

The Angry Psalm
Psalm 109

Please turn to Psalm 109. Psalm is one of the “imprecatory” psalms. To “imprecate” someone is nearly like cursing them. It means to call down bad things on another person, to ask that God would judge someone else for their evil to you.

To be more straightforward, I call it the angry psalm. Early Jewish tradition says it’s a David psalm, so we’ll go with that. David was angry at someone, and asked God to judge them.

Have you ever been too angry to pray? I experienced it this way: I wanted to pray, but after a few minutes I realized that I was just venting to God, telling God about the painful things someone had done to me, ranting about the unfairness of this person.

Oh, I thought to myself, I did not come here to do that, sorry God, and then I would start to pray a more normal balanced kind of praying, but a few minutes later I would catch myself again, fuming to God in painful rage about what had been done to me.

Praying went back and forth like that. I did not know the psalms very well then. Now I think that perhaps I was doing the right thing.

We’ll not read all of Psalm 109, just vv1-20. There’s an introduction, vv1-5, then a long wish list of bad things David wants God to do to his enemies. That’s vv6-20, and that’s the part we’re most interested in today. Let’s read.

My God, whom I praise, do not remain silent,

²*for people who are wicked and deceitful have opened their mouths against me;
they have spoken against me with lying tongues.*

³*With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause.*

⁴*In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer.*

⁵*They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship.*

Now comes the angry part, what David wants God to do to his enemies. These are people David treated well, other Israelites who should have been good to him, perhaps someone like king Saul when David was young. We’ll read this, and then we’ll talk about anger and praying in the NT.

As we read, you think about a person who has done evil to you, someone who has been cruel and unfair. Imagine yourself praying this to God about that person. It is nasty. Part way through you may say to yourself, “I am not *that* angry.”

- ⁶ *Appoint someone evil to oppose my enemy; let an accuser stand at his right hand.*
- ⁷ *When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him.*
- ⁸ *May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership.*
- ⁹ *May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow.*
- ¹⁰ *May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes.*
- ¹¹ *May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor.*
- ¹² *May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children.*
- ¹³ *May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation.*
- ¹⁴ *May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord;
may the sin of his mother never be blotted out.*
- ¹⁵ *May their sins always remain before the Lord, that he may blot out their name from the earth.*
- ¹⁶ *For he never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor
and the needy and the brokenhearted.*
- ¹⁷ *He loved to pronounce a curse—may it come back on him.
He found no pleasure in blessing—may it be far from him.*
- ¹⁸ *He wore cursing as his garment; it entered into his body like water, into his bones like oil.*
- ¹⁹ *May it be like a cloak wrapped about him, like a belt tied forever around him.*
- ²⁰ *May this be the LORD's payment to my accusers, to those who speak evil of me.*

There are two things right about what David does here. One, David does not seek revenge himself. He's not asking God to help him get even. He asks God to do it. David will not do it. He leaves it in God's hands, that's the assumption of the psalm.

Two, David does not talk to others about his enemy either, he is not asking other people to make this right. He takes it straight to God, and asks God to make it right.

God does not promise to answer this prayer. But God is saying that if you and I are this angry at someone who has betrayed us, then we should take it to God in this way. Notice the title on the psalm: *For the director of music*. This was a congregational hymn. Israelites sang this to God over the centuries in their church services. I've surely never sung a song like this.

Some scholars are offended at this long horrible prayer for God to avenge, and say that verses 6-20 are not what David prayed about his enemies, this is what David's enemies said about him, he's just quoting his enemies in his prayer to God.

I am not convinced for a few different reasons. One, this is a common theme in the psalms. I have noticed 18 different psalms with this kind of prayer in them, that God would judge the psalmist's enemies.

Two, Jeremiah 18 (vv19-23) has a five verse prayer of the prophet Jeremiah against his Jewish persecutors that is not as long, but is remarkably similar, so similar that some wonder if Jeremiah composed Psalm 109. And that's Jeremiah's prayer against his enemies, no doubt about that.

Three, in Acts 1 Peter quotes verse 8 as David's words prophesying about Judas, "may another take his place of leadership." Peter thinks vv6-20 are David's words.

Four, v20 says *May this be the LORD's payment to my accusers, to those who speak evil of me.* Even if David is quoting his enemies, he still wants God to bring all of that down on his enemies.

Anger and praying for God's revenge in the New Testament

Some people think that since Jesus has come we are no longer supposed to pray the angry prayer of Psalm 109, so I am going to explain to you why I believe God still offers us this prayer.

Turn to Romans 12 please. At the end of Romans 12 is a short section on God and anger and enemies and getting even. These verses are a good summary of NT teaching on these things.

Romans 12:17-20 – *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.* ¹⁸ *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* ¹⁹ *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.* ²⁰ *On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

This text teaches the NT basics about anger. **One**, do not try to get even, do not take revenge, do not retaliate.

Two, be generous and kind to your enemies, give them food when they are hungry, live peaceably with them.

Three, God will avenge you, God will repay your enemies, your kindness will bring burning coals of judgment down on your enemy's head. Leave room for God's wrath.

Alright, but can we do what Psalm 109 says? What about praying for revenge, praying for God to bring judgment against our enemies? Are we not to pray for our enemies? Turn to Luke 18.

²⁷*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,* ²⁸*bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.* That's Jesus speaking, in Luke 6. "*Pray for those who mistreat you.*"

Luke 18:1-8 *Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up.* ² *He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought.* ³ *And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.'*

This is a parable about prayer, so we won't give up. But the story Jesus tells is a specific prayer, it is a prayer for justice.

“Justice” from *ekdikeō*, the same Greek word as in Romans 12:19 *Do not take revenge [ekdikeō], my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge [ekdikeō]; I will repay.*

The widow has an enemy who is making her life horrible, and she wants her adversary punished – she wants the judge to make it right. She’s not asking protection, it is too late for that. She’s asking for punishment.

⁴ *“For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, ⁵ yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’”*

⁶ *And the Lord said, “Listen to what the unjust judge says. ⁷ And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? ⁸ I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.*

Jesus used a particular kind of prayer as an example of praying and not giving up, and it is a prayer for justice, a prayer that God would punish our enemies.

God said, “It is mine to avenge, I will repay.” That’s how Paul encourages the believers in Romans 12. And the followers of Jesus in Luke 18 are praying for that very thing, that God would do what he said he would do, that he would avenge and repay.

And Jesus says that God is in a hurry to answer prayers like this for his chosen ones. It might seem like a long time to us, but Jesus says that God will get to this as soon as possible.

So, in Luke 6 Jesus tells us to pray for our enemies, and in Luke 18 Jesus tells us to pray for that God would bring justice against our enemies, and not to give up, because God is listening and wants to answer.

So which one are we supposed to pray? Both. Obviously both are valid in the kingdom. God honours both, Jesus invites both. Psalm 109, the angry psalm, is basically praying what the widow said to the judge, and what Jesus urged us to pray and not give up. “God, I want your justice against my enemy, I want you to repay my enemies for what they did to me.”

One more NT prayer against enemies: Revelation 6. When the Lamb of God takes the fifth seal off the scroll, this is what John sees. ⁹*When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain (martyrs) because of the word of God and their faithful testimony.* These are martyrs, people who have been killed because they were faithful to Jesus, they are in God’s presence right now, and John hears what they pray.

Rev 6. ¹⁰ *They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?”* [“avenge” is *ekdikeō* again: repay, bring justice] ¹¹ *Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little*

longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters, were killed just as they had been.

These people in God's presence after their deaths are asking God for the same thing the widow in Luke 18 wanted: justice against her adversaries. And this prayer in heaven is almost a lament: "how long, Sovereign Lord?"

Luke 18 and Revelation 6 teach us that asking God to repay our enemies is an important NT prayer. And for that reason, Psalm 109 is still a valid psalm.

God's justice against our enemies is an important part of not retaliating. We have a deep sense of injustice about some things. What this person did is very wrong, does no one care? Does their evil just disappear? Will anyone make this right? God says: "you treat them well, I will repay, you feed your enemy and do good, I will bring coals of fire on his head."

What about forgiveness? Are we not to forgive our enemies? Yes we are, and I am not sure how to sort this out. Sometimes forgiveness means simply not repaying evil but rather living at peace, not taking revenge but being generous with our enemy, leaving room for God's wrath.

But what if we are so angry we cannot even think about anything else? What if we are full of helpless rage? Someone has been dark, evil, cruel, done great harm to you or someone you love. You cannot forgive. You cannot forgive, there are no peaceful feelings inside you at all, all you can think about is that someone needs to avenge this, someone needs to repay it.

This happens to God's people who have seen and endured horrible things. We live protected lives, but there many on this earth who live unprotected lives. They are victims, evil people do to these victims whatever they want to do. It is awful, and happening this moment. Helpless rage.

God gives them Psalm 109, the angry psalm, and the other imprecatory psalms. God says, "if rage and fury is all you feel, then here's a song to sing to me. Don't stay away from me because you are full of pain and anger. I have a song for you to sing to me. Come to me this way."

For the director of music. This was a congregational worship song. What would it feel like for a congregation to heartily sing this to God? I cannot imagine, actually.

This is the healthy way to vent our pain and our rage. It is good for us, to bring our sorrow and anger to God in a worship gathering. And God promises that if we leave these injustices with him, he will repay, he will bring justice. Which means praying Ps 109 takes faith. Amen.

Father in heaven, we are angry about the evil that people do. Evil has been done to us, and we've seen evil done to others. Sometimes we could get even if we tried, but we turn away from that because of the Lord's call. Often we are completely helpless. But will this cruelty just disappear after it has been done? Will it not be made right? You said we should leave room for your wrath, that you would avenge, that you would repay. We are counting on this. We will not repay or seek revenge, we will seek peace and be generous with our enemies. We do this because that's how Jesus lived, and because you have said you want to repay our enemies, we should leave that to you. Amen.