

Imprecatory Psalms Psalms 139 & 140

Psalms that contain a prayer in which God is called on to judge, curse, or exercise retribution against evildoers.



“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

2 Timothy 3:16-17

- God’s Omniscience (knowledge) (v.1-6)
- God’s Omnipresence (v.7-12)
- God’s Omnipotence (power) and Sovereignty (v.13-18)
- God’s Holiness and Justice (v.19-22)

Ps. 139:17 "How precious to me are your thoughts, O God. . . . I awake, and I am still with You."

Ps. 17:15 "As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; and I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake."

Ex. 4:11 "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?"

John 9:3 (man born blind) "so the works of God might be displayed in him."

1 Cor. 1:27 "God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the strong. . . ."

"Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker. . . . Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say, 'He has no hands?' Woe to him who says to a father, 'What are you begetting?' or to a woman, 'To what are you giving birth?'" (Isaiah 45:9-10).

Hate (*śānē'*)—represents an emotion ranging from intense hatred to the much weaker, to be set against and separate from; "whereas love draws, hate separates and keeps distant" (*Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies*).

Psalm 5:4-5 "for You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You. . . . You hate all who do iniquity."

2 Chron. 19:2 "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD, and so bring wrath on yourself from the LORD?"

Lessons about Imprecatory Prayers from Psalms 139 and 140

§ Imprecatory prayers demonstrate God's righteous and just judgment of the wicked. They are rooted in the character of God—in His sovereignty, holiness, righteousness, justice, omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence (Ps. 139; 140:12; 59:10-11; 7:9,11).

Lessons about Imprecatory Prayers from Psalms 139 and 140

§ Imprecatory prayers are driven by the oppression of wickedness in the world and persistent rebellion against God (Ps. 139:19-20, 140:1-5, 12; 109:2-5, 16-18).

Lessons about Imprecatory Prayers from Psalms 139 and 140

§ Imprecatory prayers are directed toward God's enemies, not to satisfy personal vendettas (Ps. 139:19-22; 79:1-7; 83:1-4). Remember that men like David, Jeremiah, and Nehemiah, who prayed this type of prayer, were acting as the Lord's representatives on earth.

Lessons about Imprecatory Prayers from Psalms 139 and 140

- § Answers to imprecatory prayer must result in God's glory and honor, not our own. They are intended to cause the righteous to praise God (Ps. 140:12-13; 7:17; 35:9-10, 27-28).
- § Imprecatory prayer should be offered with caution, after first examining our own personal motives for asking (Ps. 139:23-24; Ps. 7:3-5).

Lessons about Imprecatory Prayers from Psalms 139 and 140

- § Imprecatory prayers may lead the wicked to seek the Lord (Ps. 83:16-18) and do not necessarily preclude asking God to grant repentance (Ps.7:11-12).

Lessons about Imprecatory Prayers from Psalms 139 and 140

- § Imprecatory prayers are NOT exclusive to the Old Testament but are found in the New Testament as well. Jesus, Paul, and even saints in heaven used imprecatory prayers: Jesus (Mt. 6:10; Lk. 10:10-16; 11:42-48, 52). Paul (1 Cor. 16:22; Gal. 1:8-9; 2 Tim. 4:14). Saints (martyrs!) in heaven (Rev. 6:9-10). Furthermore, seven of the imprecatory psalms are quoted in the New Testament.

How do we reconcile imprecatory prayer with Matthew 5?

- § The Sermon on the Mount was intended to correct the Pharisees' misinterpretations and abuses of the law.
- § The Sermon on the Mount shows us how to handle personal wrongs.
- § We still have the right to self defense, and we are still entitled to government protection (Luke 22:36).

Luke 18:1-8 “ . . . Will not God give JUSTICE to His elect, who cry to Him day and night? Will He delay long over them? I tell you, He will give justice to them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He find faith on the earth?”

“Only let believers be on their guard, lest they should betray too much haste in their prayers, and let them rather leave room for the grace of God to manifest itself in their behalf; because it may turn out that the man, who to-day bears towards us a deadly enmity, may be to-morrow through that grace become our friend” (John Calvin).