

Psalms 109:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the LORD,
and of them that speak evil against my soul.

Analysis

Let this be the reward of mine adversaries from the LORD, and of them that speak evil against my soul. This verse concludes the imprecatory section of Psalm 109, summarizing David's appeal for divine justice against false accusers and malicious enemies. The word "reward" (pe'ullah, פֶּעֻלָּה) refers to recompense or wages—what one deserves for their actions. David isn't seeking personal vengeance but divine justice, appealing to "the LORD" (Yahweh) as the righteous judge who repays according to deeds.

The phrase "speak evil against my soul" (nefesh, נֶפֶשׁ) indicates attacks aimed at David's very life and being—not mere criticism but malicious slander intended to destroy. The imprecatory psalms (prayers for judgment) trouble modern readers but reflect several biblical realities:

1. God's righteousness demands justice for evil
2. victims may appeal to God rather than taking personal revenge
3. these prayers express holy hatred of sin while leaving judgment to God
4. they anticipate the final judgment when all wrongs will be righted.

Theologically, this psalm foreshadows Christ's experience of betrayal by Judas (John 13:18

Acts 1:20). Jesus endured false accusation and evil speech, yet responded not with cursing but with forgiveness (Luke 23:34). This contrast illuminates the gospel: Christ bore the curse we deserved (Galatians 3:13), satisfying divine justice while

extending mercy to enemies. Believers now pray for enemies' conversion rather than destruction, knowing Christ absorbed God's wrath against sin.

Historical Context

Psalm 109 is attributed to David and likely originated during one of his many conflicts with enemies who used slander and false testimony as weapons. Ancient Near Eastern legal systems relied heavily on oral testimony without modern forensic evidence, making false accusation particularly dangerous and destructive. A powerful accuser could orchestrate someone's execution, property confiscation, or social ostracism through coordinated false witness.

The psalm's imprecatory language reflects ancient Near Eastern treaty curses and covenant lawsuit forms. When covenant partners violated agreements, curses specified in the treaty would be invoked. Israel's covenant with Yahweh included blessings for obedience and curses for rebellion (Deuteronomy 27-28). David's appeal for curses on covenant-breakers follows this treaty pattern, asking God to enforce covenant stipulations against those who violated justice and truth.

Early Christian interpretation saw prophetic fulfillment in Judas Iscariot's betrayal of Jesus. Acts 1:16-20 explicitly applies verses from Psalm 109 to Judas, demonstrating apostolic understanding of the psalm's messianic dimensions. Jewish liturgical tradition includes this psalm among prayers for deliverance from persecution, while Christian use has been cautious, emphasizing Christ's transformation of curse into blessing through the cross. The historical evolution of interpretation shows increasing recognition that Christ absorbed these curses, enabling believers to pray for enemies' salvation rather than destruction.

Related Passages

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How do we balance desire for justice with Christ's command to love enemies and pray for persecutors?
2. What does David's appeal to God rather than personal vengeance teach about handling unjust treatment?
3. How does understanding Christ's absorption of divine curse change how we read and apply imprecatory psalms?
4. In what situations is it appropriate to pray for divine justice and judgment rather than immediately extending forgiveness?
5. How can we cultivate holy hatred of evil without becoming bitter or vengeful toward evildoers?

Interlinear Text

זֶאת	פְּעֹלָת	שׁ טָבִי	מֵאֵת	יְהוָה
H2063	Let this be the reward	of mine adversaries	H853	from the LORD
	H6468	H7853		H3068
וְהַדִּבְּרֵי יָם	עַל	בְּפִשִׁי:		
and of them that speak	evil	against my soul		
H1696	H7451	H5921 H5315		

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