

Psalms 69:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.

Analysis

They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink. This verse describes cruel mockery disguised as mercy—enemies offer the sufferer bitter poison instead of food and sour wine instead of water. 'Gall' (rosh, רֹאשׁ) can mean poison or a bitter herb (possibly wormwood or hemlock). The Hebrew parallelism emphasizes the perversity: instead of satisfying hunger and thirst, enemies increase suffering under pretense of help.

The gospels record this verse's literal fulfillment at Christ's crucifixion. Matthew 27:34 says soldiers offered Jesus wine mixed with gall, which He refused. Later, when Jesus said 'I thirst,' they gave Him vinegar on a sponge (John 19:28-29). What appeared as mercy—giving a drink to a dying man—was actually mockery. The sour wine was posca, cheap wine drunk by Roman soldiers, given to extend suffering rather than ease it. This prophecy-fulfillment demonstrates Scripture's detailed foretelling of Messiah's passion.

Spiritually, this verse represents the world's false comfort—what appears as satisfaction actually poisons. Sin promises pleasure but delivers death (Romans 6:23). The world offers 'living water' that leaves us thirsty (John 4:13). Only Christ provides true satisfaction: 'whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst' (John 4:14). Jesus, who was given gall and vinegar, now offers His own body and blood as true food and drink (John 6:55). What the world gave Him—poison and mockery—He transforms into salvation for us.

Historical Context

Crucifixion was designed for maximum suffering, and Roman executioners developed methods to prolong agony. The sour wine (oxos) served multiple purposes: it was cheap, so freely given to criminals; it was mildly anesthetic, which could prolong life and therefore suffering; and offering it mocked the victim's helplessness. The soldiers' actions fulfilled prophecy while serving Roman cruelty.

The 'gall' offered initially (Matthew 27:34) was likely myrrh mixed with wine, a mild narcotic that Jewish women customarily offered to crucifixion victims to dull pain (based on Proverbs 31:6, 'Give strong drink to him who is perishing'). Jesus refused this, choosing to face death's full agony conscious and aware. His refusal demonstrated His voluntary sacrifice—He would drink the cup of God's wrath fully, with no numbing agent.

The final offer of vinegar (John 19:29-30) preceded Jesus' death. John's gospel emphasizes that Jesus spoke 'I thirst' to fulfill Scripture, then after receiving the vinegar said, 'It is finished.' This wasn't random detail but theological point: even in death's throes, Jesus fulfilled every prophecy, completing salvation's work. The early church saw profound typology here—Jesus refused the gall but accepted the vinegar, maintaining consciousness to complete His mission. Where Adam and Eve grasped forbidden fruit, Jesus refused even legitimate pain relief to accomplish redemption.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. What 'gall' and 'vinegar' does the world offer as satisfaction that actually leaves you empty or poisoned?

2. How does Jesus' refusal of numbing agents challenge modern culture's avoidance of suffering?
3. In what ways has Christ satisfied your deepest hunger and thirst that the world cannot?
4. How can you discern between false comfort (the world's offerings) and true comfort (Christ)?
5. What does it mean to you that Jesus experienced mockery while thirsting so you can have living water?

Interlinear Text

וַתֵּן ו	בְּבָרוֹתַי	רִאשׁוֹ	לְצִמָּאִי	יִשְׁקוּ וְנִי
They gave	for my meat	me also gall	and in my thirst	to drink
H5414	H1267	H7219	H6772	H8248

וַתֵּן לִי חֶמֶץ:

they gave me vinegar

H2558

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 27:34 (Parallel theme): They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink.

Mark 15:23 (Parallel theme): And they gave him to drink wine mingled with myrrh: but he received it not.

Luke 23:36 (Parallel theme): And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar,

Matthew 27:48 (Parallel theme): And straightway one of them ran, and took a sponge, and filled it with vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink.

Mark 15:36 (Parallel theme): And one ran and filled a sponge full of vinegar, and put it on a reed, and gave him to drink, saying, Let alone; let us see whether Elias will come to take him down.

Jeremiah 9:15 (Parallel theme): Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel; Behold, I will feed them, even this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink.

Jeremiah 8:14 (Parallel theme): Why do we sit still? assemble yourselves, and let us enter into the defenced cities, and let us be silent there: for the LORD our God hath put us to silence, and given us water of gall to drink, because we have sinned against the LORD.

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