

## *Imprecatory Psalms*

### *Extreme Emotions*

- One reason the psalms have has so much appeal to God's people in all ages is their comprehensiveness of language
- A full range of human emotion, even extreme emotion, is found
- No matter how sad you are, the psalmist helps you express your sadness, with abject pathos if necessary (ex. Ps. 69:7-20; 88:3-9)
  - Pathos: "Extreme suffering"
- No matter how glad you are, the psalmist helps you express that as well (ex. Ps. 23:5-6; 98; 133)
- This obvious hyperbole is used to create impact

### *Channeling our Emotions*

- No emotion is inherently sinful
  - But bitterness, anger, and hatred may lead one to sinful thoughts and actions, such as a desire to harm others
  - It is better to let out such anger in words to God than in sinful actions
- This is not to channel our anger wrongly at God
  - But rather honestly admit the anger that we feel
  - Give it God
  - Let Him deal with the issues behind such anger in us
- God invites us "in your anger, do not sin" (Ps. 4:4; as cited in Eph. 4:26a)
  - And thus fulfill the NT teaching, "do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil." (Eph. 4:26b-27)

### *Imprecations to God*

- Imprecation: "Spoken curse"
- Imprecatory psalm: "A section of a psalm that invokes strong, hyperbolic language which helps us express our emotions to God, and let Him deal with the issues behind such extreme emotions in us"
- They are almost always found in laments
  - They are found in Ps. 3; 12; 35; 58; 59; 69; 70; 83; 109; 137; 140

### *Example: Ps. 137:7-9*

- Ps. 137 is a lament for the suffering endured by the Israelites in the exile
  - Jerusalem has been destroyed
  - Their land has been taken from them by the Babylonians
    - Aided by the greedy Edomites (cf. Obadiah)
- Heeding God's word, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay" (Deut. 32:35), the psalmist calls for judgment *according to the covenant curses*
  - Included in these curses are provision for the annihilation of the whole wicked society, including family members (Duet. 32:25; 28:53-57)

- Nothing in Scripture teaches that this *temporal* judgment should be seen as indicating anything about the *eternal* destiny of such family members
- What the psalmist has done is tell God about the feelings of the suffering Israelites, using hyperbolic language of the same extreme sort found in the covenant curses themselves
  - The fact that the psalmist seems to be addressing the Babylonians directly is simply a function of the style of the psalm
    - Notice that he addresses Jerusalem directly in v. 5
- God is actually the hearer of those angry words (v. 7), just as He should be
  - God and God *alone* should hear these angry words from us

### ***Use of Imprecatory Psalms***

- Understood in their context as part of the language of the laments and used rightly to channel and control our potentially sinful anger, the imprecatory psalms can keep us from harboring or displaying anger against others (see Matt. 5:22)
- They do not contradict Jesus' command to love our enemies
  - Love is not emotion
  - Love is about how we choose to treat people
  - Regardless of how we feel about them
- The purpose of these psalms is not that we might do evil, but rather overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21)
- Note: 'Hate' in the psalms is often misunderstood
  - Though it can mean 'to despise'
  - It can also mean 'to be unwilling or unable to put up with' or 'to reject'
    - See Ps. 139:22