

Bible Study on Psalm 35

Imprecatory Psalms – Judge between Me and Them

Perhaps you found yourself shocked at the content of the psalms in this category. Perhaps these psalms seem to contradict the NT, especially Jesus' commands that we love everyone, even our enemies. No doubt about it, the imprecatory psalms are forceful. They are not the prayers of an armchair believer whose life has always run smoothly. Instead they grow out of life in the real world, a world in which real evil causes real pain and real death – yes, even to God's people. In this real world, we encounter real injustice. And we sometimes wonder how a God of justice can let unjust, hurtful things happen. The imprecatory psalms can help us when we feel that life – and God – are being unfair. (LL)

Cruelty may be far removed from some people's experience, but it was very much a part of the lives of the imprecatory psalmists. The writers faced intense personal or national suffering. They call upon God to repay the wicked, rather than falling into the sin of revenge. Only God has the right to avenge wrongdoing. He does not want us to take matters into our own hands. We pray to God for help rather than trying to settle matters for ourselves. (LL)

The psalmists are simply asking God to act in line with His character, in line with His holiness and justice, in line with His promises to hear and help His people. We should indeed pray that God will lead our enemies to repentance. And we can ask God to make it possible for us to desire their salvation with Christ-like love. (LL)

A few psalms that fit into this category are Psalms 35, 55, 58, 69, and 137.

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. *What does this mean?* The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also.

How is this done? When God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow the name of God nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh; but strengthens and keeps us steadfast in His Word and in faith unto our end. This is His gracious and good will.

1. Psalm 35 has its setting in the time that Saul was king and David had been anointed to succeed Saul. Recall some events in the life of David as he was connected to Saul?
2. Psalm 35 begins with a prayer (vv. 1-3) in which David asks God to intervene on his behalf. What are some things David asks God to give him?
3. What attacks does he mention as the reason for his call for help?
4. Psalm 35 may be divided into three sections, the first ending at verses 9-10, the second at verse 18, the third at verses 27-28. Each ending is an expression of hope. Which of

the three comforts you most as you consider the injustice in the world and/or in your personal life? Explain.

5. Read John 10:10 and Revelation 12:9, 12. What is the ultimate power behind all wickedness and evil?
6. How would you characterize the attacks David endured in 1 Samuel 19:8-17; and 2 Samuel 21:15-17?
7. David did not respond by seeking revenge. How would you characterize his response in 1 Samuel 24:2-13 and 26:1-11?
8. Summarize these two texts, each dealing with those who want to harm us. a) Romans 12:17-21; b) 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10.
9. We are God's children. He takes it personally when someone attacks us (Zechariah 2:8b). Consider that David was to be an ancestor of the coming Savior. Why did this make any attack on David even more significant?
10. Throughout this psalm, David contrasts his friendship with his enemies and their betrayal of him. Think about a time when someone repaid you "evil for good." Without mentioning names or the specific incident, ponder the following:
 - a. Following the "attack" I felt...
 - b. I dealt with my feelings by...
 - c. The situation was resolved when...

Compare Psalm 35:19 with John 15:23-25

11. What kinds of attacks did both David and Jesus suffer?
12. What did David and Jesus each ask to do as a result of this? (See Psalm 35:13, 14, 23, and Luke 23:34.)
13. What does this tell us about our attitudes and actions toward those who hurt us?

David appeals to God Almighty as divine warrior and righteous judge. He prays that God will come to his defense and rescue him from those who were once close friends but who now accuse, slander, and condemn him with malice. The Lord forbids that we accuse an innocent person (Eighth Commandment), that he or she might be wrongly punished in body, property, or reputation (cf Pr 22:1). He bids us to err on the side of the Gospel in the case of our neighbor, unless guilt is clear (cf Mt 18:15–18). As we endeavor to treat our neighbors fairly and with mercy, our merciful Lord justifies us according to His righteousness. • O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior of the world, move us, we pray, to shun lies and to speak well of our neighbor. Build a strong bulwark around our name, reputation, and integrity that we might be protected from malicious gossip and deceitful tongues; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen. (TLSB)

Some Answers to the above Questions:

- 1. Satan and his demons directly instigate much of the evil in this world. They brought evil into God's creation. Contrary to much popular opinion, Satan is a very real, personal being who exercises great power – power limited, however, by the Lord.**
- 2. Answers will vary. The attacks could legitimately be characterized as life-threatening.**
- 3. David responded with incredible restraint. He demonstrated respect for King Saul and left revenge to the Lord.**
- 4. God calls us to live in peace with everyone insofar as it's up to us. We are to treat those who consider us their enemies with kindness and love, repaying evil with good and letting God judge and take revenge if and when justice is called for.**

On the other hand, God does promise to deal with our enemies. It's a matter of justice (2 Thess. 1:5) with Him. Those who refuse to repent and come to Him in faith for forgiveness will be eternally condemned. God doesn't take it as an inconsequential thing when someone hurts one of His children!

- 5. Specific attacks mentioned include physical attacks (v. 4); unjust persecution (v. 7); slander (vv. 11, 15, 20); mockery (v. 16); and hatred (v. 19).**
- 6. God had chosen to make David an ancestor of the Savior. But had David not lived to produce a son, God's plan would have been frustrated. Perhaps this is why Satan seems to have singled David out for so many vicious, ongoing attacks.**
- 7. There will be variety of answers possible.**
- 8. Both David and Jesus suffered undeserved hatred. David's attacks came from those whom he had befriended. Jesus truly suffered undeserved hatred as He showed nothing but love for His enemies.**
- 9. Both David and Jesus prayed for God's help. They looked to God for justice. Neither took matters into their own hands.**
- 10. Our Lord always stands ready to hear and to help us. When we take our situations to the Lord, we can trust God to do what is right and what is best for us. We can rest in this assurance because of all He has already done for us in Christ Jesus.**

11. Answers will vary.