



Psalms  
The Book of Praises

Lesson 23

Imprecatory Psalms

# Imprecatory Psalms

- Article – “The Imprecatory Psalms” p. 66
- Introduction
  - “imprecate”: “to invoke evil; to curse” (Vine’s)
  - Some psalms do just that
  - The writer prays that God may afflict the evildoer and punish him as deserved
  - Trying to justify such statements presents some problems that we will discuss

# Lessons for Today

- Let us pray for our enemies' repentance and salvation, but never casually pass over the evil that is done.
- Imprecations should be resorted to with the utmost of discretion in our days.
- Vengeance belongs to the Lord; prayerfully, turn it over to Him.

# Imprecatory Psalms

A few excerpts:

- 35:4-8, 26
- 40:13-15
- 58:6-8
- 59:5, 11-13
- 69:22-28
- 83:13-18

# Q1 – Imprecations from these psalms

- Shame, dishonor
- Brought to confusion
- Be like chaff
- Angel of the Lord pursue
- Caught in his own net
- Break their teeth
- Like a stillborn child
- Scatter
- Consume them
- Eyes blinded
- Habitation be desolate
- Blotted out of book of the living
- Like whirling dust
- Confounded and dismayed
- Perish
- Days be few
- Die – children fatherless and wife a widow
- Creditor seize all he has
- Strangers plunder his labor
- Posterity cut off
- Dashing children against rocks
- Cast into fire
- Cast into deep pits

# Psalm 109

- A psalm of David
- No occasion given; facing a lot of opposition and malicious, false accusations
- What is the tone or mood of this psalm?
  - Anguished, distraught, angry
- What is David seeking?
  - Relief from persecution and justice to be done to the evil doers
  - No hint of personal vindictiveness
  - Leaving it in God's hands



# Psalm 109

- 1-5 – Calling on God; describes David's opposition; David's attitude
- 6-15 – Imprecations
- 16-20 – Why? No mercy, cursing of David
- 21-26 – Plea for God's help
- 27-29 – Purpose – All will see it is the Lord who saves; accusers brought to shame
- 30-31 – Praise to God

## Q2 – The kind of people they are directed toward

- Wicked
- Enemies
- Evil
- Deceptive
- Proud
- Violent
- Cruel
- Workers of iniquity
- Bloodthirsty
- Prideful
- Liars
- Cursing
- Hateful
- Accusers

- 40:14; 58:3-5; 59:1-3,12,14-15; 69:4,  
83:1-5; 137:3,7-8; 140:1-5, 8



## Q3 – Things done to the writer

- Oppress
- Threaten
- Strike
- Pursue
- Act maliciously
- Lie in wait
- Reward evil for good
- Rejoice in my adversity
- Gnashed at me
- Hate me without a cause
- Seek to destroy me
- Take counsel against us
- Form a confederacy against God
- Plundered us
- Razed our city
- Hide a snare for me

# Imprecatory Psalms

Q4. Does the writer plan to personally avenge his enemy? Elaborate.

- No.
- These all are directed to God and call on Him to act. (see Psa. 94:1-7)
- 35:1-2, 5, 22-23; 40:13; 58:6; 59:1, 5; 69:13, 24; 83:1, 13; 109:1; 137:7; 140:1, 4

# Imprecatory Psalms

Q5. How do you reconcile these imprecations with passages such as Prov. 25:21-22 and Rom. 12:17-21?

- At first these may appear to be vindictive
- Opposed to the spirit of the scriptures
- First, note who wrote many of these?
  - David – Showed a spirit of tolerance and forgiveness throughout his lifetime (1 Sam. 24 & 26)
  - Psalmists – men of true piety and fear of the Lord; must be careful how we judge them

# Imprecatory Psalms

- More than just personal enmity involved; avowed enemies of God's people and God's cause
- Purpose
  - To cry for help, relief, deliverance
  - For the righteous to take courage at what they see (Psa. 35:27)
  - Vindication of God's cause (Psa. 58:11)
  - That the wicked be taught to fear God (Psa. 83:16, 18)
  - That they may know this is from the hand of God and to shame them (Psa. 109:27-29)

# New Testament Imprecations?

- 2 Tim. 4:14 – Paul regarding Alexander the coppersmith
- Acts 23:2 – Paul to the high priest, Ananias
- Acts 8:20 – Peter against Simon the Sorcerer
- Matt. 23 – Jesus to the scribes and Pharisees

# Albert Barnes' Observations

- What is charged as vindictive may be referred to as the spirit of the age
  - These feelings actually existed in the writers' minds
  - Were willing to record them; not ashamed of them
- Part of these passages may be regarded as prophetic
  - What would be instead of what should be
- Some may be a mere record of the feelings of others
- Governmental justice
- A mere record of what actually occurred in the mind of the psalmist – preserved as an illustration of human nature
  - “... the psalms illustrate religion as it actually exists in the minds of good men in this world; men who are not absolutely perfect ...”





# Imprecatory Psalms – Summary

- Violent times
- Poetic language
- Vengeance always left to God
- Purpose of these psalms – plea for deliverance



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