

PSALM 109



GOD, MY EXCEEDING JOY
A JOYFUL JOURNEY THRU THE PSALMS

PRAYERS TO THE FAITHFUL JUDGE - May 21, 2023

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. **Occasion:** Ps 109 is the longest and strongest of all the imprecatory prayers in the Bible.
- B. **Definition:** An “imprecatory prayer” (aka “imprecation”) is a prayer for God to bring judgment on someone.
- C. **Challenge:** Christians often struggle when encountering these prayers in the Bible since we are instructed by our Lord Jesus to pray for the good of our enemies. Mt 5:44.

II. THE CHRISTIAN’S PROBLEM WITH IMPRECATORY PRAYERS

- A. **CONTRADICTION?** At first, it feels like these sorts of OT prayers contradict the ethic of Jesus that calls us to pray for the good of our enemies. Mt 5:44; Lk 23:34
 - 1. Some Christians feel embarrassed by them.
 - 2. Many preachers avoid publicly reading (much less teaching!) these texts.
 - 3. Some devotional books intentionally exclude passages or portions of passages with imprecations.
- B. **MISCONCEPTIONS:** Some Christians have sub-Christian explanations for these prayers in the Bible.
 - 1. **To Be Interpreted Spiritually Only:** Some Christians **spiritualize** the references to enemies by applying them to Satan and his demonic forces. While this approach will “work” to a point, it falters badly in texts like Ps 109. And this is not the sort of application the psalmists intended.

- 2. **From “Errant” Parts of the Bible:** Those who deny the Bible’s infallibility see them as sinful corruptions.
 - a. C. S. Lewis (*The Problem of Pain*) stumbled badly on the issue of imprecations, calling these inspired utterances “devilish.”
 - b. Bede Griffith (*Psalms for Christian Prayer*): “It has become urgent ... to revise the Psalter, so that all branding of others as ‘enemies,’ ‘wicked,’ and ‘sinners’ deserving no mercy or pity be removed.”
- 3. **Belonging to a Past Age Only:** This view affirms that the OT was inspired of God but that it is no longer directly relevant today.
 - a. This view says such prayers were acceptable in their time but not today. The ethic of Jesus is so far superior that such prayers are now forbidden.
 - b. But this view doesn’t account for the facts that:
 - (1) The OT itself prohibits personal hatred of enemies. Lev. 19:17-18; 1 Sam. 24:1-7; 26:5
 - (2) The NT favorably quotes OT imprecations.
 - John 15:25 quotes Pss 35:19 & 69:4
 - John 2:17 & Romans 15:3 quote Ps 69:9
 - Romans 11:9-10 quotes Ps 69:22-23
 - Acts 1:20 quotes Ps 109:8
 - (3) The NT has its own imprecations, too, all related to the New Covenant & God’s Christ. E.g., Matt 6:10; 23:1-36, Acts 4:25-29; 1 Cor 16:22; Gal 1:8-9; Rev 6:9-10.

C. PROPER APPRECIATION

- 1. Biblical imprecations are all based upon the promises of God’s **covenants**.

- 2. Biblical imprecations seek to establish God’s kingdom, promote God’s glory, demonstrate His justice, bring deliverance to the oppressed, establish righteousness, stop the wicked, and point the world to the Lord.
- 3. In the Bible they are motivated by zeal for God’s kingdom, a holy hatred of sin, a determination to accomplish God’s purposes, and a willingness to leave judgment in God’s hands.
- 4. Almost all OT imprecations involve a **messianic** character (Abraham, Moses, David, etc), people appointed by God to establish His kingdom.
- 5. Most NT imprecations center around God’s ultimate Messiah, Jesus the **Christ**. Gal. 1:8-9; 1 Cor 16:22; Heb. 10:29; 2 Tim. 4:14.
- 6. All of our prayers must be informed by our New Covenant relationship with God through Christ.
 - a. The New Covenant includes curses for those who ultimately reject the Christ.
 - b. Key New Covenant curses include:
 - **1 Cor 16:22**, “If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha”
 - **Gal 1:8-9**, ...if any man is preaching to you a gospel other than what you have received, he is to be accursed!
 - **Rev 6:9-10**, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”

III. Genre of Psalm 109: Lament of the Individual

IV. Background

- A. The superscription ascribes the psalm to David.
- B. Commentators have long wondered whether the **betrayal** of Shimei (2 Sam 16) might be the psalm's backdrop.
- C. David speaks of associates who have betrayed him, making false accusations. David prays that the ringleader be exterminated and replaced (v. 8).
- D. While the NT applies v. 8 to Judas (Acts 1:20), that does not mean the psalm is directly prophetic. David's key enemy casts a **type** which Judas fulfills. Other imprecations in the psalm are not very relevant to Judas.

V. Placement

- A. Ps 109 is clustered with 3 other pss of David (108-110).
 1. Ps 108 celebrates Yahweh's victory thru David's army.
 2. Ps 109 prays for Yahweh to deal with internal betrayal.
 3. Ps 110 prophesies David's Lord taking dominion over the nations.
- B. Ps 109:31 says Yahweh is at the right hand of the needy, & Ps 110:1 speaks of Messiah sitting at Yahweh's right hand.

VI. Comments

- A. **Open Mouths.** V. 1 ends with a pray for God to speak to stop all the wickedness spoken by the enemies (2-5).
- B. **Countersuit.** David's enemies have tried him in the **court** of public opinion, but David brings them before God's court. The psalm might imagine that his enemies are brought before a court at the sanctuary.

C. **A Ringleader.** While vv. 1-5 and 20-29 speak of many enemies, vv. 6-19 focus on the ringleader & his family.

D. **A Convicting Court.** Vv. 6-7 call on God to establish a court procedure that will guarantee the wicked ringleader's conviction. David prays the ringleader will have an ill-intended accuser instead of a good defender.

E. **A Harsh Sentence.** David prays for the curse's effects to fall on the ringleader's family (vv. 8-15). This calls down the threat of the 2nd commandment (Ex. 20:5) and assumes that the whole family is corrupt.

F. **Not for Selfish Use.** Throughout church history this ps has been wrongly used as a way of masking hatred for others.

- Calvin lamented how people would pay Franciscan monks to pray this psalm against their enemies.
- From the 1700's-1900's in parts of central Europe, superstitions stated that reciting this ps for 374 days would bring these curses on one's enemies.
- During Obama's presidency, some American clergy invoked verse 8 against President Obama.

PSALM 109 <small>© M. Scott Bashoor 2023</small>		PURPOSE: Plagued by false accusers with an evil ringleader, David prays for Yahweh to send down covenant curses on them as definitive judgment on those who wrongly oppose Yahweh's anointed one.		Type: Lament with strong imprecation Author: David Date: Perhaps during Shimei's betrayal, c. 975 BC (2 Sam 16) Note: Acts 1:20 applies Ps 109:8 to Judas as an antitype of David's key opponent		
HEADINGS v. 0	OPENING COMPLAINT: DAVID'S LOUD ACCUSERS vv. 1-5	EXTENDED IMPRECATION: CALLS FOR JUDGMENT AGAINST FALSE ACCUSATIONS vv. 6-20		FERVENT PETITIONS: PLEAS FOR YAHWEH'S HELP vv. 21-29		CONCLUDING VOW: A PLEDGE OF PRAISE vv. 30-31
Authorization Assigned to the Sanctuary Choir Director Song Type A "Psalm" intended for musical accompaniment Authorship David	Opening Appeal for God to Intervene v. 1 Description of His Enemies' Claims vv. 2-5 False Accusations vv. 2-3 Undeserved Betrayal vv. 4-5	Prayers for Divine Judgment vv. 6-15 For Justice through a Merciless Court v. 6-7 For an Early Demise & Replacement v. 8 For the Complete Downfall of His Estate vv. 9-12 <i>His Household Destitute vv. 9-10</i> <i>All Assets Forfeited vv. 11-12</i> For the Eradication of His Sinful Family's Memory vv. 13-15	Indictment of the Accusers vv. 16-20 Worthy of Judgment for Unfaithfulness & Exploitation v. 16 Worthy of Curses for Their Employment of Curses vv. 17-19 Summary Call for Judgment v. 20	For David's Need vv. 21-25 An Appeal to Yahweh's Covenant Kindness v. 21 Lament about His Oppression vv. 22-25 <i>Suffering Great Need v. 22</i> <i>Experiencing Great Weakness vv. 23-24</i> <i>Suffering Great Disgrace v. 25</i>	For Yahweh's Glory vv. 26-29 An Appeal to Yahweh's Covenant Kindness v. 26 To Enlarge Yahweh's Glory v. 27 To Return the Curse of Shame on the Wicked vv. 28-29	Pledge to Publicly Acknowledge Yahweh for Deliverance v. 30 Concluding Confidence in Yahweh's Presence v. 31