

PSALMS

Chapter 109

Help Me, O LORD My God

To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.

Be not silent, O God of my praise! 2 For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me, speaking against me with lying tongues. 3 They encircle me with words of hate, and attack me without cause. 4 In return for my love they accuse me, but I give myself to prayer. 5 So they reward me evil for good, and hatred for my love. 6 Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand. 7 When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! 8 May his days be few; may another take his office! 9 May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow! 10 May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit! 11 May the creditor seize all that he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil! 12 Let there be none to extend kindness to him, nor any to pity his fatherless children! 13 May his posterity be cut off; may his name be blotted out in the second generation! 14 May 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 before the LORD continually, that he may cut off the memory of them from the earth! 16 For he did not remember to show kindness, but pursued the poor and needy and the brokenhearted, to put them to death. 17 He loved to curse; let curses come upon him! He did not delight in blessing; may it be far from him! 18 He clothed himself with cursing as his coat; may it soak into his body like water, like oil into his bones! 19 May it be like a garment that he wraps around him, like a belt that he puts on every day! 20 May this be the reward of my accusers from the LORD, of those who speak evil against my life! 21 But you, O GOD my Lord, deal on my behalf for your name's sake; because your steadfast love is good, deliver me! 22 For I am poor and needy, and my heart is stricken within me. 23 I am gone like a shadow at evening; I am shaken off like a locust. 24 My knees are weak through fasting; my body has become gaunt, with no fat. 25 I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they wag their heads. 26 Help me, O LORD my God! Save me according to your steadfast love! 27 Let them know that this is your hand; you, O LORD, have done it! 28 Let them curse, but you will bless! They arise and are put to shame, but your servant will be glad! 29 May my accusers be clothed with dishonor; may they be wrapped in their own shame as in a cloak! 30 With my mouth I will give great thanks to the LORD; I will praise him in the midst of the throng. 31 For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death.

Ps 109 A prayer for God to judge a case of false accusation. The author speaks of his enemies in the singular in vv. 6–19 but in the plural elsewhere. Some therefore suppose that vv. 6–19 contain the enemies' curses pronounced against the author (see NIV text note on v. 6). But it is more likely that either (1) the author shifts here to a collective mode of speaking, or (2) the enemies are united under a leader whose personal animosity toward the psalmist has fired the antagonism of others and so is singled out for special attention. Traditional attempts to isolate a distinct class of psalms called "imprecatory" (and then identify Ps 109 as the climax of the series) are mistaken. This prayer has much affinity with Ps 35. (CSB)

Two (Hebrew) four-line stanzas of petition frame the whole (vv. 1–5, 26–29), followed by a two-line conclusion (vv. 30–31). The remaining 20 lines fall into two main divisions of ten lines each (vv. 6–15, 16–25). Of these, the second is thematically divided into two parts of five lines each, the first of which (vv. 16–20) catalogues what “he” has done while the second (vv. 21–25) describes how “I” am suffering. (CSB)

A number of psalms use curses and express themselves so violently that modern readers find them shocking and even wonder how they could appear in the Sacred Scriptures. When the psalmist’s emotions spill over into violence, it is important to understand why. (TLSB p. 879)

Christians should understand that the violent outbursts in these psalms are not prescriptions for the behavior of God’s people but illustrations of emotion that God’s people will indeed experience. Christians today who lose loved ones to war or to violent criminals will have these same feelings of anger and revenge. Praying the imprecatory psalms can help God’s people express their anguish before God rather than act out their feelings in an unjust way. Imprecatory psalms prayed with psalms of repentance and hope can guide trouble hearts through the feelings they cannot escape. (TLSB – 879)

The curses contained in these psalms are often shocking to modern readers, but such prayers are in accordance with God’s curse against sin. (PBC)

The Lutheran Study Bible lists the following psalms as imprecatory: 35; 55; 59; 79; 109; 137.

Some psalms include vivid curses which ask God to punish our enemies, as He protects and defends us from evil. In light of Jesus’ teaching to love our enemies, these prayers may seem improper and un-Christian. However, in each one the psalmist cries out for God to take revenge. The imprecatory psalms put the psalmist squarely on the side of God who hates injustice and who does indeed rescue His abused children. While we leave vengeance to the Lord, and while we yearn for the ungodly to turn from sin to the Savior, we still hate wickedness and evil. Ultimately, Satan instigates all injustice, and the imprecatory psalms find their true target as we pray them against the kingdom of darkness. (LL)

No section of the Psalter causes us greater difficulty today than the so-called imprecatory psalms. With shocking frequency their thoughts penetrate the entire Psalter (5, 7, 9, 10, 13, 16, 21, 23, 28, 31, 35, 36, 40, 41, 44, 52, 54, 55, 58, 59, 68, 69, 70, 71, 137, and others). Every attempt to pray these psalms seems doomed to failure. They seem to be an example of what people think of as the religious first stage toward the NT. Christ on the cross prays for his enemies and teaches us to do the same. How can we still, with these Psalms, call for the wrath of God against our enemies? The question is therefore: Can the imprecatory psalms be understood as God’s word for us and as the prayer of Jesus Christ? Can the Christian pray these psalms? Note carefully again that we do not ask about possible motives, which we can never fathom anyway, but rather about the content of the prayer. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

The enemies referred to here are enemies of the cause of God, who lays hands on us for the sake of God. It is therefore nowhere a matter of personal conflict. Nowhere does the one who prays these psalms want to take revenge into his own hands. He calls for the wrath of God alone (cf. Romans 12:19). Therefore he must dismiss from his own mind all thought of personal revenge; he must be free from his own thirst for revenge. Otherwise, the vengeance would not be seriously commanded from God. This means that only the one who is himself innocent in relation to his enemy can leave the vengeance to God. The prayer for the vengeance of God is the prayer for the execution of his righteousness in the judgment of sin. This judgment must be made public if God

is to stand by his word. It must also be promulgated among those whom it concerns. I myself, with my sin, belong under this judgment. I have no right to want to hinder this judgment. It must be fulfilled for God's sake and it has been fulfilled, certainly, in wonderful ways. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

God's vengeance did not strike the sinners, but the one sinless man who stood in the sinner's place, namely God's own Son. Jesus Christ bore the wrath of God, for the execution of which the psalm prays. He stilled God's wrath toward sin and prayed in the hour of the execution of the divine judgment: "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they do!" No other than he, who himself bore the wrath of God, could pray in this way. That was the end of all phony thoughts about the love of God which do not take sin seriously. God hates and redirects his enemies to the only righteous one, and this one asks forgiveness for them. Only in the cross of Jesus Christ is the love of God to be found. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Thus the imprecatory psalm leads to the cross of Jesus and to the love of God which forgives enemies. I cannot forgive the enemies of God out of my own resources. Only the crucified Christ can do that, and I through him. Thus to carrying out of vengeance becomes grace for all men in Jesus Christ. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Certainly it is important to distinguish in relation to these psalms whether I stand in the time of promise or in the time of fulfillment, but this distinction is true for all psalms. I pray the imprecatory psalms in the certainty of their marvelous fulfillment. I leave the vengeance to God and ask him to execute his righteousness to all his enemies, knowing that God has remained true to himself and has himself secured justice in his wrathful judgment on the cross, and that this wrath has become grace and joy for us. Jesus Christ himself requests the execution of the wrath of God on his body, and thus he leads me back daily to the gravity and the grace of his cross for me and all enemies of God. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Even today I can believe the love of God and forgive my enemies only by going back to the cross of Christ, to the carrying out of the wrath of God. (*We need to remember that Bonhoeffer was being persecuted by the Nazi's.*) The cross of Jesus is valid for all men. Whoever opposes him, whoever corrupts the word of the cross of Jesus on which God's wrath must be executed, must bear the cruse of God some or another. The NT speaks with great clarity concerning this and does not distinguish itself at all in this respect from the OT, but it also speaks of the joy of the church in that day on which the God will execute his final judgment (Gal. 1:8f; 1 Cor. 16:22; Rev. 18; 19; 20:11). In this way the crucified Jesus teaches us to pray the imprecatory psalms correctly. (Psalms: The Prayer Book of the Bible – Dietrich Bonhoeffer)

Psalm 109 – Falsely accused, David responds by calling for judgment and punishment. Imprecatory (cursing) psalms can be difficult to harmonize with Jesus' command to "love your enemies" (Mt. 5:44). However, we do not know the hearts of David's enemies. His calls for the destruction are his prayers for salvation. If he is to be saved, and if they refuse to repent, then they must be defeated. He believes that his enemies have removed themselves beyond the reach of God's grace. Ultimately, all who persecute Christ and His followers and refuse to repent will experience God's judgment. (TLSB)

Format: Vv 1–5, David's suffering; vv 6–15, prayer for the defeat of the wicked; vv 16–20, curse turned back to the one who curses; vv 21–25, appeal for the Lord's help; vv 26–29, appeal for blessing; vv 30–31, praise for the Savior. (TLSB)

109:1–5 Appeal to God to deliver him from false accusers. – In the opening section of this psalm David states his problem. People who should be his supporters have betrayed him and are speaking lies against him. They are repaying him evil for good. (PBC)

109:1 *be not silent* – God appears to be “silent” when he does not answer; he “speaks” when he intervenes to save and to judge. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

God of my praise. The one he publicly praises as his trustworthy deliverer and defender. (CSB)

109:2–5 The particulars of his case, which he presents before the heavenly bar of justice (see 35:11–16). (CSB)

David does not take matters into his own hands or seek to avenge himself. (PBC)

109:2 These words may apply to certain people who betrayed David, such as Ahithophel (2Sm 15:31; 16:20–17:23) and Doeg (1Sm 22:6–23). (TLSB)

109:4 *I give myself to prayer.* In contrast to the enemy (see vv. 16–18). The intent may be: But I have prayed for them (as in 35:13–14). (CSB)

David’s typical response when put into a stressful situation. (TLSB)

109:5 *evil for good* – The line contrasts the depth of his kindness to them with their unlimited hatred of him. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

109:6–15 Appeal for judicial redress—that the Lord will deal with them in accordance with their malicious intent against him, matching punishment with crime. (CSB)

109:6 *wicked man ... accuser.* The psalmist’s enemy falsely accused him in order to bring him down; now let the enemy be confronted by an accuser. (CSB)

Hbr *satan* is prominent in this psalm and is the biblical name for the devil (Rv 12:10). (TLSB)

109:7 *his prayers.* The petitions he offers in his defense. (CSB)

When people are motivated by evil, everything they do is sinful. (TLSB)

109:8 *days be few.* The false accuser was no doubt seeking to effect David’s death (see 1Ki 21:8–15). (CSB)

The longer wicked op live the loner they ill be venting their hatred for the Lord and the righteous t would be better for them to perish soon so that someone else could take their position of leadership (s.v. Ps. 8:4). (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

another take his office. The enemy held some official position and was perhaps plotting a coup. For a NT application of these words to Judas see Ac 1:20. (CSB)

Appointed duty. Peter applies this verse to Judas in Ac 1:20. (TLSB)

109:9 David prays for an untimely death, assuming the accuser is incorrigible. (TLSB)

109:10–11 May he also be deprived of all his property so that he has no inheritance to pass on to his children. (CSB)

109:10 *children wander*. Punishments upon the accuser’s family are difficult to understand, because children are not to be punished for a parent’s sin (Ezk 18). But punishment is understandable if the children continue in the sins of their parents (Ex 20:5). (TLSB)

109:12 *none to extend kindness*. The close identity of a man with his children and of children with their parents, resulting from the tightly bonded unity of the three- or four-generation households of that ancient society, is alien to the modern reader, whose sense of self is highly individualistic. But that deep, profoundly human bond accounts for the ancient legal principle of “punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation” (see Ex 20:5; but see also 103:17; Ge 18:19). (CSB)

109:13 Since a man lived on in his children (see previous note), the focus of judgment remains on the false accuser (see 21:10; 37:28). (CSB)

109:14–15 *iniquity of his fathers ... sin of his mother ... their sins*. These verses return to the theme of vv. 7–8 (and thus form a frame around the stanza): May the indictment the accuser lodges against him include the sins of his parents. (CSB)

109:15 *cut off the memory of them*. May this slanderer be the last of their family line. (CSB)

109:16–20 The ruthless character of the enemy—may he be made to suffer the due consequences (see 10:2–15; 59:12–13). Accusation of the adversary is a common feature in psalms that are appeals to the heavenly Judge (see, e.g., 5:9–10; 10:2–11; 17:10–12). (CSB)

The horrible truth is that all who remain impenitent will be damned. (PBC)

109:17 *curse*. The enemy added curses to lies. (CSB)

109:18 *into his body like water, into his bones like oil*. Cursing was his food and drink as well as his clothing; he lived by cursing (see Pr 4:17). (CSB)

109:21–25 The intensity of “my” suffering—Lord, deliver me! (CSB)

109:22 The psalmist’s description of his situation echoes the words of v. 16. (CSB)

poor and needy. Dependent on the Lord. (CSB)

is wounded. The Hebrew for this phrase sounds like the Hebrew for “curse” in vv. 17–18, a deliberate wordplay—while he lives by cursing, I live with deep inward pain. (CSB)

109:23 *I fade away*. Apparently the psalmist suffers a life-sapping affliction, which is the occasion for his enemies to turn on him. (CSB)

shaken off. See Ne 5:13; Job 38:13. (CSB)

109:26–29 Concluding petition, with many echoes of preceding themes. (CSB)

In this section David's prayer takes a more positive turn. (PBC)

His prayer is confident because of his trust in the Lord's loyal love; but his prayer for deliverance has an additional purpose, namely, that they will know that it is the Lord who has taken vengeance on them and vindicated his servant. (A Commentary on the Psalms - Ross)

109:28 *Let them curse, but You will bless!* Reminder of God's covenant with Abraham (Gn 12:3). (TLSB)

servant. Perhaps identifies the psalmist as the Lord's anointed. (CSB)

109:30–31 A vow to praise the Lord for his deliverance. (CSB)

Ps 109 As we look to God for salvation, we know His justice will prevail upon our enemies who remain in sin. He declares us justified and His dear children through Jesus. • In the face of the "mystery of lawlessness" (2Th 2:7), we must sometimes cry out with the saints in heaven, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before You will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (Rv 6:10). Have mercy for Jesus' sake. Amen. (TLSB)