

An Imprecatory Psalm

INTRODUCTION: Prayer is not always easy or clear-sighted.

1. That's because life is often confusing and complicated. There are no simple answers to complex problems.
2. **For Example:** The 2016 Presidential Election: "Hillary vs. Trump"
 - a) For whom should the Christian vote?
 - b) How does one pray for this election?
 - c) The "lesser of two evils"? A "no win" situation?
 - d) Straight ticket? No vote? Non-participation? Cross over vote?
3. Life is not clear and comprehensible all the time: *Evil (sin) in our world makes things very difficult for us all.*
 - a) *Good sense wins favor, but the way of the treacherous is their ruin. (Proverbs 13:15)*
 - b) i.e., Common sense leads to favor with God and others ...
 - c) Whereas sin leads to treachery (confusion), ruin.
 - d) Bluntly: *life is complex, confusing and contradictory.*
4. Even when we use the Prayerbook of the Bible (Psalter) to pray, we run into confusing things in the Psalms! Like the **Imprecatory Psalms.**
 - a) Psalms like Pss. 7, 69, 109 and Psalm 35
 - b) **James M. Boice:** *Psalms: Vol. 1; p. 300*

When I was preaching through the psalms on Sunday evenings at Tenth Presbyterian Church it was my pattern to close each service with a hymn based on the psalm we were studying. I was surprised at how many such hymns there were. Most psalms have at least one hymn based on them, and some have several, sometimes as many as six or eight. But there was no hymn for Psalm 35. There is an easy explanation for that, of course. Psalm 35 is one of the so-called imprecatory psalms, psalms in which the writer asks God to pour out judgment on his enemies. Psalms that do that do not seem to have been written in a right spirit to be sung by Christians.
 - c) We don't know how to read them, pray them, sing them, or apply them to our lives.
 - d) James M. Boice continues ...

We find these prayers for God's judgment on the psalmist's enemies in four psalms especially, Psalms 7, 35, 69, and 109, though imprecations like these are also found elsewhere. They seem to grow in vehemence as we read through the Psalter. Psalm 7 is

the mildest. Psalm 109 is the worst; commentators have counted at least thirty anathemas in that one psalm alone.

5. For some Christians these Psalms are simply *taboo*: unfit to be included in the category of “holy scriptures.”

a) In his commentary on the Psalms **Arthur Weiser** contends that these Imprecatory Psalms are unfit for NT saints (p. 416-417)

The psalm shows its limitations clearly. We have no right to doubt the subjective sincerity of its author; his trust in the divine faithfulness and help, which like the whole psalm can be properly understood only in the light of its connection with the cultic tradition, does not lack power. The worshipper is, however, neither able nor ready to give himself up wholly to God, trusting him absolutely, and accept his suffering from his hand, enduring it patiently. Human self-will and man’s low instincts of vindictiveness and gloating retain their power over his thoughts and affect also his idea of God and his relationship to him. In spite of his hope in God the worshiper thinks of God in a rather human fashion and wants to make use of God’s might in the service of his human sentiments. Thus the hope in God’s power, too, is over shadowed in this psalm by this way of thinking, which is only too common, deeply rooted as it is in human nature. This is why the worshipper’s prayer is also unable to exercise a liberating influence; for it does not lead on to the uttermost depths of ultimate truth. In this respect the prayer is subject to the judgment of the New Testament.

b) **C.S. Lewis** flatly and outrightly rejects these Psalms and their sentiment as unfit for our prayers. In *Reflections on the Psalms* he writes (pp. 20, 22):

In some of the Psalms the spirit of hatred which strikes us in the face is like the heat from a furnace mouth. In others the same spirit ceases to be frightful only by becoming (to a modern mind) almost comic in its naïvety.

At the outset I felt sure, and I feel sure still, that we must not either try to explain them away or to yield for one moment to the idea that, because it comes in the Bible, all this vindictive hatred must somehow be good and pious. We must face both facts squarely. The hatred is there – festering, gloating, undisguised – and also we should be wicked if we in any way condoned or approved it, or (worse still) used it to justify similar passions in ourselves.

6. But other Bible Scholars take a more moderate view of these Imprecatory Psalms. **Tremper Longman** says this, in his book *How To Read The Psalms* (pp. 138-139)

a) *Curse or imprecation upon enemies is frequently found in the Psalms. How are we to understand these curses? They seem so wrong to us who are instructed to love our enemies (Mt. 5:43-48). We are called to put away the sword (Mt. 26:52) and to share the gospel in love with those who persecute us. Two errors must be avoided. On the one hand, some Christians argue that we are not to pray these same prayers because they are not God’s words, but rather the psalmist’s very human expression of hate. The psalmist falls short of the Christian ideal because he lived before the time of Christ. But if this is true, it reflects on the whole book of Psalms and raises the question, How can we treat any part of the psalms as canonical?*

- b) After all, are these Imprecatory Psalms not inspired Scripture?
- c) *All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17 NASB)*
- d) But **Longman** cautions us about a second distortion in praying these curses and laments ...

On the other hand, other Christians feel that we can pray these psalms just as the psalmist did. Those who persecute us, or at least those who commit gross sins against the church and humanity (Hitler, Khomeni, Amin, the leadership of North Korea are examples I have heard) are appropriately cursed by the church. However, this does not take into account the radical love to which Jesus calls us.

7. **Tremper Longman** goes on to state the obvious: We honestly and often do not know who to pray these Psalms (p. 139)

But we are left with a problem. How can we say it was all right for the psalmist, but wrong for us, to pray these prayers against personal enemies?

8. Psalm 35 is one of those Imprecatory Psalms: *of David*.

- a) It contains 5 paragraphs (stanzas)
- b) Each presenting the *evil* David confronts in a different picture (metaphor)
- c) When was this written? We're not sure, but more than likely the sentiments reflect the circumstances of David's life when Saul was pursuing him in order to kill him.
- d) **H. C. Leopold**: *Psalms*; p. 284

(1) *Many points of correspondence between the statements of this psalm and the experiences of David in Saul's day can be suggested if one compares 1 Sam. 20, 23, 24, 25, 26. There was someone seeking his life; there were slanderers; David himself pointedly appealed to God as judge.*

(2) *And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed.' See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the Lord therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand." (1 Samuel 24:9-15)*

- e) This is a prayer *of David*, an inspired Psalm, a prayer (hymn?) to be used by us just as certainly as Psalm 23 or Psalm 51 or Psalm 100!

9. Two things ...

- a) First: *What does David mean by this prayer?*
- b) Second: *How can we pray this prayer today?*

I. UNDERSTANDING PSALM 35

A. A Prayer When in Battle (vv. 1-8)

1. *Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me;
fight against those who fight against me!
Take hold of shield and buckler
and rise for my help!
Draw the spear and javelin
against my pursuers!
Say to my soul,
"I am your salvation!" (Ps. 35:1-3)*
2. David's first petition is that God would *contend ... fight against ... take hold of shield and buckler ... draw the spear and javelin ...*
3. **David clearly sees himself in a Battle against wicked forces.**
 - a) *Let them be put to shame and dishonor
who seek after my life!
Let them be turned back and disappointed
who devise evil against me!
Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the Lord driving them away!
Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the Lord pursuing them! (Ps. 35:4-6)*
 - b) His life is at stake; evil is devised against him.
4. In fact, his opponents have *deliberately* and *deceptively* set traps to destroy him.
 - a) *For without cause they hid their net for me;
without cause they dug a pit for my life.
Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it!
And let the net that he hid ensnare him;
let him fall into it—to his destruction! (Ps. 35:7-8)*
 - b) So David *imprecates* again them: He calls curses down upon them. "*Let them be ...*"
 - c) *Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the Lord driving them away!
Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the Lord pursuing them!
Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it!
And let the net that he hid ensnare him;
let him fall into it—to his destruction! (Ps. 35:5, 6, 8)*

5. David was “A man of war” – a fighting king. And he was hot-headed – he had a famous temper. But David was also a man prone to get along with others, forgive readily, and quick to reconcile with others.

6. **James M. Boice: Psalms: Vol. 1; p. 301**

The author of each of the imprecatory psalms is said in its title to be David. Yet in spite of the tone of these psalms, David was known personally, not for exacting vengeance on his enemies, but rather for forgiving them. His treatment of Saul was exemplary and is probably the best Old Testament parallel to Jesus’ attitude toward his enemies at the time of this arrest and crucifixion.

7. David writes and prays as *the Head of State*, and not merely as an individual. More specifically: *He is God’s anointed king, a messianic King, and the Federal Head of the OT nation (kingdom) of Israel.*

a) with whom God made a *Covenant*

When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever. (2 Samuel 7:12-16)

b) The same covenant God made with **Abraham**

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen. 12:1-3)

c) **Please note the final words** of this covenant:

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Gen. 12:3)

d) So David asks God to do what He promised: *to curse those who sought the ruin of God’s Covenant people by attacking God’s anointed king – David and his descendants.*

B. A Prayer when Betrayed (vv. 9-16)

1. *Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord,
exulting in his salvation.
All my bones shall say,
“O Lord, who is like you,
delivering the poor
from him who is too strong for him,
the poor and needy from him who robs him?”
Malicious witnesses rise up;
they ask me of things that I do not know.*

*They repay me evil for good;
my soul is bereft.
But I, when they were sick—
I wore sackcloth;
I afflicted myself with fasting;
I prayed with head bowed on my chest.
I went about as though I grieved for my friend or my brother;
as one who laments his mother,
I bowed down in mourning.
But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered;
they gathered together against me;
wretches whom I did not know
tore at me without ceasing;
like profane mockers at a feast,
they gnash at me with their teeth. (Ps. 35:9-16)*

2. Gist: When Saul was desperately ill, he played the lute and sang for Saul – perhaps some of these 150 Psalms! They were a source of great comfort to King Saul.

a) *Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a harmful spirit from the Lord tormented him. And Saul's servants said to him, "Behold now, a harmful spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord now command your servants who are before you to seek out a man who is skillful in playing the lyre, and when the harmful spirit from God is upon you, he will play it, and you will be well." So Saul said to his servants, "Provide for me a man who can play well and bring him to me." One of the young men answered, "Behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a man of good presence, and the Lord is with him." Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me David your son, who is with the sheep." And Jesse took a donkey laden with bread and a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them by David his son to Saul. And David came to Saul and entered his service. And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armor-bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Let David remain in my service, for he has found favor in my sight." And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him. (1 Samuel 16:14-23)*

b) But Saul repaid such kindness with evil intent ...

The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, "I will pin David to the wall." But David evaded him twice. (1 Samuel 18:10-11)

3. Nothing is as insidious or as evil as kindness toward a friend repaid with betrayal, intrigue and intent to harm.

*They repay me evil for good;
my soul is bereft.*

*But I, when they were sick—
 I wore sackcloth;
 I afflicted myself with fasting;
 I prayed with head bowed on my chest.
 I went about as though I grieved for my friend or my brother;
 as one who laments his mother,
 I bowed down in mourning.
 But at my stumbling they rejoiced and gathered;
 they gathered together against me;
 wretches whom I did not know
 tore at me without ceasing; (Ps. 35:12-15)*

C. A Prayer against Beasts (vv. 17-21)

1. David likens his enemies to wild beasts hunting him ...

a) he calls them “*the lions*” (v. 17)

b) *How long, O Lord, will you look on?
 Rescue me from their destruction,
 my precious life from the lions!
 I will thank you in the great congregation;
 in the mighty throng I will praise you.
 Let not those rejoice over me
 who are wrongfully my foes,
 and let not those wink the eye
 who hate me without cause.
 For they do not speak peace,
 but against those who are quiet in the land
 they devise words of deceit.
 They open wide their mouths against me;
 they say, “Aha, Aha!
 Our eyes have seen it!” (Ps. 35:17-21)*

c) “*They open wide their mouths against me ...*” – like beasts baring their fangs!

d) *cf. verse 16* – “they gnash at me with their teeth.”

2. David’s efforts at *shalom* (“peace”) have failed with these beastly people –

a) *For they do not speak peace,
 but against those who are quiet in the land
 they devise words of deceit. (Ps. 35:20)*

b) *I am for peace,
 but when I speak, they are for war! (Ps. 120:7)*

3. Again, he appeals to God to protect him from manipulation and unbridled, unwarranted hatred.

*Let not those rejoice over me
 who are wrongfully my foes,
 and let not those wink the eye*

who hate me without cause. (Ps. 35:19)

4. He calls upon God to speak up for him; to defend him before his enemies.

D. A Prayer Against Boasting (vv. 22-26)

1. *You have seen, O Lord; be not silent!*

O Lord, be not far from me!

Awake and rouse yourself for my vindication,

for my cause, my God and my Lord!

Vindicate me, O Lord, my God,

according to your righteousness,

and let them not rejoice over me!

Let them not say in their hearts,

“Aha, our heart's desire!”

Let them not say, “We have swallowed him up.”

Let them be put to shame and disappointed altogether

who rejoice at my calamity!

Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor

who magnify themselves against me! (Ps. 35:22-26)

2. He asks for one thing: *Vindication*. He wants God to show to all who are presently involved in the conflict who was in the wrong and who was in the right.
3. His fear? That his enemies will rejoice over the downfall of his throne, the ruin of his dynasty and the elimination of God's covenant people.
4. David's prayer for both *shalom* (peace) and *vindication* (justification) are **not** selfish concerns only for himself. He prays as king of the kingdom and for the *good and noble life* God wants for all men ...

a) *First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. (1 Timothy 2:1-4)*

b) **James Luther Mays:** *Psalms: Interpretation; p. 155*

The adversaries have destroyed the shalom of the petitioner, that wholeness of self with others and God which belongs to the good and normal state of life. The petitioner makes his plea in the role of the servant of a king whose interest and responsibility it is to protect and provide for the shalom of his servants. These declarations have an importance beyond the context of Psalm 35. They are nuclear statements of the theology that informs all the prayers in the Psalter.

5. And so, he imprecates God again – “Let their desire for my shame and downfall come upon their own heads!”

Let them be put to shame and disappointed altogether

who rejoice at my calamity!

Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor

who magnify themselves against me! (Ps. 35:26)

6. But ... let those who honor God, uphold His covenant and love His people – and their King – be blessed forever!

E. A Prayer for Blessing (vv. 27-28)

1. *Let those who delight in my righteousness
shout for joy and be glad
and say evermore,
“Great is the Lord,
who delights in the welfare of his servant!”
Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness
and of your praise all the day long. (Ps. 35:27-28)*

2. God is great and God is faithful to His Covenant servants!

3. And all men will hear of that greatness:

*Then my tongue shall tell of your righteousness
and of your praise all the day long. (Ps. 35:28)*

II. PRAYING PSALM 35

A. Can We Pray the Imprecatory Psalms?

1. In brief: Yes! Absolutely! *We are the covenant people of God and we have God’s Word as a guide to all aspects of our lives. Including “the Prayerbook of the Bible” – the Psalter!*

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17 NASB)

2. A helpful book will be *War Songs of the Prince of Peace: Lessons from the Imprecatory Psalms* by **James E. Adams**. Pastor Adams wrote:

My own experience with these prayers has brought me many times to sense God’s very presence. As my understanding of them deepened through much study, comparing Scripture with Scripture, my prayer life has begun to enter into the very prayers of Jesus Christ. I’ve also been enabled to preach these psalms with great joy.

3. **Remember:** If 2 Timothy 3:16-17 is true (and it is) then Jesus Christ is the ultimate author and the chief Pray-er of the Psalms. When we pray the Psalms we pray along with Christ.

- a) Thus we add to each Psalm the words “*For Christ’s sake we do pray*”

- b) **J. H. Webster:** *The Psalms In Worship* (**Adams**; p. 20)

David, for example, was a type and spokesman of Christ, and the imprecatory Psalms are expressions of the infinite justice of the God-man, of His indignation against wrong-doing, of His compassion for the wronged. They reveal the feelings of his heart and the sentiments of His mind regarding sin.

- c) **Dietrich Bonhoeffer:** *Prayerbook of the Bible*; pp. 18-19.

According to the witness of the Bible, David is, as the anointed king of the chosen people of God, a prototype of Jesus Christ. What happens to him happens to him for the sake of the one who is in him and who is said to proceed from him, namely Jesus Christ. And he is not unaware of this, but “being therefore a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants upon his throne, he foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ” (Acts 2:30f.). David was a witness to Christ in his office, in his life, and in his words. The New Testament says even more. In the Psalms of David the promised Christ himself already speaks or, as may also be indicated, the Holy Spirit. These same words which David spoke, therefore, the future Messiah spoke through him. The prayers of David were prayed also by Christ. Or better, Christ himself prayed them through his forerunner David.

4. The message of the Gospel does **not** preclude the reality of spiritual warfare, demonic forces in the world, the ugly reality of evil all around us, a passion for God’s glory, and the desire and hope for the destruction of all that is wicked ...

Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8)

5. **I suggest** to you that if we *don’t* or *won’t* pray against evil, then we are siding against Jesus Christ and His purposes.

B. Praying the Imprecatory Psalms Is Our Spiritual Warfare

1. *Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm. Stand therefore, having fastened on the belt of truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and, as shoes for your feet, having put on the readiness given by the gospel of peace. In all circumstances take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:10-20)*
2. Notice the logical flow of that key Passage –
 - a) First: The *Reality* of Spiritual Warfare
 - b) Second: The *Nature* of Spiritual Warfare – against Satanic evil.
 - c) Third: The *Realm* of Spiritual Warfare – in the “heavenly places”
 - d) Fourth: The *Weaponry* of Spiritual Warfare: truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, salvation, the Word of God
 - e) Fifth: The *Mode* of Spiritual Warfare: *Prayer*

praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end, keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak. (Ephesians 6:18-20)

3. When we face wickedness in the world, systemic injustice, and structural evil, our response is *multi-faceted*
 - a) we vote, we protest, we write to our elected officials, we boycott, we lobby ...
 - b) ... and we may even go to war ...
 - c) ... but undergirding all other activity is *Prayer!*

*Pray for the peace of Jerusalem!
 "May they be secure who love you!
 Peace be within your walls
 and security within your towers!"
 For my brothers and companions' sake
 I will say, "Peace be within you!"
 For the sake of the house of the Lord our God,
 I will seek your good. (Ps. 122:6-9)*

4. And part of that Prayer Mission must be the *Imprecatory Psalms*.
 - a) for God's glory
 - b) for the conversion of our enemies
 - c) for the cessation of evil and evil systems

5. **James M. Boice:** *Psalms: Volume 1; p. 301*

I also suggest that there is a place for private citizens, especially Christians, to oppose evil vigorously. We can pray for the conversion of the very wicked, but if they are not going to be converted (and many are not), we can certainly pray for their overthrow and destruction. It was right for all good people to pray for and rejoice at the fall of Adolf Hitler. It is right to pray for the overthrow of Saddam Hussein. We must pray, however, with awareness of our own sins and with confession and requests for forgiveness for the sins of the United States of America. That is what I mean by a balanced view. On the one hand, it recognizes evil for what it is and prays for defeat. On the other hand, it acknowledges the sin that is always also in us and prays for forgiveness. David has that balance in these psalms.

C. How to Pray the Imprecatory Psalms

1. As I have studied about the Imprecatory Psalms I have garnered six principles (guidelines) for praying these Psalms.
2. **First:** *We must always pray these prayers in Christ.* We must add to them two thoughts ...
 - a) "Not my will by Thy will be done." We must *not* assume that Jesus is always on our side!
 - b) "for Christ's sake we pray." For the benefit and blessing of Christ's kingdom.

- c) *“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.”*
- d) i.e., we pray *along with* Jesus Christ in these imprecations.
3. **Second:** *We must pray with the foundation of God’s Word.* The ultimate question behind these prayers is not, “does this prayer express my genuine thoughts?”, but rather the question: “Does this prayer pray the prophetic purpose of God?” **James E. Adams** asks the following ... (p. 59)
- a) *Do you pray that this curse may come upon the enemies of God today? Do you ask God to destroy His enemies today as He has in the past? Do you who are pastors instruct your people in this kind of prayer? Surely you must if you pray in line with God’s Word and His promises for the future. Isn’t this the very essence of New Testament prophecies?*
- b) *since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed. (2 Thess. 1:6-10)*
4. **Third:** *We must pray these Psalms with the conversion of God’s enemies as the goal.* God’s judgments can lead to men’s conversion.
- a) When Psalm 35 prays this...
- (1) *Let them be put to shame and disappointed altogether
who rejoice at my calamity!
Let them be clothed with shame and dishonor
who magnify themselves against me! (Ps. 35:26)*
- (2) It prays not for condemnation and destruction,
- (3) but for *shame* and *dishonor* to move sinners toward God!
- b) David’s motive is for God’s glory; for men to honor the Name of the Lord.
- Fill their faces with shame,
that they may seek your name, O Lord.
Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever;
let them perish in disgrace,
that they may know that you alone,
whose name is the Lord,
are the Most High over all the earth. (Ps. 83:16-18)*
- c) This is clearly the Gospel motive behind our efforts to help men face their own sin and shame.
- We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who practice such things. Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who practice such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you presume on the riches*

of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? (Romans 2:2-4)

d) **David Dickson:** *Psalms: Vol. 2; p. 67*

If any of the enemies of God's people belong to God's election, the church's prayer against them giveth way to their conversion, and seeketh no more than that the judgment should follow them, only till they acknowledge their sin, turn, and seek God.

5. **Fourth:** *We must always pray for the destruction of evil and even evil people who will not repent and relent of their evil. God's goodness includes the hatred of evil. For us to be ambivalent about evil is to dishonor God.*

6. **Fifth:** *We must always pray these prayers taking sin seriously. Even C. S. Lewis acknowledge the benefit of these Imprecatory Psalms in their realistic confrontation of evil. (p. 33)*

Against all this the ferocious parts of the Psalms serve as a reminder that there is in the world such a thing as wickedness and that it (if not its perpetrators) is hateful to God. In that way, however dangerous the human distortion may be, His word sounds through these passages too.

7. **Lastly:** *We must always pray these Imprecatory Psalms with reference to how they are used (quoted in the NT. Thus we are praying them in a "gospel manner" – the way Christ and the NT Apostles used them. So, for **Psalm 35**, we learn these things:*

a) Psalm 35 speaks of election and reprobation ...

(1) *Let destruction come upon him when he does not know it!
And let the net that he hid ensnare him;
let him fall into it—to his destruction! (Ps. 35:8)*

(2) *And David says,
"Let their table become a snare and a trap,
a stumbling block and a retribution for them;
let their eyes be darkened so that they cannot see,
and bend their backs forever." (Romans 11:9-10)*

b) Psalm 35 refers to how people hated Jesus and His followers without good reason ...

(1) *Let not those rejoice over me
who are wrongfully my foes,
and let not those wink the eye
who hate me without cause. (Ps. 35:19)*

(2) *Remember the word that I said to you: 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours. But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father. But the word*

that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: 'They hated me without a cause.'
(John 15:20-25)

- c) Psalm 35 predicts the anger our gospel witness will elicit for the hearts of men ...
- (1) *like profane mockers at a feast,
they gnash at me with their teeth. (Ps. 35:16)*
 - (2) *Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him. But he, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (Acts 7:54-55)*
- d) In this way we can see how the Psalm speaks into our situation, as it did for David, Christ and the Apostles.

Conclusion: We should pray Psalm 35, as we pray any other Psalm ...

1. *All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17)*
2. All the Psalms are prayers *in Christ*, and *by Christ* and for the *sake of Christ*.
3. And we pray them, in the Spirit, because we have *the mind of Christ*.

None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written,

*“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard,
nor the heart of man imagined,
what God has prepared for those who love him”—*

these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned. The spiritual person judges all things, but is himself to be judged by no one.

“For who has understood the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?” But we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:8-16)

4. To do so is to obey Christ, and to pray *“Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven ... Deliver us from evil.”*