

Psalm 69:20-21

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-69/psalm-6920-21/>

David describes his grief and sickness over his reproach. He laments how he finds no comfort, and how from the places where he expects to receive sympathy, he is given gall and vinegar instead. This scripture is prophetic of the gall and sour wine which Jesus was offered on the cross.

Psalm 69:20-21 as it applies to David.

After petitioning the LORD to answer him in his distress with lovingkindness (Psalm 69:16-19), David, the psalmist, complains and laments to God how his adversaries and friends have treated him.

Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick (v 20a).

A *reproach* is an expression of disapproval, disappointment, or criticism, often accompanied by a sense of blame or disgrace. A *reproach* brings shame and public humiliation and is used to discredit someone for their beliefs or behavior.

Within the context of Psalm 69, the *reproach* David describes is unjust and unwarranted. David is suffering *reproach* because he has stood with the God of Israel. Earlier in the psalm David confesses:

“Because for Your sake I have borne reproach.”
(Psalm 69:7)

“And the reproaches of those who reproach You have fallen on me.”
(Psalm 69:9b)

David does not necessarily say that he has received one *reproach*, but rather *reproach* in general. In Psalm 69:9-12, David describes multiple reproaches he has received. David has been reproached for:

- The “zeal for Your [the LORD’s] house [which] has consumed me”
(Psalm 69:9)
- “Fasting”
(Psalm 69:10)
- Mourning in “sackcloth”
(Psalm 69:10-12)

Many, or rather, much *reproach has broken his heart. And David is sick* over the humiliation his enemies have brought upon him.

When the psalmist writes *reproach has broken my heart*, he is saying that the shame and embarrassment from the *reproach* has greatly troubled and upset him and made him exceedingly sad. This *heart-breaking* sorrow appears to have taken a physical toll upon David, because he says: *I am so sick*. It makes David *sick* to think about what others have said and believed about him.

The psalmist continues:

*And I looked for sympathy, but there was none,
And for comforters, but I found none* (v 20b).

These complaints indicate how David *looked for* friends who would believe him and stand with him in his hour of need. But instead of aligning with him, David's friends were distancing themselves from him. The reason they were disassociating themselves from David was because they either believed the wicked slanders about him or feared the opinions of the ones speaking the *reproach*.

When he *looked for sympathy*, no one *was there* to give it. *And* when he *looked for comforters* he *found none* who would encourage him.

Next, David says what the people who should have comforted him did give him,

*They also gave me gall for my food
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink* (v 21).

Instead of providing *sympathy* or *comfort* during his unfair *reproach*—David's friends gave him *gall and vinegar*.

These expressions—*gave me gall for my food; and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink*—are likely figurative in David's case, rather than literal. By these expressions, David means that his friends have heaped more scorn and *reproach* upon him during a time when he was expectantly hoping to receive *comfort* and *sympathy* from them.

The unexpected *reproach* of his friends when David needed comfort was galling. It was like tricking a starving person by giving them poison *for food*, or maliciously offering a dehydrated person *vinegar to drink* when they are expecting refreshing water.

It would have been better if David's friends had offered him nothing—no *sympathy*, no *comfort*, no *reproach*—instead of receiving him and providing hope of encouragement only to give him the *gall* of further *reproach*.

Psalm 69:20-21 as Messianic Prophecy

The Bible Says has identified four Messianic prophecies in Psalm 69:20-21 that have been fulfilled by Jesus.

1. The Messiah will be heart-broken and grieved by His reproach.

Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick (v 20a).

This prophecy has multiple fulfillments in the life of Jesus.

Jesus was *heart-broken and sick* for Himself as Israel rejected Him as their Messiah, and He was *heart-broken and sick* for what was to fall upon the people who made Him a *reproach* when they crucified Him.

One fulfillment of this the prophecy in Psalm 69:20a took place shortly after Jesus entered the Garden of Gethsemane. Matthew records how He “began to be grieved and distressed” (Matthew 26:37). He confided to Peter, James, and John: “My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death” (Matthew 26:38).

Jesus knew He was already being betrayed (Matthew 26:21-25). He knew He would soon be abandoned by His disciples (Matthew 26:31). He knew He would be three times denied by Peter before it was day (Matthew 26:34). Jesus knew how Jerusalem’s rejection of Him as Messiah would result in His crucifixion (Matthew 20:18-19).

The knowledge of this forthcoming *reproach* was painful and deeply disturbing to Jesus. It agonized and grieved his *heart* and “soul” (Matthew 26:38). And it even made His body *so sick*.

Luke informs us that as Jesus prayed fervently in the garden, “His sweat became like drops of blood” (Luke 22:44). This abnormal medical condition is called hematidrosis. It describes the rare phenomenon where a person under extreme stress or anguish sweats blood. Jesus’s *reproach* literally made Him *so sick*.

A second fulfillment of this prophecy appears to have been at Jesus’s death on the cross.

John records how after Jesus gave up His Spirit, “one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out” (John 19:34).

The phenomenon of blood and water pouring out of His body seems to indicate that Jesus suffered what is called pericardial effusion. Pericardial effusion is the accumulation of fluid in the pericardial sac, the double-layered membrane surrounding the *heart*. Pericardial effusion can be caused by severe trauma.

If Jesus experienced pericardial effusion, then His *heart* was quite literally *broken* as He was made a *reproach* on the cross. The *reproach* He received literally had *broken* the Messiah’s *heart*.

But even though Israel’s *reproach* of Him personally stung and brutally pained Him, Jesus’s *heart* was also *broken* for His people and the suffering that their rejection of Him would bring upon themselves.

A third fulfillment of Psalm 69:20a: *Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick* took place on the day he triumphantly entered Jerusalem.

“When He approached Jerusalem, He saw the city and wept over it.”
(Luke 19:41)

Jesus began His lamentation over Jerusalem by comparing the prosperity and peace that Jerusalem would have enjoyed had they known who He was and not made Him a *reproach*:

“If you had known in this day, even you, the things which make for peace! But now they have been hidden from your eyes.”
(Luke 19:42)

He then laments the devastation which will fall upon them as a result of their rejection of Him as their Messiah:

“For the days will come upon you when your enemies will throw up a barricade against you, and surround you and hem you in on every side, and they will level you to the ground and your children within you, and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not recognize the time of your visitation.”
(Luke 19:43-44)

This lamentation reveals how Jesus’s *heart was broken* for Jerusalem over their rejection of Him as their Messiah. They did not recognize Him as their Messiah during the time He was among them. Because they would soon reject Him and make Jesus an object of *reproach* on the cross, Jerusalem would be left desolate and the Temple would be utterly destroyed without one stone left upon another.

This destruction came roughly forty years after Jesus was crucified in 70 A.D. when the Roman general, Titus, laid siege to the city of Jerusalem. According to the historian Josephus, Rome slaughtered over a million Jews in this attack (Josephus. *The Jewish War* 6.9.4). At the end of their siege, they completely demolished the Temple, as Jesus predicted. (See also Matthew 24:1-2).

Jesus’s lamentation in Luke is similar to His final public remarks before the cross. This is a fourth fulfillment of Psalm 69:20a, *Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick*.

Jesus lamented over Jerusalem, and the desolation they chose for themselves when they rejected Him as Messiah,

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate!”
(Matthew 23:37-38)

This lamentation again reveals the anguish, heartbreak, and sickness Jesus felt for Jerusalem due to the city’s rejection of Him as their Messiah.

2. The Messiah will look for sympathy and comfort amidst His reproach, but He will find none.

*And I looked for sympathy, but there was none,
And for comforters, but I found none* (v 20b).

This prophecy has multiple fulfillments in the life of Jesus.

First, as Jesus the Messiah's *heart was broken* and He felt *so sick* over His *reproach*, He *looked for sympathy and comforters* among His disciples but *found none*.

Immediately after He confided to Peter, James, and John about the severe grief He was feeling, Jesus asked them to "remain and keep watch with Me" (Matthew 26:38). Jesus asked them to pray so that they would not fall to temptation during the traumatic ordeal of His arrest, condemnation, and execution (Matthew 26:41). But Jesus also seems to have been seeking solidarity, *sympathy*, and comfort from His friends during His hour of need.

Instead of finding *comforters*, Jesus prayed alone, because they all fell asleep (Matthew 26:40, 43, 45).

Moreover, all His disciples abandoned Him when He surrendered to arrest (Matthew 26:56).

None remained with Him. This is a second fulfillment of Psalm 69:20b.

A third fulfillment was when Peter denied Jesus three times using oaths and curses to do so (Matthew 26:69-75).

A fourth fulfillment of Psalm 69:20b was during His religious trial when there was no one who came to His defense. This lack of defense was a violation of Jewish criminal law, which required for the trial to begin with a statement on behalf of the defendant in all cases involving capital crimes. Jesus not only was denied this opening statement on His behalf, but there was *none* who came to His defense during His religious trials, which delegitimized their verdict.

To learn more about the illegitimacy of Jesus's religious trials, see The Bible Says article, ["Jesus's Trial, Part 1. The Laws Broken by the Religious Leaders: A Summary."](#)

Throughout His religious trials Jesus was given no *sympathy*, no *comforters* as "the whole Council...[was] against Jesus" (Mark 14:55).

The fifth fulfillment of the prophecy: *And I looked for sympathy, but there was none,*

And for comforters, but I found none was during Jesus's civil trial before Pilate.

Just as Jesus was given no *sympathy* and had no *comforters* during His religious trials, neither did He find help in His civil trials. Ironically, the only person who even tried to defend the Jewish Messiah was the Roman governor who ordered His crucifixion.

When Pilate tried to declare that he was innocent of this Man's blood, "all the people said, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" (Matthew 27:25). As Jesus *looked for sympathy and comforters*, He *found none*.

3. The Messiah will be offered gall.

They also gave me gall for my food (v 21a).

This prophecy was literally fulfilled when the Roman soldiers offered Jesus the Messiah, “wine to drink mixed with gall” (Matthew 27:34) before they nailed Him to the cross.

This concoction seems to have been a numbing agent to dull what was likely the sharpest pain of the cross. Because the bones of the hand were usually too small to support the weight of crucifixion victims, the nails were driven through the wrists, between the ulna and radius, the two bones that make up the forearm.

The likely place where the nails were driven was directly into the median nerve, which travels from the elbow to the hand. This causes sharp pain that shoots up the victim’s arm. The resulting convulsions are excruciating.

To learn more about the ordeal of crucifixion, see The Bible Says article, [“Bearing the Cross: Exploring the Unimaginable Suffering of Crucifixion.”](#)

For this reason, one of the few merciful acts the executioners sometimes offered to their victims was to have them drink wine mixed with *gall* as an anesthetic concoction, before the nails were driven through.

In fulfillment of this prophecy, the soldiers who crucified Jesus showed Him this mercy, but after tasting it, Jesus “was unwilling to drink” it (Matthew 27:34). Apparently, Jesus wanted to have His full wits about Him as He endured the agonizing trial of His death.

4. The Messiah will be offered vinegar for His thirst.

And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink (v 21b).

This prophecy was literally fulfilled during the final moments of Jesus the Messiah’s crucifixion, when someone took a sponge, “filled it with sour wine and put it on a reed, and gave Him a drink” (Matthew 27:48).

John’s gospel details this fulfillment as it pertained to Jesus’s fifth statement from the cross—“I am thirsty” (John 19:28):

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, ‘I am thirsty.’ A jar full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop and brought it up to His mouth.” (John 19:28-29)

The Scripture John references is Psalm 69:21b: *And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.* John even suggests that one of the reasons Jesus said, “I am thirsty” (John 19:28) was to fulfill this Scripture.

In saying “I am thirsty” (John 19:28), Jesus not only initiated the fulfillment of Psalm 69:21, He also highlighted how the entirety of Psalm 69 was prophetic of His suffering, death, and vindication by the LORD. This is similar to how Jesus’s fourth and seventh statements on the cross alluded to the Messianic prophecies of Psalm 22 and Psalm 31.

Jesus’s fourth statement on the cross was: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34). This expression corresponds to Psalm 22:1.

To learn more about this comment from the cross and how it corresponds to Psalm 22, see The Bible Says article: [“Jesus’s Seven Last Words from the Cross—Part Four: A Word of Desolation.”](#)

Jesus’s seventh statement on the cross was: “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit” (Luke 23:46). This expression corresponds with Psalm 31:5.

To learn more about this comment from the cross and how it corresponds to Psalm 31, see The Bible Says article: [“Jesus’s Seven Last Words from the Cross—Part Seven: A Word of Trust.”](#)

To learn more about Jesus’s fifth comment from the cross and how it relates to Psalm 69, see the Bible Says article: [“Jesus’s Seven Last Words from the Cross—Part Five: A Word of Agony.”](#)

Biblical Text

²⁰ **Reproach has broken my heart and I am so sick.
And I looked for sympathy, but there was none,
And for comforters, but I found none.**
²¹ **They also gave me gall for my food
And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.**