

Psalm 109

A prayer for punishment of the wicked
To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David.

Psalm 109: This psalm constitutes the most vivid example of imprecatory prayer found in all the Psalter. Such petitions for retributive justice have posed a theological problem: How can a man who claims to trust in the Lord (verses 21-31), pray such curses on his enemies as those found in verses 6-20? Several answers may be offered for this problem. First, there is a legitimate righteous indignation against sin. God Himself possesses this attribute and Jesus indirectly commanded it when He instructed the disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come". The coming of God's kingdom includes the destruction of the wicked. Second, the curses used here are actually a prayer that places the matter into the hands of a just and holy God. Third, Peter quotes both (Psalm 69 and Psalm 109 in Acts 1:20), and attributes both references to the Holy Spirit. Fourth, the psalmist is so identified with God that he has the mind of God: the psalmist's enemies are likewise at enmity with God. The content of the psalm may be analyzed as follows: the psalmist's lament and declaration of innocence (verses 1-5), the catalog of curses that he prays will fall on his enemies (verses 6-20), and his plea that God will give mercy and protection (verses 21-31).

Verses 1-31: This imprecatory psalm of David cannot be conclusively connected by the psalm's general details with any particular incident/person in the king's life as chronicled in (1, 2 Sam. 1 Kings, and 1 Chron.). David's responds here to those who have launched a vicious verbal assault of false accusations against him (compare 109:2-3, 20). This psalm is considered messianic in nature, since (Acts 1:20 quotes verse 8), in reference to Judas' punishment for betraying Christ (compare Psalms 41:9; 69:25). David reverses roles with his enemies by moving from being the accused in man's court to being the accuser/prosecutor before the bar of God.

- I. The Plaintiff's Plea (109:1-5).
- II. The Punishment Desired (109:6-20).
- III. The Petition for Justice (109:21-29).
- IV. The Praise of the Judge (109:30-31).

Verses 1-5: It is the unspeakable comfort of all believers, that whoever is against them, God is for them. And to him they may apply as to one pleased to concern himself for them. David's enemies laughed at him for his devotion, but they could not laugh him out of it.

Psalm 109:1 "Hold not thy peace, O God of my praise;"

"O God of my praise": David begins and ends (compare verse 30), with praise for the Chief Justice of the universe. At (verse 21), David addresses the Judge as "O God the Lord" and at (verse 26), as "O LORD my God".

In this instance, David is crying out for God to speak. Everyone else has had their say, now it is time for God to speak. When God speaks, the whole world listens. "God of my praise", means that David directs his praise to Him. It could also be saying, God who deserves my praise.

Verses 2-5: David's complaint was that the innocent were being accused by the guilty. He asserted that the charges were without cause (109:3). While Doeg the Edomite has been identified by some (compare 1 Sam. chapters 21-22; Psalm 52), the far more likely candidate would be Saul (compare 1 Sam. chapters 18-27). Eight of the 14 historical superscriptions in other psalms refer to the suffering of David related to Saul's pursuits for the purpose of killing David (compare Psalms 18, 34, 54, 56, 57, 59, 63, and 142).

Psalm 109:2 "For the mouth of the wicked and the mouth of the deceitful are opened against me: they have spoken against me with a lying tongue."

Or "of deceit" itself; most wicked and very deceitful men, who sometimes flattered and pretended friendship, as the Jews did to Christ, when they designed ill against him. Though at other times their mouths were opened, and they poured out their calumnies and reproaches very freely and largely; traducing his person, and aspersing his character as a wicked man. Blaspheming his miracles, as if done by the help of the devil. Charging his doctrine with novelty, falsehood, and blasphemy. Loading him with invidious names, as Samaritan, madman, etc. Representing him as an enemy to the state, as a seditious person, and a disturber of the nation's peace; particularly their mouths were opened against him when they called for his crucifixion. And would have no denial; and especially when he was on the cross, where they gaped upon him with their mouths, and poured out their scoffs and jeers at him (see Psalm 22:14).

"They have spoken against me with a lying tongue, false witnesses rose up against him, and laid things to his charge he knew nothing of, and which they could not prove (Matt. 26:59).

In (verses 2-5, 20, 25, 27-29), David refers to a group of accusers, in contrast to (verses 6-19), where an individual is mentioned. Most likely, the individual is the group leader.

We know that there is always plenty of negative speaking around. It seems the more you love the Lord, the more the wicked speak out against you. They cannot tell the truth, so they just make up lies to tell. All believers have faced just this kind of opposition.

Psalm 109:3 "They compassed me about also with words of hatred; and fought against me without a cause."

They surrounded him as he hung on the cross, and expressed their malice and hatred against him. Then was he enclosed with these spiteful snarling dogs, and encompassed by them as with so many bees, who everyone left their sting in him (Psalm 22:16).

"And fought against me without a cause": They were of a hostile spirit, enemies and enmity itself against him. Fought against him both with words and blows, with their tongues and with their

fists. Sought his life, and at length took it away. He was attacked by the body of the Jewish nation, and by the whole posse of devils; and all this without any cause or just reason. He gave them no occasion for this enmity and malice, and opposition to him. And it was in the issue without effect, it was in vain and to no purpose. For though they gained their point in putting him to death, yet he rose again a triumphant Conqueror over them all.

It makes it difficult to understand why they would fight against you, if you had done them no harm. These words of hatred they have brought against him are, because they are jealous of his relationship with God.

Psalm 109:4 "For my love they are my adversaries: but I [give myself unto] prayer."

For the love that Christ showed to the Jews. To their bodies, in going about and healing all manner of diseases among them. To their souls, in preaching the Gospel to them in each of their cities. And for the love he showed to mankind in coming into the world to save them, which should have commanded love again. But instead of this they became his implacable adversaries. They acted the part of Satan; they were as so many Satans to him, as the word signifies.

"But I give myself unto prayer": Or "I am a man of prayer"; as Aben Ezra and Kimchi supply it. So he was in the days of his flesh (Heb. 5:7). He was constant at it, and fervent in it; sometimes a whole night together at it. His usual method was, when at Jerusalem, to teach in the temple in the daytime, and at night to go to the mount of Olives, and there abide and pray (Luke 6:12). This was the armor he alone made use of against his enemies, when they fought against him, and acted the part of an adversary to him. He betook himself to nothing else but prayer; he did not return railing for railing, but committed himself in prayer to God, who judges righteously (1 Peter 2:23). Yea, he prayed for those his adversaries: and so Aben Ezra and Kimchi interpret it, that he was a man of prayer for them, and prayed for them. As it is certain Christ did, when he was encompassed by his enemies, and they were venting all their spite and malice against him (Luke 23:34).

In return for the love that he has shown them, they are his enemies. Jesus taught us to love our enemies, even the ones who despitefully use us. Pray for them. Perhaps the prayer that David is speaking of here, has to do with getting his thoughts off these evil people and on to God. He does not, and cannot, fellowship with these people, so he fellowships with God in prayer.

Psalm 109:5 "And they have rewarded me evil for good, and hatred for my love."

For the good words and sound doctrine, he delivered to them. For the good works and miracles, he wrought among them, to the healing of them (see John 10:32).

"And hatred for my love": He came to seek and save that which was lost, and yet they hated him, and would not have him to rule over them (Luke 19:10).

There is some very good advice on this very subject in:

Proverbs 25:21-22 "If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink." "For thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the LORD shall reward thee."

The strange thing, David has been doing the right thing with these people. When David loves them and blesses the very ones who hate him, it is pleasing unto God.

Verses 6-20: The Lord Jesus may speak here as a Judge, denouncing sentence on some of his enemies, to warn others. When men reject the salvation of Christ, even their prayers are numbered among their sins. See what hurries some to shameful deaths, and brings the families and estates of others to ruin. Makes them and theirs despicable and hateful, and brings poverty, shame, and misery upon their posterity. It is sin, that mischievous, destructive thing. And what will be the effect of the sentence? Go, ye cursed, upon the bodies and souls of the wicked! How it will affect the senses of the body, and the powers of the soul, with pain, anguish, horror, and despair? Think on these things, sinners, tremble and repent.

The Mosaic law had anticipated false accusations and malicious witnesses (compare Deut. 19:16-21), by decreeing that the false accuser was to be given the punishment intended for the accused. It would appear that David had this law in mind here and verses 26-29. Thus, his imprecations are not malicious maledictions, but rather a call for justice according to the law. These severe words have respect not to the penitent, but to the impenitent and hard-hearted foes of God and His cause, whose inevitable fate is set.

Verses 6-13: Personal vengeance is not David's motive for cursing his enemies. In praying for his enemies' punishment and his own deliverance, David prays for God to be honored.

Psalm 109:6 "Set thou a wicked man over him: and let Satan stand at his right hand."

It is possible that the "wicked man" had been a government counselor or adviser to a king. The psalmist prays that his enemy will be betrayed by an adviser who offers only evil counsel.

Vengeance belongs to the Lord. About the worst thing that could happen to an evil person, is to have someone just like himself rule over him. Since his father is Satan, perhaps this would be a good spot for him to be. Look what Jesus had to say about those who are dead set on committing evil in the following verse.

John 8:44 "Ye are of [your] father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it."

Those who continue to follow the ways of Satan are Satan's children.

Psalm 109:7 "When he shall be judged, let him be condemned: and let his prayer become sin."

When he shall be arraigned at the bar of his own conscience, and be charged with the sin of which he is guilty. Let conscience, which is as a thousand witnesses, rise up against him, and condemn him; so it did Judas (Matt. 26:1). Or when he shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ at the last day.

"Let him be condemned": let him hear the awful sentence, "go, thou cursed, into everlasting fire". And let him go out immediately from the presence of the Judge into eternal punishment, the condemnation of the devil. so Judas is said to go to his own place (Acts 1:25).

"And let his prayer become sin": Let it be fruitless and in vain; and so far from being heard, let it be treated as an abomination. Let it be considered as an aggravation of his crime, as Haman's was (Esther 7:7). Let his prayer being without faith in the blood of Christ, be reckoned sinful, as it was. Let his cries, and tears, and repentance issue in desperation, and that in sin, as it did in destroying himself (Matt. 27:5).

Since Jesus is the Judge of all the world, we know that he will be condemned for the habitual sins he has committed, that he did not seek forgiveness for. If he did not believe in God, his prayers would be directed to the wrong being and would automatically be sin.

Psalm 109:8 "Let his days be few; [and] let another take his office."

The Apostle Peter cited this verse as justification for replacing Judas the betrayer with another apostle (compare Acts 1:20).

This is the opposite of long life promised to those who follow God's ways. One of the ten commandments promise long life. Let's look at it.

Exodus 20:12 "Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee."

God determines whether we live or die. There is no iron clad rule that we have to live even the 70 years allotted to mankind. Surely when you draw our last breath on this earth, someone else will take over the job you were doing, even if you were a king.

We see in the next few verses a list of terrible things that could come upon a person. God really does not need David's help deciding what to do to the evil ones. David is just mentioning some terrible things that he would like to see come on these evil ones.

Psalm 109:9 "Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow."

Hebrew, "his sons." This is what "always" occurs when a criminal who is a father is executed. It is one of the consequences of crime; and if the officer of justice does his duty, of course, the sons of such a man "must" be made fatherless. The prayer is, simply, that justice may be done, and all this is but an enumeration of what must follow from the proper execution of the laws.

"And his wife a widow": This implies no malice against the wife, but may be consistent with the most tender compassion for her sufferings. It is simply one of the consequences which must follow from the punishment of a bad man. The enumeration of these things shows the enormity of the crime, just as the consequences which follow from the execution of a murderer are an illustration of the divine sense of the evil of the offence.

Psalm 109:10 "Let his children be continually vagabonds, and beg: let them seek [their bread] also out of their desolate places."

Wander from place to place, begging their bread. This is denied of the children of good men in David's time (Psalm 37:25). Yet was threatened to the children of Eli (1 Sam. 2:36), and was very likely literally true of the children of Judas. And was certainly the case of multitudes of the children of the Jews, the posterity of them that crucified Christ, at the time of their destruction by the Romans. When great numbers were dispersed, and wandered about in various countries, as vagabonds, begging their bread from door to door. Which is reckoned by them a great affliction, and very distressing.

"Let them seek their bread also out of their desolate places": Either describing, as Kimchi thinks, the miserable cottages, forlorn and desolate houses, in which they lived. And from where they went out to everyone that passed by, to ask relief of them. Or it may be rendered:

"Because of their desolate places": Or, "after them"; so the Targum, "after their desolation was made". When their grand house was left desolate, their temple, as our Lord said it should, and was (Matt. 23:38). And all their other houses in Jerusalem and in Judea; then were they obliged to seek their bread of others elsewhere, and by begging.

Many times, when children are fatherless, and the mother has to make a living for the family by herself, the children suffer greatly. Not only are they deprived of material things, but time of training is taken away from the children, and they are not prepared to make a living in the world. The widowed mother possibly is doing the best that she can, but she cannot be two people at once. As in many cases, the children suffer for the father's sin.

Psalm 109:11 "Let the extortioner catch all that he hath; and let the strangers spoil his labor."

Or, "lay a snare for all"; as the Romans did, by bringing in their army, invading the land of Judea, and besieging the city of Jerusalem. Who are "the extortioner or exacter that demanded tribute of them"; which they refused to pay, and therefore they seized on all they had for it. The Syrian and Arabic versions render it, "the creditor"; who sometimes for a debt would take wife and children, and all that a man had (see 2 Kings 4:1). It might be literally true of Judas; who dying in debt, his wife and children, and all he had, might be laid hold on for payment.

"And let the stranger spoil his labor": Plunder his house of all his goods and substance he had been laboring for. Which was true of the Romans, who were aliens from the commonwealth of Israel. Who came into the land, and spoiled their houses, fields, and vineyards, they had been laboring in. They took away their place and nation, and all they had (John 11:48).

A crook usually gets caught in his own sin. There is always someone out there, just a little smarter crook. The extortioner is usually involved in a get rich quick scheme. Other people, who are not honest themselves, are usually the one who gets trapped. The extortioner will not quit, until he has the entire worth of the person. This stranger surely would walk away with all your labors.

Psalm 109:12 "Let there be none to extend mercy unto him: neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children."

No pity is ever expressed at hearing or reading the sad case of Judas. And though the Jews were pitied of those that carried them captive to Babylon (Psalm 106:46). Yet, in their last destruction by the Romans, no mercy was shown them. The wrath of God and man came upon them to the uttermost (1 Thess. 2:16).

"Neither let there be any to favor his fatherless children": To bestow any benefit upon them. To relieve their wants, nor to protect their persons. No more respect shown them than to their father, being shunned and hated for their father's sake.

David is saying here, this person showed no one any mercy, let him reap what he has sown. It is a bad situation, but generally children who have parents who have shown no mercy, will not be able to find mercy either. Most people believe the saying, like father like son, and they will not help him because of his father's reputation.

Psalm 109:13 "Let his posterity be cut off; [and] in the generation following let their name be blotted out."

To have a numerous posterity, to have the name and family perpetuated, was regarded among the Hebrews as one of the greatest and most desirable blessings. Hence, to pray that all one's family might be cut off was one of the severest forms of malediction which could be employed.

"And in the generation following": The very next generation. Let not his family be perpetuated at all.

"Let their name be blotted out": As a name is erased from a catalogue or muster-roll when one dies.

David is actually asking God here for their memory to be wiped away, because they did not have children. It is usually very important to a father to have a son who can carry on the family name. David says, don't let them have sons.

Psalm 109 Questions

1. Who was this Psalm written to?
2. Who penned this Psalm?

3. What does, hold not thy peace, mean?
4. Describe the wicked in verse 2?
5. They fought against me without a _____.
6. What did he give himself to in verse 4?
7. In return for their hate, what did he give them?
8. Who did David want to rule over this wicked man?
9. Who is this evil man's father?
10. Who will judge this evil man?
11. Let his prayer become _____.
12. God promises long life for what?
13. In verse 9 David says, let his children be _____.
14. Let his children be _____.
15. Many times children suffer for their _____ sin.
16. Why did David not want God to be merciful to this evil one.
17. Let his posterity be _____ _____.
18. Why is it important to a father to have a son?