

Cries of Vengeance¹

Nehemiah 4:4, 5

INTRODUCTION:

1. The term “imprecatory” is based on the Latin root for “prayer” and has to do with calling down curses from heaven upon one’s enemies.
2. It could be said that to pray for someone’s well-being is to make *intercession* for that person, but to pray for someone’s destruction is to make an *imprecation*.
3. Many of the psalms were imprecatory (cf. Psa. 7:12, 13; 35:8; 55:15, 23).
4. How can these be included in Scripture alongside other psalms that extol God’s mercy (cf. Psa. 136)?
 - a. David’s cries for vengeance were not personal vendettas but appeals to the righteousness of God.
 - b. Nothing is contradictory to the overall thrust of the Old Testament.
5. However, Psalm 137 falls into a different class (cf. vv. 7-9).
 - a. David’s prayers are emotional and bold, but they never seem to reach the level of bitterness detected in the cries of the Jewish exiles.
 - b. While David’s psalms are written from the context of injustice, this one is written from a context of justice. David was praying for wrongs to be righted, but the Jews deserved their captivity (cf. Jer. 25:9; 27:5-8).
 - c. Most of David’s prayers for revenge were directed toward the wicked who had attacked him, but Psalm 137 takes aim at innocent children.

DISCUSSION: Considerations:

I. An Inspired Report

- A. All Scripture is God breathed (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).
- B. Inspiration ensures that we have God’s revealed will in a written, infallible form, but it does not guarantee that every statement, attitude, and action it records is endorsed by the Lord.
- C. Psalm 137 is a truthful, honest report of what life was like among the exiles in Babylonian captivity.
- D. It is not necessary to conclude that God approves of every expression and emotion it contains.

II. An Accurate Prophecy

- A. The words of Psalm 137 are no different than the prophecies of Israel’s prophets who told of Babylon’s downfall (cf. Isa. 13:16-19).
- B. Evidently, the author knew the prophecies of Babylon’s end (cf. Psa. 137:8).

¹ Drew Kizer, “Cries of Vengeance in the Psalms” in *Crying Out to God*, The 73rd Annual Freed-Hardeman University Lectureship (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman University, 2009), pp. 374-379.

CONCLUSION:

1. Sin leads to bitterness and sorrow. Psalm 137 reminds us of the bitter end of sin (cf. 2 Cor. 5:10).
2. God hears prayers uttered through pain.
 - a. After God heard the petitions of the exiles, He inspired men to record them.
 - b. When we need God the most, that seems to be the time when it is hardest to pray (cf. Rom. 8:26).
3. The psalms teach us how to pray.
 - a. Psalm 137 invites us to take our complaints to God.
 - b. Our prayers do not always have to reflect perfect understanding and optimism.