here is death. But not just any death. It is death pictured as drowning, going down to Sheol in a baptism of judgment.

Baptism as judgment. Rarely do people think of baptism in this way. But that’s exactly what Psalm 69 depicts. Someone explains: “In nearly one-half of the examples in

<sup>6</sup> The deep is where God will bring back the captives of Bashan (Psalm 68:23).

which *baptizo* occurs in the literal sense, it signifies the immersion which attends drowning and the sinking of ships.”<sup>7</sup> Captain Ahab and the Pequod. Baptized to the bottom of the sea. Another says, “*Baptizō* occurs in the sense of ‘to immerse’ from the time of Hippocrates, in Plato and esp. in later writers... “to sink the ship”... “to suffer shipwreck,” “to drown,” “to perish”... “to bring the city to the border of destruction”... “to go under”... “to sink into”... “to be overwhelmed”... “thou lettest thyself be overborn.” ... The idea of going under or perishing is nearer the general usage.”<sup>8</sup> I’m pretty sure that most people don’t think of baptism like that.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, Peter calls the Flood of Noah a baptism (1Pe 3:21). Why? Because everyone on earth was baptized into death. Only eight people make it out alive in a ship that didn’t sink. In the same way, the Apostle Paul calls the Red Sea event a baptism (1Co 10:2). They were all baptized, not

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<sup>7</sup> W. J. Beecher, “[Dale on Baptism](#),” *The Presbyterian Quarterly and Princeton Review*, New Series VI, no. 21–23 (1877): 47.

<sup>8</sup> Albrecht Oepke, “[βάπτω, βαπτίζω, βαπτισμός, βάπτισμα, βαπτιστής](#),” ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 530.

<sup>9</sup> For more on Baptism as an Ordeal see my Excursus in Doug Van Dorn, *Waters of Creation: A Biblical-Theological Study of Baptism* (Erie, CO: Waters of Creation Pub., 2009), 30.

just the Israelites, but the Egyptians too. Some made it out alive, but God's enemies drown in the sea. Now, "baptism" the word does not appear in Psalm 69. But that no more means that it isn't here than it means the "Trinity" isn't in the Bible because the word isn't there. Make no mistake, this is the idea of the Psalm.

Who awaits the dead there in the OT? **Leviathan** lives here. "He makes the deep boil like a pot; he makes the sea like a pot of ointment" (**Job 41:31**). "There go the ships, and Leviathan, which you formed to play in it ... Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan the twisting serpent" (**Ps 104:26**; **Isa 27:1**). Leviathan is **the Sea-Monster**, "Am I the sea, or a sea monster, that you set a guard over me?" (**Job 7:12**). Moby Dick. Here's Ishmael again as he contemplates the tail of the great beast.

As in the ordinary floating posture of the leviathan the flukes lies considerably below the level of his back, they are then completely out of sight beneath the surface; but when he is about to plunge into the deeps, his entire flukes with at least thirty feet of his body are tossed erect in the air, and so remain vibrating a moment, till they downwards shoot out of view. Excepting the sublime breach— somewhere else to be described— this peaking of the

whale's flukes is perhaps the grandest sight to be seen in all animated nature. Out of the bottomless profundities the gigantic tail seems spasmodically snatching at the highest heaven. So in dreams, have I seen majestic Satan thrusting forth his tormented colossal claw from the flame Baltic of Hell.<sup>10</sup>



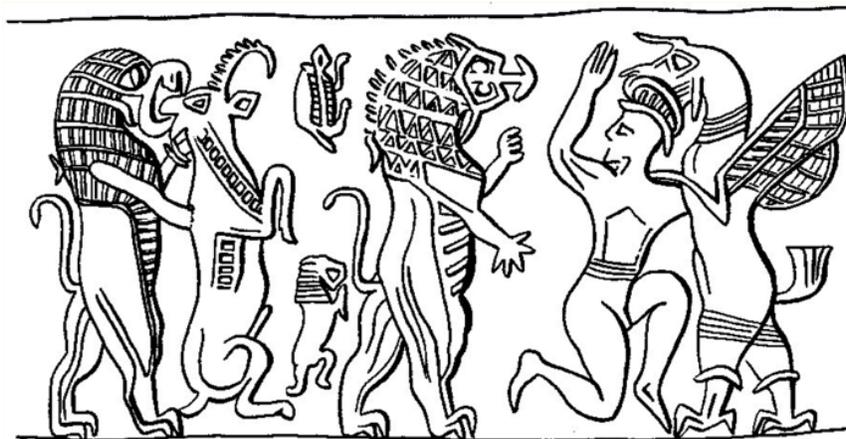
***The Flukes, Moby Dick***  
*Eric Thake (1904-82), Australia*  
*Linocut, printed in black ink, from one block*

Most see Moby Dick to be a personification of God: inscrutable, unknowable, all-powerful, thwarting human

<sup>10</sup> Melville, 356.

pride, unable to be defeated.<sup>11</sup> And Captain Ahab is the embodiment of evil pride and therefore Satan. There is clearly truth to this. But Ishmael is thinking of the creature—at least in some respects—as a terrible evil. And Melville clearly knows his Bible. Sproul believes that *Moby Dick* is unparalleled because of its “unparalleled theological symbolism.” We’ve seen Leviathan identified as Satan in Isaiah. But as we have also seen back in Psalm 18 that God is depicted as the Sea Monster, meaning that Satan is seeking to counterfeit his unfathomable power by pretending to be God.

It is interesting to note how ancient peoples pictured this in art:



Part of a Babylonian cylinder seal (ca. 1800 B.C.)  
Source: Sketch by Hildi Keel-Leu.

<sup>11</sup> See the Sproul Appendix at the end of the chapter. Also, the *SparksNotes* on *Moby Dick* (character). <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/mobydick/character/moby-dick/>, last accessed July 13, 2017.

They depict the realm of the dead as a big-mouthed monster, attempting to devour human beings. They also depicted it as a lion as a kind of personification of mortal danger.<sup>12</sup> The lion idea is found in Psalm 22, the most quoted (and alluded to) Psalm in the NT. “They open wide their mouths at me, like a ravening and roaring lion ... Save me from the mouth of the lion!” (Ps 22:13, 21).

Psalm 22 is so often cited by the NT because it is the great psalm of Messiah. However, the second most quoted psalm is our psalm: Psalm 69. And its themes are quoted with respect to the very same things Psalm 22 is: the suffering and passion of the Lord Jesus. Hence, the one with the lion imagery and the other with the Deep imagery. What we are going to see as we go through this is that Psalm 69 is telling us all about our Lord’s second baptism.

**Second baptism?** I thought you are only supposed to be baptized once. Yes. *In water*. But Jesus asked his disciples, “Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?” (Mark 10:38). Jesus had no disciples at the moment he was baptized in the

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<sup>12</sup> Picture and explanation in Lothar, 180.

Jordan. He tells them again, “I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!” (Luke 12:50). Distress? His baptism in the Jordan was not stressful. But this one is. This wasn’t a baptism in water, though when he his side was pierced, blood and water came gushing forth to symbolize it. No, this was a metaphorical baptism into death. And if you want to live, you must be baptized into his death and come out alive by his Spirit through resurrection.

In his death, *Jesus becomes Ahab for us*, taking upon us all of our sins. Ahab was baptized by the great beast. Twice. Once was a metaphor of resurrection. After three days he lived. The second time, he drown in the bottom of the sea by the Great Whale. But this reminds us of Jonah. Jonah is the reverse. He was literally swallowed by a sea-monster of some kind, yet symbolically that beast pictured death. But after three days, he lived.

Jesus said his death would be like that of Jonah. “No sign will be given to [this evil generation] except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Matt

12:39-40). Jesus' baptism—portrayed typologically and prophetically through Psalm 69, tells us all about this. And it signifies your need: to be *baptized into Christ Jesus into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead, so we too might walk in newness of life* (Rom 6:3-4).

## Down to the Depths

David begins, “*Save me, O God!*” **Salvation** is always the great cry of God's people. This is your need. You need to be saved. Why? Because, as the Psalm will show, you are desperately sick. Further, there are vicious hostile enemies who seek to destroy you. These are enemies of God, who need also to be saved. In fact, anyone who is not saved is an enemy of God and they must be reconciled to him because of their sin. Only God can save a person, and he has provided the Way for it to happen through second baptism of his Only Son.

Immediately, the water theme begins. This is not just the center of the poem. It is the initial thought. What does he need salvation from? “*For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have*

come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me” (Ps 1:1a-2). He’s drowning. While not close enough to vv. 14-15 to be called a refrain, it is clear that this is the main idea of the song, the main image used to describe his trouble.

It was a desperate trouble, causing great emotional stress. “I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God” (3). To pray so unceasingly that your tongue sticks to your mouth? To cry so constantly that your eyes can no longer see? To have do these things day and night because God isn’t answering, he is leaving you in your condition? This is trouble, trouble of a kind that would make you sweat drops of blood if that were possible.

How did he get into this trouble? First, he has enemies. “More in number than the hairs of my head are those who hate me without cause; mighty are those who would destroy me, those who attack me with lies. What I did not steal must I now restore?” (4). This is the first of many verses quoted in the NT. John 15:25, “But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘*They hated me without a cause.*’” Notice that it calls the psalm “their Law.” “Law” is sometimes a shorthand for anything in the OT. This is partly because the

whole of the OT is for “instruction,” which is a meaning of “*torah*.” Stealing. Lying. Murdering. These are the Ten Commandments. But here, they are twisted, and an innocent man is being made to pay back that which he never took. Like paying for someone else’s sins, when you were innocent.

In John, Jesus is talking to his disciples. He speaks not only about the persecution that **he will undergo** without cause, but of that which **they will soon face**. And indeed, God’s people have been hated without cause ever since. And how do they not cry out like the Psalmist when this happens to them? That’s why this is one of the most loved psalms.

Nevertheless, it must be said that we have often given the world plenty of good reasons over the last 2,000 years to hate us too. Jesus was not talking about that. Christians are to be hated for **the right reasons**: their righteousness, their holiness, their gentleness, their meekness, their love of truth and uncompromising stance against sinful things, but in it love of fellow man and one another. Those things give the world plenty of reasons to hate them. But when we are **hated for our pride**, our anger, our outrage, our hypocrisy then this is not what Jesus had in mind, and we bring shame and

reproach upon the Name as God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles (and Jews) because of us. The Psalmist isn't crying because people hate him because he's a self-righteous jerk. They hated him without cause.

What comes next is (well all of this, really is) typical of the psalms of David and at first may seem to contradict what I just said. “O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you” (5). Though this is a Psalm about Christ (in one way or another, they all are as we have seen), this is one reason why even in a song so often quoted as this one about him, we must remember that **David is the human author**. David confesses his sin. David is a sinner. Jesus is not. But Jesus is having to pay back for someone else's sins, so he becomes a vicarious sinner, counted by God as a sinner for our sake, because this is what Jesus willing offered to do.

The Psalmist continues, “Let not those who hope in you be put to shame through me, O Lord GOD of hosts (*Adonai Yahweh Sabaoth*); let not those who seek you be brought to dishonor through me, O God of Israel” (6). What does this mean? Somehow, the suffering of the psalmist without cause on account of sin has **an effect on other people**. He prays that

what he has to suffer might not be counted to them! This is pure **substitution** language. For David, as king, what he does represents his people and they may suffer because of him. So Krauss astutely notices, “**The petitioner thinks of himself as suffering by way of example ... In his distress the hope of all those who trust in Yahweh is at stake.**” But he has enough foresight to add, “**Here the prayer song points far beyond its own case.**”<sup>13</sup> Indeed, that’s why this psalm is Messianic from beginning to end.

Next we learn why this is happening to him. “**For it is for your sake that I have borne reproach, that dishonor has covered by face**” (7). Long ago, **Cassiodorus** (485 – 580), I think rightly so, saw this suffering for innocence (i.e. vs. 4) and not for sin (i.e. vs. 5).<sup>14</sup> “*And it was made a reproach to me.*’ Good people are always a reproach to the wicked, because they are quite unwilling to sanction their crimes. They carefully withdraw from them, join in no compact with them. These reproaches bear witness to the slaps, scourgings,

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<sup>13</sup> Hans-Joachim Kraus, *A Continental Commentary: Psalms 60–150* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 61.

<sup>14</sup> Kraus seems to connect it to sin, interpreting the Psalm in a kind of Job-theology, where David’s enemies think he must pay for things he has done wrong.

and spitting that the Lord Savior endured from the mad crowd.” (*Expositions of the Psalms* 68.11).

“I have become a stranger to my brothers, an alien to my mother’s sons” (8). It is easy to think of the envy David’s brothers must have had because he was chosen and they were not. It is obvious to think of his own sons who rebelled against him. David became a man without a family. **How much more** our Lord who said you cannot love father or mother more than me (**Matt 10:37**). Who said, “**Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?**” (**Matt 12:48**). He then answered that it was those who do the will of his Father in heaven (50), but even they in his moment of greatest need turn and fled, having nothing to do with him. Do you see how even in these things the psalm is bringing the psalmist closer and closer to death?

“For zeal for your house has consumed me, and the reproaches of those who reproach you have fallen on me” (9). This is cited in **John 2:17** when the Lord went into the temple early in his ministry and overturned the money changers who were using religion to make a profit! The brilliant religious satire blog *The Babylon Bee* recently posted how Creflo Dollar (not a fake name by the way), just broke

out his new looming pulpit made entirely out of hundred-dollar bills by preaching a convicting, passionate sermon on humility. But health-and-wealth TV preachers are not the only ones doing it. Since the beginning, people have been using God to feed off the poor and even those who aren't! May their money perish with them. And we see how Jesus' act in the temple sets the stage in John's Gospel right from the beginning for the Pharisees seeking to put him to death.

“When I wept and humbled my soul with fasting, it became my reproach. When I made sackcloth my clothing, I became a byword to them. I am the talk of those who sit in the gate, and the drunkards make songs about me” (Ps 68:10-12). One time David sinned greatly and for it, God took his son. He fasted. He prayed. He begged God not to do it. He wouldn't eat with the elders who sought to raise him up (2Sa 12:17). He made his servants completely distraught when the news finally came of the child's death (19). Then, when it was over, they all looked incredulous at him when he just quit and went back to normal (21). How many times was David the object of scorn in the city gate? And how many times did they turn the tables on his songs of victory to make him the scorn of their limericks? For

2,000 years people have been doing these things to Jesus, as they curse his name without cause night and day, as they mock his miracles, his resurrection, and even his very existence? In every town in the world, he is known. But in how many is there anything but ridicule? All for suffering as one of them so that they might turn to him and be saved.

He knew what he was doing. But it was not easy. “As for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD. At an acceptable time, O God, in the abundance of your steadfast love answer me in your saving faithfulness” (13). Do this not remind you of his agony in the garden when he prayed, “Take this cup from me. But not my will. Yours be done” (Luke 22:42).

This then is the language the first half of the Psalm uses to describe what would eventually take place that next morning, when they nailed him to a cross for crimes he was not guilty of committing, putting him to death even while forgiving them as they did it. It was this whole Passion (*passion* is a negative term, used mostly for raw emotions that attend suffering) that can be seen as rising waters that got so high, they eventually took our Lord down to Sheol itself. He dies like Ahab, though he is nothing like that man.

As the poem begins to make its way out, it is not finished describing this baptism into death. A parallel prayer (see vs. 13) is offered up. “Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love is good; according to your abundant mercy, turn to me. Hide not your face from your servant, for I am in distress; make haste to answer me. Draw near to my soul, redeem me; ransom me because of my enemies!” (16-18). Again, this sounds like more of his time alone in the Garden of Gethsemane. Perhaps David was thinking of temporal salvation. But when we know the story of the Jesus Christ, we know that this language is focusing more and more resurrection. And we know that Christ inspired David to write it. For he knew he had to die. He knew the Father would turn his face against him. His redemption lay beyond the grave.

The next part recalls the reproach theme. Previously, tells God that he has become a reproach. Now, he is calling God to remember that he already knows that he has become a reproach. Therefore, because of his shame and dishonor (19), he asks for two things.

The first concerns his enemies. “My foes are all known to you ... I looked for pity, but there was none, and for

comforters, but I found none. They gave me poison for food, and for my thirst they gave me sour wine to drink” (19b, 20b-21). Again, this is cited in the NT. Now Jesus is hanging on the cross. “They offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it” (Matt 27:34; cf. 48; Mark 15:23, 36; Luke 23:36; John 19:29). Why did he refuse? Because he knew his psalms! Because he knew that he was the one of whom they spoke.

Our Lord extended forgiveness to them there on the cross (Luke 23:34), for this was to be a time of salvation, not judgment. God does not delight in the death of the wicked. And through the Gospel he called all who heard the message, including some of them there that day, to repent and believe.

But if they would not, the Psalm looks forward: “Let their own table before them become a snare; and when they are at peace, let it become a trap. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they cannot see, and make their loins tremble continually. Pour out your indignation upon them, and let your burning anger overtake them. May their camp be a desolation; let no one dwell in their tents. For they persecute him whom you have struck down, and they recount the pain

of those you have wounded.. Add to them punishment upon punishment; may they have no acquittal from you. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous” (Ps 68:22-28). How amazing that David’s life would be led by God such that he would be inspired through his own life circumstances to write such things?

And what is *this* thing? That those who hate the Son (David as a type is God’s son) and reject him may perish in their own filthy sins, never to rise again. That they may be baptized into death with no hope of resurrection life in the age to come. If they will not have the Son, then give them what they deserve.

Several of these verses are quoted in the NT. Luke quotes vs. 25 of Judas. “For it is written in the Book of Psalms, ‘May his camp become desolate, and let there be no one to dwell in it’” (and ‘let another take his office’) (Acts 1:20). One whom Jesus loved betrayed him and because he would not trust in Christ, this was fulfilled in his person—the one destined to destruction.

The Apostle Paul quotes Ps 68:22-23 here of the nation of Israel whom God was hardening because of their rejection

of their very own Messiah (**Rom 11:9-10**). But, he does not leave it there, for he tells **the Gentiles** that if they will not believe in these times of grace and mercy that have been extended to them, then like the root of Israel, their branches will be cut off from the Vine of Christ, and it will be no better for them. It is a grave warning to all who hear the Gospel—a gospel in this case written 1,000 years before the events took place—that if you will not believe, then Christ prays for your certain destruction. And Revelation hints at **Psalm 68:24**. “Go and pour out on the earth the seven bowls of the wrath of God” (**Rev 16:1**).

Why? It is **because it is what we all deserve**. For you must know that it was not merely the Jews of those Days or the Roman governors or soldiers who were responsible for putting Christ to death. This substitutionary suffering was for the sons of Adam, for he is the Second Adam. Your sins. My sins. These put him to death. They afflicted him. Your sins. My sins. All our sins. No one can say that they are not responsible for the Son of God having to die on the cross. And thus, if you will not turn to him, Christ prays that you will have no part in the world to come.

But he prays for a second thing. “You know my reproach, and my shame and my dishonor ... Reproaches have broken my heart, so that I am in despair. I looked for pity, but there was none, and for comforters, but I found none ... I am afflicted and in pain” (19-20). Do you see what he went through though he had done no wrong? Do you see what your sin does?

Think of it. God himself in despair as a man. God looking for one of us to have pity. None of us do. God in flesh looking for comforters. All left him afflicted and in pain. Have we forgotten what God did for the human race in sending Jesus? Have we forgotten the cost, not just to the Son, but to the Father who had to give him up and to the Spirit who had to let him go—eternal perfect loving fellowship broken. Baptized into death. *Would* you have done it? *Could* you, he asked his own disciples? No. But *for* you? Yes.

## Up From the Grave

**And for Him.** Commentators think that these last few verses were added by someone after David. Perhaps. But it

is the reason why that is so significant. For these last verses teach us about **resurrection**. In David's temporal case, it could only be figurative, because when he died, he remains physically dead until the resurrection of us all. But when Jesus died, in a way great than Jonah three days later, the grave spits him up. The Anti-Ahab, Jesus does not seek revenge by going after the one who took his life. Rather, he seeks to hide in the shadow of God's wings. For God who was Leviathan at his death became the Eagle of Frodo and Sam three days later, and carried him up from the fires of Mt. Doom.

“**Let your salvation, O God, set me on high!**” (29). He has been in a low place, so low that the waters could not be overcome. So low, it took him to the watery place where all the dead go. Set me on high! Raise me up! This is a verse of resurrection if ever there was one. Spurgeon says, “**How fully has this been answered in our great Master's case, for he not only escaped his foes personally, but he has become the author of eternal salvation to all who obey him, and this continues to glorify him more and more. O ye poor and sorrowful ones, lift up your heads, for as with your Lord so shall it be with you. You are trodden down to-day as the**

mire of the streets, but you shall ride upon the high places of the earth ere long; and even now ye are raised up together, and made to sit together in the heavenlies in Christ Jesus.”<sup>15</sup>

For you! Baptized into death. Raised to newness of life in Christ.

Thus, our Lord **leads his people chosen** in him before the foundation of the world in songs of praise. “**I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving. This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs.**” Consider the lilies. The **song for the lilies** finally becomes a praise because resurrection is in the air.

And resurrection of who? “**When the humble see it they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive. For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners**”<sup>16</sup> (**Ps 68:33-34**). The **humble**. The **needy**. This is the kind of person Jesus showed himself to be throughout his ministry, and he showed you what kind of person it is who inherits the kingdom of God.

Not proud like Ahab or Satan:

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<sup>15</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David: Psalms 56-87*, vol. 3 (London; Edinburgh; New York: Marshall Brothers, n.d.), 184.

<sup>16</sup> On “prisoners,” see Psalm 68.

The proud person, believing that he deserves treatment appropriate to his self-inflated dignity, is quick to anger when he receives a less welcome treatment. At the exaltation of the Messiah, Satan ‘could not bear/Through pride that sight, and thought himself impair’d.’ Satan’s sense of injur’d merit’ is reported in his first speech in Hell [Milton]. Ahab's story, caused by Moby Dick biting off his leg, follows the same psychological pattern of being spiritually and physically impaired.<sup>17</sup>

No, you must not be proud. You must humbly come before the King of kings, David’s Lord, confess yourself—as David did—a needy sinner. Then you must fall upon the only Rock high enough to save you from the flood. And when you confess his name, you must be baptized, as Peter told you. For this act of spiritual-warfare attacks Satan as you renounce all his pomp and circumstances, die to the flesh, and understand that by faith alone it pictures for you resurrected life with Christ. Down into the grave; up to newness of life.

And when you do this, you praise some more. “Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that

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<sup>17</sup> Henry Francis Pommer, *Milton and Melville* (Cooper Square Publishers, 1970), 95.

moves in them” (Ps 68:34). The water is no longer your enemy, for it has been defeated, and even the raging seas praise him. And then you confess his omnipotent, gracious, electing love that is the only reason you who had so rebelled against him in the first place would ever turn to him for salvation.

And thus the song will end reflecting on how it began. The cry of desperation becomes the hope of the loved: “Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck” (1) becomes, “For God will save Zion and build up the cities of Judah, and people shall dwell there and possess it; the offspring of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall dwell in it” (35-36). And you will be able to see the truth of the matter, unlike Ahab, but like Ishmael:

*And I only am escaped alone to tell you. Job*

*The drama’s done. Why then here does any one step forth?*

—

*Because one did survive the wreck.*



*Epilogue:*

The last poem of the Extracts at the End of my version of *Moby Dick* reads:

*Oh, the rare old Whale, mid storm and gale  
In his ocean home will be  
A giant in might, where might is right,  
And King of the boundless sea*

Whale Song

Would that you know that 1. The Whale represents God. 2. God is all powerful. 3. The powerful God became flesh, and humbled himself, becoming considered an Ahab. That those who by his powerful grace might confess him King of the boundless sea, and earth, and heavens, and all.

## APPENDIX:

RIGHT NOW COUNTS FOREVER

*THE UNHOLY PURSUIT OF GOD IN MOBY DICK*

by R.C. Sproul

*My Note:* *Given all the talk of Moby Dick in the Sermon, I thought you might enjoy this short article by R.C. Sproul from an old TableTalk:*



It seems that every time a writer picks up a pen or turns on his word processor to compose a literary work of fiction, deep in his bosom resides the hope that somehow he will create the Great American Novel. Too late. That feat has already been accomplished and is as far out of reach for new novelists as is Joe DiMaggio's fifty-six-game hitting streak or Pete Rose's record of cumulative career hits for a rookie baseball player. The Great American Novel was written more than a hundred and fifty years ago by Herman

Melville. This novel, the one that has been unsurpassed by any other, is *Moby Dick*.

My personal copy of *Moby Dick* is a leather-bound collector's edition produced by Easton Press under the rubric "The Hundred Greatest Books Ever Written."

Note that the claim here is not that *Moby Dick* is one of the hundred greatest books written in English, but rather that it is one of the hundred greatest books written in any language.

Its greatness may be seen not in its sometimes cumbersome literary structure or its excursions into technicalia about the nature and function of whales (cetology). No, its greatness is found in its unparalleled theological symbolism. This symbolism is sprinkled abundantly throughout the novel, particularly in the identities of certain individuals who are assigned biblical names. Among the characters are Ahab, Ishmael, and Elijah, and the names *Jeroboam* and *Rachel* ("who was seeking her lost children") are given to two of the ships in the story.

In a personal letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne upon completing this novel, Melville said, "I have written an evil book." What is it about the book that Melville considered

evil? I think the answer to that question lies in the meaning of the central symbolic character of the novel, Moby Dick, the great white whale.

Melville experts and scholars come to different conclusions about the meaning of the great white whale. Many see this brutish animal as evil because it had inflicted great personal damage on Ahab in an earlier encounter. Ahab lost his leg, which was replaced by the bone of a lesser whale. Some argue that Moby Dick is Melville's symbol of the incarnation of evil itself. Certainly this is the view of the whale held by Captain Ahab himself. Ahab is driven by a monomaniacal hatred for this creature, this brute that left him permanently damaged both in body and soul. He cries out, "He heaps me," indicating the depth of the hatred and fury he feels toward this beast. Some have accepted Ahab's view that the whale is a monstrous evil as that of Melville himself.

Other scholars have been convinced that the whale is not a symbol of evil but the symbol of God Himself. In this interpretation, Ahab's pursuit of the whale is not a righteous pursuit of God but natural man's futile attempt in his hatred of God to destroy the omnipotent deity. I favor this second

view. It was the view held by one of my college professors—one of the five leading Melville scholars in the world at the time I studied under him. My senior philosophy research paper in college was titled “The Existential Implications of Melville’s *Moby Dick*.” In that paper, which I cannot reproduce in this brief article, I tried to set forth the theological structure of the narrative.

I believe that the greatest chapter ever written in the English language is the chapter of *Moby Dick* titled “The Whiteness of the Whale.” Here we gain an insight into the profound symbolism that Melville employs in his novel. He explores how whiteness is used in history, in religion, and in nature. The terms he uses to describe the appearance of whiteness in these areas include *elusive*, *ghastly*, and *transcendent horror*, as well as *sweet*, *honorable*, and *pure*. All of these are descriptive terms that are symbolized in one way or another by the presence of whiteness. In this chapter Melville writes,

*But not yet have we solved the incantation of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul; and more strange and far more portentous—why, as we have seen, it is at once the most*

*meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian's Deity; and yet should be as it is, the intensifying agent in things the most appalling to mankind. Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that as in essence whiteness is not so much a colour as the visible absence of colour; and at the same time the concrete of all colours; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning, in a wide landscape of snows—a colourless, all-colour of atheism from which we shrink?*

He then concludes the chapter with these words: “And of all these things, the albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?”

If the whale embodies everything that is symbolized by whiteness—that which is terrifying; that which is pure; that which is excellent; that which is horrible and ghastly; that which is mysterious and incomprehensible—does he not embody those traits that are found in the fullness of the perfections in the being of God Himself?

Who can survive the pursuit of such a being if the pursuit is driven by hostility? Only those who have experienced the sweetness of reconciling grace can look at the overwhelming power, sovereignty, and immutability of a transcendent God and find there peace rather than a drive for vengeance. Read *Moby Dick*, and then read it again.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> R. C. Sproul, [“Right Now Counts Forever: The Unholy Pursuit of God in Moby Dick,”](#) *Tabletalk Magazine, August 2011: Theological Reflections on Classic Literature* (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2011), 5–7.