

Psalms 140:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again.

Analysis

Let burning coals fall upon them: let them be cast into the fire; into deep pits, that they rise not up again. David's imprecatory prayer intensifies with vivid imagery of total destruction. "Let burning coals fall upon them" (yimotu alehem gachalim, יִמּוּתוּ עֲלֵיכֶם גָּחָלִים) invokes fiery judgment. Mot (וָיַּוֵּת, "fall, slip, totter") suggests raining down from above. Gechel (גָּחֵל, "burning coal") is hot, glowing ember that inflicts burns and ignites fires. This imagery recalls Sodom and Gomorrah's destruction by fire and brimstone from heaven (Genesis 19:24), God appearing in burning coals (Ezekiel 1:13, 10:2), and eschatological fire judgment (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8, Revelation 20:9-10).

"Let them be cast into the fire" (yappilum ba-esh, יִפְלֵם בְּאָשׁ) requests consignment to flames. Naphal (נַפְלָה, "fall, cast down") in Hiphil is causative—"cause to fall." Esh (אָשׁ, "fire") represents both temporal judgment and eschatological hell. Jesus used fire imagery for final judgment: "everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41), "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:43-48). David's prayer anticipates ultimate justice for impenitent wicked.

"Into deep pits, that they rise not up again" (be-mahomorot ve-bal-yakumu, בְּמַהוּמָרוֹת וְבְאַל-יָקָעָם) adds imagery of inescapable imprisonment. Mahomorah (מַהוּמָרָה, "deep pit, miry place") suggests muddy, waterlogged holes from which escape is impossible—quicksand-like traps. Bal (בְּלֹא, "not, never") is strong negative. Kum (קָם, "rise, stand, arise") in negative form emphasizes permanent defeat: they will

NEVER rise again. This isn't temporary setback but final, irreversible judgment. The pit imagery recalls Korah's rebellion when earth opened and swallowed rebels (Numbers 16:31-33).

Historical Context

These imprecatory prayers troubled some Christians throughout church history, seeming incompatible with Jesus's command to "love your enemies" (Matthew 5:44). However, several factors provide context:

1. David as God's anointed king represented God's kingdom; attacks on David were attacks on God's purposes.
2. These prayers invoke divine justice, not personal revenge—David repeatedly refused to take personal vengeance (1 Samuel 24:6, 26:9-11).
3. The prayers assume impenitent wickedness, not redeemable sinners.
4. They express honest emotion to God rather than suppressing righteous anger.
5. They anticipate New Testament teaching on final judgment.

Jesus Himself pronounced woes on hypocrites (Matthew 23:13-36) and warned of hell's reality. Revelation contains prayers from martyrs: "How long, O Lord... dost thou not judge and avenge our blood?" (Revelation 6:10). The imprecatory psalms honestly acknowledge evil's reality and God's justice, entrusting vengeance to Him (Romans 12:19).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Study Questions

1. How can believers pray for justice against evil (as David does) while also praying for enemies' salvation (as Jesus commands in Matthew 5:44)?
2. What does the imagery of 'burning coals,' 'fire,' and 'deep pits' teach about the seriousness of final judgment and hell's reality?

3. How does David's appeal to divine justice rather than taking personal revenge (1 Samuel 24:12, 26:10) provide a model for believers facing injustice?

Interlinear Text

יָפַל מִ fall H5921	בְּאֵשׁ בְּ Let burning coals H1513	בְּ יְמִינֵיכֶם לְ into the fire H784	עַלְיָהָם עַלְ upon them let them be cast H5307
<small>H4131</small>			

בְּ מַקְמָר וְתִּ into deep pits H1077	בְּ קָרְבָּנוֹת that they rise not up again H6965
<small>H4113</small>	

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 11:6 (Parallel theme): Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.

Psalms 21:9 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt make them as a fiery oven in the time of thine anger: the LORD shall swallow them up in his wrath, and the fire shall devour them.

Revelation 20:15 (Parallel theme): And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 21:8 (Parallel theme): But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

Psalms 120:4 (Parallel theme): Sharp arrows of the mighty, with coals of juniper.

Psalms 55:23 (Parallel theme): But thou, O God, shalt bring them down into the pit of destruction: bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; but I will trust in thee.

Proverbs 28:10 (Parallel theme): Whoso causeth the righteous to go astray in an evil way, he shall fall himself into his own pit: but the upright shall have good things in possession.

Proverbs 28:17 (Parallel theme): A man that doeth violence to the blood of any person shall flee to the pit; let no man stay him.

Matthew 13:42 (Parallel theme): And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

Matthew 13:50 (Parallel theme): And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

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