

# **Psalms 69:33-34 in the light of the poor in the *Psalter* as a whole**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Psalms 69:33-34 in the light of the poor in the *Psalter* as a whole**

*The Psalter has very often been regarded as the prayer book of the poor. In the Psalms God is portrayed as the saviour of the poor, their hope, their stronghold and liberator – whether these are prayers of an individual or prayers of the community. The high concentration of the term(s) for the “poor” in the Psalter, in relation to the rest of the books of the Old Testament (OT), indeed indicates a profound affinity for the “poor” in the Psalter, which is an indication that the Psalter underwent a redaction of the “theology of the poor”. In this article the focus will be on Psalm 69, as it seems to have undergone a “redaction of the poor”. The main focus will be on the verses 33 and 34, as they, specifically, contain terminology of the “poor”. Special attention will also be given to the different terms used for the poor in this text.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

At least one out of every fifth person in our world today falls below any reasonable poverty line. It seems that within a few years, the percentage is estimated to top 25% of the global population (Blomberg 1999:17). The poor are often the victims of natural disasters, famine or drought. In addition to suffering from a lack of income, the poor are often uneducated, or afflicted with physical illness, political oppression and/or religious persecution. The majority of the world’s poor live in rural areas or villages. Countless others have left these areas for the metropolises hoping to find a better life – however, only a handful will ever find it.

The Psalter has very often been regarded as the prayer book of the poor (McPolin 1989:79). In the Psalms God is portrayed as the saviour of the poor, their hope, their stronghold and liberator – whether these are prayers of an individual or prayers of the community. The high concentration of the term(s) for the “poor” in the Psalter, in relation to the rest of the books of the Old Testament (OT), indeed indicates a profound affinity for the “poor” in the Psalter. According to Berges (1999a:14-15, 19) this is undoubtedly

an indication that the Psalter underwent a redaction of the “theology of the poor”. It is thus not surprising that the Psalter is regarded more and more as the prayer and meditation book of the small man/person, that is the marginalised.

In this article the focus will be on Psalm 69, as it seems to have undergone a “redaction of the poor”. The main focus will be on verses 33 and 34, as they, specifically, contain terminology of the “poor”. Special attention will also be given to these terms.

## 2 PSALM 69:33A-33B<sup>1</sup>

The vow to praise, which occurs in verses 31-32, is followed by the accomplishment of the praise, which is in the form of blessings or well-wishes. This section positions the whole prayer in the midst of a community regarding itself as “miserable” (Gerstenberger 2001:51). Consolation is now promised to a group of the *‘anāwîm* (“poor”). The emphasis has thus shifted from the individual supplicant – who is described as *‘ānî* (“poor” – 30a) – to the community who is described as *‘anāw* (33a). Colon 33a commences with the verb *rā’û* (“they see”), which is directly followed by the subject (*‘anāwîm* – “poor”)<sup>2</sup>. Noticeable is the fact that this colon contains a second verb (*yišmāhû* – “they will rejoice”). The subject is thus both preceded as well as followed by a verb, which are both applicable to the same subject (*‘anāwîm*).

Colon 33b builds upon the statement which was made in colon 33a. The group of the *‘anāwîm* (“poor”) is now furthermore specified with the honorary title *dôršê Elohim* (“those who seek God”), which is a designation for the faithful and the pious<sup>3</sup>. They, because they seek God, can expect to receive salvation<sup>4</sup>. However, in contrast to 33a where the supplicant speaks about the *‘anāwîm* in the third person, they are now addressed directly by means of a jussive, which is an encouragement in the second person (*wîhî* – “and let

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1 Psalm 69:33ab reads as follows: “The poor see – they will rejoice; you who seek God, let your heart live”.

2 This term alludes to the occurrence of *‘ānî* (“overwhelmed by want, poor, afflicted”) in 30a.

3 Cf also Pss 22:27; 70:5; 105:3; 119:2.

4 Cf Westermann (1960:26): “denen, die Jahwe suchen, kann Heil zugesagt werden”.

live”)<sup>5</sup>. It is noticeable that for the first time in this psalm a jussive (command) is not directed towards the deity anymore. The subject occurs at the end of the colon (“your heart”); the pronominal suffix 2 male plural links the subject to the vocative occurring at the beginning of the colon (*dôršê Elohim* – “those who seek God”).

In these cola the individual vow of praise, which has started in 31ab, is now extended to include the community as well.<sup>6</sup> The supplicant, who is singing this song of praise (*tôdāh*), is attached to a group which is now identified in these cola as the ‘*anāwîm* (“poor”) and the *dôršê Elohim* (“those who seek God”) (cf Levin 1993:374). One can even assume that the supplicant is not only bound to this group but also represents this group, that is to say he functions as *exemplum* of the group. This supplicant is hereby placed on the same level with those who share a common need for Yahweh’s help and likewise have come to seek his aid. The confession of confidence on the part of the individual is offered as a basis for the trust of the community<sup>7</sup>. The community can thus (re-)discover itself in the fate of the individual sufferer, his tribulation, his being threatened by the enemy as well as his trust<sup>8</sup>. The emphasis is thus not upon the (grammatical) individual anymore, as has been the case in the preceding part of the psalm, but has shifted to the group/the community<sup>9</sup>.

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5 According to Kraus (1979:206) “wessen Leben bedroht ist, der ist darauf angewiesen, daß Jahwe sich erbarmend ihm zuwendet und ihm Gutes antut, so daß er wieder auflebt”.

6 In this regard Sedlmeier (1996:114) infers as follows: “zwar ist die Ausweitung auf das Kollektiv hin, die in V. 33 beginnt, auch für die Toda der individuellen Klage-psalmen kennzeichnend”. Cf also Albertz 1994:508-11; Gamberoni 1986:107-8; Gerleman 1982:41 and Gerstenberger 1996:75.

7 Cf Erbele-Küster (2001:177): “Der Beter erkennt, daß Gott zugunsten der Angefeindeten und Bedrückten rettend eingreift”.

8 Cf also Seidl (1999:247): “Die Einzelerfahrung wird zur Erfahrung der Gesamtgruppe”.

9 Gerleman (1982:33-49) formulates this assumption as follows: “Der ‘Einzelne’ ist hier zunächst nicht ein Individuum, sondern ein Typus, Vertreter eines Kollektivs ... Daß das Schicksal des Psalmisten und das eines größeren Menschenkreises in diesen und vielen anderen Psalmen eng aufeinander bezogen sind, ist offensichtlich ... Der ‘Einzelne’, der hier erscheint, wird als exemplum der vielen angeschaut. Seine Rettung soll vorbildlich als Heilszusage ... verstanden werden”.

These people in all likelihood stand around the supplicant as he is citing or singing this song of praise (*tôdāh*)<sup>10</sup>. In these cola the supplicant thus addresses the humble folk, those who lack the material wealth and power to exercise much authority in ordinary human affairs but who are faithful to Yahweh and seek his presence. Their deliverance and prosperity depend upon divine action. They are encouraged by the supplicant to revive their hearts, that is to let their inner vitality as well as inner volition be quickened into new life by confidence in the work of Yahweh (cf Kraus 1979:191 and Tate 1990:200). They surely have no other claim to salvation except the fact that Yahweh, who is a God of *hesed* (14b.17b), would be denying himself if he, in the long term, would keep on overlooking the crying of the poor (i.e. “connective justice”)<sup>11</sup>. Therefore they time and again anticipate his ultimate mercy for the oppressed in eschatological songs of praise<sup>12</sup>. In the subsequent section I will focus in greater detail on the two terms for the poor that occur in Psalm 69:33ab, namely ‘*ānî* and ‘*anāw*.

### 3 ANI / ANAW: AN OUTLINE

The adjective ‘*anāw* (pl. ‘*anāwîm* – “poor”) occurs 21 times in the OT, of which 12 times in the Psalter; and the adjective ‘*ānî* (Ps 69:30a) occurs 75 times in the whole of the OT, of which 30 times in the Psalter<sup>13</sup>. The question of the meaning of the terms for “poor” has generated considerable debate<sup>14</sup>. Much of the discussion has centred

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10 Gunkel & Begrich (1998:200). Cf also Becker (1966:45): “auch der in v. 33 ausgesprochene Hinweis auf die Festgemeinde, die den Dankenden umringt ....”.

11 Cf in this regard Groenewald (2002) for a discussion of the concept “connective justice”.

12 Westermann (1977:109) makes use of the term “eschatologisches Loblied”. In this regard he infers as follows: “Diese eschatologischen Loblieder sind gewissermaßen das Echo der Gemeinde auf die von Gott her ergangene Heilszusage ... jedoch hat er sowohl geschichtlich als auch theologisch als auch nach dem Vorkommen seine feste Verankerung in der Prophetie des II. Jesaja, in der ja auch abgesehen von dieser Form das Reden der Psalmen und der Sprache der Propheten einander begegnen” (Westermann 1977:109-10). Cf also Albertz (1994:520) and Hermisson (2002:92-104).

13 Martin-Achard (1997:933-4). Cf also Berges (2000:232) and Schwantes (1977:35-38).

14 This outline, however, does not aim to give an overview of this whole debate. Comprehensive accounts of the history of this debate occur in

around the relationship between the two terms *'ānî* and *'anāw* – which both occur in Psalm 69, and respectively in cola 30a and 33a. The whole controversial issue in this debate was whether *'ānî* indicates a person who is “socially weak and poor” and whether *'anāw* / *'anāwîm* is a term for the group of “faithful” in Israel; *'anāw* in this sense was regarded as parallel to *šdyq* (“righteous”) and *ḥsd* (“faithful”) (cf Schultz 1973:133-8). This debate has, however, lost its attractiveness as the confidence in etymological deductions has gradually been discarded (Berges 1999a:14-15). Martin-Achard (1997:934)<sup>15</sup> therefore infers that *'anāw* is fundamentally indistinct from *'ānî* in meaning: “poor, lowly, bowed down, insignificant, humble”, and even “meek”. These terms are used interchangeably and can express both material or spiritual poverty (cf McPolin 1989:81-82). They are thus appropriate for those who are humbled through all kinds of material oppression, and in these cases, they depict not only physical suffering, but also a poverty of spirit which demonstrates complete dependence upon God as he is the one who can offer relief of the deep religious needs which the vicissitudes of life present.

Both *'ānî* and *'anāw* are associated with the terms *'ebyôn* (“needy” – 34a)<sup>16</sup> and *dal* (“insignificant, poor, helpless”). They are furthermore also associated with “those who seek God” (*dôršê Elohim* – 33b). In line with this, Blomberg (1999:61) postulates that the psalms manifest the beginning of a recurrent equation between the materially poor and the pious person. Accordingly, the *'ānî* and *'anāw* are distinct from the proud, the mockers and the evildoers. Therefore these adjectives, first of all, do not anymore indicate the “poor” in as far as they are economically deprived, but in as far as they can reckon on an ‘ethical imperative’ (Berges 2000:233; Gillingham 1988/89:16 and Lohfink 1997:333). The “poor” – even

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Birkeland (1933:14-20); Croft (1987:49-53); Dickson (1993:15-37); Fleischer (1989:272-4); Lohfink (1986:155-61, 170-3); Rahlfs (1892:53-88); Schultz (1973:5-20); Van der Ploeg (1950:236-42).

15 Cf also Gerstenberger (1989:263-7).

16 The fact that the two terms *'ānî* and *'ebyôn* constitute a word-pair and occur often in the OT is an indication of the close connection existing between them (cf Prinsloo 1998:397). See, for example, Deut 24:14; Jer 22:16; Ezek 16:49; 18:12; 22:29; Pss 37:14; 40:18; 70:6; 86:1; 109:16.22; Job 24:4.14; Prov. 31:9.

when indicating themselves as *‘ānî* and *‘anāw* – can lay claim to assistance, which in this instance is divine assistance.

The high concentration of the two adjectives *‘ānî* and *‘anāw* in the Psalter in relation to the rest of the books of the OT has already been referred to<sup>17</sup>. Significant is that one-fifth of the psalms contains references to the poor; this fact indicates a profound affinity for the “poor” in the Psalter<sup>18</sup>. According to Berges (1999a:14-15, 19) this is a sign that the Psalter underwent a redaction of the “theology of the poor”. It is thus not surprising that the Psalter is regarded more and more as the prayer and meditation book of the small man, the marginalised, who had a critical view of the post-exilic temple aristocracy as well as their position of power. The Psalter rather functioned as a “*Volksbuch* für Laien ..., das als »fromme« und »konservative« *Kurzfassung* von Tora und Nebiim gelesen, gelernt und gelebt werden konnte” (Zenger 2006:367). The perception that the Psalter functioned as the cultic songbook of the second temple has thus finally been rejected (Füglister 1988:337). Zenger (1998:35) furthermore infers “der Psalter als Ganzer (und im übrigen bereits die meisten Teilsammlungen, die in ihm integriert sind) hat *originär* einen nicht-liturgischen und kultunabhängigen »Sitz im Leben«”. The supplicants of the psalms thus did not find protection in the cult first of all, but rather in the praises of the psalms which ascend to Yahweh, the king of the world, who had established his just rule on mount Zion (Berges 1999a:15).

According to Albertz (1994:518ff) the social and religious split experienced by the Judahite community in the second half of the fifth century as the result of an economic crisis, in all probability led to the formation of a special personal piety in the impoverished lower classes. There is enough evidence indicating the marginalisation of these poorer religious classes in society. This caused the development of a specific kind of personal piety in these classes, namely the so-called “piety of the poor”. The most important task of this theology of the “piety of the poor”, which was developed and practised in these communities, was to restore dignity as well as

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17 Noteworthy is the fact that the second highest occurrence of *‘ānî/‘anāw* occurs in the book of Isaiah, which indicates a close interrelatedness between the Psalter and the book of Isaiah (cf. Berges 1999b:159f).

18 The only exception is the fourth book of the Psalms (Pss. 90-106) where this theme does not play such an important role.

hope to the oppressed victims of the social crisis. This function of this theology explains why the social terms for “poor” took on a religious undertone in the piety of the poor. However, what is meant here is not a religious transfiguration of poverty, but religious compensation for a social lack. According to their own self-understanding, they were not on the periphery of the community, but they formed the core (Albertz 1994:522). This assumption gave them the power to assert themselves within the community of Judah, despite their social marginalisation. They indeed even gained influence over the community as a whole with their “piety of the poor”. This influence is, among other things, to be recognised in the redaction of the Psalter, namely a redaction characterised by the “theology of the poor”.

#### 4 PSALM 69:34A-34B<sup>19</sup>

In these cola the praise, which commenced in cola 33ab, continues. It is in the form of a reflection upon God’s relationship to the poor, and is thus still part of the eschatological song of praise. Colon 34a commences with the conjunction *kî*, through which it is closely linked to the preceding cola. The aforementioned proclamation and call-up are now established in the person of Yahweh. The conjunction thus has a causal function: it introduces additional grounds for the supplicant to sing the song of praise (*tôdāh* – 31b). The conjunction is linked to the participle *šōmē‘a* (“listens”) by means of the *maqṣeph*. Yahweh functions as the subject and occurs in the final position of the colon. It is congruent in both gender and number to the participle *šōmē‘a* (male singular); an identification of subject and predicate with one another is thus established. The participle is then furthermore qualified by the prepositional object (*‘ebyônîm*), as it governs the prepositional object (cf. Tillmann 1993:89). The participle (*šōmē‘a*) fulfils a very important function in this colon: it namely emphasises continued uninterrupted activity which, in this particular instance, is Yahweh’s act of listening to the needy, that is to say to give a favourable hearing to the needy<sup>20</sup>. It

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19 This text reads as follows: “For Yahweh always listens to the needy, and he does not despise his captives”.

20 In this regard Waltke & O’Connor (1990:624) postulates that the use of the participle is, among other things, to emphasise durative circumstances. The state of affairs involves repeated facts as well as action, rather than a particular event. According to Gesenius (1910:355-6 § 116a) “the *participle active*

thus indeed stresses the fact that Yahweh is listening to his needy – those who are dependent on him – is guaranteed and is also of a perpetual nature<sup>21</sup>.

Cola 34a and 34b are syndetically linked together. The object occurs in the first position (<sup>a</sup>*sîrāyw* – “his captives”) and is indicated by means of the *nota objecti*. The pronominal suffix 2 male singular attached to the object (<sup>a</sup>*sîrāyw*), refers back to Yahweh, occurring in the preceding colon. The verb (*bāzāh* – “he despises”), which occurs in the final position, is negated by means of the negative particle. The negative formulation of divine concern is quite striking: it has an undertone of challenge (Albertz 1994:646). Yahweh is actually in a way challenged to prove that he does not despise his prisoners, that is to say “his own who are in bonds”. Although the word <sup>a</sup>*sîrîm* (“captives”) is normally rendered as “prisoners”, it can also refer to those who are suffering and in affliction, or who are economically bound<sup>22</sup>. It is thus not always befitting to be interpreted literally as “prisoners”<sup>23</sup>. Johnson (1979:395-396) wisely warns against taking the “captives” (or “bonds”) in this colon too literally. This approach relates well to the desperate struggle with deadly conditions which are graphically described in Psalm 69:2a-3d and Psalm 69:15a-16c. If this colon is seen in connection with Psalm 69:5ef, which states the fact that the

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indicates a person or thing conceived as being in the continual uninterrupted *exercise* of an activity”.

21 Arambarri (1990:145) analyses this colon as follows: “Die Erhörung war bisher immer die Antwort auf eine konkrete Notlage gewesen; in diesem Text dagegen ist eine allgemeine Überzeugung oder theologische Aussage vorhanden. Auch das Partizip betont eine Eigenschaft (= Jahwe ist einer, der für die Armen eine Antwort hat)”.

22 Cf. for example Isa. 61:1: “The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners” (NRSV).

23 Gesenius (1962:55) renders it, over and above “Gefangenen”, as “leidenden Israeliten”. Some exegetes, however, see this colon as referring to the exilic Judahites. On the basis of this interpretation they therefore ascribe this text to either the late exilic or early post-exilic period (cf. Delitzsch 1894:472; Herkenne 1936:238; Lindström 1994:224; Mays 1994:232; Ridderbos 1958:215; Sedlmeier 1996:115, 158; Tate 1990:200; Van Uchelen 1977:212).



supplicant is innocently accused of theft, the term <sup>a</sup>*sîrîm* can be an indication of people or a group who regard themselves as captives of their persecutors (Cf. Becker 1966:45; Bratcher & Reyburn 1991:607 and Seybold 1996:270). It is thus rather a figure of the bonds of suffering and oppression. It indicates those who are captives of a bleak situation in which they find themselves. In this sense <sup>a</sup>*sîrîm* must be read and interpreted as synonymous with *'anāwîm* (“poor”), *dôršê Elohim* (“those who seek God”) and *'ebyônîm* (“needy”) (Botterweck 1974:38 and Dahood 1970:165).

These two cola (34a and 34b) thus cite an additional justification for the supplicant to praise the name of God. Although they contain other arguments, they are still linked to the preceding cola by means of the conjunction *kî* which indeed indicates a further development of the preceding arguments. These cola furthermore recount the divine benefaction the supplicant is sure to experience. This implies a transaction between Yahweh and the human world, which is recounted in the *kî*-clause (Mayer 1986:433-434). Because the *kî*-clause follows a summons to praise, it constitutes a statement about Yahweh. The group of the *'anāwîm* (“poor”) is furthermore identified by means of two honorary attributes, namely the *'ebyônîm* (“the needy/poor”) and <sup>a</sup>*sîrāyw* (“his captives”, viz. Yahweh’s captives). We can thus presume that because Yahweh always listens to the needy and does not despise any of his prisoners (34ab), the poor will be a witness of this beneficial action of Yahweh, they will rejoice and as a result will let their heart live. The justification for the *tôdāh* (31b) is thus based on Yahweh’s faithful action towards the needy (34ab)<sup>24</sup>.

## 5 *'EBYÔN: AN OUTLINE*

The noun *'ebyôn* (pl. *'ebyônîm*) occurs 61 times in the OT, of which 23 times in the Psalter (Botterweck 1974:29 & Gerstenberger 1997:16). It belongs to a series of words which describe the socially weak and/or poverty. Words belonging to the same semantic field

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24 See also Berges (2000:233), who in this regard infers as follows: “De drie theo-politieke begrippen dal, ebyôn en ani/anaw getuigen van een groeiende betrokkenheid op de ethische sfeer, waarvoor JHWH zelf borg staat en waarvan Hij de behoeder is. Arm-zijn wordt steeds meer – wat boven de economische nood uitgaat – een ‘rechts-grond’, die JHWH, de God van de bevrijding, in het geding brengt. Wat toegespitst kan men zeggen: overal waar de armen zijn, speelt ook JHWH een rol”.

include *'ānî* (30a) and *'anāw* (33a), which both occur in this psalm; as well as other terms which do not occur in this psalm, for example, *dal* (“insignificant, poor, helpless”), *rāš* (“poor”)<sup>25</sup>, as well as *“nî* (“misery, poverty”). According to McPolin (1989:82) *'ebyôn* describes the person who asks<sup>26</sup>. Originally the *'ebyôn* is the one who seeks alms, that is to say the beggar. Only later on the word was used more generally for the poor and/or needy person. In both the legal as well as prophetic corpus the *'ebyôn* is portrayed as the exploited.<sup>27</sup> Wisdom passages, however, often simply have material suffering in mind which stands in contrast to wealth (Spangenberg 1991:250-62. Cf. also Fensham 1962:137).

The manner in which the psalms, in particular, use *'ebyôn* confirms the general impression that in Israel, as everywhere else in the Ancient Near East, the socially weak must have had a special relationship to the deity (cf. Lohfink 1987a:129-32 & Lohfink 1997:333). In this regard Lohfink (1987b:123)<sup>28</sup> infers as follows: “The sun god, appearing under different names according to the different cultures, was everywhere regarded as the god of justice and of a successful human social order. As such, the god had a special affection for the poor”<sup>29</sup>. Purely on the basis of statistics, we could probably fit the great majority of the OT texts, which speak of the “poor”, quite easily into the Ancient Near Eastern picture. However, when the Hebrew world is compared to its social surroundings (*Umwelt*), an interesting process which took place in this regard is noted. Of course, here we have only one God rather than many. This automatically leads us to the question of who takes care for the poor. Here it is not the sun god who takes the responsibility for the socially weak, but the God of Israel, that is to say Yahweh (Janowski 1999:218-9; see also Prinsloo 1996:479).

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25 See Schwantes 1977:16-52 for an extensive discussion of these four preceding terms.

26 It derives from the verb *'bh* which can be rendered as “to want, desire”.

27 With regard to the legal corpus in the OT see Bosman (1991:210-5) and Gillingham (1988/89:16). With regard to the prophetic corpus compare Van Heerden (1991:241).

28 Cf also Lohfink (1992/3:14); (Einführung III: Die “Armen in Bibel und Umwelt”).

29 Examples of sun gods in the ancient Orient are, for example, Shamash in Mesopotamia and Re in Egypt.

In order to illustrate this process which occurred in the Hebrew world, a brief look will be taken at Psalm 82. This psalm is not only an important text in a *religionsgeschichtliche* (“history of religions”) respect, but it also gives a clue to a better understanding of the position of the socially weak in Israel<sup>30</sup>. In verse 1 God (*Elohim* – i.e. Yahweh) is represented anthropomorphically as judge in the midst of the “divine council”. His function as judge is explained in greater detail in the following verses (vv 2-4). The irony is that God (*Elohim* – i.e. Yahweh) is accusing the gods (*elōhîm*) of failing to fulfil their judicial function (v 2). They have judged unjustly and allowed the transgressors to rise to the top of the world’s societies. The important part with regard to the position of the socially weak occurs in the verses 3-4, in which God (Yahweh) challenges the gods (*elōhîm*) to let justice be done to the orphans and the poor, as well as to rescue the weak and the needy from the power of the wicked. But the gods have not done that. In verse 5 it is therefore emphatically stated that the gods have no insight, as a consequence of which they cannot be judges. Instead of letting justice prevail, their behaviour caused a total chaos. And because they have failed to accomplish this command, the verdict of death is pronounced over them (vv 6-7), which means that they are deprived of their divinity (cf. also Hossfeld 1998:241). Therefore, they are to be deposed, and Yahweh alone will take over their task. In the last verse (v 8) the supplicant brings to God the victorious command to give justice to the world. It can thus be deduced that the only one who can give justice and deliverance to the weak and the needy is God. The God of Israel (Yahweh) is regarded as the only true judge and protector of the weak<sup>31</sup>. It is furthermore important to take note of the fact that the most important difference between this specific conception in the Hebrew world, and that of Mesopotamia and Egypt, is the fact that

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30 Hossfeld & Zenger (2000:492) formulates this fact as follows: “Ps 82 bleibt einer der spektakulärsten Texte des Alten Testaments, der in seiner Bedeutung bislang wenig erkannt ist. Mit seiner »Definition« des wahren Gottes ... ist der Psalm sowohl religionsgeschichtlich als auch systematisch-theologisch originell und singulär”.

31 Boshoff (1991:184) analyses this central proposition made in Psalm 82 as follows: “In lyn met die tema van rykdom en armoede is dit interessant dat die maatstaf vir god-wees waarmee Hy die gode beoordeel, is of hulle reg kan laat geskied en die arme kan red”.

the exercising of justice is narrowed down to one God (Yahweh) and all the others are hereby excluded<sup>32</sup>.

The following count as symptoms of “being poor before God”: unfortunate circumstances, contempt, persecution, sickness, near death, etcetera (Gerstenberger 1997:18). It thus applies to those who are humbled through all kinds of material oppression, and in these cases, it depicts not only the physical suffering, but also a poverty of spirit which demonstrates complete dependence upon God<sup>33</sup>. The term *'ebyôn* in the psalms is furthermore used to depict what has happened as a result of the malevolent actions of others, rather than describing any particular status of the psalmist/supplicant in question. The *'ebyônîm* are clearly distinct to those who are in authority, to the oppressors, the mighty, the evildoers and the wicked (Berges 2000:232). It is indeed to be seen as a stereotyped term which refers to all who have been deprived of their rights, and so must wait for God alone, for he is the only source of vindication. It is thus apparent that Yahweh is portrayed as the deliverer of the *'ebyônîm* (Botterweck 1974:38-40). In most of the individual psalms of lament, like in Psalm 69, the believing hope and the certainty that Yahweh will give a favourable hearing is expressed by referring to his divine deliverance. This hope and confidence is based on the *'ebyôn*'s faith in God, namely the fact that he is abundant in steadfast love (69:14b.17b) and full of mercy (69:17c). The *'ebyôn* (“needy/poor”) thus relies on Yahweh to reciprocate his enemies (69:23a-29b), to turn to him (69:17c), not to hide his face from him (69:18a) and to hear his prayer (69:14b.17a.18c) in the faithfulness of his salvation (69:14b).

## 6 CONCLUSION

In general the Psalms are sincere expressions of feeling. They are cries of the heart to God expressing fundamental attitudes towards God and human life. The cry of the poor is a calling on God and also a cry of deep distress. The poor and the needy implore God to hear and answer them in their distress and their petition is one of trust.

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32 Cf. also Fensham (1962:130-135); Krawczack (2001:52); Labuschagne (1966:83f); Lohfink (1994:7); Loretz (2002:276); W S Prinsloo (1995:227; 2000:118) and Stendebach (1986:439).

33 Cf Berges (2000:232): “De connotatie ‘behoefstig zijn’ die meeklinkt in het woord *ebjôn* is van het sociale niveau overgedragen op het religieuze vlak”.

God is thus never so absent for the poor that God cannot be present to their outcry, so that they can express their belief that there is always hope for the poor.

In this article the focus was on Psalm 69:33-34 in view of the terminology of the poor used in this text. Attention was given to the terms 'ānî/'anāw (pl. 'anāwîm) and 'ebyôn – specifically on the way they function within the context of Psalm 69. It seems that these verses undergone a “redaction of the poor”, that is they reflect the “piety of the poor”. This development in the literary history of ancient Israel had the task to restore dignity, as well as hope for those in the Judahite society who regarded themselves to be victims of the social crisis during the fifth century.

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