

CHAPTER 26

PRAYING AGAINST THE WICKED – A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO ‘IMPRECATORY’ PRAYER

And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, “Arise, O LORD, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee.”

Numbers 10:35 (RSV)

*“No weapon that is formed against you will prosper;
And every tongue that accuses you in judgment you will condemn.
This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord,
And their vindication is from Me,” declares the Lord.
Isaiah 54:17 (NASB)*

Arise, O Lord!

*Deliver me, O my God!
For thou dost smite all my enemies on the cheek,
thou dost break the teeth of the wicked.
Psalm 3:7 (RSV)*

*Contend, O Lord, with those who contend with me;
fight against those who fight against me!
Psalm 35:1 (RSV)*

*Destroy their plans, O Lord, confuse their tongues;
for I see violence and strife in the city.
Psalm 55:9 (RSV)*

²³ *But the Lord your God will give them over to you, and throw them into great confusion, until they are destroyed.*

Deuteronomy 7:23 (RSV)

*Let my persecutors be put to shame,
but keep me from shame;
let them be terrified,
but keep me from terror.
Bring on them the day of disaster;
destroy them with double destruction.
Jeremiah 17:18 (NIV)*

² *And he said to me, “Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city;*

Ezekiel 11:2 (RSV)

*Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man.”
Ezekiel 11:4 (RSV)*

Is it ever valid to pray *against* another person?

The first question is can we ever pray *against* a person, or at least against their actions and plans? This is controversial, as many believe we should never do so, under any circumstances. The word ‘praying’ is almost always followed by the word ‘for’. The very idea of praying *against* any person or thing

therefore seems alien to many of us. Some won't teach on this at all, for fear of inducing immature Christians to go too far or to use imprecatory prayer in the wrong way, against the wrong people, or with wrong motives. Our starting point is that we should, ordinarily, pray *for* others, not against them:

⁴³ *"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*

Matthew 5:43-44 (ESV)

Are Jesus' words absolute, with no exceptions? Or do they need to be read alongside, and be tempered by, other passages? I believe they do and that there are times where we can, *and should*, pray against the wicked, or at least their plans and actions. However, we must be sure, before even considering the use of imprecatory prayer, that the person really *is* wicked. We cannot assume that anybody who opposes us is, by definition, wicked, or even wrong. We tend to think that, as we are so very self-centred, but not all who oppose us are even bad, let alone wicked.

They could be entirely right to resist us, as we may be in the wrong, or doing wrong. Indeed, God Himself may even have sent them to oppose us, as His agents. So don't leap automatically to the conclusion that anybody who ever gets in your way must be a bad person, such that imprecatory prayer is justified. Instead, stop and question yourself closely and examine the facts objectively. Also ask God to reveal the truth to you. Very few of us ever do any of that, but such questions must be addressed before imprecatory prayer is even *considered*, let alone engaged in.

Subject to that strong caveat, there are situations where it is appropriate to use imprecatory prayer. We shall examine some in this chapter. We shall also look at what various Bible characters did and how, when, why, and against whom, they did it. We shall begin by defining '*imprecation*' and then look at King David in particular. Imprecatory prayer was a major part of his prayer life, as the Psalms clearly show, no matter how many preachers ignore them. Then we shall look at others in the Bible who engaged in imprecatory prayer, because it was by no means limited to David.

What exactly do we mean by the words 'execration', 'anathema' and 'imprecation'?

These are old-fashioned words which are rarely used now, so we must define them. Also there aren't really any modern words in common use today which have the same meaning and which we could use instead. Therefore we shall set them out in turn:

- a) **'Execration'** (noun) To 'execrate' (verb) is another word for the verb 'to curse', whereby someone or something is cursed, or a curse is pronounced upon them or it. The word execration, when used as a noun, means the action of execrating, or it can mean the actual uttered curse or 'anathema' itself.
- b) **'Anathema'** (noun) This is a Greek word which is used in the New Testament, for example in Galatians 1:8-9, and it means 'accursed'. Apostle Paul uses this word in speaking against those who preach a false gospel when he says: "... *let him be accursed*". (anathema):

⁸ *But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to that which we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again, If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to that which you received, let him be accursed.*

Galatians 1:8-9 (RSV)

- c) **'Imprecation'** (noun) To 'imprecate' (verb), means to pray for, invoke, or call down evil upon a person, or to curse them. So, imprecation (noun) is the act of imprecating. It can also mean the act of invoking evil, vengeance or divine judgment upon another person, or on oneself, as when taking an oath in court or 'adjuring'. The adjective form of the word is '*imprecatory*' and is used to describe a prayer or pronouncement which involves or contains imprecation, execration or cursing.

Those are the alternative technical terms applicable to this subject. We can now examine what King David and others did, and why. Then we can consider whether or not we are meant to do likewise.

Some examples of ‘imprecatory’ psalms in which King David prayed for the failure, defeat, and even death, of his enemies or directly cursed them himself

There are many examples in the book of Psalms of David’s imprecatory prayers and/or imprecatory declarations and proclamations. We could go on and on listing them for pages. However, I will set out only a representative sample, in which David prays for the confusion, scattering, failure, defeat and even death, of his enemies. I will refer to enough of these to show that this was how David prayed and/or spoke on a regular basis, not just in exceptional, one-off situations. Consider the following extracts:

¹ *Let God arise, let his enemies be scattered;
let those who hate him flee before him!*

² *As smoke is driven away, so drive them away;
as wax melts before fire,
let the wicked perish before God!*

Psalm 68:1-2 (RSV)

*Let them be put to shame and confusion
altogether who seek to snatch away my life;
let them be turned back and brought to dishonor
who desire my hurt!*

Psalm 40:14 (RSV)

*Arise, O Lord! confront them, overthrow them!
Deliver my life from the wicked by thy sword,*

Psalm 17:13 (RSV)

¹⁷ *Let me not be put to shame, O Lord,
for I call on thee;*

*let the wicked be put to shame,
let them go dumbfounded to Sheol.*

¹⁸ *Let the lying lips be dumb,
which speak insolently against the righteous
in pride and contempt.*

Psalm 31:17-18 (RSV)

⁸ *Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked;
do not further his evil plot!*

⁹ *Those who surround me lift up their head,
let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them!*

¹⁰ *Let burning coals fall upon them!
Let them be cast into pits, no more to rise!*

¹¹ *Let not the slanderer be established in the land;
let evil hunt down the violent man speedily!*

Psalm 140:8-11 (RSV)

⁹ *Keep me from the trap which they have laid for me,
and from the snares of evildoers!*

¹⁰ *Let the wicked together fall into their own nets,
while I escape.*

Psalm 141:9-10 (RSV)

¹¹ *For thy name's sake, O Lord, preserve my life!
In thy righteousness bring me out of trouble!*
¹² *And in thy steadfast love cut off my enemies,
and destroy all my adversaries,
for I am thy servant.*

Psalm 143:11-12 (RSV)

⁴ *Requite them according to their work and according to the evil of their practices;
Requite them according to the deeds of their hands;
Repay them their recompense.*

Psalm 28:4 (NASB)

²⁴ *Pour out thy indignation upon them,
and let thy burning anger overtake them.*
²⁵ *May their camp be a desolation,
let no one dwell in their tents.*
²⁶ *For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten,
and him whom thou hast wounded, they afflict still more.*
²⁷ *Add to them punishment upon punishment;
may they have no acquittal from thee.*
²⁸ *Let them be blotted out of the book of the living;
let them not be enrolled among the righteous.*

Psalm 69:24-28 (RSV)

¹ *Contend, O LORD, with those who contend with me;
fight against those who fight against me!*
² *Take hold of shield and buckler and rise for my help!*
³ *Draw the spear and javelin against my pursuers!
Say to my soul, "I am your salvation!"*
⁴ *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!*
⁵ *Let them be like chaff before the wind,
with the angel of the LORD driving them away!*
⁶ *Let their way be dark and slippery,
with the angel of the LORD pursuing them!*
⁷ *For without cause they hid their net for me;
without cause they dug a pit for my life.*
⁸ *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!*

Psalm 35:1-8 (ESV)

*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!*

Psalm 35:26 (ESV)

¹⁹ *O that thou wouldst slay the wicked, O God,
and that men of blood would depart from me,*
²⁰ *men who maliciously defy thee,
who lift themselves up against thee for evil!*
²¹ *Do I not hate them that hate thee, O Lord?
And do I not loathe them that rise up against thee?*
²² *I hate them with perfect hatred;*

I count them my enemies.

Psalm 139:19-22 (RSV)

King David also made declarations and proclamations by himself, or directly to other people. These amounted to curses, in that he was invoking God's judgment upon them.

David also asked God to expose false friends who were pretending to support him but were secretly opposed to him. Or he would say such things to people himself, *as a declaration of his own*, rather than as a request to God. When he did that he was proclaiming, in faith, that he confidently expected that they would be exposed by God. Such an imprecatory statement is effectively a curse in itself when said directly to, or about, the wicked. David himself was *invoking* God's judgment upon them, rather than *asking* for it. That is David was cursing them *himself*, rather than asking God to do so:

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 24:15 (RSV)

¹⁷ Saul recognized David's voice, and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And David said, "It is my voice, my lord, O king."¹⁸ And he said, "Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What guilt is on my hands?"¹⁹ Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the Lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering; but if it is men, may they be cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the Lord, saying, 'Go, serve other gods.'

1 Samuel 26:17-19 (RSV)

¹⁶ And some of the men of Benjamin and Judah came to the stronghold to David. ¹⁷ David went out to meet them and said to them, "If you have come to me in friendship to help me, my heart will be knit to you; but if to betray me to my adversaries, although there is no wrong in my hands, then may the God of our fathers see and rebuke you."

1 Chronicles 12:16-17 (RSV)

David also made such declarations or proclamations to, or about, his enemies who were seeking to kill him. He not only proclaimed that they would be exposed or opposed by God, but even that they would be *killed*. It is important to see that, when speaking in this way, David was not asking God to do this. He was declaring it, *in his own right*, as what *he* expected, and wanted, to happen. Accordingly, he was cursing them himself. Or you could say he was announcing out loud what he was believing for, or had faith for. He speaks in that way in these passages:

*⁹ But those who seek to destroy my life
shall go down into the depths of the earth;
¹⁰ they shall be given over to the power of the sword,
they shall be prey for jackals.*

Psalm 63:9-10 (RSV)

*Now I know that the Lord will help his anointed;
he will answer him from his holy heaven
with mighty victories by his right hand.*

*⁷ Some boast of chariots, and some of horses;
but we boast of the name of the Lord our God.*

*⁸ They will collapse and fall;
but we shall rise and stand upright.*

Psalm 20:6-8 (RSV)

Likewise, in this next extract, we see David making a declaration, or proclamation, of the fact that he has faith about what will become of his enemies. He boldly asserts that God has already heard his prayers for help and that He will deal with those enemies. Therefore he is sure that they will 'turn back' be 'ashamed', 'sorely troubled', and 'put to shame'. These are the outcomes which David wants, has been asking for, and is confident will happen:

⁸ *Depart from me, all you workers of evil;
for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.*
⁹ *The Lord has heard my supplication;
the Lord accepts my prayer.*
¹⁰ *All my enemies shall be ashamed and sorely troubled;
they shall turn back, and be put to shame in a moment.*
Psalm 6:8-10 (RSV)

David does the same in this next psalm:

³ *For insolent men have risen against me,
ruthless men seek my life;
they do not set God before them.*
⁴ *Behold, God is my helper;
the Lord is the upholder of my life.*
⁵ *He will requite my enemies with evil;
in thy faithfulness put an end to them.*
Psalm 54:3-5 (RSV)

What David was doing in the examples above amounts to curses being uttered *by him*. He is not merely asking *God* to expose, rebuke or punish the person. David is pronouncing it over them *himself*, with the intention that it should take effect *if* they are false. There are also psalms in which David makes statements or proclamations by himself, even if only for himself to hear, of what he believes God will do. In some cases he suddenly moves from making such statements into asking God to deliver him from his enemies and to smite them etc, as in Psalm 3:

*O Lord, how many are my foes!
Many are rising against me;*
² *many are saying of me,
there is no help for him in God.*
³ *But thou, O Lord, art a shield about me,
my glory, and the lifter of my head.*
⁴ *I cry aloud to the Lord,
and he answers me from his holy hill.*
⁵ *I lie down and sleep;
I wake again, for the Lord sustains me.*
⁶ *I am not afraid of ten thousands of people
who have set themselves against me round about.*
⁷ *Arise, O Lord!
Deliver me, O my God!*
*For thou dost smite all my enemies on the cheek,
thou dost break the teeth of the wicked.*
⁸ *Deliverance belongs to the Lord;
thy blessing be upon thy people!*
Psalm 3:1-8 (RSV)

The prophet Jeremiah also made such proclamations or declarations about the wicked, just as David did. Again, these were really *statements* rather than requests.

Jeremiah also made imprecatory statements or announcements in which he proclaimed what he believed would happen to the wicked. As in David's case, when Jeremiah did this he was not asking God to do anything. He was declaring what *he himself* believed, or had faith for. Consider this passage in which Jeremiah is speaking about his persecutors:

¹⁰ *For I hear many whispering,
Terror is on every side!
"Denounce him! Let us denounce him!"
say all my familiar friends,
watching for my fall.
"Perhaps he will be deceived,
then we can overcome him,
and take our revenge on him."
¹¹ *But the Lord is with me as a dread warrior;
therefore my persecutors will stumble,
they will not overcome me.
They will be greatly shamed,
for they will not succeed.
Their eternal dishonor
will never be forgotten.*
*Jeremiah 20:10-11 (RSV)**

Having proclaimed what he has faith for, Jeremiah then moves into a direct imprecatory prayer in which he asks God to bring vengeance upon these wicked men:

¹² *O Lord of hosts, who triest the righteous,
who seest the heart and the mind,
let me see thy vengeance upon them,
for to thee have I committed my cause.*
Jeremiah 20:12 (RSV)

We too sometimes need to pray and proclaim *against* the wicked, as King David did. He was not unique in having the ability, or the right, to do it.

Too many Christians are sentimental and soft about the wicked. God is not. He has openly declared that He is opposed to them and He wants us to be so too. Although it is correct to pray *for* the wicked, and to ask God to save them, it can also be right to pray *against* them, at least at certain times. It depends on the context and on the nature and severity of the situation. For example, we might ask God to destroy the plans of the wicked and to confuse their communications when they are plotting. That is important, because the wicked operate as a pack, and they devise schemes together.

We therefore need to ask God to send confusion and disunity into their camp, as they rely on each other in their plots and are conspiratorial by nature. That said, '*the camp of the wicked*' also includes the demons who inform and empower them. The demons are part of the 'gang' and need to be seen as such. So, when we pray for confusion in the enemy camp, one thing we are asking for is that the demons won't be able to assist or coordinate the wicked effectively. Therefore, we are not only praying against the human beings, but also the demons who are in or alongside them:

*Destroy their plans, O Lord, confuse their tongues;
for I see violence and strife in the city.*
Psalm 55:9 (RSV)

David prayed in this way during Absalom's rebellion. He asked God to interfere with the advice given to Absalom by the shrewd and highly skilled counsellor, Ahithophel:

³¹ *And it was told David, "Ahith'ophel is among the conspirators with Ab'salom." And David said, "O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahith'ophel into foolishness."*

2 Samuel 15:31 (RSV)

In Psalm 109 David sets out a lengthy and blood-curdling curse against the wicked people who oppose and attack him.

Psalm 109 is one of the more robust of David's imprecatory psalms. The heading above it in the Revised Standard Version is '*A Psalm of anathema*', which means a psalm of cursing. That word has probably been avoided by the RSV translators so as not to upset those who are uneasy about, or opposed to, the concept of cursing anybody. Even I find parts of this psalm surprising in terms of the severity of David's request, not only about the wicked, but *their wives and families as well*.

Nevertheless, it is in the Bible, so we have to deal with it. It is how King David often prayed and there is no getting away from it. Do also bear in mind that, from David's perspective, and also from Israel's, the children of the wicked were very likely to become wicked themselves. If so, within ten years or so, they would become the next generation of adult enemies with whom David would have to contend. Seen in that context, and given that David and his line had the throne permanently, it makes sense for him to think of the long term, not just the present.

Look closely at verses 1 to 20, especially verses 10-13 and see how explicit David was. Note also that this passage contains a variety of approaches. David uses imprecatory prayer, in which he asks God to do things. He also makes proclamations and declarations of what he believes will occur. But he also makes a number of *direct curses of his own* in which he speaks curses over his enemies and invokes a dreadful outcome for them. He speaks it over them, wills it upon them, and seeks to cause it, by his own cursing words:

¹ *Be not silent, O God of my praise!*

² *For wicked and deceitful mouths are opened against me,
speaking against me with lying tongues.*

³ *They beset me with words of hate,
and attack me without cause.*

⁴ *In return for my love they accuse me,
even as I make prayer for them.*

⁵ *So they reward me evil for good,
and hatred for my love.*

⁶ *Appoint a wicked man against him;
let an accuser bring him to trial.*

⁷ *When he is tried, let him come forth guilty;
let his prayer be counted as sin!*

⁸ *May his days be few;
may another seize his goods!*

⁹ *May his children be fatherless,
and his wife a widow!*

¹⁰ *May his children wander about and beg;
may they be driven out of the ruins they inhabit!*

¹¹ *May the creditor seize all that he has;
may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil!*

¹² *Let there be none to extend kindness to him,
nor any to pity his fatherless children!*

¹³ *May his posterity be cut off;*

- may his name be blotted out in the second generation!*
- ¹⁴ *May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord,
and let not the sin of his mother be blotted out!*
- ¹⁵ *Let them be before the Lord continually;
and may his memory be cut off from the earth!*
- ¹⁶ *For he did not remember to show kindness,
but pursued the poor and needy
and the broken hearted to their death.*
- ¹⁷ *He loved to curse; let curses come on him!
He did not like blessing; may it be far from him!*
- ¹⁸ *He clothed himself with cursing as his coat,
may it soak into his body like water,
like oil into his bones!*
- ¹⁹ *May it be like a garment which he wraps round him,
like a belt with which he daily girds himself!*
- ²⁰ *May this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord,
of those who speak evil against my life!*

Psalm 109:1-20 (RSV)

This psalm presents a difficulty, even for advocates of imprecatory prayer. It goes further than I personally would want to go, unless I was in extreme circumstances. But then, the fact is that David spent much of his life in extreme circumstances. He faced wars, rebellions, attempts on his life, plots, lies, slanders and curses. He also had to spend years on the run with people hunting him, or seeking to betray him to those who would kill him. If I was in some of the harrowing situations David had to deal with, I think I would be willing to pray such a prayer.

Bear in mind as well that what David was praying for in verses 10-13 of Psalm 109 is actually less severe than what the British and American air forces did to Germany in the strategic bombing campaign of 1941-1945. The bombs which we dropped relentlessly, night and day, were not only aimed at German industry, dockyards and railways, but also at their *cities*. We took the view that until we were strong enough to invade France, which wasn't until June 1944, the only major offensive action of which we were realistically capable was the aerial bombing of Germany.

I believe we were right to bomb Germany, *including their civilian population*, because their whole nation was one huge war-making machine. If we could not hit all of their railways, depots and factories, we could at least hit their houses. That would render the factory workers homeless, and reduce the efficiency and industrial capacity of Germany. That was necessary, and justified, because those factory workers were just as much a threat to our troops as the German soldiers, sailors and airmen. Therefore David wasn't praying for anything worse than we inflicted on Germany.

Anyone criticising David should also bear that in mind what we did to Hiroshima and Nagasaki which were obliterated by atomic bombs. That said, Tokyo was almost equally destroyed by conventional bombs and incendiaries, by which we created a fire-storm. We were prepared, rightly in my view, to destroy those cities ourselves, and the *men, women and children who lived in them*, many of whom were innocent bystanders. Therefore, why would David be wrong to ask God to bring about the same effect, on a far smaller scale, and solely amongst the families of the wicked, not the innocent?

The difference between asking God to curse a person or group and directly cursing them yourself

The very suggestion of praying *against* a person and asking God to oppose or remove them is hard enough for most people to accept. It seems alien and improper and the fact that it is not done in the vast majority of churches strengthens the impression that there must be something wrong with it. Even more would recoil from the idea of a Christian *directly cursing* a person or group themselves. That would

seem unthinkable to many. But the problem is both of these things are done by many major figures in the Bible, including apostle Paul.

Leaving aside their validity, let us seek to distinguish these two methods more clearly. That will help us to see when it might be more appropriate to ask *God* to oppose, or curse, the person or group and in what circumstances we should do so *ourselves*. Imagine what happens when artillery is used in warfare. Those are the very large guns that fire explosive shells onto enemy positions. Let's consider how that artillery is used, and by whom, and how it is directed onto the intended targets. The soldiers can do one of two things:

- a) They can fire the heavy guns themselves. This is like what happens when a person curses something or someone themselves. They themselves are doing the actual firing.
- b) Or soldiers can request support from those who fire the artillery and give them map references, coordinates, or even laser guidance. This can be done by those in forward positions who can see the target. They then radio in and tell those who are doing the firing where the enemy is located.

The main approach taken in the Bible would broadly correspond to option (b) above. That is the most usual approach. It would involve us asking God to 'fire the artillery' at the enemy. Then the person engaging in imprecatory prayer is not firing any weapon themselves. They are asking God to do so. Nevertheless, they are still heavily involved and they fully intend for God to 'open fire' on that enemy. However, there is no getting away from the fact that, at certain times, David, Moses, Paul and others also engaged in option (a) above.

That is they fired the 'artillery' themselves by directly cursing a person or group, rather than by asking God to do it for them. I accept that this is the less-used of the two approaches. Nevertheless, it was still used by figures in the Bible and I believe there are times when we are meant to do so too. That is there are certain times when God not only permits us, but *wants us*, to fire the artillery ourselves, by directly cursing someone or something. An example of when I have engaged in such direct imprecation or cursing involved two former business partners of mine. They acted wrongly towards me and expelled me from a law firm in which I had a one third equity stake.

They did so because I had caught one of them forging an invoice on the firm's letterhead and confronted him about it. The other one, the senior partner, initially promised to support me. But he then changed sides and was totally silent when I raised it at a partners' meeting. The end-result was that they joined together to drive me out of that firm and then refused to pay me my one third share of the equity value. It was impossible for me to sue them *and* set up a new law firm of my own. I had not got the money, or the time, to do both. So I reluctantly chose not to sue them.

Instead I prayed for God to judge between us, to grant me justice, and to bring His judgment upon them for what they had done. I proclaimed Psalm 35 in relation to them. In that psalm, which is set out earlier in this chapter, David asks God to contend with his enemies and to fight against them. I later felt that God wanted me to go even further and to be involved in the judgment that He was going to bring upon them. To begin with, I believe God spoke to me through a friend of mine called Bob. He was older than me and far more knowledgeable about imprecatory prayer.

Bob told me the difference between asking God to bring judgment on those two men and speaking it over them myself, as an imprecatory declaration *by me*. An analogy came to my mind of me lighting the blue touch paper, as when one is lighting fireworks. I felt that God was actually waiting for me to 'light the blue touch paper' before He would move against them in judgment. That is I felt God wanted me to be part of what He was doing and to operate in conjunction with Him.

I believe God wanted *me* to speak the judgment over them, as Ezekiel was told to prophesy judgment over various groups and nations. I felt unsure about this, so I told Bob. He said it sounded absolutely right to him and that I should go ahead. However, note how cautious I was about all of this. I had been

treated abominably and my former partners had taken all my assets. Yet I was not rushing, even into imprecatory prayer, let alone into directly proclaiming against them or cursing them myself. On the contrary, I had to be persuaded to do it and I entered into it slowly and reluctantly.

Yet I believe it was right to do so. From the point when I ‘lit’ the blue touch paper and spoke God’s judgment over them, a series of events started which went on for over ten years. They declined, lost staff, and got into one problem after another, including trouble with regulatory authorities. However, I went from strength to strength. Within five years my new firm was over three times bigger than theirs and vastly more profitable. Moreover, when I eventually sold my law firm, to become a full time Bible teacher and writer, everything went well with the sale. God provided me with the perfect buyer.

However, the year after my sale and the start of my new ministry, both of my former business partners were declared bankrupt. I believe that God’s judgment had pursued them throughout those 14 years and that He was punishing them. In the end, God took everything away from them, not only what had belonged to me, but all of their own assets too. Who could have foreseen that, in the natural, at the outset? Their business was a successful going concern. They had all the staff, files, clients, premises, equipment and a strong cash flow.

In stark contrast, I had nothing at all and had to begin my new firm with no staff, clients, files or equipment whatsoever. If anyone had said then that I would end up successful, and they would both go bankrupt, it would have been considered ridiculous. In the natural, it seemed impossible, not only for me to succeed, but for them to fail. But both of those things happened and I believe that a large part of the reason for what became of them was my imprecatory prayer. In particular, I believe it was the direct imprecation of my own, when I spoke God’s judgment over them.

David’s imprecatory prayers on behalf of Israel

Now consider these examples of imprecatory prayer which David used specifically on behalf of *Israel*, rather than himself. Whatever one might say about the validity of such prayer on one’s own personal behalf, I believe it is undoubtedly justified when done for the benefit of Israel:

¹⁹ *Arise, O Lord! Let not man prevail;
let the nations be judged before thee!*

²⁰ *Put them in fear, O Lord!
Let the nations know that they are but men!*
Psalm 9:19-20 (RSV)

*Thou, Lord God of hosts, art God of Israel.
Awake to punish all the nations;
spare none of those who treacherously plot evil.*
Psalm 59:5 (RSV)

¹² *For the sin of their mouths, the words of their lips,
let them be trapped in their pride.
For the cursing and lies which they utter,
¹³ consume them in wrath,
consume them till they are no more,
that men may know that God rules over Jacob
to the ends of the earth.*
Psalm 59:12-13 (RSV)

¹¹ *O grant us help against the foe,
for vain is the help of man!*
¹² *With God we shall do valiantly;*

it is he who will tread down our foes.
Psalm 60:11-12 (RSV)

A major imprecatory psalm on behalf of Israel which is written by Asaph, not King David

This next psalm is written by Asaph, a Levite. He was not a King of Israel but a musician and worship leader in the Tabernacle. We are also told in 1 Chronicles 25:2 that he “*prophesied under the direction of the King*”. In Psalm 83 he is asking God to expose, defeat, destroy and put to shame the enemies of Israel and of the Jewish people. Asaph begins by identifying the main enemies of Israel, the Arab nations surrounding them. That was true then and still is today, 3000 years later:

O God, do not keep silence;
do not hold thy peace or be still, O God!
² *For lo, thy enemies are in tumult;*
those who hate thee have raised their heads.
³ *They lay crafty plans against thy people;*
they consult together against thy protected ones.
⁴ *They say, “Come, let us wipe them out as a nation;*
let the name of Israel be remembered no more!”
⁵ *Yea, they conspire with one accord;*
against thee they make a covenant—
⁶ *the tents of Edom and the Ish'maelites,*
Moab and the Hagrites,
⁷ *Gebal and Ammon and Am'alek,*
Philistia with the inhabitants of Tyre;
⁸ *Assyria also has joined them;*
they are the strong arm of the children of Lot.
Psalm 83:1-8 (RSV)

Asaph spells out starkly what he wants God to do to those hostile Arabs who are causing trouble for Israel. He does not use any sanitised euphemisms or toned-down, politically correct language. He means business and asks God to intervene in drastic ways. I believe we are entitled to pray in similar ways today against those who oppose Israel, or the Church, or who seek world domination. That includes groups such as ISIS, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, Hamas, Hezbollah, the Taliban etc, but also the very religion of Islam itself. That is utterly evil and satanic and promotes violent Jihad:

⁹ *Do to them as thou didst to Mid'ian,*
as to Sis'era and Jabin at the river Kishon,
¹⁰ *who were destroyed at En-dor,*
who became dung for the ground.
¹¹ *Make their nobles like Oreb and Zeeb,*
all their princes like Zebah and Zalmun'na,
¹² *who said, “Let us take possession for ourselves*
of the pastures of God.”
¹³ *O my God, make them like whirling dust,*
like chaff before the wind.
¹⁴ *As fire consumes the forest,*
as the flame sets the mountains ablaze,
¹⁵ *so do thou pursue them with thy tempest*
and terrify them with thy hurricane!
¹⁶ *Fill their faces with shame,*
that they may seek thy name, O Lord.
¹⁷ *Let them be put to shame and dismayed for ever;*
let them perish in disgrace.

Psalm 83:9-17 (RSV)

King David did not invent imprecatory prayer, and neither did Asaph. Moses also used it many centuries earlier.

On the rare occasions when imprecation is mentioned at all in churches, it is usually implied that only King David ever did this, or even that it can only be done by Kings. That isn't true. David was not the only one to engage in imprecatory prayer or proclamation. He wasn't even the first. For example, Moses used it, as in this prayer below:

³⁵ *And whenever the ark set out, Moses said, "Arise, O Lord, and let thy enemies be scattered; and let them that hate thee flee before thee."*

Numbers 10:35 (RSV)

We need to examine this practice right across the board and look at some of the many different figures in the Bible who prayed like this. You may be surprised by how numerous they are.

King Jehoshaphat also used imprecatory prayer on behalf of Judah when it faced military attack by the men of Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir (Arabs).

When the Kingdom of Judah faced attack King Jehoshaphat asked God to intervene and to "execute judgment" upon these attackers. They were what we would now call Arabs:

¹⁰ *And now behold, the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Se'ir, whom thou wouldst not let Israel invade when they came from the land of Egypt, and whom they avoided and did not destroy—¹¹ behold, they reward us by coming to drive us out of thy possession, which thou hast given us to inherit.¹² O our God, wilt thou not execute judgment upon them? For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon thee."*

2 Chronicles 20:10-12 (RSV)

God did not disapprove of the prayer, or refuse to answer it. He actually replied to Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah through a prophetic word spoken by Jahaziel, one of the sons of Asaph. God said they would not even need to fight in this battle, as He would fight for them:

¹⁴ *And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jaha'ziel the son of Zechari'ah, son of Benai'ah, son of Je-i'el, son of Mattani'ah, a Levite of the sons of Asaph, in the midst of the assembly.¹⁵ And he said, "Hearken, all Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, and King Jehosh'aphat: Thus says the Lord to you, 'Fear not, and be not dismayed at this great multitude; for the battle is not yours but God's.¹⁶ Tomorrow go down against them; behold, they will come up by the ascent of Ziz; you will find them at the end of the valley, east of the wilderness of Jeru'el.¹⁷ You will not need to fight in this battle; take your position, stand still, and see the victory of the Lord on your behalf, O Judah and Jerusalem.' Fear not, and be not dismayed; tomorrow go out against them, and the Lord will be with you."*

2 Chronicles 20:14-17 (RSV)

Later God answered the prayer directly by intervening and causing these three Arab armies to turn on each other and destroy themselves, without Judah having to do anything:

²² *And when they began to sing and praise, the Lord set an ambush against the men of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Se'ir, who had come against Judah, so that they were routed.²³ For the men of Ammon and Moab rose against the inhabitants of Mount Se'ir, destroying them utterly, and when they had made an end of the inhabitants of Se'ir, they all helped to destroy one another.²⁴ When*

Judah came to the watchtower of the wilderness, they looked toward the multitude; and behold, they were dead bodies lying on the ground; none had escaped.

2 Chronicles 20:22-24 (RSV)

Further imprecatory psalms concerning the enemies of Israel which are written by people other than King David

Other psalmists besides David also wrote imprecatory psalms about the enemies of Israel, i.e. 'Zion'. An example of this is in Psalm 129, by an unnamed psalmist:

*5 May all who hate Zion
be put to shame and turned backward!
6 Let them be like the grass on the housetops,
which withers before it grows up,
Psalm 129:5-6 (RSV)*

Likewise, in Psalm 79, Asaph makes this imprecatory prayer for God to punish the enemies of Israel, who had taunted God:

*Return sevenfold into the lap of our neighbors
the taunts with which they have taunted you, O Lord!
Psalm 79:12 (ESV)*

Then, in Psalm 94, an unnamed psalmist makes a powerful imprecatory prayer, and also a proclamation, against the arrogant nations which seek to crush the Jewish people:

*O Lord, thou God of vengeance,
thou God of vengeance, shine forth!
2 Rise up, O judge of the earth;
render to the proud their deserts!
3 O Lord, how long shall the wicked,
how long shall the wicked exult?
4 They pour out their arrogant words,
they boast, all the evildoers.
5 They crush thy people, O Lord,
and afflict thy heritage.
6 They slay the widow and the sojourner,
and murder the fatherless;
7 and they say, "The Lord does not see;
the God of Jacob does not perceive."
Psalm 94:1-7 (RSV)*

*For the Lord will not forsake his people;
he will not abandon his heritage;
Psalm 94:14 (RSV)*

He concludes by proclaiming that God will "wipe them out":

*He will bring back on them their iniquity
and wipe them out for their wickedness;
the Lord our God will wipe them out.
Psalm 94:23 (RSV)*

I believe it was right for David and others to pray for the destruction of those Arab armies and that it is equally valid for us to do so today. Israel's enemies are now found in every nation. Yet, they are still mainly amongst the Islamic neighbours of Israel, especially the Arabs. Accordingly, I believe we should also pray for the defeat of Islam itself. It is an evil abomination, created by Satan, which is committed to destroying Israel and the Jewish people. Those facts alone both entitle and oblige us to pray against Islam, quite apart from the fact that it also persecutes the Church.

Other miscellaneous psalms of imprecation which are not written by King David

In these passages the Psalmists proclaim what they want, and expect, God to do to the wicked. These examples further underline the point that imprecatory prayer was not restricted only to King David, or even to Kings in general. The other psalmists were not Kings, but they all took the same approach to imprecatory prayer:

*Let the wicked together fall into their own nets,
while I escape*

Psalm 141:10 (RSV)

Next, we see a prayer for the wicked to be "put to shame and confusion" and "turned back in disgrace":

*¹Hasten, O God, to save me; O LORD,
come quickly to help me.
²May those who seek my life be put to shame and confusion;
may all who desire my ruin be turned back in disgrace.*

Psalm 70:1-2 (NIV)

The Psalmist speaks similarly in this next psalm. He does not mince his words, or use any polite euphemisms to disguise his real meaning:

*¹⁰For my enemies speak against me;
those who wait to kill me conspire together.
¹¹They say, "God has forsaken him;
pursue him and seize him, for no one will rescue him."
¹²Be not far from me, O God; come quickly,
O my God, to help me.
¹³May my accusers perish in shame;
may those who want to harm me
be covered with scorn and disgrace.*

Psalm 71:10-13 (NIV)

In Psalm 10, the Psalmist asks God to break the arm of the wicked and to seek out their wickedness:

*Break thou the arm of the wicked and evildoer;
seek out his wickedness till thou find none.*

Psalm 10:15 (RSV)

In this next example the Psalmist asks directly for his enemies to be *destroyed*:

*¹¹For thy name's sake, O LORD,
preserve my life! In thy righteousness bring me out of trouble!
¹²And in thy steadfast love cut off my enemies,
and destroy all my adversaries,
for I am thy servant.*

Psalm 143:11-12 (RSV)

In Psalm 72, King Solomon makes an imprecatory prayer against oppressors in general:

*Give the king thy justice, O God,
and thy righteousness to the royal son!
² May he judge thy people with righteousness,
and thy poor with justice!
³ Let the mountains bear prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness!
⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor!*
Psalm 72:1-4 (RSV)

*May his foes bow down before him,
and his enemies lick the dust!*
Psalm 72:9 (RSV)

Also the famous, but unnamed, writer of Psalm 119 said these things:

*Let the godless be put to shame,
because they have subverted me with guile;
as for me, I will meditate on thy precepts.*
Psalm 119:78 (RSV)

⁸⁴ *How long must thy servant endure?
When wilt thou judge those who persecute me?*
⁸⁵ *Godless men have dug pitfalls for me,
men who do not conform to thy law.*
⁸⁶ *All thy commandments are sure;
they persecute me with falsehood; help me!*
⁸⁷ *They have almost made an end of me on earth;
but I have not forsaken thy precepts.*
Psalm 119:84-87 (RSV)

Some other examples of imprecatory prayers which are not in the Psalms

Let's now look at some examples of prayers against the wicked from elsewhere in the Bible, not within the Psalms. Here is the forthright, politically incorrect stance taken by the prophet Jeremiah:

*But, O Lord of hosts, who judges righteously,
who tests the heart and the mind,
let me see your vengeance upon them,
for to you have I committed my cause.*
Jeremiah 11:20 (ESV)

Let my persecutors be put to shame, but keep me from shame; let them be terrified, but keep me from terror. Bring on them the day of disaster; destroy them with double destruction.
Jeremiah 17:18 (NIV)

⁶⁴ *“You will repay them, O Lord,
according to the work of their hands.*
⁶⁵ *You will give them dullness of heart;
your curse will be on them.*
⁶⁶ *You will pursue them in anger and destroy them*

from under your heavens, O Lord.”

Lamentations 3:64-66 (ESV)

When Judah was attacked by Assyria, King Hezekiah rallied the people to resist the invasion. He urged them not to be afraid, but to trust that God was with them and would fight for them in the coming battles:

⁷ “Be strong and of good courage. Do not be afraid or dismayed before the king of Assyria and all the horde that is with him; for there is one greater with us than with him. ⁸ With him is an arm of flesh; but with us is the LORD our God, to help us and to fight our battles.” And the people took confidence from the words of Hezeki'ah king of Judah.

2 Chronicles 32:7-8 (RSV)

Hezekiah's statement above relates to the nation of Judah, not an individual Christian. However, it is reasonable to conclude that God will also fight for an individual Christian, church or family if they are seeking to do His will and to resist the wicked. That must be so, because so many of the imprecatory psalms, and also Jeremiah's prayers, relate to the writers' own personal enemies and accusers, not just to the enemies of Israel or Judah.

Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada the priest, prayed for God to take vengeance upon those who were putting him to death.

Zechariah was the godly son of the priest, Jehoiada, who had saved the life of King Joash and served him faithfully thereafter. When Jehoiada died King Joash went astray and fell into idolatry. Zechariah therefore confronted him, but Joash would not listen. Instead, he listened to his new supporters, who were conspiring against Zechariah, and he gave orders for him to be stoned to death. As they were preparing to kill him, Zechariah prayed a prayer of imprecation in which he asked God “to see and avenge”:

¹⁷ Now after the death of Jehoi'ada the princes of Judah came and did obeisance to the king; then the king harkened to them. ¹⁸ And they forsook the house of the Lord, the God of their fathers, and served the Ashe'rim and the idols. And wrath came upon Judah and Jerusalem for this their guilt. ¹⁹ Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the Lord; these testified against them, but they would not give heed. ²⁰ Then the Spirit of God took possession of Zechari'ah the son of Jehoi'ada the priest; and he stood above the people, and said to them, “Thus says God, ‘Why do you transgress the commandments of the Lord, so that you cannot prosper? Because you have forsaken the Lord, he has forsaken you.’” ²¹ But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the Lord. ²² Thus Jo'ash the king did not remember the kindness which Jehoi'ada, Zechari'ah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And when he was dying, he said, “May the Lord see and avenge!”

2 Chronicles 24:17-22 (RSV)

God dramatically answered that prayer. At the end of that year the Syrian army came against King Joash and killed the princes of Judah who had conspired against Zechariah. Those Syrians did not know it, but they were an answer to his prayer:

²³ At the end of the year the army of the Syrians came up against Jo'ash. They came to Judah and Jerusalem, and destroyed all the princes of the people from among the people, and sent all their spoil to the king of Damascus. ²⁴ Though the army of the Syrians had come with few men, the Lord delivered into their hand a very great army, because they had forsaken the Lord, the God of their fathers. Thus they executed judgment on Jo'ash.

2 Chronicles 24:23-24 (RSV)

That wasn't the end of it. The servants of King Joash then conspired against him and killed him. They also compounded the judgment upon him by refusing to bury him in the tombs used for the previous Kings. That was a great dishonour to him:

25 When they had departed from him, leaving him severely wounded, his servants conspired against him because of the blood of the son of Jehoi'ada the priest, and slew him on his bed. So he died; and they buried him in the city of David, but they did not bury him in the tombs of the kings.

2 Chronicles 24:25 (RSV)

Therefore what those conspirators had done was brought back upon themselves as a judgment. Also King Joash, who gave the order to the conspirators, was himself murdered as a result of a conspiracy. They all reaped exactly what they had sown, which is what apostle Paul told us will happen to all of us. Indeed, you could say it is a law of God which has been woven into the very fabric of the universe. Therefore it already applies to all of us, whether or not anyone is praying for it:

7 Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.

Galatians 6:7 (RSV)

This link to the "law of sowing and reaping" is significant. One could say that Zechariah was simply asking God to operate in accordance with this law, which He has already said He will. Thus any imprecatory prayer, *if rightly made*, is really just a request for God to act in accordance with His own nature. He has said that this will involve Him in opposing the wicked and avenging all wickedness. Samuel also confirms that "the wicked shall be cut off" and that "the adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces". Samuel describes how God operates, and His robust approach to the wicked:

***7 The Lord makes poor and makes rich;
he brings low, he also exalts.***

***8 He raises up the poor from the dust;
he lifts the needy from the ash heap,
to make them sit with princes
and inherit a seat of honor.***

***For the pillars of the earth are the Lord's,
and on them he has set the world.***

***9 "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones;
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness;
for not by might shall a man prevail.***

***10 The adversaries of the Lord shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.***

***The Lord will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king,
and exalt the power of his anointed."***

1 Samuel 2:7-10 (RSV)

Samuel indicates that this is how God is *by His very nature*, so these are the things He does, even without being asked. It surely follows that an imprecatory prayer comes within the category of asking God to do something which is in line with His own will. That is the kind of prayer which He has said He will answer, because we are asking Him to do what He already intends to do:

7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you.

John 15:7 (RSV)

14 And this is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us.

1 John 5:14 (RSV)

Even God Himself engages in imprecation when He pronounces His own curses upon the wicked and states His own intentions for them.

It would take too long to set out all the verses in which God Himself speaks against the wicked. There are very many where He pronounces His judgment upon them, states His future intentions towards them, or even directly curses them. However, I will give just a few examples to illustrate the point and to prove that God Himself engages in imprecatory pronouncements *and direct curses*.

So it is not just characters in the Bible who do so, but God Himself. That is very significant as it underscores the point that imprecatory prayer, *when done rightly*, is consistent with God's own nature. It also corresponds to His own stated intentions in regard to the wicked, For example, consider what God said, through the prophet Isaiah, about the city of Damascus in Syria:

*An oracle concerning Damascus.
Behold, Damascus will cease to be a city
and will become a heap of ruins.
Isaiah 17:1 (ESV)*

This pronouncement against Damascus is supplemented by what God says later through the prophet Jeremiah:

²⁵ *How is the famous city not forsaken,
the city of my joy?
²⁶ Therefore her young men shall fall in her squares,
and all her soldiers shall be destroyed in that day,
declares the Lord of hosts.
²⁷ And I will kindle a fire in the wall of Damascus,
and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad.”
Jeremiah 49:25-27 (ESV)*

God also pronounces His judgment upon Edom. That is within what we now call Jordan, and is part of the Arab race. It is also known as 'Esau', because they are the descendants of Jacob's brother. God is particularly severe towards the Edomites, or descendants of Esau, because they are the closest group, in racial origin, to the Jewish people. Therefore, they are even more accountable, and blameworthy, than all the other nations which have mistreated Israel:

¹⁷ *“Edom shall become a horror. Everyone who passes by it will be horrified and will hiss because of all its disasters. ¹⁸ As when Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities were overthrown, says the Lord, no man shall dwell there, no man shall sojourn in her. ¹⁹ Behold, like a lion coming up from the jungle of the Jordan against a perennial pasture, I will suddenly make him run away from her. And I will appoint over her whomever I choose. For who is like me? Who will summon me? What shepherd can stand before me? ²⁰ Therefore hear the plan that the Lord has made against Edom and the purposes that he has formed against the inhabitants of Teman: Even the little ones of the flock shall be dragged away. Surely their fold shall be appalled at their fate. ²¹ At the sound of their fall the earth shall tremble; the sound of their cry shall be heard at the Red Sea.
Jeremiah 49:17-21 (ESV)*

Likewise, God pronounces a blood-curdling judgment on the city of Babylon in Chaldea, for all of their wickedness. Babylon was where the occult was first practised, and from which witchcraft and idolatrous, occultic forms of false religion spread all over the world. Here is what God says He will do to Babylon. It is long and highly detailed, so I will just quote some extracts from it:

¹ *The word that the Lord spoke concerning Babylon, concerning the land of the Chaldeans, by Jeremiah the prophet:*

Jeremiah 50:1 (ESV)

⁹ For behold, I am stirring up and bringing against Babylon a gathering of great nations, from the north country. And they shall array themselves against her. From there she shall be taken. Their arrows are like a skilled warrior who does not return empty-handed. ¹⁰ Chaldea shall be plundered; all who plunder her shall be sated, declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 50:9-10 (ESV)

¹³ Because of the wrath of the Lord she shall not be inhabited but shall be an utter desolation; everyone who passes by Babylon shall be appalled, and hiss because of all her wounds.

Jeremiah 50:13 (ESV)

¹⁸ Therefore, thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing punishment on the king of Babylon and his land, as I punished the king of Assyria.

Jeremiah 50:18 (ESV)

³⁹ “Therefore wild beasts shall dwell with hyenas in Babylon, and ostriches shall dwell in her. She shall never again have people, nor be inhabited for all generations. ⁴⁰ As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah and their neighboring cities, declares the Lord, so no man shall dwell there, and no son of man shall sojourn in her.

Jeremiah 50:39-40 (ESV)

¹ Thus says the Lord:

“Behold, I will stir up the spirit of a destroyer against Babylon, against the inhabitants of Leb-kamai,

² and I will send to Babylon winnowers, and they shall winnow her, and they shall empty her land, when they come against her from every side on the day of trouble.

³ Let not the archer bend his bow, and let him not stand up in his armor.

Spare not her young men; devote to destruction all her army.

⁴ They shall fall down slain in the land of the Chaldeans, and wounded in her streets.

Jeremiah 51:1-4 (ESV)

¹¹ “Sharpen the arrows!

Take up the shields!

The Lord has stirred up the spirit of the kings of the Medes, because his purpose concerning Babylon is to destroy it, for that is the vengeance of the Lord, the vengeance for his temple.

Jeremiah 51:11 (ESV)

²⁴ “I will repay Babylon and all the inhabitants of Chaldea before your very eyes for all the evil that they have done in Zion, declares the Lord.

Jeremiah 51:24 (ESV)

⁵⁵ For the Lord is laying Babylon waste and stilling her mighty voice.

Their waves roar like many waters; the noise of their voice is raised,

⁵⁶ for a destroyer has come upon her, upon Babylon;

*her warriors are taken;
their bows are broken in pieces,
for the Lord is a God of recompense;
he will surely repay.*

Jeremiah 51:55-56 (ESV)

I could go on giving other examples of how God makes such cursing pronouncements, but you can see them yourself, all over the Bible, once you open your eyes. If anyone tries to argue that this was only how God spoke and acted in the Old Testament, bear in mind that His pronouncements about Damascus, Edom and Babylon have still not been entirely fulfilled, so they are still future. That means God is still carrying them out now, or is going to. If that is not enough to prove that God has not changed, and never will, look at how He speaks even at the very end of the Bible, in Revelation, when His future judgment is further described:

²¹ *Then a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone and threw it into the sea, saying,
“So will Babylon the great city be thrown down with violence,
and will be found no more;*

²² *and the sound of harpists and musicians, of flute players and trumpeters,
will be heard in you no more,
and a craftsman of any craft
will be found in you no more,
and the sound of the mill
will be heard in you no more,*

²³ *and the light of a lamp
will shine in you no more,
and the voice of bridegroom and bride
will be heard in you no more,*

*for your merchants were the great ones of the earth,
and all nations were deceived by your sorcery.*

²⁴ *And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints,
and of all who have been slain on earth.”*

Revelation 18:21-24 (ESV)

¹¹ *Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. ¹² His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. ¹³ He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God. ¹⁴ And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. ¹⁵ From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. ¹⁶ On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords.*

Revelation 19:11-16 (ESV)

¹⁹ *And I saw the beast and the kings of the earth with their armies gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army. ²⁰ And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had done the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur. ²¹ And the rest were slain by the sword that came from the mouth of him who was sitting on the horse, and all the birds were gorged with their flesh.*

Revelation 19:19-21 (ESV)

⁷ *And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison ⁸ and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. ⁹ And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven*

and consumed them,¹⁰ and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.

Revelation 20:7-10 (ESV)

¹¹ Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. ¹² And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. ¹³ And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. ¹⁴ Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. ¹⁵ And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:11-15 (ESV)

Nehemiah also prayed against the wicked when they were trying to prevent him from rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem.

Nehemiah prayed against the wicked, not only when they posed a threat to his own life, but also because they were opposing God's work. He was entrusted with the task of organising the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem and certain men, in particular Sanballat and Tobiah, were obstructing him. They weren't seeking to kill Nehemiah, but he still felt it was right to pray against them:

Now when Sanbal'lat heard that we were building the wall, he was angry and greatly enraged, and he ridiculed the Jews. ² And he said in the presence of his brethren and of the army of Samar'ia, "What are these feeble Jews doing? Will they restore things? Will they sacrifice? Will they finish up in a day? Will they revive the stones out of the heaps of rubbish, and burned ones at that?" ³ Tobi'ah the Ammonite was by him, and he said, "Yes, what they are building—if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!" ⁴ Hear, O our God, for we are despised; turn back their taunt upon their own heads, and give them up to be plundered in a land where they are captives. ⁵ Do not cover their guilt, and let not their sin be blotted out from thy sight; for they have provoked thee to anger before the builders.

Nehemiah 4:1-5 (RSV)

Ezekiel prophesied against the enemies of Israel and also against the wicked within Israel. God used him as an agent, through whom to pronounce His own judgment on them.

In this intriguing series of passages God uses Ezekiel as His agent, or mouthpiece, through whom He causes His own judgments to be pronounced, and even released, upon various groups. In this passage Ezekiel is instructed to "*prophesy against*" certain wicked people within Israel who were devising iniquity and giving wicked counsel. God tells him to pronounce His judgment upon them. God chooses to involve Ezekiel in this process of judgment, and one could even say that He allows him to release it, rather than God just doing and saying it all Himself:

The Spirit lifted me up, and brought me to the east gate of the house of the Lord, which faces east. And behold, at the door of the gateway there were twenty-five men; and I saw among them Ja-azani'ah the son of Azzur, and Pelati'ah the son of Benai'ah, princes of the people. ² And he said to me, "Son of man, these are the men who devise iniquity and who give wicked counsel in this city; ³ who say, 'The time is not near to build houses; this city is the caldron, and we are the flesh.' ⁴ Therefore prophesy against them, prophesy, O son of man."

Ezekiel 11:1-4 (RSV)

Then Ezekiel is instructed to prophesy in a similar manner in relation to the Ammonites, Moabites and Edomites, all of whom are part of what we now call the Arab race. The first of these, the Ammonites lived in what we now call Jordan, and were enemies of Israel. God intends to punish them, but note that He wants *Ezekiel* to say it:

The word of the Lord came to me: ²“Son of man, set your face toward the Ammonites, and prophesy against them. ³ Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord God: Thus says the Lord God, Because you said, ‘Aha!’ over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when it went into exile; ⁴ therefore I am handing you over to the people of the East for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst; they shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk. ⁵ I will make Rabbah a pasture for camels and the cities of the Ammonites a fold for flocks. Then you will know that I am the Lord. ⁶ For thus says the Lord God: Because you have clapped your hands and stamped your feet and rejoiced with all the malice within you against the land of Israel, ⁷ therefore, behold, I have stretched out my hand against you, and will hand you over as spoil to the nations; and I will cut you off from the peoples and will make you perish out of the countries; I will destroy you. Then you will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 25:1-7 (RSV)

God then tells Ezekiel to do the same concerning the Moabites, close relatives of the Ammonites, who also came from what we now call Jordan. Again, it was due to their mistreatment of Israel:

⁸ “Thus says the Lord God: Because Moab said, Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations, ⁹ therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth-jesh'emoth, Ba'al-me'on, and Kiriatha'im. ¹⁰ I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East as a possession, that it may be remembered no more among the nations, ¹¹ and I will execute judgments upon Moab. Then they will know that I am the Lord.

Ezekiel 25:8-11 (RSV)

The same is said about the Edomites, the descendants of Esau, for their mistreatment of Israel:

¹² “Thus says the Lord God: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance upon them, ¹³ therefore thus says the Lord God, I will stretch out my hand against Edom, and cut off from it man and beast; and I will make it desolate; from Teman even to Dedan they shall fall by the sword. ¹⁴ And I will lay my vengeance upon Edom by the hand of my people Israel; and they shall do in Edom according to my anger and according to my wrath; and they shall know my vengeance, says the Lord God.

Ezekiel 25:12-14 (RSV)

Lastly, Ezekiel is told to prophesy against Egypt, as before, for their treatment of Israel:

In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me: ² “Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him and against all Egypt; ³ speak, and say, Thus says the Lord God:

*“Behold, I am against you,
Pharaoh king of Egypt,
the great dragon that lies
in the midst of his streams,
that says, ‘My Nile is my own;
I made it.’*

*⁴ I will put hooks in your jaws,
and make the fish of your streams stick to your scales;
and I will draw you up out of the midst of your streams,
with all the fish of your streams*

which stick to your scales.

⁵ *And I will cast you forth into the wilderness,
you and all the fish of your streams;
you shall fall upon the open field,
and not be gathered and buried.*

*To the beasts of the earth and to the birds of the air
I have given you as food.*

⁶ *“Then all the inhabitants of Egypt shall know that I am the Lord. Because you have been a staff of reed to the house of Israel; ⁷ when they grasped you with the hand, you broke, and tore all their shoulders; and when they leaned upon you, you broke, and made all their loins to shake; ⁸ therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold, I will bring a sword upon you, and will cut off from you man and beast; ⁹ and the land of Egypt shall be a desolation and a waste. Then they will know that I am the Lord.*

“Because you said, ‘The Nile is mine, and I made it,’ ¹⁰ therefore, behold, I am against you, and against your streams, and I will make the land of Egypt an utter waste and desolation, from Migdol to Syene, as far as the border of Ethiopia.

Ezekiel 29:1-10 (RSV)

Ezekiel was instructed to “*prophesy against them*”, not merely *about* them. In a sense, so were all of the other prophets when they pronounced God’s judgment. God operates with us in a kind of partnership, whereby He allows us to be involved in what He plans to do. When He asks the prophets, and even us, to make such pronouncements, He is letting us work with Him. I believe there have been times when God has wanted me to speak out His judgment on a group or institution, and to be part of what he was doing. I gave an example earlier, concerning my former business partners.

Are we entitled to pray against the wicked as King David did, given that we are not Kings?

I remember a sermon in which a church leader said that David was only authorised to pray as he did because he was a King and because he was asking God to destroy Israel’s enemies. That preacher then argued that because we are not Kings, and are not Kings of Israel in particular, we have no right to imitate the content, or even the tone, of David’s imprecatory prayers. However, he made no mention of the many other psalmists and prophets who also used imprecatory prayer.

I thought initially that his argument had some potential merit and could not be brushed aside. Yet I felt, even at the time, that it was unsatisfactory. It was a glib handling of an important and complex question, which deserves to be examined thoroughly and with a genuinely open mind. Some years ago, when I was beginning to explore this subject, I asked an older man for his view, but his mind was entirely closed. He was not willing even to consider the idea of imprecatory prayer and warned me against even looking into it.

He insisted that we should *never* curse *any* other person, under any circumstances, or even pray against anybody, *in any way whatsoever*. For a time, his vehemence made me feel wary about this subject, until I had given it a lot of further study and clarified my thinking. So I spent years pondering this, on and off, but the task was made harder by the fact that so few people write or preach about imprecatory prayer. It is almost completely ignored. Even when they are forced to address the psalms of imprecation, in commentaries on the Psalms, they don’t handle them adequately.

They briefly mention David’s imprecatory prayers, but they don’t know what to make of them and are scared even to try to discuss them. So they move quickly on to comment on other psalms, about which they feel more comfortable. Imprecation seems alien to them, as though it belongs to another era long ago. Let us firstly address the suggestion that David only ever prayed for the destruction of *God’s* enemies, or *Israel’s* enemies, and never his *own* personal enemies. That is simply not true. Here is one of the many instances where David is undoubtedly asking God to destroy his own *personal enemies*:

*And in Your loving kindness, cut off my enemies
And destroy all those who afflict my soul,
For I am Your servant.*

Psalm 143:12 (NASB)

One might argue that in Psalm 143 David was not praying on his own account, but *in his role as King*. From that perspective, one could say his own enemies were, by definition, also the enemies of Israel and of God too. That is a potentially fair point, but it doesn't deal adequately with the issue. Neither does it explain why David spoke so frequently of "my" enemies when, in other prayers, he referred to them as Israel's enemies or God's enemies. Why would he differentiate by using all three descriptions if his own enemies were also, by definition, the enemies of Israel and of God?

Why not just call all of them "my" enemies all the time? The fact that David refers to them differently in different prayers suggests that he differentiates between them deliberately, to *create* a distinction, rather than remove it. That said, it is possible that the phrases could all effectively mean the same thing, but we would need to see solid evidence for that and cannot merely assume it. But even if David did pray against individuals or groups as King, not in his personal capacity, we would still need to explain why other men used imprecatory prayers on their own behalf.

These include Asaph, the other psalmists, Moses, Nehemiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Elijah, Elisha, and so on. I see no basis to think they were only praying in some official capacity, such that Jeremiah did so solely in his capacity as a prophet and Nehemiah in his capacity as Governor of Judah. Nevertheless, even if it was done in an official capacity, don't all of us have some kind of role or capacity? We might be an elder, teacher or missionary. Or we could have a job as a headmaster, school teacher, police officer, social worker, factory manager, supervisor, lawyer or judge.

But it is not only roles such as those which create authority and responsibility. We could have any one of hundreds of other roles which also create some element of responsibility and authority. All those jobs are important and those who do them are as entitled as anyone else to say that God has appointed them to that role and wants them to serve Him in it. The importance of our position, or our level of seniority, is not the issue. Nevertheless, even if imprecatory prayer can only be done by someone who holds some special role or senior position, that would still cover a great many people.

That said, I don't accept the argument that we need to have some important role or status. I believe we can pray in our own personal capacity, as well as in any other official role that we may have, not only in the church, but in our family or job. Indeed, isn't simply being a disciple a role, and one which we are all meant to have? Also, what about being a parent and praying on behalf of our children? It is hard to think of any role which is more important than that of a disciple or parent.

Therefore, how can we say that Nehemiah was entitled to make an imprecatory prayer, because he was the Governor of Judah, but that you aren't, because you are 'only' a nurse, an elder, a parent, or a disciple? Remember too that every Christian is also a 'saint', and a 'priest', as part of the priesthood of all believers. If you and I are entitled to enter God's very throne room with our other prayers, why should some different, or greater, qualification be required to approach Him with an imprecatory prayer? The Bible never says so, and we must not invent any such rules.

The prophet Elijah called down fire from heaven upon two groups of soldiers who came to arrest him.

Here is an example of imprecatory prayer which had an immediate and dramatic answer. The prophet Elijah called down fire from heaven on two groups of soldiers who wanted to arrest him:

⁹ Then the king sent to him a captain of fifty with his fifty men. So he went up to him; and there he was, sitting on the top of a hill. And he spoke to him: "Man of God, the king has said, 'Come down!'"

¹⁰ So Elijah answered and said to the captain of fifty, "If I am a man of God, then let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And fire came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. ¹¹ Then he sent to him another captain of fifty with his fifty men. And he answered and said to him: "Man of God, thus has the king said, 'Come down quickly!'" ¹² So Elijah answered and said to them, "If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty men." And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty.

2 Kings 1:9-12 (NKJV)

Elijah was willing to make a prayer which would involve the death of 50 men, and to do so again afterwards. It would be hard to classify his prayers as anything other than imprecatory. Moreover, God was willing to answer Elijah. He would not have done so if the prayers were sinful in any way.

Later, the prophet Elisha also prayed that God would strike with blindness the Syrian soldiers who were coming to capture him.

The prophet Elisha operated similarly when the King of Syria sent soldiers to seize him, because Elisha was revealing his secret plans to the King of Israel. The account begins here:

⁸ Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, "My camp will be in such and such a place." ⁹ And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, "Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there." ¹⁰ Then the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice. ¹¹ Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, "Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?" ¹² And one of his servants said, "None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom." ¹³ So he said, "Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him." And it was told him, saying, "Surely he is in Dothan." ¹⁴ Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. ¹⁵ And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, "Alas, my master! What shall we do?"

2 Kings 6:8-15 (NKJV)

Elisha prays for his frightened servant to be able to see the angels who surround them and serve as their protectors. He then moves into imprecatory mode and prays that God would strike the Syrian soldiers with blindness. Again, God would not have answered him if the prayer was improper:

¹⁶ So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." ¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, and said, "Lord, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. ¹⁸ So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, and said, "Strike this people, I pray, with blindness." And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. ¹⁹ Now Elisha said to them, "This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek." But he led them to Samaria.

2 Kings 6:16-19 (NKJV)

The blindness inflicted on the Syrians was only temporary, but it was still an imprecatory prayer. Having achieved his goal, by having his enemies struck blind and captured, Elisha asks the King of Israel *not* to kill them. That is interesting, because it proves Elisha was not motivated by hatred. Yet he was still willing to use imprecatory prayer. Moreover, he did so in a limited sense, both in terms of the severity of the sanction and its duration. So there is a precedent for us to do likewise. However, the key point is that even a man as merciful as Elisha was still willing to use imprecatory prayer:

²⁰ *So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, "Lord, open the eyes of these men, that they may see." And the Lord opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were, inside Samaria!* ²¹ *Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, "My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?"* ²² *But he answered, "You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master."* ²³ *Then he prepared a great feast for them; and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master. So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel.*

2 Kings 6:20-23 (NKJV)

Elisha also cursed a gang of youths (not boys) and it resulted in two bears mauling them.

This episode of Elisha and the bears is controversial because most Bible translations wrongly imply that the youths whom Elisha cursed were "little children" (KJV), "young lads" (NASB) or "small boys" (RSV). The NKJV and NIV translate it most accurately as "youths". It occurred when Elisha was travelling to Bethel and met a large and hostile gang of young men who began to abuse him. The likelihood is they would have become violent. So Elisha cursed them and two she-bears then emerged from the woods and mauled 42 of the youths:

²³ *Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!"* ²⁴ *So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths.* ²⁵ *Then he went from there to Mount Carmel, and from there he returned to Samaria.*

2 Kings 2:23-25 (NKJV)

Note that it says Elisha "pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord". Note also that it is not just the NKJV which says he *cursed* them. So do the NIV, NASB, RSV, ESV and KJV. 'Curse' is the right word to use, even if it makes people uncomfortable. Elisha defended himself from a hostile mob of youths by cursing them. Many would say this was wrong, whatever age the youths were. However, the mistake of assuming them to be very young boys, or even "little children", as the KJV wrongly puts it, compounds the problem. It causes many preachers to avoid the passage completely.

Let us firstly address the issue of the age of the youths. Then we shall look at the wider question of whether it was legitimate for Elisha to curse anybody, of any age, even if they were attacking him. The Hebrew word used in the passage, which the NKJV and NIV correctly translate as *youths*, is 'na'ar'. It refers to young men, in their late teens, twenties, or even thirties. It does *not* mean children. Interestingly, *na'ar* is the very same Hebrew word which is used in Genesis 22:5 to refer to Isaac when he went with Abraham to be sacrificed.

The KJV also gets that passage disastrously wrong and refers to Isaac as a '*lad*'. He was actually a grown man, in his thirties. Indeed, the very point of sacrificing Isaac was for him to be a type of Jesus, who was Himself a man, not a little boy, when He died for us. Abraham is meant to be seen as a type of God the Father, who later offered his own Son as a willing sacrifice. Thus for Isaac to be portrayed as a little boy, as in the usual Sunday-school pictures, profoundly undermines the typology of the event. It is meant to point to Jesus' *voluntary* death on our behalf, as an adult.

Also, in 2 Samuel 14:21, the same Hebrew word, *na'ar*, is used to refer to the adult Absalom. That was just after he had had Ammon murdered, and just before he began his revolt against David. Therefore he plainly wasn't a little boy. Accordingly, the youths insulting Elisha were grown men, and well able to attack him. So his decision to curse them is easily understandable. He could either have fought them himself, or put it into God's hands. By 'cursing' them, he was effectively asking God to intervene and to judge them, even by force, for what they were doing. Elisha was clearly right to do that.

The fact that God responded by sending two she-bears strongly supports that view. If these youths were not violent, we would need to ask why they were in such a large gang that 42 of them were mauled. It isn't the size of group that peaceful people usually gather into. But even if they weren't threatening Elisha, the very least we can say is they were insulting the senior prophet in Israel, just after he had taken over from Elijah. If nothing had been done about their abuse, Elisha's authority would have been undermined, and so would God's honour. One cannot insult a prophet and expect to get away with it.

The most compelling argument for the continued legitimacy of imprecatory prayer is that apostle Paul himself used it, in the New Testament era.

The most common argument *against* imprecatory prayer is the idea that it was only done in Old Testament times, not in the Church age. Some also contend that Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount forbid us from cursing anybody. We need to meet that argument head-on, as we did in chapter 25, when looking at whether the Sermon on the Mount prohibits physical force in self-defence. Please refer to those points, because similar issues arise. However, I believe the most powerful argument in support of imprecatory prayer is that *apostle Paul* used it.

Note also that that was *after* the Sermon on the Mount. Given that Paul was the most knowledgeable of all the apostles, we can safely assume he understood Jesus' words and was not disobeying them when he used imprecatory prayer. It therefore follows that imprecatory prayer, in itself, cannot have been put out of bounds for us and that it was not what Jesus was forbidding. Let us now look again at what Paul said in Galatians when he uttered a curse against all those who preach a false gospel, i.e. anything different from the true Gospel, as preached by Paul:

⁶ I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—⁷ not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. ⁸ But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹ As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.

Galatians 1:6-9 (ESV)

The word translated 'accursed' in these verses is the Greek word 'anathema', which we defined earlier. Paul taught, in Romans 12:14, as we saw in chapter 25, that we should not curse others merely because they abuse us. Yet he pronounced a curse on anybody who preaches a false gospel. He evidently considered that justifiable. To distort the true Gospel, and cause people to lose the opportunity of salvation, is of the utmost seriousness. Paul meant it would be better for those who preach a false gospel to be accursed than for others, who need to hear the true Gospel, to be lost eternally.

The operative point is that Paul felt it was valid to engage in imprecatory prayer, and even to make an imprecatory proclamation. He plainly did not feel that it was improper, or that the Sermon on the Mount prevented it. One cannot even say that Paul made an error, or spoke hastily. This was said in a formal letter, not verbally in a sermon. Moreover he said it twice, in order to really underline it. He would never have done that if it was wrong to say it. So, we can safely say that Paul said it deliberately, and soberly, and that he absolutely meant it.

If a Christian is allowed to carry a sword, and to use it to *kill* his enemies, both in war and self-defence, why would God not want him to *pray* against those enemies?

The next strongest argument for the legitimacy of imprecatory prayer is that in Luke 22:36 a Christian is required to go out and buy a literal metal sword. As we saw in chapter 25, that must mean he can also use it to kill people in war and self-defence. How can it make any sense to say that we can *kill* an enemy with a sword, but that God would not want us to *pray* against that enemy? If we are entitled to

kill a man, wouldn't it be absurd to say that we may not pray against him, or for the failure of his wicked plans, military or otherwise?

It would mean that killing him with a literal sword is alright, but using a metaphorical sword to pray for his attack to fail, or for his defence not to hold, would be wrong. If we are trying to kill that man it must follow that we want him to fail. Indeed, by killing him, we are trying to ensure that his attacks, and also his defences, do fail. So, if we believe that it is God's will for us to fight physically, why would we then hold back from praying for our success, and our enemy's failure, in that battle? Consider the national days of prayer in the UK in World War 2.

When people prayed about Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain or D-day they were praying for our forces to succeed. Few would argue against that. However, they were equally praying for *the Germans to fail and/or be defeated*. To be brutally frank, we were praying for their men to be killed and for our men not to be. It has to be put in those blunt terms, or the point is missed. Therefore, praying for our army to succeed is exactly the same as praying for the German army to fail. If so, we should say that plainly and stop acting it as if there was a distinction which means that the former is acceptable, but the latter is not.

Some might say it is alright to pray for the success of our army, at a *national* level and for the defeat of our nation's enemies, but wrong for us to do so at an *individual* level. But how can that make any sense? In chapter 25 I spoke of how I needed to defend my son from two men who wanted to attack him. How could it be wrong for me to pray for my success, and their failure, in the fight that I was expecting to happen? By that logic, it would be right for me to hit those men, even with the intention of injuring them, but wrong to pray for *God's help in doing so*.

That would be an absurd argument, and one which is based on emotional squeamishness, not logic. Some people can't imagine themselves praying a prayer such as: "*LORD, please help me to defend myself and my child effectively. Help me to hit hard, and accurately, and to knock this man out.*" Or they can't imagine being a soldier and praying: "*LORD please help me to shoot accurately and rapidly and to kill or incapacitate all of the men that I aim at. Please also show me which men to aim at.*" Such prayers would simply feel wrong to many people, at an irrational and purely emotional level.

They may be able to imagine taking part in a war, or fighting someone in self-defence. But the idea of actually asking God to help them to hit someone, or even to kill a person, would seem to be beyond the pale. Yet, they would not be able to put into words *why* that would be wrong, or what Scripture they base it on. I know, because I have questioned Christians on such points and none of them could ever formulate any coherent position, or justify what they felt. They could only *feel* it, not define it, or even explain it. But you cannot base your theology on your feelings.

The issues may sound theoretical now, but they won't if you ever face a life or death situation, in which you need to defend yourself, your family or your business from a wicked person. There was nothing abstract about the Charlton fans who wanted to attack my son, or the people who have tried to attack my business and harm me or my staff. In each of those battles I needed all the help I could get. To rule out praying for God's help, due to the misguided belief that it would be improper, would be a huge error. When I faced such battles, I made it my practice to pray as King David did and to ask:

- a) that God would expose the schemes of my enemies so that I, and others, can see what they are up to
- b) that He would cause them to trip over their own lies and catch themselves out
- c) that He would send confusion, disunity and disarray into the camp of my enemies, so that they are not capable of co-operating or organising themselves effectively, as when David prayed for the advice of Ahithophel to be turned into foolishness
- d) that they would over-reach themselves and make tactical errors which they later regret

- e) that God would give me inspired ideas for how best to fight, how to gain the advantage, and how to outwit them
- f) that new and additional witnesses, documents, or other forms of evidence would come forward, or be found, and undermine my enemy's case or obstruct his schemes
- g) that any lies told would be exposed
- h) that any liars would, likewise, be exposed
- i) that God would send fear and panic into the hearts and minds of my enemies, so that they would flee from me
- j) that God would raise up third-parties to become "enemies to my enemies" and contend with them, so as to weaken them and distract them from fighting against me

If I had felt that it was improper or "unchristian" to pray in those ways, I would have denied myself benefits that God wanted to give me, and which He did actually give me many times. Some might say that we need not pray specifically for such interventions and can just leave it to God to intervene in such ways as He sees fit, if He wants to. In other words, they might argue that we need not spell out exactly what we want Him to do to the wicked, but can just let God decide whether and how to help us. Then we don't have to be explicit, or say anything which makes us uncomfortable.

That indirect approach, whereby we either ask for nothing at all, or just drop hints to God, without saying anything specific, may appeal to some. But it is not how we operate with any of the other needs which we pray about. We have no qualms about being direct and specific when praying about those. Why should we switch to being vague and indirect when praying against the lies, schemes and attacks of our enemies? We should be just as vocal, and specific, in those requests as in any other. At any rate, I see no valid reason why we should not.

Nevertheless, there is a difference between praying against a person's evil actions or plans and praying against the person themselves.

There is an important difference between praying against a wicked person's *evil actions or plans* and praying against *the person themselves*. We can do the former without necessarily doing the latter. Indeed, in many ways, if we pray for the defeat of a wicked person's schemes, it can actually benefit them. It is in their own long-term interests for their wicked plans to fail. If they went ahead, they would only be storing up for themselves an even harsher sentence at the Great White Throne Judgment.

The failure of their plans, and the consequent reduction in their future punishment would actually be good for them, even if they were never saved, because there are degrees of punishment, even in the Lake of Fire. There is also the possibility that their exposure, dismissal, bankruptcy or even being sent to prison, could be the very thing which breaks their hard hearts and brings them to repentance. So, opposing the wicked, or praying against their schemes, is not contrary to their long term interests.

It may be exactly what they need, even though they don't yet know it. If they fully understood the true facts, had wisdom, and knew about the severe judgment that awaits them, they would actually *want* you to oppose them. It could even be that your prayers for them to be exposed and defeated may lead to their eventual salvation. They might reflect later on their actions and realise they have done wrong. But they would probably never do any of that if their wicked plans were to succeed.

We can still pray against the wicked even when we don't know who they are, or which party is right or wrong in a dispute.

We do not necessarily need to know who the wicked are, or who is right or wrong in a dispute, in order to pray for their exposure and defeat. If you are in a new job or church and don't yet know who the

wicked people are, or what they are doing, you can still ask God to open your eyes, give you discernment, and help you to identify them. That prayer is often answered by God causing the wicked person to slip up, miscalculate or over-reach himself. Then he gives himself away and enables you to get a glimpse of his real nature and motives.

It may be that you have no idea who the wicked people are, or which of the parties in a dispute are right or wrong. You can still ask for the wicked to be obstructed and defeated and for God to reveal their identities and motives, and even for Him to drive them out of the workplace or church. All those prayers can be made even before you find out who the wicked ones are. You don't need to wait until then to start praying against them. God already knows who they are, even if you don't.

It is also possible to pray against a person's evil actions and plans, and to resist them, and yet still forgive them and pray for them personally.

To resist a person's evil actions and plans does not necessarily mean we are being 'unforgiving'. We can fully forgive that person *even while we continue to oppose them*. There is no inconsistency in that. Forgiveness is really about releasing the other person to God, so that they receive *Jesus'* judgment, rather than *yours*, and so that you do not seek for any personal *vengeance*. Resisting the wicked, opposing their actions, and exposing them for what they really are, have got nothing to do with vengeance. That has to do with *punishing* the person for what they did.

However, resisting, sacking, expelling, or even prosecuting, a wicked person need not involve any vengeance. All those things can, and should, be done calmly, without any emotion, as a pure duty, not a pleasure. In all of my dealings with the wicked, I never got any enjoyment out of it. I always had to grit my teeth, press on and face them down. It would actually have been far easier just to let them get away with it. That is why so many pastors, elders and church members, 'turn a blind eye' to the actions of the wicked, and say nothing. So do a lot of managers in a business context.

Tackling the wicked is like getting a tooth filled or cleaning a toilet. It is something you only ever do because it needs to be done, not because you enjoy it. Therefore, you can genuinely forgive the *person* by handing their judgment, and any punishment, over to Jesus, or to the police. But, at the same time, you can be actively involved in opposing their *actions and plans*. Moreover, whilst doing so, you can be earnestly praying for God to forgive them and to let them learn from the pain of being exposed, sacked, or whatever else is involved in tackling them.

Although imprecatory prayer is valid, if used rightly, we are not to take pleasure from the bad things that happen to our enemies or to gloat at their misfortunes.

A counter-balancing point is that we are not to gloat over, or take pleasure from, the bad things that happen to our enemies. That is not the right attitude for a Christian to have and is not what imprecatory prayer is about. By the same token, we are not to curse people in the way the wicked do, by wanting them to suffer, fail or die merely for our satisfaction, or because we hate them. That would be entirely wrong because the *motive* is wrong. A passage which brings this out is what Job says when he is defending himself from his accusing 'friends' and explaining the ways in which he has not sinned:

²⁸ *then these also would be sins to be judged,
for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.*

²⁹ *"If I have rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune
or gloated over the trouble that came to him*

³⁰ *I have not allowed my mouth to sin
by invoking a curse against their life*

Job 31:28-30 (NIV)

Imprecatory prayer can be valid *if done with the right motive*. That qualification is not a mere technicality. It really matters to God, and it needs to matter to you, if you are to engage in imprecatory prayer. If your heart attitude is not like Job's, David's or Jeremiah's, then stay well away from it. Imprecatory prayer should only be done by the godly and the mature, not by the carnal or vengeful. Above all, it must never be done by those who *enjoy* it. I would liken it to the approach that a police force would take (in the UK) in selecting officers to work in an armed response unit.

They would not want any officer working in such a unit, or carrying a gun at all, if he relishes the prospect of shooting someone, takes pleasure from it, or day-dreams about doing so. Such a man would be totally unsuitable. Ironically, the only men you would want carrying guns are those who *have no desire to shoot anyone*. They must be men who, though *willing* to do it, if necessary, would try very hard to avoid it and take no pleasure from doing it. I expect that that is pretty much the same way God views it when deciding who is suitable to engage in imprecatory prayer.

Is there any real difference between praying for the vindication of those who are falsely accused and praying for false accusers to be exposed as liars?

King Solomon prayed that if witnesses lie when giving evidence under oath, God would bring judgment upon them and cause their own wicked conduct to rebound upon them:

³¹ *“If a man sins against his neighbor and is made to take an oath, and comes and swears his oath before thine altar in this house, ³² then hear thou in heaven, and act, and judge thy servants, condemning the guilty by bringing his conduct upon his own head, and vindicating the righteous by rewarding him according to his righteousness.*

1 Kings 8:31-32 (RSV)

What else is this but imprecatory prayer? Solomon is invoking God's judgment upon liars who give false evidence. That issue must have been close to his heart, because he sat as a judge and had to decide who was truthful and who was lying. So does any manager or church leader who has to deal with disputes or accusations, and so did King David. Psalm 71:13 may sound harsh to our modern ears. David asks for those who accuse him falsely to be “*put to shame*” and “*disgraced*”. But how is that any different from simply asking for himself to be vindicated? See how David puts it:

*May my accusers be put to shame and consumed;
with scorn and disgrace may they be covered
who seek my hurt.*

Psalm 71:13 (RSV)

If David had just asked God to vindicate him, most people would not even consider it to be an imprecatory prayer. Yet it would be, because for David to be vindicated requires the truth to be revealed about whoever was accusing him falsely. Likewise, honour for David would have to involve dishonour for the false accuser. How is that any different, in real terms, from simply asking directly for his accuser to be put to shame and disgraced? Any form of vindication for David must inevitably involve scorn, disgrace and shame for the accuser. How could it not do so?

If the truth is revealed, then those who lied about him would have to be exposed as false. If not, how can David be vindicated in any meaningful sense? The argument can become a dispute about semantics, involving notional distinctions between words, but without any substantive difference. A person may be relaxed about praying for himself to be vindicated, but feel uneasy about asking God to expose false accusers. Yet, when you look closely, it is a distinction without a difference. The two prayers are effectively the same.

The directly imprecatory prayer is just more honest. It says what it really means, whereas a prayer to be vindicated is the same thing, but only hints indirectly at what is being asked for. The same applies

to other prayers which might not be considered to involve any element of imprecation, but actually do. To pray for success in a battle is effectively to pray for the failure or defeat of your opponent/enemy. It sounds nicer, but again, it really amounts to the same thing. I discussed this issue on a trip to Israel with a group of Christians from varied church traditions.

Some were uncomfortable about praying *against* the Arabs, or even against the Arab armies. But they felt comfortable about praying *for* Israel's success and protection. I challenged them to identify any meaningful difference between the two things, but none of them could. I then asked them to imagine that Egypt, Syria, Jordan, or some other Arab nation or terrorist group, had launched an attack on Israel. That is exactly what they did do in 1948, 1967 and 1973 and, on a smaller scale, many other times.

Then I asked them to spell out what they might pray if such a war began, and how God could grant victory to the Israelis without, at the same time, imposing defeat on the Arabs. I also asked how the Israelis could be given victory unless either they themselves, or God on their behalf, were to kill Arab soldiers, destroy Arab tanks and shoot down Arab aircraft. I also asked how praying for Israel, or even praying against its Arab enemies, was any different from *cursing* those enemies, because to pray for their defeat is effectively to curse them.

When I put it in those stark terms, not one of them was able to identify any difference between praying *for Israel* and praying *against its enemies*. Neither could they say why the latter didn't amount to a curse. Their discomfort with these concepts was at an entirely emotional level. They were just using alternative words that made them feel better, but there was no practical difference between them. Therefore if we are to debate this issue properly we need to stop using euphemisms to disguise what we really mean and start to be frank and explicit.

It is insincere, and pretentious, to object to the concept of imprecatory prayer, but then to pray for precisely the same things using more diplomatic wording. If you really do object to imprecatory prayer, and truly mean it, then you would not be able to pray for your own success or vindication at all. Asking for those things would require God to oppose your opponent on your behalf. If that is what you really mean, and you genuinely don't want God to do anything to resist, expose or defeat your enemy, then say so openly. You would also need to ask God not to help you in any way.

In fact, you would need to stop praying for yourself in any way, because any protection, guidance or assistance which God might give to you could mean that success is withheld from your enemies. If that is really how you believe you need to operate, with God doing nothing at all to help you, in case it hinders your enemy, then say so. However, I doubt whether you, or anybody else, ever will go that far, because as soon as one states that argument in plain words its absurdity is exposed.

Using weasel words and euphemisms to disguise your real meaning is dishonest. The psalms of imprecation are simply a more honest, earthy way of praying than most of us feel comfortable with. We may be being pretentious, and even deluding ourselves, by objecting to praying against our enemy. The need for truthfulness applies just as much in our prayers as in any other form of speech. What King David did in his prayers was to call a spade a spade and we should do likewise.

What about apostle Paul's rebuke to Ananias, in which he said God would strike him?

In Acts 23 apostle Paul rebukes Ananias, the High Priest and also says what God will do to him. The High Priest was wrong to order that Paul be struck in the face, so Paul rebuked him and said: "*God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall.*" Let's look at the passage:

And looking intently at the council, Paul said, "Brothers, I have lived my life before God in all good conscience up to this day."² And the high priest Ananias commanded those who stood by him to strike him on the mouth.³ Then Paul said to him, "God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!

Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?”

Acts 23:1-3 (ESV)

We can rule out any suggestion that Paul was behaving wrongly. He was surely the most godly, self-controlled man on Earth at that time, so he was not acting sinfully. Paul was actually using heavy irony to draw attention to the fact that Ananias was not really the High Priest at all. He had usurped the office illegally. I explain that irony more fully in my Book 3. So, the rebuke he gave to Ananias was entirely appropriate. What then are we to make of Paul's declaration, or prophecy, that God would *strike* Ananias?

Was Paul merely stating what he expected God to do to in judging Ananias? Or was Paul proclaiming it with the intention of causing it to happen? As with Elymas the magician, who was struck blind, was Paul effectively calling down God's judgment upon Ananias, or merely predicting that it would come? I actually think it was both. So, he was telling Ananias what was coming, but also seeking to bring it about. Perhaps he was even making himself the vehicle by which that judgment would come.

We can use imprecatory prayer to pray against, and curse, groups like ISIS, Al Qaeda, Boko Haram, the Taliban, and even Islam itself.

A prime example of when it is right to ask God to destroy an organisation or ideology, is with groups like ISIS, Boko Haram, Al Qaeda and the Taliban. They are wicked to the core. Everything they stand for is against God's will. Our governments should destroy them, but most Western leaders are too blind to realise what we are up against. Given the wicked aims of these Jihadist groups, who seek to take over the world by violence, it is entirely appropriate for our governments to *fight* them and for us to *pray against* them. We can therefore pray for all the following things, and more:

- a) for the failure of their plans and objectives
- b) for them to be exposed for what they really are
- c) for their identities to become known to the police and military
- d) for their fighters to be killed or captured
- e) for their sources of money to dry up
- f) for their locations to become known to our intelligence services
- g) for them to be defeated and killed in battle
- h) for our governments to send more troops to fight them
- i) for our troops to succeed, and theirs to fail
- j) for our intelligence services to discover and foil their plots
- k) for individual suicide bombers to fail and even to blow themselves up prematurely, as happened recently when an instructor blew up his whole 'class' by accidentally detonating a bomb belt while explaining how to use it. In fact, it would not surprise me if that explosion occurred as a direct result of the imprecatory prayers of one or more Christians.
- l) for them to become confused, disorganised and paranoid, and to suspect each other, and fight against each other, as the men of Moab, Ammon and Mount Seir did when the people of Judah began to sing and praise (See 2 Chronicles 20:22)
- m) for their propaganda to be exposed as lies

Some might protest at this and say we should pray for the salvation of the Jihadists. Of course we should, but that does not prevent us praying, at the same time, for their defeat in battle and the failure

of their objectives. For many, it is only when their false god, Allah, is defeated that they first begin to wonder if he is real and whether Islam is false. Therefore those Muslims actually need the Jihad to be defeated, in order for their eyes to open to the Gospel and to find the true God of the Bible. So, I would pray for all Muslims to be saved, including Jihadists, but I would also pray that God would destroy those terrorists whom he knows will not repent.

If He knows that they will never respond, or give up violence, it is better that they be destroyed now rather than later, after they have caused more harm. But it isn't just these Jihadist groups that we should pray against. We should also pray for the containment, defeat and exposure of *Islam as a whole*. The whole thing is an evil monstrosity and the biggest threat to the Gospel in the world today. It is an utterly false religion, quite apart from its promotion of violence, corruption, oppression, rape and the degradation of women. Therefore Islam itself needs to be opposed, and prayed against, not tolerated.

However, it is not only Islam, or individual Jihadists, that we need to pray against. There are many other individuals, organisations and nations which are hostile to Christianity and doing all they can to oppose the Gospel and persecute Christians. It is just that Islam is by far the biggest and the most evil. So, we also need to pray against every other false religion, and every other evil group or government, for their wicked schemes to fail. For example, Freemasonry is a great evil and we need it to fail. So too is witchcraft, the abortion industry and anti-semitism. The list is very long.

The late Derek Prince told a story of how, in 1953, Josef Stalin of the Soviet Union intended to begin a new wave of persecution against the Jews. Derek Prince, and others, prayed against this, and against Stalin personally, and asked God to stop him. Then Stalin suddenly died, possibly due to poisoning by someone close to him. So the purge against the Jews did not go ahead. If Stalin's death was caused by God's intervention, and if that was in answer to imprecatory prayers, then I believe it was fully justified. Moreover, it is something we ought to do far more often, and openly, than we do.