

Introduction to Imprecatory Psalms (Selected Psalms)

All right, this is the first lesson in a series of lessons on the imprecatory psalms or imprecatory prayers or the imprecatory elements within Scripture, and if you're not sure exactly what that means or what that is, then that'll become obvious to you before we're done here this morning.

This is a series that I originally taught back in June of 2008, so that is sixteen years ago now, and I taught it back then because I was getting asked these questions. How should we interpret these psalms that seem to call or ask for God's judgment upon the wicked? What do we do with those psalms? And so I taught a series of three lessons. I know we recorded them at the time. I don't know where they're at or if they're up on the website or what happened to them, but in the course of the last sixteen years, my understanding of this issue has not changed, but it has grown deeper. And so for the last couple of years, I've wanted to revisit this whole subject and take a little bit more time to go through it than just the original three lessons that I spent on this. I've spent a good amount of time in the course of the last sixteen years thinking about this issue and refining my own thinking on it, and so I want to sort of unburden my heart on when it is appropriate to use imprecatory prayers and if it's appropriate to use imprecatory prayers. And of course, this is going to tie into how we interpret them when we find them in the psalms.

My suspicion is that this series of lessons is going to raise for you a lot of questions. You're going to have probably a number of questions even before we get done here this morning, and I will tell you right now, I'm not going to answer those questions by the time we get done with this one lesson. I'm just introducing the subject today, but I do welcome your questions. If you have a question at some point, I'll stop periodically through this to say, "Are there any questions about what I just said?" and I'll scan the audience to see. You're welcome to ask questions, and I may be able to answer them at the moment, or I may say to you, "Look, we're going to deal with that in two or three or four weeks from now, so we'll put it off." But please do raise your questions, ask your questions, write them down. And if at some point in this series, I don't answer them—I think I will—but if at some point in the series I don't, then I welcome those toward the end.

All right. Imprecatory psalms, imprecatory prayers. Let me give you an introduction to this issue. What is an imprecatory psalm? And that might be a phrase or a word that you're not even familiar with. Very possible, because I've told people I'm into a series on

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the imprecatory psalms, and they say, “What's an imprecatory psalm?” You've read them, you know what they are, but whether you know that they fit under the category of imprecations or imprecatory psalms is a different issue. An imprecatory psalm—and I need to be at this point specific as well as broad, and I'll tell you when I'm being specific, and I'll tell you when I'm speaking very generally. I'm being specific now in terms of the psalms. An imprecatory psalm is a psalm—that's like in our book of Psalms—it is a psalm that calls for a curse or a destruction of a person. It is a psalm that asks God to curse someone, or it is a psalm that asks God to judge someone or to visit destruction or evil upon someone.

Now the object of the imprecation—that is, the person that the psalm is addressing that is prayed against—might be an enemy of God. So sometimes we will read this, and I'm going to have some examples up on the screen here in just a moment, where the psalmist or somebody prays for or asks God to judge or visit a curse upon somebody who is an enemy of God and an enemy of righteousness. But imprecations are also found in Scripture against personal enemies of individuals, and this is where it gets a little bit more difficult to kind of flesh out. I understand that I would want to ask God to judge His enemies, but is it ever appropriate for us to ask God to judge our personal enemies? Well, you have authors of Scripture that ask that very thing, so how do we interpret that? How do we deal with that?

So it is a psalm that asks God to judge His enemies. Sometimes it is a psalm or a prayer that asks God to judge the author's or the speaker's personal enemies. It is a psalm that calls upon God to destroy the wicked. So the word *imprecate* means to invoke evil on or to curse. So an imprecatory psalm is a psalm that asks God to curse someone or to visit evil upon someone. A looser definition is that it would be to ask God, and this is where I'm speaking generally, to visit judgment upon somebody. So some people might try and distinguish between God visiting a curse upon somebody and God judging His enemies. And I would suggest to you that those are not radically different ideas. For God to visit a judgment on somebody is, in fact, a curse upon that person. For God to visit evil upon somebody is, in fact, a curse and a judgment. So, in some ways, the idea of cursing an individual or God judging an individual or asking God to judge an individual, that overlaps with this idea of imprecation.

Now, there are different levels of imprecation in Scripture, different kinds of curses or judgments. And there are different ways that these things are treated in Scripture. I'm going to give you a couple of them here. First, there are mentions of threatenings or

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judgment in Scripture. Mentionings just simply to mention a curse or to mention the judgment. And by the way, I'm going to, through the course of this—you're welcome to try and keep up with what I have up on the screen, but through the course of this, because there are going to be lessons where we're looking at a lot of psalms, comparing psalms, I'm just going to be putting all the texts that I'm referencing up on the screen here, even some of the longer passages when we could turn to that, because it keeps us from feeling like you're doing a Bible drill, going through a sword drill where you have to find the book and the passage. So I'm just going to be flashing them up on the screen here.

So here's a mention or a threatening of judgment. Psalm 2: “Do homage to the Son, that He not become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” You'll notice that there's the threatening of wrath that will fall upon the one who does not give homage or worship or render obedience to the Son. Psalm 2 is that messianic psalm where it begins with, “Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?” (v. 1, NIV) They say to themselves—they counsel together and say, “We'll tear off their fetters, and we will reject the Lord and do war against His anointed.” Well, that Anointed One in Psalm 2 now is the one, the Son, to whom we must give homage lest He curse or judge somebody. So there's just a threatening or a mention of judgment.

Another one is Psalm 29:10: “The Lord sat as King at the flood; yes, the Lord sits as King forever.” Now there's a mention to a judgment. Is the flood a small judgment? That was a worldwide judgment, a cataclysmic worldwide judgment in which all of humanity, and we're talking about millions, probably hundreds of millions of people, was destroyed and only eight were saved. So here's just a mention of a curse or a judgment upon the wicked and God visiting that through a worldwide cataclysm.

Psalm 105:29–36; look at this.

29 He turned their waters into blood and caused their fish to die.

30 Their land swarmed with frogs even in the chambers of their kings.

31 He spoke, and there came a swarm of flies and gnats in all their territory.

32 He gave them hail for rain, and flaming fire in their land.

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33 He struck down their vines also and their fig trees, and shattered the trees of their territory.

34 He spoke, and locusts came, and young locusts, even without number,

35 and ate up all vegetation in their land, and ate up the fruit of their ground.

36 He also struck down all the firstborn in their land, the first fruits of all their vigor. (NASB)

What is that describing? It's describing Egypt. It's describing the exodus, the beginning chapters of the book of exodus. That was a massive judgment in multiple signs that God visited upon one nation, upon one people. So those are just mentions of judgment. Notice there that there's no calling for a curse. This is just a mention of a time when God judged His enemies. There is the threatening of judgment or the description of past curses or judgments. That's kind of a low-level imprecation.

Then there are promises of the judgment that is to come upon the wicked. Psalm 5:5–6: “The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who speak falsehood; the Lord abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.” So you'll notice there that this all of a sudden becomes very personal, doesn't it? The Lord hates the man of bloodshed. The Lord despises the one who does iniquity. He hates all who do iniquity. Here's a more intense form of imprecation or curse.

Psalm 73, which deals with the prosperity of the wicked: “For, behold, those who are far from You will perish; You have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You.” So here's a promise of the judgment that is to come.

Psalm 64:7–8: “But God will shoot at them with an arrow; suddenly they will be wounded. So they will make him stumble; their own tongue is against them; all who see them will shake the head.” Now those are just promises of judgment that is to come. Here's a promise of a curse that is going to fall upon the wicked. So now we've kind of come from a low level of imprecation, just mentions of past judgments or curses, and then all of a sudden now we have threatenings or warnings of judgments and curses that are to come to the one who will not repent.

Then there is another level of imprecation, and here is prayers for the judgment upon the wicked. Psalm 109:6–17—now watch this. “Appoint a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is judged, let him come forth guilty, and let

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his prayer become sin. Let his days be few; let another take his office” (vv. 6–8). Do you recognize that verse by the way? Let his days be few and another take his office—does anybody know where that comes from? Sound familiar? Just shout it out if you know it. Yes, Acts 1. When the disciples replaced Judas with Matthias. This is Peter quoting this imprecatory psalm, and he is applying it here to Judas as if this is a prophecy of Judas's betrayal, all right?

So verse 9—so before you just think this psalm only describes Judas, keep in mind that David was writing of somebody in his life who had done these things to him. “Let his days be few; let another take his office. Let his children be fatherless and his wife a widow” (vv. 8–9). What is he asking for? Death. He's asking for death upon this individual. “Let his children wander about and beg; and let them seek sustenance far from their ruined homes” (v. 10). What is he asking for there? The destruction of his home. And this is not just a curse that is asked for, and by the way, we have no record that Judas had children, so that means that the primary target of this imprecation is not Judas. It's somebody that David knew, and he is asking for this person's children to suffer the results of his sin. “Let the creditor seize all that he has, and let strangers plunder the product of his labor” (v. 11). Make him work for his bread only to have it taken from him, which is nothing less than a form of slavery and indentured service.

Verse 12: “Let there be none to extend lovingkindness to him, nor any to be gracious to his fatherless children.” He doesn't even want anybody to be gracious to this man's children. “Let his posterity be cut off; in a following generation let their name be blotted out. Let the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord, and do not let the sin of his mother be blotted out” (vv. 13–14). So now you're talking about his mother and father. Let them be cursed and judged for this man's betrayal. Let his children be cut off and likewise be cursed. And of course, let his days be few and another take his office.

Verse 15: “Let them be before the Lord continually, that He may cut off their memory from the earth.” By the way, this language of being cut off, in the Old Testament when you're talking about the covenant people of God, that doesn't just describe somebody being dead. That describes the worst of curses. In other words, let this person be regarded as cut off and outside of the covenant, alienated from all of God's grace. That is what it meant to be cut off.

“Because he did not remember [here's the reasoning] to show lovingkindness, but persecuted the afflicted and needy man, and the despondent in heart, to put them to

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death. He also loved cursing, so it came to him; and he did not delight in blessing, so it was far from him” (vv. 16–17). So here is the language of why the imprecation is being called upon, because he didn't remember to show lovingkindness, but instead persecuted the afflicted. So is this a personal enemy that David is writing about? It kind of is. How do we know that David is not one of those who is the needy man who was neglected or the one that this person betrayed? But David has in mind here, even when he is asking for an imprecation, he is having in mind here somebody who has afflicted the needy man and has put to death the despondent in heart, who has cursed others rather than blessing them. So there's obviously something that has happened that has caused David to pray for this person's judgment and cursing.

All right, so that's an example of prayers for judgment on the wicked. Are there any questions about that before we move on? By the way, I'm just trying to make you uncomfortable with these passages. I hope I'm doing that. I'll try and resolve it later on. If I'm making you uncomfortable, then I've done my job.

But go ahead, is there a question? [*someone asks a question*] Yep, in this instance it is. What we don't know is if this is David describing somebody that is current to him while he's king. It's been suggested, by the way, that in this passage what is being described here is the conduct of Shimei. Do you remember when that man cursed David when he was leaving there? So some have suggested that this is David's response to what Shimei did in cursing him when he was run out of Jerusalem. In which case, at that point, David would be the object of Shimei's cursing. So there is a sense in which this might not be personal. There is also a sense in which this could be David's personal response to this individual for what he has done.

All right, fourth, there's a fourth level, and this is praises to God and rejoicing to Him for His cursing of the wicked. This becomes even a little bit more uncomfortable. Psalm 98:1–9—now, this is really good until verse 9. So bear with me.

1 O sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done wonderful things, His right hand and His holy arm have gained the victory for Him.

2 The Lord has made known His salvation; He has revealed His righteousness in the sight of the nations.

3 He has remembered His lovingkindness and His faithfulness to the house of Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.

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4 Shout joyfully to the Lord, all the earth; break forth and sing for joy and sing praises.

5 Sing praises to the Lord with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody.

6 With trumpets and the sound of the horn shout joyfully before the King, the Lord.

7 Let the sea roar and all it contains, the world and those who dwell in it.

8 Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy

9 before the Lord, for He is coming to judge the earth; He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with equity. (NASB)

So that is a lot of ramping up for God to be praised and glorified and His name to be exalted, and call in the band, get all the instruments there, let the voices be raised, let all of creation join in to this massive worship and praise event. Why? Because God is going to judge the world in righteousness and all the peoples with equity. Now, do you understand what that last statement means for those who are unrighteous? That judgment, what he is praising God for in this passage, is a judgment that boggles our mind. And yet this is the thing that causes the psalmist to break forth in joy and praise and exaltation of God's name. Is it difficult for you to get there?

How about this one? Psalm 137:7–9:

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, you devastated one, how blessed will be the one who repays you with the recompense with which you have repaid us.

9 How blessed will be the one who seizes and dashes your little ones against the rock. (NASB)

OK, what do we do with stuff like that? All I've tried to do so far is just make you uncomfortable with these realities, because it is very easy for us to read over them and then to not put them into a theological framework and to not put them into a hermeneutical grid that we can assess these. So here is the dilemma simply stated: what do we do with passages like this? Not just mentions of past judgments but warnings of

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future judgments, and then prayer for God to judge the wicked, and then rejoicing and praise over God's righteous acts of judgment.

So here are the interpretive questions. I'm just going to give these to you. I'm going to read them kind of slowly because I want you to think through these issues for a moment. Is this just for the Old Testament dispensation? Because I think some of you might have been thinking in your head, "Well, yeah, of course, all this is Old Testament stuff." OK, well, when Paul then says let the one who preaches another gospel be eternally damned, let him who loves not the Lord Jesus Christ be anathema, those are curses upon God's enemies spoken by an apostle in inspired Scripture. So is this just the content of what we would expect from the Old Testament dispensation?

Second, do these sentiments express God's character? Do these sentiments express God's character? Is God going to judge the wicked? Is God going to—when He judges the wicked, is it going to be a right and righteous and holy and good thing? Is it sinful for God to judge the wicked? It certainly is not. If it's not sinful for God to judge the wicked, then is it sinful for the righteous to desire God to judge the wicked? And if it's not sinful for God to do something that is within His purview to do, then is it sinful for us to ask God to do something that is within His purview to do? And if we can ask God to do those things, is it not right and appropriate if we should rejoice and worship Him when He does what is right for Him to do? Is there a way or a time when imprecations are appropriate for Christians? Is it appropriate for you to pray like this toward somebody, about somebody? And if so, when? Somebody cuts you off in traffic? "Blessed be the one who dashes your little ones against a rock. May his name be blotted out and his children cursed to wander about their ruined homes and his mother's sin not be blotted out." That may be what you feel, but is it appropriate when somebody cuts you off in traffic to call down an imprecation? But is it appropriate when somebody runs an abortion mill? Or when somebody molests children? Or when somebody is a serial killer? Or when somebody is so vehemently opposed to God and His purposes that he persecutes Christians? Is the imprecatory prayer something that we should pray then? And if so, how do we do it?

Is it sinful for us to rejoice in God's judgments upon the wicked? Were these sentiments—and this is another one we're going to deal with in a couple weeks—were these sentiments sinful for the Old Testament saints to desire? In other words, was David in sin when he prayed for God to judge these people that way? Why are these included in Scripture? What are we to think of these prayers and the people who wrote

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them? And if they're not for us in the New Testament era, then what is their value to us? And to what degree, and this one is key, to what degree has the ease of Western Christianity affected us? To what degree has the ease of Western Christianity affected us?

Now, I got in trouble with someone who used to attend this church some years ago because when the US military took out a known terrorist, a high-level, high-ranking terrorist who had killed people, destroyed people—he was known for every form of depravity you can imagine—I posted something on Facebook where I said, “This is good, and I'm glad this happened.” And this person was trying to be nicer than Jesus and chastised me for expressing that sentiment. And I stand by it. I think it's a biblical sentiment. Now, not because this person was my personal enemy but because this person had afflicted the needy and afflicted the downtrodden. And what this person, Soleimani, I think, or something like that, what this terrorist had done was so wicked, so vile, and hurt so many people that when a government finally does one of the few things that God has ordained it to do, which is to destroy the wicked, when it finally does that and does it well, for Christians to come out and to reject that and to criticize that and say, “Well, we shouldn't be doing that. That's not very loving to our enemies,” I can't buy that at all. So has the ease of Western Christianity affected how we think about this issue so that we are more committed to be tolerant and inclusive and diverse and gentle and soft and loving and outwardly so that we forget the fact that we serve a God who is going to judge the wicked in righteousness and all the peoples with equity.

So here's the big issue. Is there a redemptive historical-theological framework in which these things must be understood and appreciated and then used? And how do we maintain a high view of Scripture and interpret these psalms? Because most of the ways that these psalms are taken or interpreted actually undermines a high view of Scripture. And we're dealing with this in four weeks from now. No. Yeah, four weeks from now, I think, we're dealing with inadequate interpretations of imprecatory psalms. People will say that's just the Old Testament dispensation, that they didn't know any better. Well, see, these types of interpretations of the psalms, they undermine a high view of Scripture, that these are inspired writers and this is the Holy Spirit who put this in His written Word. And so therefore we have to have a theological framework that has a high view of Scripture, that honors the high view of Scripture and honors the Spirit of God's intention in giving us these prayers for judgment.

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How do we recognize divine inspiration and deal with these psalms? How can we do justice to both of those? And how can we acknowledge, or can we even acknowledge, that these psalms are written by the Spirit of God? And what can we learn from their inclusion in the Psalter and in Scripture? So this is the difficult subject that we're going to deal with. And as I said, I'm not resolving any of these conundrums for you today because I'm going to, in the next few weeks, lay a foundation for how we are to think about these things. And then hopefully at the end, I'll tie it all together in a nice bow for you.

But we're going to think through the theology of judgment and grace and then answer these questions: Should we use these psalms and these prayers? Are they appropriate? And how should we think of God's judgments? And I guess I will give you the—if I haven't already tipped my hand to you a little bit, I will give you the answer to this in a very brief way. My intention here is to make imprecatory prayers great again. In fact, that was almost the title of this series of lessons, but I thought, well, somebody ten or fifteen years from now might not understand that reference. So I do want to make imprecatory prayers great again, but in doing so, I want to do justice to theology. I want to bring this theological issue in front of us and have us think carefully about how it is that we really should view these things. How do we put these together, and when do we cross the line? When it is appropriate to pray this way, and when is it not? There is, like dealing with Psalm 69, which we had here a moment ago—there is a massive typological theology that is behind this issue, and that's what's going to take me a little bit to unfold in the next couple of weeks. So here's the scope of this study ahead.

And by the way, let me give you a couple of clarifications from what I've already covered here. Number one, these are not all found only in the Psalms. It's not like we can just sort of dismiss the Psalms as sort of that rustic book written by a bunch of bloodthirsty tribalists from years ago in the ancient world and we'll just sort of exorcise that out and then the rest of Scripture is all about love and grace and forgiveness and hope and mercy and all that. No, these imprecatory elements are all the way through Scripture. In fact, you have mentions and promises and praising God for His judgments in the Old Testament prophets, major prophets and minor prophets. You have in Exodus chapter—is it 15?—after they come through the Red Sea where they just have a worship service on the shore and say, “The horse and the rider, He has thrown into the sea. He destroyed the firstborn.” So you have the entire nation of God's covenant people who are rejoicing and praising Him for what? For just bringing them through the Red Sea? No, that whole nation of people is praising God for His righteous judgment upon a

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nation. He destroyed Egypt. It was destruction. All of the firstborn, the entire military, the crops, the livestock, the buildings. That entire nation was utterly ruined and laid waste. God did that and then they rejoiced over His judgments. You have to have room in your theology for that. And I'm not suggesting that none of you do, but there's a whole segment of the Christian church that has no room in their theology for that type of a response to God's judgments.

And by the way, here's a little preview of what's to come. In the future, when we are in Heaven, we are going to praise God for His righteous judgments upon the wicked because the believers in Heaven do that now. And so if they're doing that now in a sinless state, in a glorified place, then certainly it is not sinful for you and I to do that now in this sin-cursed and fallen world.

We also find references to imprecatory issues, imprecatory praise and judgment, against Babylon and for Jerusalem's destruction, as you do here, but you also find it in some of the major and minor prophets. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul comforts the afflicted in his day and says, "Hey, just want to encourage you, Christ is coming back with angels in flaming fire, and He's going to destroy the wicked and all those who do not obey the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. So look up. Judgment is coming. Let that cheer you up." That's sort of an imprecatory sentiment, isn't it? That's his comfort. Not, "Hey, Thessalonians, you can do this. Just sort of buck up. Cheerio. You can get through this. Just grab your bootstraps and endure." No, but, "Yeah, that's right, you are suffering. But listen, those who afflict you now, when Christ comes back in flaming fire, He's gonna afflict them. So just put a smile on your face and let that cheer your heart." That's 2 Thessalonians. And of course, in Revelation, there is praise in Heaven over those judgments. Now, there is a way in which some of these elements are concentrated in the Psalms, probably, I think, more than most of you would be willing to guess. The amount of imprecatory elements in the Psalms is probably more than whatever percentage you think it is.

So we're going to approach this with a hermeneutical perspective in mind. Right now I'm going to give you this—we're going to be a couple minutes early with this, and maybe we'll take some questions at the end of this, but this introduction is going to be shorter than our normal lessons. In the weeks ahead, I'm going to be just cramming to fit stuff in so we can stick to this course, this outline that I've got for you. So here's what is ahead. Here's what the lessons are going to look like in the next couple of weeks. And by the way, I'm doing this because somebody on Friday—in fact, it was Simon who said somebody asked him how long the series on imprecatory prayers is going to last. He

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said, “Well, how many imprecatory prayers are there in Scripture?” So we're not going to do all of them. In fact, most of our study here is not going to be spent in any one of these particular imprecatory psalms.

So I'm going to chart this out for you so you know what this is going to look like and when I'm finally going to be done. The next lesson is going to be an introduction to the Psalms or an introduction to the Psalter. It's going to be actually two parts. It'll be two Sundays. Then after that on March 10, I won't be here. I'm going to be at Shepherds Conference in California. So you'll have a break from this heavy subject then. And then we're going to deal with the issues in the imprecat—let me try it again. We're going to deal with issues in imprecate—oh! We're going to deal with a whole nother lesson that has to do with these psalms and some of the issues that are raised and then we're going to have a lesson where we evaluate three interpretive approaches that do not honor Scripture and really do not have a high view of the Word of God. So I'm going to give you three very inadequate interpretations or ways that people approach the imprecatory psalms so you can kind of see that these don't work with what we know about Scripture and what we know about the biblical writers.

And then we're going to look at an imprecatory psalm, and I think if I can do this, this is how I would like to do it—to cover Psalm 109, which is the long one that we had up here where it says, “Let his days be few; let another take his office” (v. 8). I want to look at that entire psalm in one Sunday school class, and if I have an extra week because things have went well, then we'll take a week and look at Psalm 69, which is another example of really aggressive imprecations. Psalm 69, Psalm 109, we may combine both of those into one class. And then after that, I'm going to wrap all of it up talking about God's justice and probably do two Sundays dealing with how we view God's justice, what Scripture says about God's justice, and then sort of tie it all together with everything that we've learned through the course of this in how we would pray imprecatory psalms and when and if it's ever appropriate.

So we have—I'm going to be gone at Shepherds Conference. That's March 10. Then March 31 is Sunday morning Easter breakfast, resurrection breakfast, so there'll be no Sunday school that day. And Lord willing, if we can get through all of this, then we will wrap all of this up by the second to the last Sunday in April. And then, as I mentioned a few weeks ago, I'm heading to the Philippines for a couple weeks after that. So I will be done before I take off for that trip. And my goal is to not stretch this out past May and into June or anything like that. I'll be done by the end of April.

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So, in the next week, in the next lesson, we're going to do an introduction to the Psalms, and here are the things that we're going to consider next week: the theology of the Psalms, the authors of the Psalms, the structure of the Psalms. This I think will blow you away that there is a structure to the Psalter that is just mind-boggling. Only the Spirit of God could put that book together. For years, I thought the Psalms was just a collection of these hymns that were written over the course of Israel's history. There is a theological and chronological flow to the Psalms that is mind-blowing, and you have got to see that and understand it so you can put these imprecatory elements into its proper historical-theological context. And then we're going to look at the main themes of the Psalms and the nature of poetic genre, and then the hermeneutics, how we interpret the Psalms, and then what are the value of the Psalms to us today, and then the role of the Psalms in the life of a New Testament believer. So, that's what we're going to tackle next week.

Now, before I give you a couple of resources that I would recommend, are there any questions about what we've just gone over or where we're heading in the weeks to come? [*someone asks a question*] I haven't done that, no. It could be, but here's the problem. The only problem I have with doing that is that my plans may change on a Sunday morning or late Saturday night as I'm going over all this stuff, which sometimes I do that. I will give you a preparation like I did today for what's to come the next week. So, if you're here, I'll kind of give you a preview of where we're going in the next Sunday so you can be thinking kind of along those lines. And then I may have periodically through this course, I may have a few suggested homework assignments for you during the week—you know, read this psalm, think about this, look for that, etc. I'll try and sort of put together some of that type of stuff so you can be thinking ahead. Yeah, I appreciate that.

[*someone comments*] Yeah, for those listening by audio, Nora's observation was that it's difficult to pray for somebody to be cursed because you don't know if they're going to repent. And that is true. Of course, it is entirely possible to pray for both of those things, like, "Make them repent, or . . ." Because that is going to happen. Either they repent or God is going to judge them for that sin. I think it is also possible, and I'll say this now because you'll probably forget about it by the time we get to it, but it is also possible for you to pray a curse upon somebody whom you genuinely have in your heart a love for. I may want—I may love somebody and love them enough to want their wickedness to stop that I would pray for God's judgment to fall, His chastisement to fall, because I want God . . . This person whom I love is causing these other people so much pain and

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affliction, so I want this to stop, and if the only way that it will stop is if God ends this person, I can pray for God's judgment to fall upon somebody that I love.

[*someone comments*] Yeah, that's a very good point. Even by praying for God to curse an enemy, it's not like we're Harry Potter and if we say the right formula, then it's bound to happen. So we can even pray for God's judgment to fall upon certain things or certain people, even recognizing that this is according to the will of God. And it may be the will of God for this evil to continue for a period of time because He's doing something through it. So even that prayer—we could pray for a curse, but that doesn't mean that God is going to necessarily curse that person or judge that person right now. We may be praying for something that is outside of the will of God, but it may be that in praying for judgment to fall, that we're actually praying for something that is within the will of God.

All right, any other questions or comments? [*someone asks a question*] Yeah, it would depend on what you mean by praying down a stronghold. I don't know that the language “praying down a stronghold” is helpful, but I can pray against their plans or their plots or people who are influencing them. There are people that I prayed for where I prayed, “God, would you end this relationship because this is a bad relationship in the life of this person?” So I mean, it's possible to pray for that or that their evil plans would be thwarted. Yeah, we're praying—our prayers should be more in keeping with, “I'm praying for this person's eyes to be opened, their mind to be opened, their heart to be softened, etc. Yeah.

[*someone asks a question*] If and how this applies to evangelism. Yeah, I don't know that there's a unique application there, but if I get into it and you're like, “I'm not sure how I use this in evangelistic encounters,” let me know.

[*someone asks a question*] Ah, yeah, I can sympathize with that because there was a time when I was innocent of the things that were evil. And now, of course, in my life, there's evil flashed in front of us all the time in the headlines. I would say just be praying and thinking about God's mercy and His grace and His wrath. And what I would encourage a young person to come to grips with early in life is the reality that God is complex in the sense that He can have emotions and passions and desires in Him that to us seem contradictory. God can both love the sinner and hate the sinner at the same time for entirely different reasons. God can desire to execute His justice upon someone and desire that that person be saved at the same time. These are things that we are unable to grasp. So I would just want to encourage young people just to be thinking in terms of everything that we read about God is true, and we have to be open to the idea

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and the fact that—we have to have room in our idea of God for all of these things that cause us difficulty.

All right, my time is up. I want to recommend to you a few resources if you want some stuff on the Psalms. This is just if you want to study this, and since we're talking about the Psalms. These are not necessarily books that deal with what I'm dealing with, but these are some good resources on the Psalms. If you have one commentary set, and I mean one commentary set at all, if you have to sell all of your underwear except for one pair to buy this commentary set and you can only afford one resource on the Psalms, it has to be Spurgeon's *The Treasury of David*. This is absolute gold. It is worth its weight in gold, and here's why—this is volume two of three. There's three volumes that are the same size as this—and here's why. For every psalm in the Psalter, Spurgeon has a bunch of introductory comments that kind of are just very Spurgeonesque. There's some fantastic observations in there. But then what he does is, verse by verse, sometimes phrase by phrase, he culls all of the best statements and observations about any particular verse in the psalm from all of the commentators of his age and that preceded him. So you get all these commentators who wrote commentaries on the Psalms, most of whom I've never even heard of, and Spurgeon just takes the best of all of those and just sort of collects them underneath an individual verse. And you get that for every verse in the psalm. And then at the end, he has all kinds of observations and hints for preachers, clever outlines, clever structures for how you would preach the psalm. And it is just, the stuff in here is—and there's three volumes of that, and it is just gold.

So that's one. Second, this is *Psalms* by James Hamilton. This is a two-volume set. It's rather new. I heard James Hamilton speak at the Spurgeon Fellowship in Spokane, and I learned more about the Psalms in that one hour of Hamilton's time than I learned in a semester at Bible college. It's phenomenal, his grasp. He also wrote the book *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment*. I just read that, and Simon is reading it or just finished it. So this commentary on the Psalms, this is two volumes. This is a great resource on the Psalms as well. Hamilton's observations about the overall structure of the entire Psalter are excellent. You don't get that in Spurgeon, but you will get that with Hamilton.

And then this by James Johnston. It's a series edited by R. Kent Hughes. *The Psalms*. This is volume 1, Psalms 1 to 41, and it is the Preaching the Word series. This is very good, a very good, very readable commentary on the Psalms.

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And then this is volume 1 of 3 by Alan P. Ross on the Psalms [*A Commentary on the Psalms*]. These are probably my four best resources that I have on the Psalms. The Kregel Exegetical Library by Ross, the Preaching the Word series by James Johnston, Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary by James Hamilton, and then the number one, the best one that everybody should have in their library is *The Treasury of David* by Spurgeon.

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