

Imprecatory Psalms

As we discussed last week, there is a special form of lament psalm called “imprecatory” psalms. The word imprecation basically means curse. Imprecatory psalms are psalms where the psalmist is cursing an enemy, usually by calling down the righteous judgment of God upon them. Many of the lament psalms contain some form of imprecation but there are some psalms that stand out because they contain very harsh or extended imprecations. We already saw a strong imprecation last week when we looked at psalm 3 whose 7th verse says,

Arise, O LORD!

Save me, O my God!

**For you strike all my enemies on the cheek;
you break the teeth of the wicked.**

I suspect we would instinctively hesitate to sing a request for God to knock someone’s teeth out, but these kinds of statements were part of the songs of worship for ancient Israel. Whatever conclusions we reach on how to understand and apply them it is true that they are a part of God’s Word. Let’s look at a few additional examples.

Psalm 109 is in many ways the most intense and sustained imprecation in the psalter.

Help Me, O LORD My God

109 TO THE CHOIRMASTER. A PSALM OF DAVID.

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| <p>¹ Be not silent, O God of my praise!</p> <p>² For wicked and deceitful mouths are
opened against me,
speaking against me with lying tongues.</p> <p>³ They encircle me with words of hate,
and attack me without cause.</p> <p>⁴ In return for my love they accuse me,
but I give myself to prayer.</p> <p>⁵ So they reward me evil for good,
and hatred for my love.</p> <p>⁶ Appoint a wicked man against him;
let an accuser stand at his right hand.</p> <p>⁷ When he is tried, let him come forth
guilty;
let his prayer be counted as sin!</p> <p>⁸ May his days be few;
may another take his office!</p> <p>⁹ May his children be fatherless
and his wife a widow!</p> <p>¹⁰ May his children wander about and beg,
seeking food far from the ruins they
inhabit!</p> <p>¹¹ May the creditor seize all that he has;</p> | <p>may strangers plunder the fruits of his
toil!</p> <p>¹² Let there be none to extend kindness to
him,
nor any to pity his fatherless children!</p> <p>¹³ May his posterity be cut off;
may his name be blotted out in the
second generation!</p> <p>¹⁴ May the iniquity of his fathers be
remembered before the LORD,
and let not the sin of his mother be
blotted out!</p> <p>¹⁵ Let them be before the LORD continually,
that he may cut off the memory of
them from the earth!</p> <p>¹⁶ For he did not remember to show
kindness,
but pursued the poor and needy
and the brokenhearted, to put them to
death.</p> <p>¹⁷ He loved to curse; let curses come upon
him!
He did not delight in blessing; may it be
far from him!</p> <p>¹⁸ He clothed himself with cursing as his
coat;</p> |
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may it soak into his body like water,
like oil into his bones!
19 **May it be like a garment that he wraps
around him,
like a belt that he puts on every day!**
20 **May this be the reward of my accusers
from the LORD,
of those who speak evil against my life!**

21 But you, O GOD my Lord,
deal on my behalf for your name's sake;
because your steadfast love is good,
deliver me!

22 For I am poor and needy,
and my heart is stricken within me.

23 I am gone like a shadow at evening;
I am shaken off like a locust.

24 My knees are weak through fasting;
my body has become gaunt, with no fat.

25 I am an object of scorn to my accusers;
when they see me, they wag their heads.

26 Help me, O LORD my God!
Save me according to your steadfast
love!

27 Let them know that this is your hand;
you, O LORD, have done it!

28 Let them curse, but you will bless!
They arise and are put to shame, but
your servant will be glad!

29 May my accusers be clothed with dishonor;
may they be wrapped in their own
shame as in a cloak!

30 With my mouth I will give great thanks to
the LORD;
I will praise him in the midst of the
throng.

31 For he stands at the right hand of the
needy one,
to save him from those who condemn
his soul to death.

Perhaps the most shocking to most modern readers are the imprecations from psalm 137, particularly verse 9.

How Shall We Sing the LORD's Song?

137 By the waters of Babylon,
there we sat down and wept,
when we remembered Zion.

2 On the willows there
we hung up our lyres.

3 For there our captors
required of us songs,
and our tormentors, mirth, saying,
"Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

4 How shall we sing the LORD's song
in a foreign land?

5 **If I forget you, O Jerusalem,
let my right hand forget its skill!**

6 **Let my tongue stick to the roof of my
mouth,**

**if I do not remember you,
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy!**

7 **Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites
the day of Jerusalem,
how they said, "Lay it bare, lay it bare,
down to its foundations!"**

8 **O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be
destroyed,
blessed shall he be who repays you
with what you have done to us!**

9 **Blessed shall he be who takes your little
ones
and dashes them against the rock!**

Likewise, psalm 69 contains several severe curses against enemies including blindness, barrenness, and being blotted out of the list of the righteous.

Save Me, O God

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69 TO THE CHOIRMASTER: ACCORDING TO LILIES. OF DAVID.

- ¹ Save me, O God!
For the waters have come up to my
neck.
- ² I sink in deep mire,
where there is no foothold;
I have come into deep waters,
and the flood sweeps over me.
- ³ I am weary with my crying out;
my throat is parched.
My eyes grow dim
with waiting for my God.
- ⁴ More in number than the hairs of my head
are those who hate me without cause;
mighty are those who would destroy me,
those who attack me with lies.
What I did not steal
must I now restore?
- ⁵ O God, you know my folly;
the wrongs I have done are not hidden
from you.
- ⁶ Let not those who hope in you be put to
shame through me,
O Lord GOD of hosts;
let not those who seek you be brought to
dishonor through me,
O God of Israel.
- ⁷ For it is for your sake that I have borne
reproach,
that dishonor has covered my face.
- ⁸ I have become a stranger to my brothers,
an alien to my mother's sons.
- ⁹ For zeal for your house has consumed me,
and the reproaches of those who
reproach you have fallen on me.
- ¹⁰ When I wept and humbled my soul with
fasting,
it became my reproach.
- ¹¹ When I made sackcloth my clothing,
I became a byword to them.
- ¹² I am the talk of those who sit in the gate,
and the drunkards make songs about
me.
- ¹³ But as for me, my prayer is to you, O LORD.
At an acceptable time, O God,
in the abundance of your steadfast love
answer me in your saving
faithfulness.
- ¹⁴ Deliver me
from sinking in the mire;
let me be delivered from my enemies
and from the deep waters.
- ¹⁵ Let not the flood sweep over me,
or the deep swallow me up,
or the pit close its mouth over me.
- ¹⁶ Answer me, O LORD, for your steadfast love
is good;
according to your abundant mercy, turn
to me.
- ¹⁷ Hide not your face from your servant,
for I am in distress; make haste to
answer me.
- ¹⁸ Draw near to my soul, redeem me;
ransom me because of my enemies!
- ¹⁹ You know my reproach,
and my shame and my dishonor;
my foes are all known to you.
- ²⁰ Reproaches have broken my heart,
so that I am in despair.
I looked for pity, but there was none,
and for comforters, but I found none.
- ²¹ They gave me poison for food,
and for my thirst they gave me sour wine
to drink.
- ²² **Let their own table before them become a
snare;
and when they are at peace, let it
become a trap.**
- ²³ **Let their eyes be darkened, so that they
cannot see,
and make their loins tremble
continually.**
- ²⁴ **Pour out your indignation upon them,
and let your burning anger overtake
them.**
- ²⁵ **May their camp be a desolation;**

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- let no one dwell in their tents.
26 For they persecute him whom you have struck down, and they recount the pain of those you have wounded.
27 Add to them punishment upon punishment; may they have no acquittal from you.
28 Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous.
- 29 But I am afflicted and in pain; let your salvation, O God, set me on high!
30 I will praise the name of God with a song; I will magnify him with thanksgiving.
31 This will please the LORD more than an ox or a bull with horns and hoofs.
32 When the humble see it they will be glad; you who seek God, let your hearts revive.
33 For the LORD hears the needy and does not despise his own people who are prisoners.
34 Let heaven and earth praise him, the seas and everything that moves in them.
35 For God will save Zion and build up the cities of Judah, and people shall dwell there and possess it; the offspring of his servants shall inherit it, and those who love his name shall dwell in it.
36

We see that some of these psalms contain very harsh and serious language. Is it appropriate for a Christian to pray these kinds of prayers?

Christians have had various views on the best way to understand and apply (if at all) these types of passages. We do not have time to retrace the logic behind the various positions in detail. I will share my perspective and you will need to come to peace with how you decide to apply these texts in your own prayer life.

Is it appropriate for a Christian to pray these kinds of prayers? *I say that the answer is yes... but. There are several important considerations that we must keep in mind to avoid sinning in praying imprecatory prayers.* To lay the foundation for that answer, we need to work through several basic principles.

Old Testament vs. New Testament

Many argue that the Gospel ethic that Jesus taught makes these kinds of prayers obsolete in the life of God's people or that such thoughts are unworthy of one who has a spirit of love. Jesus, they say taught us to "turn the other cheek" to our enemies, not to smash his cheek. The idea is that the "Gospel" ethic replaces the "Law" ethic, and we are now to only pray for salvation and not for judgment.

There are, however, several problems with this kind of approach that tries to drive a wedge between various parts of the Bible or between Jesus and the Holy Spirit that inspired these psalms. First, Jesus himself frequently used imprecatory psalms. For example, he often quoted psalm 69 (John 15:25 = Psalm 69:4, "**They hated me without cause.**" John 2:17 = Psalm 69:9, "**Zeal for your house has eaten me up.**" Matthew 27:24 = Psalm 69:21, "**They gave me gall for my food.**"). Jesus identified with this psalm which included very harsh language such as "**Add to them punishment upon punishment; may**

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they have no acquittal from you. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living; let them not be enrolled among the righteous.”

It is also not the case that only the non-harsh portions of these psalms are used in the New Testament. For example, the apostle Paul quotes from psalm 69 in Romans 11:9-10 where he applies the imprecation to the non-elect in a New Testament context.

The continuity of the New Testament writers with the Old Testament material makes it very difficult to make any case that these psalms were considered of any other status than the rest of the psalms or Old Testament. They must therefore be considered “breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2 Tim. 3:16)

Another problem with this kind of approach is that it submits itself to a pharisaical reading of the Old Testament. Jesus taught that his teaching did not simply overturn the Law, but fulfilled it. (Mt. 5:17) The ethic that Jesus preaches *was always present in the Old Testament*.

I trust a few examples will be enough to make the point. The biblical concept that we should love our neighbors as ourselves was not first introduced in the New Testament, it comes from Leviticus 19:18. Jesus expands the understanding to the despised Samaritans but even this wasn't a new concept. Proverbs 25:21 says, **“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink...”**

Also, the New Testament contains rather severe imprecations and judgments and not all of those are merely quotes from those found in the Old Testament. Consider the following passages from the New Testament:

- **(Jesus in Mt 11:21-24) “... But I tell you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for Tyre and Sidon than for you. ... You will be brought down to Hades. ... “I tell you that it will be more tolerable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom than for you.”**
- **(Jesus in Luke 11:2) “he said to them, “When you pray, say: “Father, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come.**
- **(Paul in 1 Cor. 16:22) “If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come!”**
- **(Paul in Acts 13:11) “And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and unable to see the sun for a time.”**
- **(Paul in Gal. 1:9) “If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”**
- **(Paul in Gal. 5:12) “I wish those who unsettle you would emasculate themselves!”**
- **(John in 1 Jn. 5:16) “...There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that.”**
- **(Jesus in Rev. 2:22-23) “Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, 23 and I will strike her children dead.”**
- **(Martyrs in Rev. 6:10) “They cried out with a loud voice, “O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?”**

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These are just some of the examples. The fact is that Jesus illuminates and expands the gracious and selfless ethics of mercy found in both Testaments, while also illuminating the holiness and judgment of God also found in both Testaments. There is one God, and the Bible is one revelation. If we have any questions about the continuity of both the love and mercy as well as holiness and judgment of God, we need only to read each Testament more closely. It is an oversimplification and an error to think there is a significant disconnect between the ethical principals in each Testament. There are big differences between them, but this isn't where the difference lies.

Justice vs. Vengeance

The distinction between personal vengeance and God's justice is one of the keys to the proper use of these psalms. We must also recognize, however, that it isn't quite accurate to say the psalmist is always just "turning it over to Jesus".

Psalms 118, which is the most frequently quoted Old Testament passage in the New Testament includes personal involvement in bringing about the requested outcome. Three times in verses 10 through 12 the writer says "**in the name of the Lord I cut them off**". In psalm 41:10 the writer says, "**But you, O LORD, be gracious to me, and raise me up, that I may repay them!**" and David in psalm 144 says "**Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle**". The psalmists therefore can also be understood to be the means through which the enemies will be judged or defeated.

The distinction, however, between justice and personal vengeance is an important one. Where the psalmist sees himself as the means of the judgment, the request is still addressed to God and the psalmist is understood to be an agent of God's work and aligned with God's purposes (more on this later). These songs are heart-cries to God for deliverance. There is an underlying assumption, which is repeated multiple times in both Testaments, that "**vengeance belongs to God, and He will repay.**"

The relationship between our desires and God's purposes as well as our dependence upon Him for our deliverance is crucial to the proper use of these psalms. They are never merely requests for divine intervention for human ends. And if there is intense frustration it is far better that it be expressed to God in a prayer and depend upon Him than to act for our own vengeance.

With David in particular, there is a connection between him and his kingdom and the purposes of God that must be kept in mind. If David is killed by enemies or loses his crown the salvation of the entire human race is at stake and God's Word is compromised. The messiah is David's greater Son and is the fulfillment of God's promises from Eve through David and beyond.

A Closer Look at David for Clarity

Even recognizing the messianic nature of David's life and kingship it is interesting to see how he interacted with his enemies considering his sometimes-harsh prayers. Thankfully, we have a lot of additional information about how David interacts with his enemies other than what is found just in these psalms. I think it is instructive to consider what we learn from placing the two side by side.

Humanly speaking, two of the most significant human adversaries that David faced were king Saul, who tried to hunt him down and kill him, and his son Absalom, who tried to overthrow him. In 1 Samuel 26:5-9 David has an opportunity to kill Saul but doesn't do it and doesn't permit anyone with him to do it. Instead, he says "And David said, "**As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him, or his day will come to**

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die, or he will go down into battle and perish.” (1 Sam. 26:10). David knew that Saul was the anointed king and refused to take matters into his own hand but waited upon the Lord with confidence in the promises that God had made to deliver David and make him king. His reverence for what God had ordained was so great that he regretted even cutting off the corner of Saul’s robe (1 Sam. 24:5).

David was clearly not therefore driven by a personal hatred for his enemies and these prayers indicate that something beyond his own agenda is at stake. For example, in psalm 109:10 David prays regarding his enemy **“May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit!”** but once David became king, he recalled the affection of Saul’s son Jonathan and inquired if there were any surviving descendants so he could be gracious to them (2 Sam. 9:1-2). When David finds out that there was a grandson of Saul’s named Mephibosheth who was alive, he orders his servants to bring him to the palace and the Bible records that **“Mephibosheth ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons.”** (2 Sam. 9:11). This is unheard of for a king to do to one who could potentially produce a rival claimant to the throne and yet David shows grace to Mephibosheth.

Similarly, during the rebellion of Absalom David specifically commands that Absalom not be killed, **“protect the young man Absalom”** (2 Sam. 18:12) and mourned deeply for him when he was killed against his orders, “The king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, **“O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!”** (2 Sam. 19:4)

The calling down of judgment seemingly comes regrettably against persistent and unrepentant opposition that would work against God’s own promises. I believe these imprecations operate under the broader covenant assumptions shared by both Testaments. Namely, that the curses of God are upon those who refuse to repent. It is difficult to imagine that if the enemies of David suddenly turned to serve God that David would not rejoice with them. I don’t think this is just speculation as we have clues to the pattern in a few of the psalms. Notice in psalm 109:4-5 that the initial response was not imprecation but love. **“In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love.”** We see a similar dynamic in Psalm 35:12-13, **“They repay me evil for good; my soul is bereft. But I, when they were sick— I wore sackcloth; I afflicted myself with fasting; I prayed with head bowed on my chest.”**

We see that in at least these examples the evil intention of the enemies has involved a rejection of love. The psalmist prefigures the way that God judges those who ultimately reject the love offered to them. Eventually, the evil is to such an extent that the time of God’s gracious patience is exhausted, and they bring judgment upon themselves.

The righteous are right to want unrepentant evil to be dealt with because the Lord’s glory and holiness is at stake. In Psalm 139 David sees it as a sign of his faithfulness that he is the enemy of God’s enemies.

- ²⁰ They speak against you with malicious intent;
your enemies take your name in vain.
- ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?
- ²² I hate them with complete hatred;
I count them my enemies.

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Covenant Themes

One of the major structures in the outworking of the promises of God is the covenant framework. There are various distinct covenants related to the single promise. These covenants involve promises and warnings which will be fulfilled through future blessings and curses and any injustice done to God's people, which He claims as His possession, is a crime that requires His action in fulfillment of the covenant.

For example, the Abrahamic Covenant includes this an explicit commitment from God. When Abraham is called in Genesis 12:1-3 God says, **"I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse..."** (Gen. 12:3). Those who are the covenant people would therefore expect that the curses of the covenant could be invoked against their enemies. In fact, several of the imprecations are reciprocal, calling for God to repay the injustice that was done. Psalm 137 is an example of this, just before the disturbingly violent language in verse 9 we read, **"O daughter of Babylon, doomed to be destroyed, blessed shall he be who repays you with what you have done to us!"** (Ps. 137:8)

Several of these psalms include both blessing and curses, references to the law and the invocation of God using His covenant name of Yahweh. There are similarities between the nature of these psalms and the proclamations of woe in the prophetic literature. Echoes of this originate in the Law itself (see the Song of Moses in Deut. 32:1-43), and are expanded by the prophets who are the spokesman for the covenant.

This is significant because it would indicate that the imprecations of the psalmist are not simply pleas for vengeance or judgment in an individual sense but are built upon the principals of divine justice found in the Law and prophets and are bound up with God's reputation (His Holy Name). The enemies are therefore embodiments of wickedness and opposition to God.

Messianic Themes

Of course, the promises and covenants all come together in Jesus. Interlinked with all of the specific promises are the promises of the perfect Prophet, Priest, and King, the messiah. Because of the messianic nature of the psalms themselves, the representative nature of the enemies comes together with the representative nature of David. They are real desires expressed toward real enemies but are more than that. They are prophetic as well. Because of this, I think it is likely that these imprecations are only ultimately directed to those who persist in opposition to God because of the connection of these psalms to Jesus Himself. It is important to understand their function as prophesy and their role in the broader story of redemption that is being played out through the Bible. There are a few different elements of this that are helpful to be aware of.

First, is the connection of David to the messianic promises. The kingship of David as God's anointed king is pointing to Jesus. Wherever you see David, you can anticipate a connection, resolution, or fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Most of the Psalms are connected to David and there is therefore a prophetic function for these Psalms. They speak to David's experiences and are David's words, but they are also understood (by the N.T. authors) as connected to and fulfilled in Jesus. The entire Jesus narrative in the N.T. is woven together with Psalms (something we will look at soon). David prefigures the life and ministry of Jesus and these psalms, which are truly David's words are also prophetic utterances connected to the

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coming Messiah, Jesus. The New Testament writers explicitly consider David a prophet and use the psalms this way. Does this mean that these psalms have multiple meanings or double fulfillments that go beyond the intention and thoughts of David as he wrote them? No, David was conscious of his unique role as God's anointed king and that the messiah would come from his line. David knew that he was writing prophetically as he penned these psalms. Peter makes this clear in his sermon at Pentecost saying,

“Being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on his throne, he foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption.” (Acts 2:30-31)

Elsewhere Peter adds **“It was revealed to them [the prophets] that they were serving not themselves but you, in the things that have now been announced to you through those who preached the good news to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look.”** (1 Pet. 1:12)

Therefore, we must understand that the poetic language in these imprecatory psalms is connected not just to David and his circumstances but are ultimately pointing us to Jesus Christ. David is dealing with the broad theme of the seed of the Serpent vs. the promised seed of the Woman. The adversaries are both physical adversaries of David, but also truly the enemies of God working to destroy God's plan of salvation and cut off the line of the Messiah. They encapsulate the larger struggle between good and evil.

For example, the imprecations in Psalm 109 take on a different character when we understand their historical redemptive connection. The singular enemy mentioned in the psalm relates to Judas, a representative of all the seed of Satan among humanity in its opposition to the Anointed One. Peter quotes from this psalm as justification for replacing Judas among the apostles. He says, **“Let another take his office.”** (Acts 1:20) If, however, we look at the surrounding context of that verse in Psalm 109 the curse takes on a larger significance. The enemy of David, Judas, etc. are all fulfillments of the generational seed of the serpent in opposition to the work of God that never ceases in its attack, generation after generation, on the faithful seed of The Promise.

The nature of these (and other) psalms to the unfolding promise of God that culminate in Jesus is supported not only using individual psalms but (I would argue) by the overall messianic structure of the psalter itself. We will look at this later in the course.

To summarize all of this, we can say that even as David is writing these psalms about his own experiences, he is conscious that they are part of a much bigger story than his individual circumstances. They express ultimately a desire for God to triumph over those who refuse to repent and set themselves on opposition to God Himself. As one theologian put it, “If we want to read and pray the prayers of the bible, especially the psalms, we must not, therefore, first ask what they have to do with us, but what they have to do with Jesus Christ.”

Summary of Observations

First, we must always be careful not to place ourselves as a judge over the Word of God. Our justice is not as righteous as God's. We must not think we are more merciful than He. Like Abraham who was

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unsettled about the judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah we must have the confidence in God to say, “shall not the judge of the Earth do what is right?”. We must not apologize for God or His Word.

David (and the other psalmists) who wrote these imprecations were inspired by the Holy Spirit. David had a unique relationship, as God’s anointed king and the foreshadow of Jesus the Messiah. As a representative figure, his calling down judgment on the enemies of God was not personal retribution.

Instead, it was connected to God’s promises and a foreshadowing of what will happen on the Day of the Lord when God casts all his enemies into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15). God is working his plan of salvation in and through the world as it is, both spiritual and material. The Divine Logos, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, taking upon Himself flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, as well as the promise of our own resurrection shows that we cannot simply spiritualize the promises of God. Rewards and judgments are both spiritual and physical. All, however, are connected to or are components of the great struggle between God and Satan as it plays out through the Seed of the Woman and that of the Serpent.

Therefore, our situation is somewhat different from that of David. We are not prophets or kings. We do not live under a theocracy and we are not in the line of promise leading to the messiah. Therefore, we must be very careful to leave final judgments up to God. We are told to love and pray for our enemies and seek their repentance. Like David and Jesus, we should show love and patience before desiring judgment. Yet, there is also some continuity between us and David and the other psalmists.

What about Us?

When we understand these prayers in the broader context of the struggle between God and the devil played out in physical circumstances, we can recognize a legitimate place for these prayers in our own worship. By our union with Christ through faith we are also connected to the bigger story of redemption. We enter the suffering of Christ, and He is “in” us. Therefore, I believe it is appropriate for us to pray these prayers if done within the context of a Gospel framework. We pray for grace, mercy, and salvation but also for the righteous judgment of God upon those who are unrepentantly working toward the destruction of His people and His promises.

Here are some things to consider in thinking through how to use these kinds of psalms appropriately.

1. Who is the enemy against which we can pray these?

Ultimately, Satan is the one that that we pray against (Eph. 6:12). We pray for the destruction of Satan’s kingdom. That, however, includes those who persist in unrepentant service of evil. We can pray against murderers, liars, oppressors, and mockers but calling on their destruction should always be within the context of our desire to see them accept the grace of the Gospel. We therefore pray only for the judgment of those who *will never* repent. To the extent that Satan uses material means in his warfare, we can pray for judgment on those activities as well (i.e. the persecution of the church, etc).

2. How should we pray these?

Keep in mind that the psalmists were representative figures. They are the prayers of the innocent who are suffering. This means that ultimately, only Jesus can properly pray these prayers since He is the only innocent victim. We therefore can only participate in these prayers with Christ. It is only for His glory and righteousness that we can offer them. They are only appropriate when we pray them “with” Jesus.

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They must never proceed from a desire for personal vengeance but always a desire for His kingdom to come.

We participate in the kingdom only through grace and must never forget that we are also guilty and that the evil in the world is partly because of our own sin. Even in the requests did not come out of a spirit of self-righteousness (Ps. 69:5-6).

3. It is appropriate to desire the destruction of evil.

The desire that Jesus will come to have final victory over evil, death, sin, sorrow, and Satan, is a biblical desire. When the disciples asked Jesus to teach them to pray, he includes at least four elements that either call for or require the destruction of evil: 1. **Hallowed be your name**, 2. **your kingdom come**, 3. **your will be done**, 4. and **deliver us from the Evil One**. The final petition found in the Bible is “**come Lord Jesus**”, which completes the book of Revelation that depicts the dramatic events surrounding the ultimate triumph of Jesus over all enemies. Our urgency in witnessing to the world is tied up with our desire for the dawning of the kingdom.

Final Thought

We never know if an enemy of the Gospel will someday repent. We are called to pray for that and to show love and grace. These prayers allow us to pray honestly to God, depending upon Him to deal with those who oppose us. We express to God our desire for His glory to be displayed by protecting and delivering His people and trust Him to make righteous judgments in both the expression of His grace and His wrath.