

PSALM 109 & 137

Psalms of Imprecation

Psalm 109

¹ For the director of music. Of David. A psalm. O God, whom I praise, do not remain silent, ² for wicked and deceitful men have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues. ³ With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause. ⁴ In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer... ⁸ May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership. ⁹ May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. ¹⁰ May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes. ¹¹ May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor. ¹² May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children. ¹³ May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation. ¹⁴ May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out. ¹⁵ May their sins always remain before the LORD, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth... ³⁰ With my mouth I will greatly extol the LORD; in the great throng I will praise him. ³¹ For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save his life from those who condemn him.

Psalm 137

By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. ² There on the poplars we hung our harps, ³ for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" ⁴ How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land? ⁵ If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. ⁶ May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth if I do not remember you, if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy. ⁷ Remember, O LORD, what the Edomites did on the day Jerusalem fell. "Tear it down," they cried, "tear it down to its foundations!" ⁸ O Daughter of Babylon, doomed to destruction, happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us- ⁹ he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.

Matthew 5:44

Love your enemies

Bless those who curse you

Do good to those who hate you

Pray for those who persecute you

Psalm 109 & 137

⁸ May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership; ⁹ may his children be fatherless and his wife a widow (Psalm 109)

⁸ O Daughter of Babylon... happy is he who repays you for what you have done to us- ⁹ he who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks. (Psalm 137)

¹¹ May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruit of his labors, ¹² may no one extend kindness to him (Psalm 109)

¹⁵ May their sins always remain before the LORD, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth. (Psalm 109)

I. Imprecatory Psalms - Psalms that declare a desire for God's just vengeance to fall on enemies. (E.g., Ps. 35, 70, 109, 137)

II. Imprecatory Psalms- A critical response

These psalms display "the undisguised gloating and the cruel vindictiveness of an intolerant religious fanaticism . . . it is one of those dangerous poisonous blossoms . . . which show the limits set to the Old Testament religion." (Arthur Weiser, The Psalms, OTL, 432)

"How can we really pray those psalms today, if we can no longer truly accept their genuine meaning at every point?" We need . . . "the New Testament corrective to this imperfect Old Testament way of thinking." (Heinrich Junker, OT prof at Trier)

Summary: these texts are offensive, sub-Christian, OT Jewish ideas, which need the NT corrective.

III. Imprecatory Psalms- A Conservative Critical Response

Such Psalms are "devilish," "terrible or (dare we say?) contemptible," "wicked," "sinful," "ferocious," "dangerous" (C.S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms)

"the sentiments are in themselves evil" and "these psalms are not the oracles of God" (Peter Craigie, WBC 41).

Summary: these parts of the OT are inferior to what Jesus had in mind in the NT, they are full of carnal passions that are inexcusable, some call them repulsive.

IV. Imprecatory Psalms— your response?

- 1) Which of the above explanations do you think is the most common today? Why? What is *your* reaction to the imprecatory Psalms?
- 2) How do we harmonize the words of Psalm 109 & 137 with Jesus' words on the Sermon on the Mount?
- 3) What cause is the Psalmist most distressed about? How does Ps 137 bear this out?

"[R]ighteous retribution is one of the glories of the divine character. If it is right that God should desire to exercise it, then it cannot be wrong for his people to desire him to exercise it." -R.L. Dabney, Discussions by Robert L. Dabney.

"God's kingdom cannot come without Satan's kingdom being destroyed...Evil cannot be destroyed without the destruction of men who are permanently identified with it." -Johannes G. Vos, "The Ethical Problem of the Imprecatory Psalms"

- 4) What does our reaction to this Psalm teach us about our view of suffering and persecution?
- 5) How is it legitimate (even necessary!) for Christians to want, at some level, God's vengeance to be taken on His enemies?
- 6) What does Psalms 109 & 137 teach us about our view of sin?
- 7) Some might ask: *where is Jesus in this Psalm?* I thought all of Scripture pointed to Him?

"Imprecations on judgment on the wicked on the hypothesis of their continued impenitence are not inconsistent with simultaneous efforts to bring them to repentance; and Christian charity itself can do no more than labor for the sinner's conversion. The law of holiness requires us to pray for the fires of divine retribution: the law of love to seek meanwhile to rescue the brand from the burning." -Joseph Francis Thrupp, An Introduction to the Study and Use of the Psalms

"It is our duty to pray for all who trouble us; to desire the salvation of all men; and even to be careful for the welfare of every individual. At the same time, if our hearts are pure and peaceful, this will not prevent us from freely appealing to God's judgment, that he may cut off finally the impenitent."
- John Calvin