

# PRAYING FOR JUSTICE

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To those of us involved in ministering to Christians suffering persecution, the imprecatory Psalms are a tremendous source of comfort. And those of us who are fighting for the right to life of the preborn, or battling social evils such as pornography or crime, are beginning to appreciate what an important weapon God has entrusted to us in the imprecatory Psalms. [Sunday 14 November is the International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted.](#) This study may help inspire and guide the prayers of your family and congregation.

## The Imprecatory Psalms

When I first encountered the prayers for judgement in the Psalms I was quite at a loss to know how to respond to them. Prayers such as: ***"Break the arm of the wicked and evil man; call him to account for his wickedness..."*** Psalm 10:15 did not seem consistent with the gospel of love which I had accepted. Yet Psalm 10:15 was clearly motivated by love for God (***"The Lord is King forever and ever; the nations will perish from His land"*** 10:16, and ***"Why does the wicked man revile God?"*** 10:13), and by love for the innocent who suffer (***"You hear, O Lord, the desire of the afflicted; You encourage them, and You listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed, in order that man, who is of the earth, may terrify no more."*** 10:17-18)

## The Wrath of God

Nevertheless, I grew increasingly uncomfortable reading such graphic prayers for God to judge the wicked as: ***"Pour out your wrath on them; let Your fierce anger overtake them"*** 69:24; ***"O Lord, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth. Rise up, O Judge of the earth, pay back to the proud what they deserve."*** 95:1-2; ***"Break the teeth in their mouths, O God;...let them vanish like water...let their arrows be blunted...The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they bathe their feet in the blood of the wicked. Then men will say, 'Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth.'"*** 58:6-11

Certainly I wanted God to be honoured and yes I was deeply distressed by the prevalence of evil - but could I actually pray for God to *"pour out His wrath"* on the wicked?

## **How are these Prayers to be Prayed?**

The Scriptures make it clear that these prayers are not to be prayed for our own selfish motives, nor against our personal enemies. Rather they are to be prayed in Christ, for His glory and against His enemies. The psalmist describes the targets of these imprecations as: those who devise injustice in their heart and whose hands mete out violence (58:2); those who **"boast of evil"** and **"are a disgrace in the eyes of God. Your tongue plots destruction, it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth."** 52:1-3; **"They crush your people...They slay the widow and the alien; they murder the fatherless."** 94:5-6; **"With cunning they conspire against Your people; they plot against those You cherish."** 83:3; **"You hate all who do wrong. You destroy those who tell lies; bloodthirsty and deceitful men the Lord abhors."** 5:5-6

To those unrepentant enemies of God, the psalmist declares: **"Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin"** 52:5; **"Surely God will crush the heads of His enemies...of those who go on in their sins."** 68:21

## **The Purpose of these Prayers**

And the purpose of these prayers for justice is declared: **"Then it will be known to the ends of the earth that God rules..."** 59:13; **"to proclaim the power of God"** 68:34; **"All kings will bow down to Him and all nations will serve Him"** 72:11; **"Who knows the power of Your anger? For Your wrath is as great as the fear that is due You."** 90:11

Yet despite the fact that 90 of the 150 Psalms include imprecations (prayers invoking God's righteous judgement upon the wicked) such prayers are rare in the average Western church. However, amongst the persecuted churches these prayers are much more common.

## **Praying Against the Persecutors**

Amidst the burned-out churches and devastation of Marxist Angola, I found the survivors of communist persecution - including the crippled and maimed, and widows and orphans praying for God to strike down the wicked and remove the persecutors of the Church. I was shocked - yet it was Biblical (Even the martyrs in Heaven pray, **"How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until You judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?"** Revelation 6:10)

The initiator of the communist persecution in Angola was Agestino Neto. Described as a "drunken, psychotic, Marxist poet", Neto had been installed by Cuban troops as the first dictator of Angola. He boasted that: "Within 20 years there won't be a Bible or a church left in Angola. I will have eradicated Christianity." Yet despite the vicious wave of church burning and massacres, it is not Christianity that was eradicated in Angola but Agestino Neto. Neto died in mysterious circumstances on an operating table in Moscow.

### **Persecutors Judged**

In **Romania**, I learnt of a series of remarkable incidents recorded of God judging the persecutors of the Church in answer to prayer:

- \* A communist official ordered a certain pastor to be arrested. The next day the official died of a heart attack.
- \* Another communist party official ordered that all the Bibles in his district were to be collected and pulped, to be turned into toilet paper. This blasphemous project was in fact carried out. But the next day when the official was medically examined, he was informed that he had terminal cancer. He died shortly afterwards.
- \* On another occasion, a communist official who had ordered a Baptist church to be demolished by bulldozers died in a car crash the very next day.
- \* When an order was given to dismantle a place of worship on the mountainside in a forest, the workmen flatly refused to carry out the order. At gunpoint a group of conscripted gypsies also refused to touch the church. In desperation, the communist police forced prisoners at bayonet-point to dismantle the structure. Yet the officer in charge pleaded with the local Christians to pray for him, that God would not judge him. He emphasised that he had nothing against Christians and was only obeying strict orders. The building was, in fact, reconstructed later and again used for worship.

***"They were all seized with fear and the Name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honour...in this way the Word of the Lord spread widely and grew in power."*** Acts 19:17,20

Nicolae Ceaucescu, the dictator who ordered much of the persecution in Romania, was overthrown by his own army and executed on Christmas day 1989 to joyous shouts of "the anti-Christ is dead" in the streets. Many testified that this was in answer to the fervent prayers on the long-suffering people of Romania.

## **Challenging God**

Another persecutor of the Church who challenged God was Samora Machel, the first dictator of Marxist Mozambique. Samora Machel was a cannibal who ate human flesh in witchcraft ceremonies in the 1960's. He pledged his soul to Satan and vowed that he would destroy the Church and turn Mozambique into the first truly Marxist-Leninist state in Africa. Thousands of churches in Mozambique were closed, confiscated, "nationalised", claimed and padlocked, burnt down or boarded up. Missionaries were expelled, some being imprisoned first. Evangelism was forbidden. Bibles were ceremonially burnt and tens of thousands of Christians, including many pastors and elders, were shipped off to concentration camps - most were never seen again.

A month before his sudden death, Samora Machel cursed God publicly and challenged Him to prove His existence by striking him (Machel) dead. On 19 October 1986, while several churches were specifically praying for God to stop persecution in Mozambique, Machel's Soviet Tupelov aircraft crashed in a violent thunderstorm. The plane crashed 200 metres within South Africa's boundary with Mozambique. Amidst the wreckage, the Marxist plans for overthrowing the government of Malawi were discovered and published. Not only had God judged a blasphemer and a persecutor, but He had also saved a country from persecution.

## **The Power of Prayer**

In the months leading up to the first multi-party elections in Zambia many churches fasted and prayed for God to remove the 27-year socialist dictatorship of Kenneth Kaunda. This was done on 31st October 1991 when Fredrick Chiluba (a man converted to Christ whilst imprisoned for opposing Kaunda) was elected president of Zambia and covenanted to make Zambia a Christian country.

It is recorded in history that the wicked Mary, Queen of Scots, declared trembling and in tears:  
*"I am more afraid of John Knox's prayers than of an army of ten thousand."*

## **The Psalms are the Oracles of God**

Our Lord Jesus Christ & His apostles used the Psalms constantly in teaching men to know God. The New Testament (NT) quotes the Old Testament (OT) over 283 times and 41% of all OT quotes in the NT are from the Psalms. Christ Himself alluded to the Psalms over 50 times. The Psalms are the Prayer Book of the Bible.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 declares: ***"All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*** (See also 2 Peter 3:15-16)

The Psalms are part of God's revelation of Himself and His attributes, and they are reaffirmed by the NT as the authoritative Word of God. Those imprecatory Psalms which evangelical plastic surgeons reject as "unsuited" and "unworthy" for the Church are the very Psalms Christ used to testify about Himself (e.g. Mark 12:36; Matt 22:43-44) and which the apostles used as authoritative Scripture (e.g. Acts 1:16-20; Acts 4:25; Hebrew 4:7). See also 2 Samuel 23:1-2.

CH Spurgeon said concerning the imprecatory Psalms, (especially Psalm 109): ***"Truly this is one of the hard places of Scripture, a passage which the soul trembles to read, yet it is not ours to sit in Judgement upon it, but to bow our ear to what the Lord would speak to us therein."***

The rejection of any part of God's Word is a rejection of the giver of that Word, God Himself.

### **The Messianic Psalms are the Words of Christ**

Christ quoted the Psalms not merely as prophesy; He actually spoke the Psalms as His own words. The Psalms occupied an enormous place in the life of our Lord. He used it as His prayer book and songbook - from the Synagogue to the festivals and at the Last Supper.

On the cross, Christ quoted from the Psalms - not as some ancient authority that He adapted for His own use, but as His very own words - the words of the Lord's Anointed, which as David's Son He truly was.

***"Father, into Your hands I commit My Spirit."*** Psalm 31:5

***"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"*** Psalm 22:1

In His ministry, Christ foretells what He will say as the Judge on the Day of Judgement and He quotes the Psalms in doing so!

Matthew 7:23 ***"Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evil doers.'"*** Psalm 6:8

In Hebrews 10:5, the apostle attributes Psalm 40:6-8 directly to Christ although nowhere in the Gospels is Christ recorded as having said these words. Similarly Hebrews 2:11-12 attributes Psalm 22:22 directly to Christ despite there being no record of His having spoken these words while on earth. Clearly, the apostles believed Christ is speaking in the Psalms.

Christ came to establish His Kingdom and to extend His mercy in all the earth. But let us never forget that Jesus will come again to execute Judgement on the wicked.

David as the anointed king of the chosen people of God was a prototype of Jesus Christ. Acts 2:30: ***"being therefore a prophet, ...he foresaw and spoke of the Resurrection of Christ."***

David was a witness to Christ in his office, in his life, and in his words. The same words, which David spoke, the future Messiah spoke through him. The prayers of David were prayed also by Christ. Or better, Christ Himself prayed these Psalms through His forerunner David.

The imprecatory Psalms are expressions of the infinite justice of God, of His indignation against wrongdoing, and His compassion for the wronged.

### **What about the Psalms of Repentance?**

Christ is also the Lamb of God, the substitutionary sacrifice for our sins. Christ, in the day of His crucifixion, was charged with the sin of His people. He appropriated to Himself those debts for which He had made Himself responsible. Our Lord was the substitution for the sinner. He took the sinners place. (Isaiah 53)

***"God made Him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God."*** 2 Corinthians 5:21

In history, the Psalms, especially the imprecatory Psalms, have been understood to have been the prayers of Christ by: St Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, Tertullian, Luther and many others. All the Psalms are the voice of Christ. Christ is praying these prayers of vengeance. It is only right for the righteous King of Peace to ask God to destroy His enemies.

These prayers signal an alarm to all who are still enemies of King Jesus. His prayers will be answered! God's Word is revealed upon all who oppose Christ. Anyone who rejects God's way of forgiveness in the cross of Christ will bear the dreadful curses of God.

He who prays Psalm 69:23-28 will one day make this prayer a reality when He declares to those on His left: ***"Depart from Me you who are cursed into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*** Matthew 25:41

All the enemies of the Lord need to hear these Psalms. God's Kingdom is at War. The powers of evil will fall and God alone will reign forever!

***"With justice He judges and makes war...out of His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. He will rule them with an iron sceptre; He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty...King of Kings and Lord of Lords."*** Revelation 19:11-15

### **What About Loving our Enemies?**

What about Jesus' command to love our enemies and to bless those who curse us? (Matthew 5:44)

Christ is, of course, the loving and merciful Saviour who forgives sin; but He is also the awesome Judge who is coming in Judgement on those who disobey His Gospel.

***"God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled... This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels. He will punish those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of His power on the day He comes to be glorified in His holy people and to be marvelled at among all those who have believed."*** 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

Jesus has power on earth to forgive sins, and He has power on earth to execute judgement upon His enemies. In the Psalms, we see both the vengeance and the love of God.

Even in the NT & in the Gospels we see imprecations.

***"Woe to you... hypocrites... blind guides... blind fools... full of greed and self indulgence... whitewashed tombs... you snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to Hell?"*** Matthew 23

In Matthew 26:23-24, Christ quotes from Psalm 69 and 109 to refer to His betrayal by Judas.

We also need to acknowledge that Christ's prayers of blessing are not for all. In John 17:6-9, it is clear that Christ is only praying for the elect of God - those who have: *"obeyed your Word"... "accepted" God's Word...and have "believed"*. (See Luke 10:8-16 - Those who reject the message of God's kingdom will be judged.)

### **May we Pray the Imprecatory Psalms?**

Martin Luther pointed out that when one prays: ***"Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done"*** then *"he must put all the opposition to this in one pile and say: 'Curses, maledictions and disgrace upon every other name and every other kingdom. May they be ruined and torn apart and may all their schemes and wisdom and plans run aground.'"*

To pray for the extension of God's kingdom is to seek the destruction of all other kingdoms, e.g. Daniel 2:44: ***"The God of heaven will set up a kingdom that will never be destroyed...It will crush all those kingdoms and bring them to an end, but it will itself endure forever."***

Advance and victory for the Church means defeat and retreat for the kingdom of darkness.

**There is a life & death struggle between two kingdoms.** The Church cannot exclude hatred for satan's kingdom from its love for God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom cannot come without satan's kingdom being destroyed. God's will cannot be done on earth without the destruction of evil. The glory of God demands the destruction of evil. Instead of being influenced by a sickly sentimentalism which insists upon the assumed, but really non-existent, rights of man - we should focus instead upon the rights of God.

### **"Do To Them As You Did to Sisera"**

Note Psalm 83 where the Psalmist prays against those who "plot together" against God and His people: ***"Cover their faces with shame so that men will seek your Name, O Lord...Do***

***to them as You did to Midian, as you did to Sisera and Jabin at the river Kishon, who perished at Endor and became like refuse on the ground."***

The story of Sisera in the book of Judges (Chapter 4 and 5) provides a vivid example of God's judgement on the wicked. Sisera *"cruelly oppressed the Israelites for twenty years"* and they *"cried to the Lord for help"* Judges 4:3. In response to those prayers: ***"The Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera abandoned his chariot and fled on foot...All the troops of Sisera fell by the sword; not a man was left."***

Judges 4:15-16

The account then goes on to describe how Sisera escaped to the tent of Jael where she lulled him into a false sense of safety and then drove a tent peg through his temple with a hammer. The song of victory by Deborah and Barak celebrated the crushing of the head of Sisera in graphic detail (Judges 5:25-27). And it is this that Psalm 83 implores God to again do to His enemies... ***"As you did to Sisera..."***

### **The Blessings of Obedience and the Curses of Disobedience**

The imprecatory Psalms are fully consistent with the law of God: ***"If you do not carefully follow all the words of this Law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome Name - the Lord your God - the Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants. He will bring upon you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you. The Lord will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law until you are destroyed...because you did not obey the Lord your God...so it will please Him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess."*** Deuteronomy 28:58-63

The Covenant God made with His people included curses for disobedience as well as blessings for obedience. Deuteronomy 27 records the formal giving and receiving of the covenant terms in an awesome account: ***"The Levites shall recite to all the people of Israel in a loud voice:***

*'Cursed is the man who carves an image or casts an idol - a thing detestable to the Lord, the word of the craftsman's hands - and sets it up in secret.'*

Then all the people shall say, 'Amen!'

*'Cursed is the man who dishonours his father or his mother...'*

'Cursed is the man who moves his neighbour's boundary stone...'

'Cursed is the man who leads the blind astray on the roads...'

'Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow...'

'Cursed is the man who kills his neighbour secretly...'

'Cursed is the man who accepts a bribe to kill an innocent person.'

'Cursed is the man who does not uphold the words of this Law by carrying them out.'

Then all the people shall say, 'Amen'." Deuteronomy 27:14-26

The New Testament confirms that the inevitable consequences of rejecting Christ is the curse.

***"If anyone does not love the Lord - a curse be on him."*** 1 Corinthians 16:22 (See also: Romans 12:19-21; Hebrews 1:1-3; 3:7-12; 3:15-19; 10:26-31; 12:14-29.)

### **How Can We Preach these Prayers?**

The Church of Jesus Christ is an army under orders. Scripture constitutes the official dispatches from the Commander-in-Chief. But we have a problem: those who are called to pass on those orders are refusing to do so. How then can we expect to be a united, effective army? Is it any wonder that the troops have lost sight of their commission to demolish the strongholds of the kingdom of darkness? If the Church does not hear the battle cries of her Captain, how will she follow Him onto the battlefield?

Pastors are commissioned to pass on the orders of the Church's Commander, never withholding or changing His words. One whose job is to carry dispatches to troops in wartime would face certain and severe punishment if he dared to amend the general's orders. The pastor's charge is of greater importance than that of a courier in any earthly army. There's no place for the dispatcher to decide he doesn't agree with his Commander's strategy.

When Jesus Christ sent seventy-two disciples on a preaching mission, He told them to proclaim the coming of God's Kingdom (Luke 10:9) - that is, to announce that people must submit to God's rule in their lives. Jesus instructed them to pray for peace on any house they approach, assuring them that if anyone rejected it, the peace would return on the disciples (verse 5). But we must consider what He said they should do if their message were rejected - that is, if the hearers persisted in rebellion against God's rule - ***"But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our***

***feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The Kingdom of God is near.***" Luke 10:11

What would be the result of that denunciation? "***I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom*** [on which God sent fire from heaven in judgement for its wickedness] ***than for that town.***" (verse 12) Immediately Jesus added curses on Korazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum for their rejection of His message. (verse 13:15)

He then explained to the disciples the great authority He had given them: "***He who listens to you listens to Me; he who rejects you rejects Me; but he who rejects Me rejects him who sent Me.***" (verse 16) This is the fundamental basis for calling down God's curses on anyone: his persistent rebellion against God's authority expressed in His Law and the ministry of His servants.

We need to clearly and forcefully proclaim the war cries of the Prince of Peace. Only then will the Church awake from its lethargy and once again enter the battle. If we fail to pass on the battle cry then a lack of urgency and confusion in the ranks will be inevitable.

### **God Cannot Be Mocked**

Like Psalm 1, our preaching needs to clearly show the blessings of obedience and the curse of disobedience. The eternal truth is that **God cannot be mocked**. Whatever a man sows - that shall he reap (Galatians 6:7). The curses pronounced on disobedience in Deuteronomy 28:47-53 were fulfilled in detail in Samaria (2 Kings 6:28-29) and in Judea (AD 70). The wrath of God upon covenant breakers is real.

The "I" of the Psalms is Jesus Christ. The "we" of the Psalms includes those of us in the Lord Jesus. The enemies are not our own, individually, but those of the Lord and of His Church. The Psalms are of Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King. They record Christ's march in victory against the kingdom of darkness. As Christ is the author of the Psalms, so too is He the final fulfilment of the Covenant on which they are based. God will answer the psalmist's prayers completely in Jesus Christ on the final Day of Judgement. While on earth Jesus foretold the day when He will say: "***But those enemies of Mine who did not want Me to be King over them - bring them here and kill them in front of Me.***" Luke 19:27

## **God's Kingdom is at War**

A fatal end awaits everyone who refuses to acknowledge and to obey Jesus as King and Lord. Hearing expositions of these war psalms of the Prince of Peace will remind His people that God's Kingdom is at war! The Kingdom of darkness is being overcome by the Kingdom of Jesus Christ, a war in which each local congregation of believers plays a vital part. You must rally your battalion to put on the whole armour of God, including ***"the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God."*** Ephesians 6:17 That battle-readiness also involves ***"pray(ing) in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests."*** Ephesians 6:18

Christ teaches His army to pray for the utter destruction of the enemies of God as the psalmist did: ***"Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not acknowledge You, on the kingdoms that do not call on Your Name."*** Psalm 79:6

## **Pray for the Persecuted**

To deal with the very real hurts and injustices in this world it is necessary for us to pray for God's justice. Those who are persecuted need the comfort of these prayers.

***"Let the saints rejoice in His honour and sing for joy... May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, to carry out the sentences written against them. This is the glory of all His saints. Praise the Lord."*** Psalm 149:5-9

## **Spiritual Warfare**

Prayer is, in fact, spiritual warfare. One weapon is prayer for conversion of spiritual enemies; another is prayer for judgement on those who finally refuse to be converted. We handicap the army of God when we refuse to use both of these great weapons that He has given us. It is, at all times, a part of the task of the people of God to destroy evil.

If you have been guilty of dulling your sword, by neglecting or undermining these Psalms, repent of that sin, sharpen your sword anew, and go forth to do battle in the Name and for the Glory of Jesus - until ***"the knowledge of the Lord will cover the earth as the water cover the sea."*** Habakkuk 2:14

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