


A plea for vengeance in Psalm 35: 1-3 and its reflections in Africa (Yoruba) indigenous churches

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Psalm 35 is one of the most popular, widely read and used Psalm among the African indigenous churches (Yoruba) in Nigeria. This article investigates why and how Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 is used as a plea for vengeance among the Yoruba Christians in African indigenous churches in Nigeria. The article explores how the plea for vengeance is understood and expressed in the African traditional context. African biblical hermeneutics with the view of providing a useful lens to reread biblical text in African context was adopted for the study. It was discovered that as early as the 3rd-century Christian era, the book of Psalms was used in the liturgy of the church. The notion of vengeance as found in Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 is a recurrent theme in African indigenous churches in Nigeria. This Psalm is used among the Yoruba Christians in African indigenous churches as a plea for divine intervention against their enemies. Through a synthesis of biblical and traditional African sources, this article demonstrates how the plea for vengeance is expressed in the cultural practices and beliefs of African indigenous churches. The plea for vengeance in this Psalm is a reflection of African indigenous churches' understanding of key social issues such as justice, relationships between individuals and groups, and the need to maintain social integrity. Psalm 35 is usually read, sung, memorised, inscribed on parchment, and chanted by African Christians and non-Christians as expression of faith in God to intervene in the issues confronting them as he did for the Psalmist.

Intradisciplinary and/or interdisciplinary implications: The Yoruba Christian readers of Psalm 35vv. 1-3 appeal to God for intervention against their enemies. The article emphasises that Christians should not take laws into their hands but trust in God for justice.

Keywords: vengeance; Yoruba Christians; African indigenous churches; Psalm 35; Nigeria.

Introduction

The Book of Psalms, found in the Bible, was originally the hymn book of ancient Israel. It is a collection of religious songs, poems and prayers attributed to David and other authors from the time of Moses to the time after the Babylonian Captivity (McCain 2002:188). Psalms were sung in the temple (Ps 100), and by the early Church (Col 3:16). When a Psalm was sung, the singer was testifying to God's greatness and the listener was hearing how God had worked in another person's life, and everyone was encouraged to trust in God's power (Schultz & Garry 2001:113). In Psalms, the Israelite worshippers had a ready-made prayer for all of life's vicissitudes (Dillard & Longman 1994:218). Among the diverse themes explored within the Psalms, one that stands out is the expression of raw human emotions and the profound spiritual connection between the Psalmist and God. To read and pray the Psalm is to join the voices of numberless people who too have read and prayed them, and have felt their joy, anguish and indignation (Bullock 1979:113).

According to Nasuti (2001:144), the book of Psalms is like the trends in modern speech act theory and contains potent and effective words. To buttress this assertion, Adamo (2007:58) maintained that the Psalms is the best, the favourite and most cited book in the Old Testament by the African indigenous churches in Nigeria because of the belief that its contents are the most potent and effective words in the Bible. Most times, the African indigenous churches draw their prayer items, sermon topics and songs from the contents of the Psalter (Awojobi 2021a:9). Psalms, as a genre, encompasses a wide range of emotions, from praise and thanksgiving to lament and imprecation, making them a valuable source for understanding the religious life of ancient Israel.

Psalm 35 has attracted the attention of many biblical scholars across the globe. This Psalm means different things to different people. This is the reason why Psalm 35 has been given different names by biblical scholars. For instance, Kraus (1988) titled this Psalm as 'Plea for Yahweh's

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Assistance against False and Hostile Witnesses'. Craigie (1983:10) calls it 'A Royal Psalm for International Crisis'. While Weiser (1998:300) sees it as, 'Lament of one of the Quiet in the Land' (1998:300) and DeClaise-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner (2014:331) named it 'Fight for Me, Save me'. For Ross (2011:759), this is called 'Hated Without a Cause' (2011:759); Mays (2011:154) gives it 'You Deliver the Weak'. Schaefer (2001:86) titles it, 'Do not let them Rejoice over Me'. As far as Anderson (1972:275) is concerned, it is 'A Prayer for Deliverance'. Brueggemann and Bellinger Jr. (2014:176) believe that it is a 'Psalm of zeal', while Oduyoye (1997:7–10) titles it 'The Psalms of Satan'.

Psalm 35 is very controversial among Christians and biblical scholars today because it contains words of hate, and violence instead of love and compassion as found in the teachings of Jesus in the New Testament. In fact, a scholar reworked the book of Psalms and expunged all the imprecatory Psalms including Psalm 35 (Oduyoye 1997:7–10). The Psalmist's plea for divine intervention and vengeance against his enemies raises complex questions about the theological and ethical dimensions of seeking retribution and justice. The enemies referred to in this Psalm are not foreign enemies like the Babylonians and the Assyrians but enemies within (Ross 2011:763).

Theological perspectives on Psalms 35 vary, with scholars interpreting the passage in different ways. Some emphasise the imprecatory nature of the Psalm, where the Psalmist calls upon God to take vengeance on his enemies (Mays 1994). Others focus on the theme of divine rescue and salvation, viewing the Psalmist's plea as an expression of trust in God's protection (Collins 2014). This diversity of interpretations highlights the richness and complexity of Psalms 35 within the larger biblical canon.

This article aims to examine how Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 is read and understood among the Yoruba in African indigenous churches in Nigeria, especially in their time of trouble. Another purpose of this article is also for readers and scholars to understand not only the resemblance between Psalm 35 and African *ogede*, *ofo* or *madarikan* [incantations] in content, intention and formula but in order to understand why Psalm 35 is loved by Yoruba and other African Christians, especially when they are in trouble (Adamo 2019:14–33). Within this rich tapestry of emotions and theological exploration, Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 occupies a significant place. Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 is a portion of Scripture in which the Psalmist fervently implores God for help and vindication in the face of adversaries. This article interpretes Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 in the light of vengeance, vindication and protection against enemies which are considered the greatest needs of the African people. Table 1 shows the text in both English and Hebrew.

TABLE 1: Psalm 35:1-3: Comparison between the English and Hebrew.

English	Hebrew
Contend, O LORD with those who contend with me; fight with those who fight with me. Take up shield and buckler; arise and come to my aid. Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to my soul, I am your salvation (NIV).	<p>WTT Psalm לְתוֹרֵי רִיבֵי יְהוָה אֶת־רִיבֵי לָאִם אֶת־לְמִי: הִתְחַמַּק מִנִּי וְצַדִּיק לְפָנַי בְּעִנְיֹתַי:² וְתִקַּח מִגִּית וְסֶבֶר לְקִרְיַת רִדְפֵי אֹמֵר לְנַפְשִׁי יִשְׁעֲתָה אֵלַי:³</p>

WTT, Westminster Leningrad Codex.

Literary analysis of Psalm 35

This section of the article discusses the Western position on Psalm 35. It considers, among other things, the various interpretations of biblical scholars on the Psalm under consideration. A good understanding of their views will help in appreciating the African contemporary interpretation of the text.

Traditionally, the authorship of Psalm 35 is ascribed to King David, although it is held in many quarters that its composition was perhaps in the post-exilic era (Ross 2011:763). Psalm 35 has been a subject of scholarly exploration from both historical and theological perspectives. Historically, this passage is situated within the broader context of the Psalms, which were likely compiled over centuries, reflecting the religious and cultural evolution of ancient Israel (Collins 2014). Psalm 35 is grouped among the imprecatory Psalms. Imprecatory Psalms are Psalms of cursing. They are Psalms composed of persons in difficult situations. They are usually in the form of pleas or cries or laments to the divinity for vengeance against enemies. These are Psalms calling for immediate judgement against known enemies (Simango & Kruger 2016). It is crucial to mention that scholars are divided into camps on whether the term imprecatory should be used for these types of Psalms or not (Laney 1981:35–44). Other issues associated with the imprecatory Psalms are that they are full of curses, and vengeance and as such were called Psalms of hate and violence (Crenshaw 2001:65). As far as Crenshaw (2001:68) is concerned, imprecatory Psalms are theologically wrong. This is what made Brueggemann declare that imprecatory Psalms are Psalms of disorientation and darkness (1984:52). The contents of the imprecatory Psalms are at variance with the teaching of Jesus Christ on love in the New Testament (Zenger 1996). To this end, Laney concluded that imprecatory Psalms are not good for Christians (Mowinckel 1962:48–49). However, to some scholars, the imprecatory Psalms are merely linguistic styles which the author may not consider seriously (Adamo 2006:139–153).

To proffer solutions to the issues surrounding the imprecatory Psalms, some scholars opine that the words in these categories of Psalm are personal sentiments from the Psalmists, void of inspiration and should be ignored because they are personal responses of aggrieved, hurt, oppressed, marginalised and persecuted individuals calling the divinity to intervene quickly (Kittel 1913:143). It should be noted that some scholars are of the view that the words of violence, hate and plea for vengeance are prophetic in nature (Cragie 1983:10) and should not be treated as personal wishes of the Psalmist on his enemies (Lockyer 1993:446–447).

According to Laney, imprecatory Psalms are covenant Psalms because they are based on covenant (Laney 1995:66–67). Imprecatory Psalms are abjurations against evil forces and spirits (Laney 1995:66–67). Mowinckel agreed that imprecatory Psalms are pronouncements of curses against evil and demonic forces which manifest in sicknesses, and all

forces of evil (Simango & Krugel 2016:584). However, according to Luc, Vos and Day, the imprecatory Psalms are relevant to contemporary Christians because it is a plea for divine justice (1985:10). To discover the relevance of imprecatory Psalms, there is the need to study its social, cultural and religious settings as it relates to the ancient Near East practices and norms. This will help in discovering the intention of the author and how to apply it to contemporary contexts (Simango & Krugel 2016:584).

Besides, Psalm 35 is a Psalm of lamentation (Brueggemann & Bellinger 2014:174). It is usually categorised among the individual lament (Cragie 1983:285). Recent biblical studies on the Psalter have shown that Psalms in the category of lamentation have great theological significance in worship in ancient Israel and the contemporary church (Brueggemann 1995:98).

Interpretation of Psalm 35:1–3

This section of the article considers Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 with the purpose of understanding the original intention of the author. As mentioned earlier, the Jewish tradition ascribed the authorship of this Psalm to King David. They claimed that this Psalm was composed when David was going through tough times. Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 is a passage that vividly illustrates the Psalmist's plea for vengeance against his adversaries. In verse 1, he declared: 'Contend, O Lord with those who contend with me' [אֶת־יָרִיבַי לָחֵם אֶת־לְחֻמֵּי] (Ps 35:1). The psalmist begins with a call for God to contend with his adversaries and to arise for his aid. This statement suggests that the author is going through a tough time and he is calling on God to step in and fight for him. The author employs passionate and metaphorical language to implore divine intervention. This use of the word 'contend' is significant, suggesting a legal or judicial aspect to the plea, wherein the Psalmist seeks God's involvement in settling the matter.

The Psalmist further requests God to 'fight against those who fight against me'. This is an indication that the enemies are real and the author can see them around him. The most significant usage of the verb לָחֵם I, fight or do battle occurs 171 times and pertains to God's role in Israel's wars. When God calls Israel to arms against an enemy, it is because of the enemy's moral degradation (Dt 7:4, 16, 25; Dt 20:18 etc.). In such conflicts, it is the Lord who does battle on Israel's behalf (Ex 14:14, 25; Dt 1:30; Dt 3:22; Jos 10:14, 42; Jr 21:5; Neh 4:14; 2 Chr 20:29). In doing so, Yahweh often calls into his service not only Israel but also the elements of nature (Jos 10:11; Jos 24:7; Jdg 5:20). It was Yahweh who went before them (Jdg 4:14; Dt 20:4; 2 Sm 5:24), gave them courage (1 Sm 30:6) and took it from their foes (Ex 15:15–16; Ex 23:27ff) by miracles (Jos 10:11; Jos 24:7; Jdg 5:20) and by terror (1 Sm 14:15) (NDNT, VI:508)¹. Knowing what Yahweh did for Israel, the psalmist is calling on him to do the same in his situation.

1. See Moisés Silva 2014.

In verse 2, the author said: 'take up shield and armor' and to 'arise and come to my aid' [הִתְחַזַק מִנֵּן וְצַנְדָּה וְקִימָה בְּצַדִּיקַי] (Ps 35:2 WTT). The Hebrew word [מִנֵּן] shield occurs only in the Piel. The verb and its derivatives occur about 130 times. The basic idea of the verb is to cover over and thus shield from danger (Harris et al. 1980). The word [מִנֵּן] is used only in reference to the protective guardianship of God. Of its eight occurrences, six have to do with the Assyrian crisis in the days of Hezekiah. Isaiah assured the king that God would care for Jerusalem like a mother bird hovering with wings spread over her young in the nest (Is 31:5). God would protect Jerusalem in this crisis for his own sake and for the sake of David (Is 37:35). The deliverance of Jerusalem would demonstrate to the world that God was faithful to his promises and mighty to deliver his people from their oppressors. Zechariah twice uses the same verb to describe the divine protection of God's people in their wars against the sons of Greece (Zch 9:15) and of Jerusalem in the last days (Zch 12:8). God is asked to get all the weapons of war ready for this battle (VanGemeren 1997:76 [2]). This imagery paints a picture of God as a divine warrior who actively engages in battle on behalf of the Psalmist. These metaphors emphasise God's role as both a protector and a warrior in the face of adversity. The use of military imagery, such as shields, armour, spears and javelins, underscores the urgency of the plea (Brueggemann 2014). The Psalmist seeks not only God's intervention but also divine vindication and protection. The subsequent verses intensify the plea for divine intervention and vengeance.

The plea continues in verse 3 with a call for God to 'brandish spear and javelin' against the pursuers, and a declaration that God is the Psalmist's 'salvation' (Ps 35:3). These metaphors emphasise God's role as both a protector and a warrior in the face of adversity. The author appears to be aware that God had the weapons of war he mentioned at his disposal and all he needed was to take them up and use them for him to fight the enemies. The phrase 'I am your salvation' is an assurance from the psalmist that Yahweh is in charge of the situation and there is no cause for alarm. He is sure that he has won the battle already because Yahweh will fight for him. In verses 1–3, the petition to Yahweh is strong. It appears the Psalmist is saying, after all, the trouble is yours, God and it is time to act and fix it.

Theological interpretation of Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 delves into questions about the ethics of seeking vengeance. Some argue that the imprecatory nature of the Psalm reflects the Psalmist's trust in God's justice and willingness to see wrongs righted (Mays 1994). Others caution against endorsing revenge, emphasising the importance of interpreting such passages within the broader context of biblical ethics (Westermann 1981). This debate underscores the complexity of Psalm 35:1–3 and its implications for contemporary theology.

The theological implications of seeking vengeance in the Old Testament are multifaceted. On one hand, passages like Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 depict a belief in divine justice and the Psalmist's trust in God's willingness to right wrongs. The Psalmist's plea is an expression of confidence in God's role as

a protector and vindicator of the righteous (Mays 1994). However, seeking vengeance in the Old Testament also raises ethical questions. While the Bible contains imprecatory psalms like Psalm 35, it also contains teachings that emphasise forgiveness and leaving vengeance to the Lord (e.g. Pr 20:22; Rm 12:19). The tension between seeking vengeance and relying on God's justice is a recurring theme in Old Testament theology (Wright 2009).

A comparative analysis of Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 with other biblical passages on vengeance reveals varying perspectives within the Old Testament. For example, Psalm 94:1 states, 'The Lord is a God who avenges. O God who avenges, shine forth'. This verse echoes the sentiment of divine vengeance seen in Psalm 35, emphasising God's role as an avenger. On the contrary, Proverbs 20:22 advises, 'Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the Lord, and he will avenge you'. This proverb counsels against seeking personal vengeance and encourages trust in divine retribution. Additionally, Jesus' teachings in the New Testament, such as 'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Mt 5:44), introduce a different perspective that emphasises forgiveness and non-retaliation. Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 presents a theological view of divine intervention and vengeance within the Old Testament. While it reflects the Psalmist's passionate plea for God's justice, the broader biblical context and comparative analysis with other passages reveal the complexities and tensions surrounding the theological concept of vengeance in the Bible.

Reading Psalm 35 vv. 1-3 among the Yoruba in African indigenous churches in Nigeria

Here the article investigates how and why the Yoruba Christians in African indigenous churches in Nigeria use Psalm 35.

The Yoruba are one of the main ethnic groups in Nigeria. They are mostly found in the south-western part of the country. They are one of the ethnic groups that first received Christianity when the missionaries came from Europe and America. The Yoruba that first became Christians were members of mainline Churches like the Anglican, Baptist, Methodist and the like before floating the African indigenous churches as a response to the challenges they were facing as African Christians. When Christianity was introduced to Africa by missionaries from Europe and America, their converts in Yoruba land were not allowed to use the African indigenous medicine that they were used to before accepting the new religion. Prior to the arrival of these missionaries, the people were used to herbal medicine [*ofo*] talisman and [*madarikan*] for protection; but after they became Christians, the missionaries told them to trust Christ for their protection. However, these African Yoruba converts to Christianity still had challenges with witches, wizards, sorcerers, diseases and enemies who they claimed to be the sources of their misfortune and troubles. It was these issues that made them search the

Bible continuously to know if there were Scriptures that addressed their ugly predicaments. In their search, they discovered the Psalms whose authors had similar challenges to their own and adopted it as a replacement for incantations in African indigenous religion. To their own mind, the words of the Psalms are potent and can be used for healing, protection, provision and success. This led to the excommunication of many of them from the mission-established churches. Others who remained in the mission-established churches eventually broke away to start new church movements that were later called the African indigenous churches (Adamo 2019).

The reason for the breakaway was not to go back into African indigenous religion but to find greater power in Christianity through the Bible. The separation gave them the freedom to search the Bible on their own to discover what they claimed to be the hidden power in the Bible. Through their search, they came in contact with the Psalms and it became their favourite book for defence and protection against enemies. To their amazement, the Psalms are almost like an incantation, *ofo, ogede* in their African religion. They approached the Bible and used it in the same way the indigenous Yoruba people used their incantation, *ofo, ogede* to deal with issues confronting them (Adamo 2018) This type of African Christians used mainly the imprecatory Psalms such as Psalm 35 for spiritual warfare against their enemies. They maintained that imprecatory Psalms are potent words that are irrevocable to fight evil forces. They recite it, sing it, read it into bathing water, drink or sprinkle it on properties, write it on paper, on vehicles, on house walls, doors, on clothes and any living and non-living things for healing, success, protection or security purposes (Adamo 2018). This made the imprecatory Psalms popular among the Yoruba people of Nigeria.

Today, this practice has spread to most of the established mission churches in Nigeria, especially among the Yoruba people. It should be noted that the Africans opined that words are very powerful especially when they are spoken in faith. For instance, in African traditional religion, whenever the priest and the Babalawo invoke words by faith they are established. Such is the power in the spoken words when they are memorised, spoken and recited (Adamo 2015). The Yoruba Christians maintained that if the spoken words in African religion are potent, the words in the Bible are more potent than that. For the word of God is powerful and sharper than a two-edged sword (Heb 4:12). That is why they inscribe the words in the Bible especially Psalm 35 on the door post to protect the house, on motor vehicles to prevent enemies from causing an accident and on parchment to ward off evil spirits and read it into the water for healing (Adamo 2019).

Psalm 35 is regarded as *Madarkan, ofo, oro ogede* [incantations] in Yoruba tradition. *Madarikan* is another way of protection in African religion and tradition (Adamo 2019). According to Dopamu, Psalm 35 is *ofo, madarikan, and ogede* that Christians recite (1987:5061). He stressed that the Yoruba people use *Madarikan* or *ofo* for victory over enemies. One does not wait

for the time one is aware that he or she has enemies before using *Madarikan*. Because it gives victory over enemies known or unknown. *Madarikan* is not an evil thing because it protects people from evil. It thwarts the evil plan of enemies to nothing (Dopamu 1987:5061).

In Psalm 35 v. 1 the psalmist says, 'Contend, O LORD with those who contend with me' [וְיָבֹהֶּ, יְהוָה אֶת־יָרִיבָי] (Ps 35:1 WTT), [*Oluwa gbogun ti awon ti o gbogun ti mi*]. This is a language of war. It is an appeal to Yahweh for justice (Barker & Kohlenberger 1994:835). It appears that the author of this Psalm suffered injustice from some quarters and there is a gang up against him from forces he cannot contend with. This statement is a call by a person in distress to God for intervention in his situation. It appears from this pronouncement that the author of this Psalm is surrounded by forces that are greater than him. This is a call for help and protection from real enemies. To the Yoruba, nothing happens without a cause. All evil things happen as a result of an enemy's activity (Adamo 2015). This is why to the Yoruba, the world is a warfare, [*ogun laiye*] and full of enemies [*ota*] and as such everyone should prepare for war on a daily basis. In the African religious experience, everyone is made aware of the need to be protected against enemies (Adamo 2005:73). An enemy in the Yoruba understanding may include opposition from individuals and organised opposition from both human and spiritual groups working together. The definition of who is an enemy includes personal and close friends. Enmity may also occur as a result of a quarrel between two persons who refuse to forgive each other. They may include all oppressors, the so-called friends and, of course, the devils and demons (Ademiluka 2009:216–241). This is why 'Contend, O LORD with those who contend with me' will appeal to an average Yoruba person. With the understanding that God himself is a man of war, they can rest assured that once God is called and he accepts, the battle is now God's and as such victory is guaranteed.

The expression '*fi ija fun awon timba mi ja*' [fight with those who fight with me] should be noted. The metaphor of lawsuit changes to that of warfare. The Lord is likened to a warrior who fights on behalf of his own. This is a plea to God to take over the battle and do the fight himself. Praying Psalm 35 is an act of faith that God will judge the wicked and, therefore, instead of fighting by visiting *Babalawo* [Yoruba medicine man] to obtain medicine to kill the enemies as is often the case in African indigenous religion. The Yoruba Christians leave everything to God to do justice for the oppressed (Adamo 2006:139–153).

In Psalm 35 v. 2, the psalmist declares: '*Di asa on apata mu, ki o sidide fun iranlowo mi* [take up shield and buckler]'. The shield is for protection (VanGemeren 1997:847[2]). The author of this Psalm is calling for help from a greater quarter. To the Yoruba, no human is an island on his own. Humans are created to depend on one another. However, whenever the help from humans fails, God is to be consulted and appealed to for intervention. The help of God is considered the greatest of all help. It should be noted that Africans are always soliciting help in one way or the other. This is evident

by the way governments in most African nations beg for help and support from the developed nations to build their nations. The level of poverty, insecurity and health issues is very high in Africa (Awojobi 2021b:78).

Psalm 35 v. 3 is another appeal to God to fight and not spare the enemies at all because they actively pursue and persecute the Psalmist (VanGemeren 1997:368 [1]). The Psalmist said: '*fa oko yo pelu ki o si dena awon tin se inunibini si mi: wi fun okan mi pe, Emini igbala re* [Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to my soul, I am your salvation]'. The Yorubas are warriors. They had their own empire and fought many wars. During the intertribal wars in Nigeria, the Yoruba warriors were used to spear and javelin. Most of the warriors had bows, arrows, spears and javelins in their hands. The expression 'Brandish spear and javelin' is meaningful to the Yoruba, because instead of humans using these weapons of war, it is God who will now use them against their enemies in battle. Because God is now the one fighting against human and unseen enemies, victory is guaranteed. The Psalmist concluded that '*wi fun okan mi pe, emi ni igbala re* [say to my soul, I am now your salvation]'. This is a statement of confidence in the salvation of God. The Psalmist does not need to worry or fight again because God has taken over the fight and he is fighting on his behalf.

It should be noted at this juncture that, one of the African indigenous churches in Nigeria that is fond of appealing to God for vengeance over their enemies is the church called Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries (MFM). This Christian group was founded in 1989 by a Yoruba man by the name Dr Daniel Kolawole Olukoya who was a former member of Christ Apostolic Church (CAC)². Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries is known for its dynamic and often confrontational approach to spiritual issues, including the battle against perceived spiritual and physical enemies (Olukoya 2008). Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries' interpretation of Psalm 35 and similar imprecatory Psalms is characterised by an emphasis on victory over spiritual adversaries and the belief in God's willingness to contend with the enemies of believers (Olukoya 2008). The members of MFM are always seen calling down fire on their enemies whenever they pray. They use the Psalms and any other Bible passages that talk about spiritual warfare. One of the popular Psalms among them is Psalm 35. They often reference the metaphoric language of shields, armour, spears and divine warriors from the Psalm to illustrate the idea of God actively engaging in battle on behalf of believers. Mountain of Fire and Miracles Ministries teaches that divine vengeance can manifest as deliverance from oppressive situations, financial breakthroughs, physical healing and protection from harm (Olukoya 2008). Members are encouraged to engage in specific prayer sessions and rituals designed to invoke God's retribution against their perceived enemies. These practices are viewed as essential for achieving victory and success in various life domains.

2. See www.mountainoffire.org/.

Conclusion

This article reveals that the book of Psalms was very popular in ancient Israel and the early Church. The Psalms in the category called imprecatory Psalm in which Psalm 35 is part are controversial among some biblical scholars and Christians. This is because they contain words of hate, violence, vengeance and warfare against enemies. It is clear from this article that the author of this Psalm is calling on God for immediate vengeance on the perceived enemies because he believes that he can only be rescued by him. In the same way, the Yoruba Christians in African indigenous churches in Nigeria use Psalm 35 to express God's righteous indignation against injustice and evil. Instead of physically fighting their enemies or visiting native doctors (Babalawo) for charms to deal with them, they now resolved to appeal to God for justice. This action strengthens their faith in the God of the Bible as they now leave vengeance to him. The Yoruba Christians in Nigeria believe that by reading, singing, reciting, and inscribing Psalm 35 on their houses, clothes, and vehicles, they take on the identity of the psalmist. As a result, they expect to experience what the author and ancient Israel experienced. To this end, their security, help and success are guaranteed. In this way, the Bible now becomes a substitute for African indigenous incantation (*ofo, ogede, madarikan*), talismans or amulets used for protection, healing and success before their encounter with Christianity. This has generated unwavering faith in them that the God of the Christians and the Bible are more powerful and able to fight their battle than the traditional deities.

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