

IMPRECATORY PRAYER? PART 1

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In many churches ... “Christians” look down on the Old Testament. It's “old” and who wants old ... we all want new. Not relevant to us New Testament Christians.

Or ... it's “For Jews” ... done away ... all fulfilled in Christ.

And many also see the Old Testament as depicting a harsh ... vindictive God ... He's strict and He's judgmental ... unlike Jesus ... meek and mild. The Old Testament is legalistic. The New Testament is all Love and Mercy. You've probably heard them discussed this way.

The Old Testament talks of stoning adulterers ... destruction of Sodom ... the extermination of the nations of Canaan. Whereas The New Testament seems much kinder ... talks about Grace ... do good ... forgive.

Some conclude there are two different Gods. Or that the Old Testament is not helpful or relevant to us believers now.

One area that causes many well-intentioned believers to turn away is those hideous stories which recount Ancient Israel ... instructed to exterminate tribes in Canaan ... man, woman, child, infant (often the animals too). They think to themselves: How can that be a loving God?

Richard Dawkins view: “The God of the Old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all fiction; jealous, and proud of it; a petty, unjust, unforgiving control-freak; a vindictive, bloodthirsty ethnic cleanser; a misogynistic homophobic, racist, infanticidal,

genocidal, filicidal, pestilential, megalomaniacal, sadomasochistic, capricious malevolent bully".

He believes that the God of The Bible is a monster! As far as he is concerned ... The Bible is fiction.

I've talked previously (briefly) about the extermination of tribes in Canaan ... but today ... I do want to look at another area that causes believers to be uncomfortable about what they read in the Old Testament ... or even embarrassed about the men of God (or God Himself).

Some "Christians" prefer to just ignore ... pretend these scriptures don't exist.

Some of the Psalms! Many people like the Psalms (for example: especially Psalm 23) ... sort of ... but there are some Psalms they prefer to hurry over ... they don't like the content of.

Psalms 137:1-3 (NKJV)

1 By the rivers of Babylon,
There we sat down, yea, we wept
When we remembered Zion.

2 We hung our harps
Upon the willows in the midst of it.

3 For there those who carried us away captive asked of us a song,
And those who plundered us requested mirth,
Saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!"

Psalms 137:7-9 (NKJV)

7 Remember, O Lord, against the sons of Edom
The day of Jerusalem,
Who said, "Raze it, raze it,
To its very foundation!"

8 ***O daughter of Babylon, who are to be destroyed,
Happy the one who repays you as you have served us!***

9 ***Happy the one who takes and dashes
Your little ones against the rock!***

People read that and don't think it sounds very nice. What do I do with that sort of language? This is what is referred to as an imprecatory Psalm.

Psalms 109:6-15 (NKJV)

6 Set a wicked man over him,
And let an accuser stand at his right hand.

7 When he is judged, let him be found guilty,
And let his prayer become sin.

8 Let his days be few,
And let another take his office.

9 ***Let his children be fatherless,
And his wife a widow.*** (In other words ... kill him ... destroy him)

10 Let his children continually be vagabonds, and beg;
Let them seek their bread also from their desolate places.

11 Let the creditor seize all that he has,
And let strangers plunder his labor.

12 Let there be none to extend mercy to him,
Nor let there be any to favour his fatherless children.

13 ***Let his posterity be cut off,***
And in the generation following let their name be blotted out.

14 Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord,
And let not the sin of his mother be blotted out.

15 Let them be continually before the Lord,
That He may cut off the memory of them from the earth;

This is a Psalm of David. Isn't he "a man after God's own heart"? Surely this isn't the Word of God? What sort of fool put it into the canon of scripture?

Let's look at another one of these type of Psalms. Another Psalm of David.

Psalms 35:4-6 (NKJV)

4 Let those be put to shame and brought to dishonour

Who seek after my life;

Let those be turned back and brought to confusion

Who plot my hurt.

**5 Let them be like chaff before the wind,
And let the angel of the Lord chase them.**

6 Let their way be dark and slippery,

And let the angel of the Lord pursue them. (*Danger wherever they turn*)

Psalms 35:8 (NKJV)

8 Let destruction come upon him unexpectedly,

And let his net that he has hidden catch himself;

Into that very destruction let him fall.

Psalms 35:26 (NKJV)

26 Let them be ashamed and brought to mutual confusion

Who rejoice at my hurt;

Let them be clothed with shame and dishonour

Who exalt themselves against me.

Psalms 139:19-22 (NKJV)

19 Oh, that You would slay the wicked, O God!

Depart from me, therefore, you bloodthirsty men.

20 For they speak against You wickedly;

Your enemies take Your name in vain.

21 Do I not hate them, O Lord, who hate You?

And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?

22 **I hate them with perfect hatred**; (*a total complete hatred*)

I count them my enemies.

Some strong language ... prayers of hatred ... destruction ... violence.
How can this be compatible with a God of Love ... or of any relevance
to a New Testament Christian ... trying to walk in love?

Psalms like these (relatively few) are referred to as: Imprecatory
Psalms.

Definition: to imprecate ... to invoke or bring down evil or calamity on
someone

Some (modern) commentators just dismiss these Psalms.

Albert Barnes: "difficult to reconcile with a kind and forgiving
spirit". "Perhaps there is no part of The Bible that gives more
perplexity and pain to its readers than this; perhaps nothing that
constitutes a more plausible objection to the belief that the Psalms
are the production of inspired men than the spirit of revenge which
they sometimes seem to breathe and the spirit of cherished malice
and implacableness which the writers seem to manifest".

C S Lewis: He talks about some of these Psalms as: "Spirit of
Hatred" ... "Terrible or contemptible" ... "indeed devilish". He states:
"The hatred is there ... festering, gloating, undisguised ... and also we
should be wicked if we in any way condoned, or approved it".

These Psalms cause problems to many sincere believers. They find
various ways to attempt to justify or excuse them ... "not God's
Word ... these are the views of carnal men ... moved by carnal
passions". "We can observe their views and their passions ... but

should be horrified by what they are saying ... and of course, as New Testament Christians ... and followers of Jesus ... we should be above such carnality”.

So ... do we ignore them ... pretend they aren't there ... get embarrassed by the language? What do with these Psalms?

2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NKJV)

14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

15 and that from childhood you have known **the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.**

16 **All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,**

17 **that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

All scripture is profitable ... including Psalms.

Psalms are frequently quoted in the New Testament ... approximately 150 times. Clearly the Psalms are highly valued and respected by the New Testament authors. And Jesus Himself quoted them many times.

(A Few Messianic Psalms are the most quoted Psalms ... 22, 23, 110, 118 ... but other than these ... the imprecatory Psalms ... 35, 69, 109 ... are the next most quoted!). In other words ... these Psalms are the most quoted in the New Testament so you can't just pretend that they aren't there.

We can't just ignore them! The New Testament writers recognised their importance! Most/many have the preconceived view that the

Old Testament is harsh ... legalistic (and its God) ... the New Testament is love and mercy. That is a flawed viewpoint. (Marcion ... back in the second century ... was one of the first to say that the God of the Old Testament was a harsh God etc). That's an inaccurate view.

In the New Testament ... Jesus said the greatest of all of the commandments is to Love God with all of your heart and mind. Next is to Love your neighbour as yourself. These are the two most fundamental commandments ... as per Jesus. But notice ... Loving your neighbour ... comes from the Old Testament.

Leviticus 19:16-18 (NKJV)

16 You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbour: I am the Lord. (*Jehovah God*)

17 "**You shall not hate your brother in your heart.** You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him.

18 **You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people,** but **you shall love your neighbour as yourself.** I am the Lord. (*The second greatest commandment according to Jesus*)

This is the same message ... the same instructions as in the New Testament.

Also ... personal vengeance was not permitted. Vengeance is God's prerogative.

Deuteronomy 32:34-35 (NKJV)

34 'Is this not laid up in store with Me,
Sealed up among My treasures?

35 **Vengeance is Mine, and recompense;**
Their foot shall slip in due time;

For the day of their calamity is at hand,
And the things to come hasten upon them.'

Deuteronomy 32:39-43 (NKJV)

39 'Now see that I, even I, am He,
And there is no God besides Me;
I kill and I make alive;
I wound and I heal;
Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.

40 For I raise My hand to heaven,
And say, "As I live forever,
41 If I whet My glittering sword,
And My hand takes hold on judgment,
*I will render vengeance to My enemies,
And repay those who hate Me.*

42 I will make My arrows drunk with blood,
And My sword shall devour flesh,
With the blood of the slain and the captives,
From the heads of the leaders of the enemy." '

43 "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people;
For He will avenge the blood of His servants,
And render vengeance to His adversaries;
He will provide atonement for His land and His people."

So God says clearly that vengeance belongs to Him. He will exercise judgment in due time. This is the same teaching as in the New Testament.

Romans 12:17-21 (NKJV)

17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.

18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

19 **Beloved, do not avenge yourselves**, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "**Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,**" **says the Lord.** (From Deuteronomy 32)

20 Therefore

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

If he is thirsty, give him a drink;

For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." (Quoting Proverbs)

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So. Both the Old Testament and New Testament say we are to Love our neighbours ... even strangers. And both say personal vengeance is not allowed. No fundamental difference.

We saw in a few Psalms the imprecatory nature of the Psalmists prayer to God ... calling down a curse ... a calamity ... and evil on someone. But ... not just in the Old Testament ... there are imprecations also in the New Testament teachings and examples.

1 Corinthians 16:22 (NKJV)

22 If anyone does not love the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be **accursed**. O Lord, come! (Greek: *Anathema*. Lexicon: *Man accursed, devoted to the direst of woes. Ultimately ... if you are Anathema ... then you are destined to fiery destruction in the Lake of Fire and you won't come out*)

Galatians 1:6-9 (NKJV)

6 **I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel,**

7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

8 **But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.** (Greek: *Anathema*)

9 As we have said before, so now I say again, **if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed.** (*Greek: Anathema ... Doubly accursed. That's imprecatory in the New Testament by Paul ... a Man of God*)

Revelation 6:9-10 (NKJV)

9 When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held.

10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, **"How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"** (*The implication is ... destroy these people who killed us*)

Quite a few other places. Jesus Himself called down "Woes" on Pharisees/Sadducees ... on citizens of Chorazin ... Bethsaida ... Capernaum ... Jesus called down a woe on Judas ("it would have been better for that man if he'd never been born"). Devoting them to destruction.

Revelation 6 tells us that people flee to hide in the caves and under the rocks ... because the Wrath of The Lamb has come ... massive death and destruction. Do lambs bring wrath? Well. This one does.

There's a sense in which you and I pray an imprecatory prayer almost every day. Implied imprecatory prayer rather than an explicit one.

Matthew 6:7-10 (NKJV)

7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.

9 In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven,

Hallowed be Your name.

10 Your kingdom come.

Your will be done

On earth as it is in heaven.

How can God's will be done on earth ... as it is in Heaven? How can that come to pass in a world of hostile ... evil ... selfish ... arrogant ... violent people? Only by their complete destruction. So ... really ... if we pray the Lord's Prayer ... we are praying for God to destroy the wicked (at least the incorrigibly wicked).

Of course ... language of the imprecatory Psalms is very explicit. Raw ... extreme ... many people find it very offensive. How can the Word of God contain such words ... such sentiments? How could the Psalmists be men of the Holy God? (But note: nearly all of the imprecatory Psalms are by David ... "a man after God's own heart").

Part of the problem to you and I today is that we live in a world (most of us) that is politically correct ... we must never be offensive about anything to anybody. Being offensive ... using offensive language ... can even be a hate crime.

An example earlier this week ... here in the United Kingdom ... Cardiff University has issued instructions to avoid using words that might be offensive to some people.

Don't use:

Mankind ... rather use ... humanity

Forefathers ... rather use ... ancestors

Man in the street ... rather use ... average person

Man-made ... rather use ... artificial

Sportsmanship ... rather use ... fairness

So. Students need to be warned off the risk of offending someone by using such vile and disgusting words as mankind or sportsmanship!!! (Don't know how these students will cope when they get into the real world!)

There's even a move to change The Bible to be more politically correct. To change some of the language from where it's masculine to be more inclusive ... so as not to offend some people (who???)

Mark 1:17 in the KJV and most translations states: "come ye after Me and I will make you to become Fishers of Men".

The New International Version and some others state: "come follow Me, Jesus said, and I will send you out to Fish for People".

It appears hundreds of times. They tend to change "He" or "Him" to "them".

One main reason given is not to "clarify" something obscure ... but so as to not offend people

With such a politically-correct mindset ... never using offensive language ... it is easy to see why many are horrified at these Psalms.

Let's go back to these "difficult Psalms".

Some say they aren't expressions of writers' own feelings ... merely predictive ... prophetically in the fullness of times ... this person will die. Matthew Henry Commentary offers this view (shared by Augustine, John Calvin) ... merely statements of what will happen.

Others ... like Halley's Bible Handbook ... says that God accommodates Himself in Old Testament times to "men's ideas" ... but in the New Testament ... He deals with men according to His own ideas.

Many say that these Psalms are just carnal thoughts of carnal men ... based on unconverted emotions ... and of no relevance to a spirit-filled New Testament believer. So ... we can ignore them.

Yet ... Psalms are quoted all over the New Testament ... and is the book that Jesus quoted most. Lots of them including the imprecatory Psalms. And Psalmists said to be moved by the Holy Spirit ... would seem foolish and dangerous to just ignore them.

Acts 4:23-25 (NKJV)

23 And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.

24 So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "**Lord, You are God**, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them,

25 **who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: (then Psalm 2 is quoted)**

'Why did the nations rage,
And the people plot vain things?

Psalms 2:1-3 (NKJV)

1 **Why do the nations rage,**

And the people plot a vain thing?

2 The kings of the earth set themselves,

And the rulers take counsel together,

Against the Lord and against His Anointed, saying,

3 "Let us break Their bonds in pieces

And cast away Their cords from us."

Psalms 2:9 (NKJV)

9 You shall break them with a rod of iron;

You shall dash them to pieces like a potter's vessel.' "

Psalms 2:10-12 (NKJV)

10 Now therefore, be wise, O kings;
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.

11 Serve the Lord with fear,
And rejoice with trembling.

12 Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,

And you perish in the way,

When His wrath is kindled but a little.

Blessed are all those who put their trust in Him.

God spoke this through David. We can't try to dissect Psalms into those portions which are "inspired" and those which are "uninspired".

Hebrews 3:7-9 (NKJV)

7 Therefore, **as the Holy Spirit says:** (*quoting Psalm 95:7-11.*

Hebrews 4:7 identifies the Psalmist as David)

"Today, if you will hear His voice,

8 Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
In the day of trial in the wilderness,

9 Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,
And saw My works forty years.

So. If the Psalms are inspired ... are God's Word (Psa 2) ... Holy Spirit inspired (Psa 95) ... then certainly we should heed them ... they are profitable for us.

So. Should we pray imprecatory prayers on occasions? How often? When? Why? What is a Godly motive? Are there right principles? Things to avoid? What lessons should we learn from them as New Testament believers? Is this an important part of our walk with God ... or should we just take a big marker pen and delete the imprecatory Psalms (and while we're at it ... should we delete all of the other Psalms too?)

Well ... writers of the New Testament ... quoted Psalms more than 100 times. It's the book that Jesus quoted from the most ... it's a great resource for truth for New Testament believers like us.

It is profitable for reproof ... correction and instruction in righteousness.

We'll pick up the story next time.