

What is Imprecatory Prayer?

Imprecatory prayer is a prayer in which God is called on to judge, curse, or exercise retribution against evildoers or against enemies of God. Examples of psalms with imprecations include Psalms 7, 35, 55, 58, 59, 69, 79, 83, 109, 137, 139, and 140.

Points to Consider about Imprecatory Psalms/Prayers

1. 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).
2. Imprecatory prayers are driven by the oppression caused by sin, wickedness in the world, and persistent rebellion against God (Ps. 140:1-5, 12; 109:2-5, 16-18). Moreover, the language sometimes invoked by the Psalmist is intended to convey the sense of desperation and pain experienced by the Psalmist (Psalm 137:8).
3. Imprecatory prayers are directed toward God's enemies, not to satisfy personal vendettas (Ps. 139:19-22; 79:1-7; 83:1-4). It must be remembered that men like David, Jeremiah, and Nehemiah, who prayed this type of prayer, were acting as the Lord's representatives on earth (see also Jer. 12:1-4, 18:18-23; Neh. 4:4-5).
4. 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. 7:17; 35:9-10, 27-28; 140:12-13).
5. Imprecatory prayer should be offered with caution, after first examining our own personal motives for asking (Ps. 7:3-5; Ps. 139:23-24).
6. 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).
7. 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.

“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