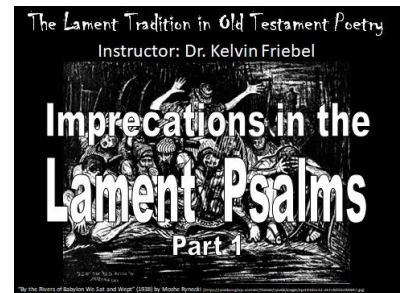


(*The following is the script of the 2-part lecture done for the course, "The Lament Tradition in OT Poetry" for Baltic Methodist Theological Seminary in Tallinn, Estonia, in May 2021
 The lectures are viewable on YouTube: Part 1 <https://youtu.be/RLLUAP3EOM8>;
 Part 2: <https://youtu.be/1Vk4qsmRgiY>)

Imprecations in the Psalms

- In this lecture, I am going to talk about Lament Psalms that contain harsh petitions directed against the enemies
- one such psalm is Ps 109:



Psalm 109 <small>(NIV)</small> <i>For the director of music. Of David. A psalm.</i>	
Trust / Confidence	1^a My God, whom I praise,
Petition	1^b do not remain silent,
Complaint "They --"	<p>2 for people who are wicked and deceitful have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues.</p> <p>3 With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause.</p> <p>4 In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a person of prayer.</p> <p>5 They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship.</p>

--then comes the petition for God to deal with the enemy

Psalm 109 <small>(NIV)</small>	
Imprecatory Petition	<p>6 Appoint someone evil to oppose my enemy; let an accuser stand at his right hand.</p> <p>7 When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him.</p> <p>8 May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership.</p> <p>9 May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow.</p> <p>10 May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes.</p> <p>11 May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor.</p> <p>12 May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children.</p> <p>13 May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation.</p> <p>14 May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out.</p> <p>15 May their sins always remain before the LORD, that he may blot out their name from the earth.</p>

Psalm 109 <small>(NIV)</small>	
Complaint "They –"	16 For he never thought of doing a kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the brokenhearted. 17a α He loved to pronounce a curse—
Petition	17a β may it come back on him.
Complaint "They –"	17b α He found no pleasure in blessing—
Petition	17a β may it be far from him.
Complaint "They –"	18 He wore cursing as his garment; it entered into his body like water, into his bones like oil.
Imprecatory Petition	19 May it be like a cloak wrapped about him, like a belt tied forever around him. 20 May this be the LORD's payment to my accusers, to those who speak evil of me.

Psalm 109 <small>(NIV)</small>	
Petition	21 But you, Sovereign LORD, help me for your name's sake; out of the goodness of your love, deliver me.
Complaint "I –"	22 For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. 23 I fade away like an evening shadow; I am shaken off like a locust. 24 My knees give way from fasting; my body is thin and gaunt. 25 I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they shake their heads.
Petition	26 Help me, LORD my God; save me according to your unfailing love. 27 Let them know that it is your hand, that you, LORD, have done it. 28 While they curse, may you bless; may those who attack me be put to shame, but may your servant rejoice. 29 May my accusers be clothed with disgrace and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.

Psalm 109 (NIV)

Affirmation of Praise	30 With my mouth I will greatly extol the LORD; in the great throng of worshipers I will praise him.
Trust / Confidence	31 For he stands at the right hand of the needy, to save their lives from those who would condemn them.

* * * * *

--the words of the petitions in vv. 6-15
& those throughout vv. 16-20



tend to shock our sensibilities

--Jesus said we are to love our enemies
& pray for those who persecute us

& we assume that what is meant by praying for our persecutors is not this kind of prayer
 that seeks that the enemies
 be found guilty in court
 have their lives cut short
 lose their position of leadership
 experience financial collapse
 their children be orphans & become homeless beggars

--so how are we to both understand
& apply these psalms into the prayer life & worship
of the contemporary church?

Psalm 109

Imprecatory Petition

4 Appoint someone evil to oppose my enemy; let an accuser stand at his right hand.
7 When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him.
8 May his days be few,
 may another take his place of leadership.
9 May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow.
10 May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes.
11 May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor.
12 May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children.
13 May his descendants be cut off; their names blotted out from the next generation.
14 May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out.
15 May their sins always remain before the LORD, that he may blot out their name from the earth.

* * * * *

► **Definition of “Imprecation:”**

- these petitions in Ps 109 are an example of what are referred to as “imprecations”
- “imprecation” is another term for a “spoken curse”, in the sense of calling down harm on a person
- in OT scholarship, the term “imprecation” is used of those passages in the psalms where psalmist petitions God to bring harmful judgment upon the enemies

Imprecation
= “spoken curse”

“Imprecations” in the Psalms are when the Psalmist Petitions God to bring harm upon the Enemies

- forms of “imprecations” occur in about 40 % of the Lament psalms & there are a few other occurrences in other genres of psalms, as well
- & imprecations also occur in the *Bk of Lamentations*

--the “imprecations” are an element of the Petition component of the Lament Psalms

--Petition is one of the 3 key components in the genre of Lament Pss, along with Complaint & statements of Trust & Confidence & the secondary component of Affirmation to Praise

Lament Psalms

Complaint

Petition + Motivation
Asking God to Help + Reason Why

Imprecations

Trust / Confidence

Affirmation to Praise

- since imprecations are an element in the Petition component of the Lament Psalms, it is really not correct to refer to “Imprecatory Psalms” as a distinct genre from the Lament Psalms rather more precisely we are speaking about “Imprecations in the Psalms”
- even more precisely, “Imprecatory Petitions” in the Lament Pss

~~There is no “genre” of Imprecatory Psalms~~

rather, *Imprecations* are a part of the “Petition” element within *the Lament Psalms*

► **Kinds of Imprecations**

--there are several different kinds of Imprecatory Petitions:

1) Generic Requests for God to Intervene against the Enemies & Judge the Enemies for their Actions

--those imprecatory petitions

only in a broad, general way

state what the psalmist expects God to do

--some are for God to intervene, to deliver through defeating the enemies

e.g., Ps 17:13 & Ps 143:12

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

1) Generic Requests for God to Intervene Against Enemies & Repay them for their Actions

Individual Lament Pss: Ps 5:10 Ps 7:1, 6, 9a Ps 10:2, 15 Ps 17:13 Ps 22:20 Ps 25:2 Ps 28:4 Ps 54:5 Ps 56:7 Ps 59:5, 11-13 Ps 94:1-2 Ps 141:10 Ps 143:12	Community Lament Pss: Ps 74:22-23 Ps 79:6, 10, 12
---	--

Ps 17:13 ...
 Rise up, LORD, confront them,
 bring them down;
 with your sword rescue me from the wicked.

Ps 143:12 ...
 In your unfailing love, silence my enemies;
 destroy all my foes,
 for I am your servant.

--others, in a general way, request that God repay the enemies for what they have done

--the psalmists petition that the enemies would receive their just due

based upon what they have done

--often there is a sense of "Poetic Justice" in that the evil that the enemy has done or is planning to do to the psalmist,

is requested to come back & fall on the enemy

e.g., Ps 28:4

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

1) Generic Requests for God to Intervene Against Enemies & Repay them for their Actions

Individual Lament Pss: Ps 5:10 Ps 7:1, 6, 9a Ps 10:2, 15 Ps 17:13 Ps 22:20 Ps 25:2 Ps 28:4 Ps 54:5 Ps 56:7 Ps 59:5, 11-13 Ps 94:1-2 Ps 141:10 Ps 143:12	Community Lament Pss: Ps 74:22-23 Ps 79:6, 10, 12
---	--

Ps 28:4 ...
 † Repay them for their deeds and for their evil work;
 repay them for what their hands have done
 and bring back on them what they deserve.

--those kinds of very generalized statements

come across as fairly mild expressions,

& thus, tend not to offend our sensibilities too much

2) Requests Specific Actions



--some Imprecatory Petitions move beyond a generalized, non-specific statement of judgment to specify the desired Actions

--some of these are extended lists of multiple & diverse, specific, acts that the psalmists petition God to do against the enemies such as Ps 109 that we just read

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS	
2) Requests for Specified Actions	
Individual Lament Pss:	Community Lament Pss:
Ps 31:17-18	Ps 83:9-18
Ps 35:1-9, 24, 26	Ps 137:7-9
Ps 55:9, 15	
Ps 58:6-10	
Ps 69:22-28	
Ps 109:6-19	
Ps 140:9-11	

--another example is Ps 35:1-8

Psalm 35 (NIV)

Imprecatory Petition	<p>¹ Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me.</p> <p>² Take up shield and armor; arise and come to my aid.</p> <p>³ Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to me, "I am your salvation."</p> <p>⁴ May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay.</p> <p>⁵ May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away;</p> <p>⁶ may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them.</p> <p>⁷ Since they hid their net for me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me,</p> <p>⁸ may ruin overtake them by surprise— may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin.</p>
-----------------------------	---

e.g., Ps 140:8-11

Psalm 140 (NIV)

Imprecatory Petition	<p>⁸ Do not grant the wicked their desires, LORD; do not let their plans succeed.</p> <p>⁹ Those who surround me proudly rear their heads; may the mischief of their lips engulf them.</p> <p>¹⁰ May burning coals fall on them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise.</p> <p>¹¹ May slanderers not be established in the land; may disaster hunt down the violent.</p>
-----------------------------	--

- it is these cases of lists of multiple specified imprecations that are disturbing to our sensibilities
- this language seems to be very strong, & even seems like it may be filled with bitterness & malice
- so these extended lists often cause us the most consternation as we question how the psalmists can pray those things?
 - how can the psalmists seem so vicious toward their enemies?
- it is these extended imprecatory petitions that raise the questions of how properly to understand & to interpret these requests & they raise the harder application questions about the on-going use of these psalms within a contemporary setting

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

2) Requests for Specified Actions

Individual Lament Pss:	Community Lament Pss:
Ps 31:17-18	Ps 83:9-18
Ps 35:1-9, 24, 26	Ps 137:7-9
Ps 55:9, 15	
Ps 58:6-10	
Ps 69:22-28	
Ps 109:6-19	
Ps 140:9-11	

► **Contexts:**

so as to adequately understand the imprecations,
the first step is to properly understand them in their original contexts,
& then move to deal with the issue of contemporary validity

--imprecatory petitions need to be read & interpreted in 5 contexts:

1) Literary Context

--we've already noted that the imprecations occur primarily

(a) in the context of lament psalms

-- as part of the Lament pss, the imprecatory petitions
reflect the emotional character of outcry
that is characteristic of the genre of lament

--imprecations are not detached theological reflections
arising out of studied contemplation of

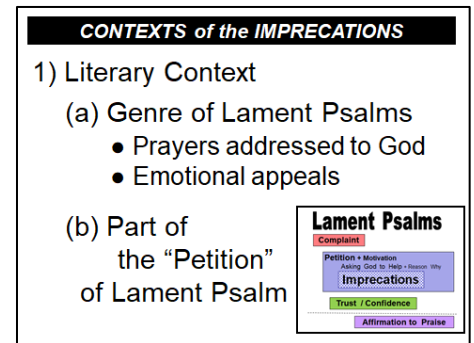
how evil should be dealt with by God

--rather, they are the emotion-laden appeals to God
arising out of the intensity of the suffering

(b) the other aspect of the literary context is that
the imprecatory elements are specifically
part of the Petition component of the Lament pss
in which the psalmists are requesting of God
what they would like him to do

so as to alleviate the situation of distress

--they are petitions expressed to God,
they are NOT curses directly spoken to the enemies



2) Communication-Event Context
--that of Prayer addressed to God



CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS
1) Literary Context
2) Communication-Event Context

--within the context of prayer,
the imprecatory Petitions are part of the dialogue-type
conversation with God

--whereas the psalmists make the requests to God
most often, within the psalms themselves,
a response from God is not given

--there is no divine word saying what God will do,
nor do the psalms give a record
of what action God subsequently took

--so we do not know exactly what God's response was
to each of these imprecatory petitions

--whether God's response was that of granting the request,
or denying it,
or modifying it in some way

-in the Component of Trust & Confidence in these pss,
the psalmists do feel assured that God will hear
& that God will, in some way act on their behalf
in protection & deliverance

--but exactly how God did respond,
is unstated in the record of the communication event

--the psalms only record the psalmists' part of the conversation

--but as part of the prayer communication event,
every imprecatory petition seems to imply an attached,
"Your will be done"

--meaning the matter is left up to God
as to how he will respond



CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS
2) Communication-Event Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dialogue of Prayer with an implied: <i>"Your will be done"</i> • Matter of whether & Manner in which the Petitions are carried out, are left completely in God's hands

--thus, within the prayer, the requests are left fully in God's hands
to deal with the petitions as he wishes
& any act of judgment, punishment, retribution, vengeance
against the enemies is likewise left in the hand of God to execute

---only in one psalm does the psalmist assume
that they will be the instrument used by God
to execute the imprecation in real life

- that is, Ps 41:10 (NIV)

where the petition is that God would grant the psalmist
the ability to "repay" the enemies

¹⁰ But may you have mercy on me, LORD;
raise me up, that I may repay them.

--but even there, the way that repayment is envisioned as happening
is not explicitly stated

--the context is that the psalmist is afflicted with sickness
& those around him are declaring that he will die
& they are abandoning him

--that context suggests that the psalmist's "repayment" may be
God's healing & keeping the psalmist alive

--so in Ps 41, the "repayment" may not involve any action taken
directly against the enemies

--rather, the psalmist repays the enemies
by the psalmist not dying,
& thus proving the enemies' words as false

--But in every other psalm with imprecatory petitions,
both the matter of whether God will answer the petition as
requested, is left up to God

& also, the manner in which the petitions are dealt with
or carried out
is fully left in God's hands

3) Covenant Context

--third context is that of the broader theological context of the covenant between God & His people in the OT
 --the Lament psalms & their petitions arise out of the covenant-relationship & assume that the covenant obligations & commands are binding upon the people
 --the lament psalms are also based on the expectations & theological presuppositions of the covenant both, with respect to what God requires in that relationship as well as, how God will act within the covenant relationship in response to the people's obedience or disobedience

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

- 1) Literary Context
- 2) Communication–Event Context
- 3) Covenant Context

--so we must note that the
 (a) covenant demands loving treatment of one's personal enemies

(a.1) Loving one's neighbor & one's enemy is expressed in the covenant as an obligation

e.g., Leviticus 19:17-18 (NIV)

^{17a} *“Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. . . .*

¹⁸ *“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD*

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

- 3) Covenant Context
 - (a) Covenant Demand of Loving Treatment of One's Personal Enemies

Leviticus 19:17-18 ...
^{17a} Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. . . .
¹⁸ Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD

Proverbs 25:21 ...
 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

--one was expected & required to deal with one's enemy in a gracious, loving manner

e.g., Proverbs 25:21 (NIV)

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

(a.2) in fact in the very psalms that contain imprecations, the psalmists speak about their gracious behavior toward their enemies

just one example: Psalm 109:4-5 (KGF)

^{4a} *In return for my love, they accuse me, even though I pray (for them).*


⁵ *They place upon me evil for good, and hatred in return for my love.*

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

- 3) Covenant Context
 - (a) Covenant Demand of Loving Treatment of One's Personal Enemies

Psalm 109:4-5 ...
⁴ In return for my love, they accuse me, even though I pray (for them).
⁵ They place upon me evil for good, and hatred in return for my love.

--since love of enemies was expected, issue becomes as to how to reconcile that covenant obligation with the harsh judgmental words in the imprecatory petitions

(b) 2nd aspect of the covenant context:  when the covenant obligations / commandments were violated, it is delineated that there was to be just & justifiable retribution upon the perpetrator

---appropriate retribution for violations of the covenant applied both to human relationships with each other, as well as in the people's relationship with God

--when one human did an offense against another human, the cases were to be adjudicated with fairness & justice to determine the guilty party so as to exact a punishment

that was equal to the crime committed
--principle of retribution is referred to as *lex talionis*
(an eye for an eye)

i.e., the punishment was to equal the crime

--similarly when God's people violated the relationship with God, God, as covenant overlord or suzerain, was considered to a God of justice, who executed the appropriate retribution

--the "judicial / legal" language & imagery of the lament psalms, places the imprecatory petitions within a context of asking God for a just punishment against those who have done wrong

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

3) Covenant Context

- (a) Covenant Demand of Loving Treatment of One's Personal Enemies
- (b) Violation of the Covenant Requires Just Retribution

(c) also within the covenant is the other side of the coin:
 --covenant blessings stipulate that covenant obedience will be rewarded

- since blessing for obedience was expected, the psalmists declare their faithfulness to the covenant in the "Assertions of Innocence" component within the Lament Psalms
- their assertions of their loyalty to God serve as a motivation, based on the covenant, for God to deliver

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

3) Covenant Context

- (a) Covenant Demand of Loving Treatment of One's Personal Enemies
- (b) Violation of the Covenant Requires Just Retribution
- (c) Obedience will be Rewarded

--note how in Ps 25 there is an emphasis on & appeal to the covenant as well as psalmist petitioning to be taught in the covenant way of living

--this covenant emphasis is coupled with the petition in v. 2b for God to prevent the enemies from triumphing over the psalmist

Psalm 25 (NIV)

Trust / Confidence	¹ In you, LORD my God, I put my trust. ^{2a} I trust in you;
Petition	^{2b} do not let me be put to shame, nor let my enemies triumph over me.
Trust / Confidence	³ No one who hopes in you will ever be put to shame, but shame will come on those who are treacherous without cause.
Petition	⁴ Show me your ways , LORD, teach me your paths . ^{5a} Guide me in your truth and teach me,
Trust / Confidence	^{5b} for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.



Psalm 25 <small>(NIV)</small>	
Trust / Confidence	⁸ Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners <i>in his ways</i> .
	⁹ He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way .
	¹⁰ All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful toward those who keep the demands of his covenant .
	...
	¹² Who, then, are those who fear the LORD? He will instruct them in the ways they should choose.
	¹³ They will spend their days in prosperity, and their descendants will inherit the land.
¹⁴ The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.	
¹⁵ My eyes are ever on the LORD, for only he will release my feet from the snare.	

--so both the psalmists' Deliverance (Vindication) & the Retribution / Punishment coming on the enemies,

are based on the covenant concepts of blessings for obedience & curses for disobedience

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

3) Covenant Context

- (a) Covenant Demand of Loving Treatment of One's Personal Enemies
- (b) Violation of the Covenant Requires Just Retribution
- (c) Obedience will be Rewarded

(d) 4th aspect of the covenant context:
 is the "Here-&-Nowness"
 --"This-Life Orientation"
 of both the punishments & blessings

--in light of the progressive revelation within the NT,
 we have moved most judgment & retribution off
 to life-after-death & to the eschatological future
 in which the righteous will be justly rewarded,
 & the wicked will be duly punished

--so immediate, earthly punishment & blessing
 are not nearly as essential

--but in the OT period,
 given the amount of revelation that they had at that time,
 they didn't have the theological option of pushing
 the blessings & punishments off into the afterlife
 --from their perspective, when justice was executed,
 both as rewards & punishments
 it was thought of as a necessary occurrence
 that would happen right here & right now,
 in this life

--as such, the blessings & punishments are thought of in more
 immediate material ways:

--this is evident in the covenant blessings & curses
 in Deut 27-28 & Leviticus 26

--if God was going to bless,
 you would experience it in this life
 through prosperity & wealth
 through increase in material possessions
 through longevity of life
 through victory over enemies,
 through economic & social success

--similarly with punishment,
 you would experience poverty,
 lack of descendants,
 having your life cut short
 suffering social & economic distress & hardship
 being overcome by your enemies


--that "here-&-now" perspective clearly shapes the punishments
 requested in the imprecatory petitions against the enemies
 as the things petitioned all reference matters of earthly living
 & they are requested to happen in the very immediate future

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

3) Covenant Context

- (a) Covenant Demand of Loving Treatment of One's Personal Enemies
- (b) Violation of the Covenant Requires Just Retribution
- (c) Obedience will be Rewarded

- (d) "Here-&-Nowness" ("This-Life Orientation")
 of both Punishment & Blessing

(d) 5th covenant context aspect to note is:  the content of the specific actions asked for in imprecatory petitions often correspond directly


to the “curses” / punishments for violating the covenant that are prescribed in Deut 28 & Lev 26

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS	
3) Covenant Context	
(a)	Covenant Demand of Loving Treatment of One's Personal Enemies
(b)	Violation of the Covenant Requires Just Retribution
(c)	Obedience will be Rewarded
(d)	"Here-&Nowness" ("This-Life Orientation") of both Punishment & Blessing
(e)	Imprecations correspond to the Covenant "Curses" (Deut 28 & Lev 26)

--see the correspondence in this chart that several of the imprecations echo the very punishments that God said that he would execute against those who broke the covenant commands

Psalms “Requests” = Covenant “Curses”			
“Request” in the Psalms		“Curse” in the Covenant (Deuteronomy 28:15-68 & Leviticus 26:14-39)	
Psalm 7:9 Psalm 54:5 Psalm 55:15 Psalm 59:13 Psalm 69:28 Psalm 83:17b Psalm 143:12	death	Deut 28:20b	
Psalms 31:17 Psalm 35:4, 26 Psalm 83:16-17 Psalm 109:28-29	shame	Deut 28:28	
Psalm 35:4, 26 Psalm 55:9	confusion	Deut 28:20, 28	
Psalm 69:23	fear	Deut 28:66-67	Lev 26:36
Psalm 69:25	desolation	Deut 28:52	Lev 26:33
Psalm 35:5-6 Psalm 83:15	pursued by God		Lev 26:33

* * * * *

--so the broader theological context of the covenant plays a significant part in the specific content & perception of what is requested in the imprecatory petitions 

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS	
3) Covenant Context	
(a)	Covenant Demand of Loving Treatment of One's Personal Enemies
(b)	Violation of the Covenant Requires Just Retribution
(c)	Obedience will be Rewarded
(d)	"Here-&Nowness" ("This-Life Orientation") of both Punishment & Blessing
(e)	Imprecations correspond to the Covenant "Curses" (Deut 28 & Lev 26)

4) Specific Situational Context:

4th context in which the imprecatory petitions must be read is the specific situational contexts of disorientation that elicit the imprecatory petitions

--that context is ascertained from the Lament psalms themselves as they describe & speak about the circumstances, primarily in the "Complaint" sections

--although these situational aspects are evident in the majority of the Lament psalms,

we will illustrate them through just one psalm--Ps 69

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

- 1) Literary Context
- 2) Communication-Event Context
- 3) Covenant Context
- 4) Situational Context

(a) Life is Threatened

--the enemies' threats have resulted in debilitating emotional distress for the psalmists

--Psalmists feel that their lives are threatened by these enemies & thus, the psalmists plead with God for action against the enemies

--with respect to the communal lament psalms & *Bk of Lamentations*,

the imprecations are directed against the enemy nations:

-- the context is that the nation of Israel/Judah has already been devastated & the population decimated due to the enemies' invasion of the land

--thus the continuing threat of the enemies must be dealt with

--in the individual Lament psalms, the actions of the enemies are not minor misdemeanors or inconveniences being perpetrated against the psalmists but major, potentially violent crimes

--the enemies are said to be acting out of hatred toward the psalmists thus, the psalmists fear for their lives

--psalmists express that if God does not deliver them, they will end up dying

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

- 4) Situational Context
 - (a) Psalmist's Life is Threatened by the Enemies

Psalm 69 (NIV)

Petition	1 ^a Save me, O God,
Complaint "I –" "They –"	1 ^b for the waters have come up to my neck. 2 ^l I sink in the miry depths, where there is no foothold. I have come into the deep waters; the floods engulf me. 3 I am worn out calling for help; my throat is parched. My eyes fail, looking for my God.
	4 ^a Those who hate me without reason outnumber the hairs of my head; many are my enemies without cause, those who seek to destroy me.

Psalm 69 (NIV)

Trust/ Confidence	13 ^a But I pray to you, LORD, in the time of your favor;
Petition	13 ^b in your great love, O God, answer me with your sure salvation. 14 Rescue me from the mire, do not let me sink; deliver me from those who hate me, from the deep waters. 15 Do not let the floodwaters engulf me or the depths swallow me up or the pit close its mouth over me. 16 Answer me, LORD, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. 17 Do not hide your face from your servant; answer me quickly, for I am in trouble. 18 Come near and rescue me; deliver me because of my foes.

--one aspect of the situational context
is that the psalmists are in extremely dire straits

<i>CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS</i>
<p>4) Situational Context (a) Psalmist's Life is Threatened by the Enemies</p>

--I think one of reasons that it is hard for us to relate to these imprecations is that we have not been in situational contexts like those of the psalmists
where our lives are actually being threatened

- if you were in a situation, like so many were in Nazi Europe, in a death camps, suffering under imprisonment, forced labor & imminent extermination:
what would your prayer be for your oppressors?
what would you pray to happen to Hitler?
- if you were in the midst of a war torn nation, under constant siege & bombings, & were daily huddled in the ruins of bombed out buildings:
what would you pray to happen to those dropping the bombs?
- what if you were in a position of being repeatedly sexually abused by a family member:
How would you pray about your abuser?

--those kinds of situation are more comparable to what the psalmists were experiencing,
as opposed to an inconvenience
or minor setback in life

--so in their distressing situation of being threatened & attacked, the psalmists prayed for deliverance

--they saw deliverance coming through God eliminating the ones causing their suffering

--psalmists did not seem to see any other way for deliverance to occur

other than the utter elimination of the enemies

--so that is what they petitioned for God to do

(b) Enemies

- 2nd aspect of the situational context is that the Enemies are viewed as enemies against God
 - not merely as the psalmists' personal antagonists
- the enemies are described as evildoers, they are hostile, deceitful persons, they are persons who mistreat the vulnerable
- how they are treating the psalmists is how they treat others & the way they treat others is because of their rebelliousness against God
- the descriptions of the enemies clearly position those persons as being wicked rather than righteous
- such description must not be viewed as the psalmists making false accusations against their enemies nor should it be viewed as an exaggerated, negative assessment of the enemies for the rhetorical purpose of bolstering the psalmists' argument

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

4) Situational Context

- (a) Psalmist's Life is Threatened by the Enemies
- (b) Their Enemies are foremost Enemies against God

Psalm 69

Complaint "I -"	<p>¹⁹ You know how I am scorned, disgraced and shamed; all my enemies are before you.</p> <p>²⁰ Scorn has broken my heart and has left me helpless; I looked for sympathy, but there was none, for comforters, but I found none.</p>
"They -"	<p>²¹ They put gall in my food and gave me vinegar for my thirst.</p>
Imprecatory Petition	<p>²² May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap.</p> <p>²³ May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever.</p> <p>²⁴ Pour out your wrath on them; let your fierce anger overtake them.</p> <p>²⁵ May their place be deserted; let there be no one to dwell in their tents.</p>
Complaint	<p>²⁶ For they persecute those you wound and talk about the pain of those you hurt.</p>
Imprecatory Petition	<p>²⁷ Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation.</p> <p>²⁸ May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous.</p>

- given who the enemies are, the psalmists call for God to repay the enemies for what they have done
- psalmists call for retribution to come on their enemies for the crimes that the enemies have committed

(c) Innocent Psalmists

--in contrast to the portrayal of the enemies,
psalmists often view themselves as
innocent or righteous sufferers seeking vindication

--in some of the Psalms that have imprecatory petitions,
there are also "Assertions of Innocence"
& assertions that the psalmist
has treated the "enemy" with kindness,
which is not being reciprocated

--in those psalms, the threats to the psalmists by the enemies
are seen as being unprovoked & without cause

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS
4) Situational Context
(a) Psalmist's Life is Threatened by the Enemies
(b) Their Enemies are foremost Enemies against God
(c) The Psalmists are Innocent of Wrongdoing

Psalm 69 (NIV)

<p>Complaint "I—"</p>	<p>⁷ For I endure scorn for your sake, and shame covers my face.</p> <p>⁸ I am a foreigner to my own family, a stranger to my own mother's children;</p> <p>⁹ for zeal for your house consumes me, and the insults of those who insult you fall on me.</p> <p>¹⁰ When I weep and fast, I must endure scorn;</p> <p>¹¹ when I put on sackcloth, people make sport of me.</p> <p>¹² Those who sit at the gate mock me, and I am the song of the drunkards.</p>
----------------------------------	--


--in those Laments, the psalmists position themselves with God
while the enemies are in opposition to both God
& to the psalmists

--this portrayal of themselves is not just a rhetorical ploy
to get God on the psalmists' side
--but reflects an appropriate self-evaluation

thus, by God intervening & delivering
the psalmists will be vindicated in their faithfulness to God

--so the imprecatory petitions are also
cries for vindication for the psalmist

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS
4) Situational Context
(a) Psalmist's Life is Threatened by the Enemies
(b) Their Enemies are foremost Enemies against God
(c) The Psalmists are Innocent of Wrongdoing

(d) when considered together,  Enemies Wickedness + Psalmists' Innocence
 it means that the petitions are Pleas for "justice"
 --the enemies have brought false accusations against the psalmists,
 the enemies have threaten the psalmists without cause,
 they have violated the covenant obligations
 of how to treat one's neighbor

& the psalmists are suffering an injustice that is being perpetrated against them by the enemies

--therefore the psalmists cry out to God to execute a just punishment against the enemies

- for justice to occur,
 it means punishment / retribution upon the enemies
 & deliverance / vindication for the psalmists

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

4) Situational Context

- (a) Psalmist's Life is Threatened by the Enemies
- (b) Their Enemies are foremost Enemies against God
- (c) The Psalmists are Innocent of Wrongdoing

5) Canonical / Scriptural Context →

--5th contextual aspect is that of Canonical Context that is, the inclusion, in the *Book of Psalms*, of these Lament Pss that contain imprecatory petitions

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

- 1) Literary Context
- 2) Communication–Event Context
- 3) Covenant Context
- 4) Situational Context
- 5) Canonical Context

--the compilation of the psalms was designed not as an anthology to preserve the “historical record” of the prayers that people prayed over the course of Israel’s history
 --purpose of the compilation was not merely to show how people had prayed in the past

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

5) Canonical Context

- Included in *Book of Psalms*
 (the Prayer Book & Song Book of the OT Worshipping Community)
 as Model, Exemplary Prayers

--but rather the compilation was designed to be the prayer book & song book of the OT worshipping community as such, it preserved exemplary prayers that showed future worshipers how to pray


--thus, these psalms with imprecations must be viewed, along with the rest of the psalms, as model prayers collected for the purpose of being subsequently used by worshippers
 --they serve an instructional purpose of showing how the Believing community can & should pray when it finds itself in similar kinds of situations

-- the purpose & function as model prayers makes it highly unlikely that “sinful” attitudes were intentionally preserved & canonized within the *Bk of Psalms*

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

5) Canonical Context

- Included in *Book of Psalms*
 (the Prayer Book & Song Book of the OT Worshipping Community)
 as Model, Exemplary Prayers



it makes it highly improbable that examples of prayers that are inappropriate or should not be prayed would be included in the collection

--it would be like printing a hymnal & including songs with poor theology or even heretical theology & then labeling them “Do Not Sing”

--so the canonical context seems to play a significant role in how the Lament Psalms with imprecatory petitions were understood within their OT context

* * * * *

-- the 5 contexts:

- 1) Literary Context of the Petitions within the Lament genre
- 2) Communication-Event Context of prayer
- 3) Covenant Context of the Covenant obligations & expectations
- 4) Situational Context as portrayed in the specific psalms
- 5) Canonical Context of these Lament psalms being included in the Book of Psalms

CONTEXTS of the IMPRECATIONS

- 1) Literary Context
- 2) Communication-Event Context
- 3) Covenant Context
- 4) Situational Context
- 5) Canonical Context

--Reading the imprecations within those contexts
 helps to clarify how to understand the imprecatory petitions
 in the psalms themselves
 gives an understanding of how to better interpret
 the imprecatory petitions

--we can then move to summarizing the purpose & function
 of the Lament Psalms that contain imprecatory petitions:

--the purpose & function can be summarized in 7 ways,
 with each particular psalm emphasizing
 the different purposes to differing degrees

--but all 7 functions encapsulate the main reasons & motivations
 behind the petitions that request harm to come upon the enemies

1) they are Cries for Deliverance & Protection

--the individual lament psalms are filled with the language of deliverance ,

- salvation,
- of God rescuing,
- of God protecting

--uses metaphors of God being the psalmists' rock, refuge, fortress

e.g., Ps 59:1-2

--the general petition for deliverance is given in vv. 1-2, to which more detail is given in vv. 11-13

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

1) Cries for Deliverance & Protection

Psalm 59 (NIV)

Petition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> ¹ Deliver me from my enemies, O God; be my fortress against those who are attacking me. ² Deliver me from evildoers and save me from those who are after my blood.
Imprecatory Petition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> ^{11b} In your might uproot them and bring them down. ¹² For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter, ¹³ consume them in your wrath, consume them till they are no more.

Ps 35:1-8, 17b

--in Ps 35, the specific requests are given first, but then summarized in v. 17 as "rescue"

Psalm 35 (NIV)

Imprecatory Petition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> ¹ Contend, LORD, with those who contend with me; fight against those who fight against me. ² Take up shield and armor; arise and come to my aid. ³ Brandish spear and javelin against those who pursue me. Say to me, "I am your salvation." ⁴ May those who seek my life be disgraced and put to shame; may those who plot my ruin be turned back in dismay. ⁵ May they be like chaff before the wind, with the angel of the LORD driving them away; ⁶ may their path be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them. ⁷ Since they hid their net for me without cause and without cause dug a pit for me, ⁸ may ruin overtake them by surprise— may the net they hid entangle them, may they fall into the pit, to their ruin.
Petition	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> ^{17b} Rescue me from their ravages, my precious life from these lions.

- the direness of the circumstances provoked the crying out to God
- apparently, psalmists most often conceived of no other way for deliverance to occur other than through the utter defeat of the enemies

- so that is what they requested God to do in the imprecatory petitions:
 - they asked God to bring an utter end to the enemies, which would end the enemy's assaults & thus, give the psalmists relief

2nd purpose & function:

2) Cries for Divine Justice

Not for Personal Favoritism

the psalmist calls for justice,
 --the psalmists are not seeking some
 special, undeserved consideration
 or preferential treatment

e.g., Ps 94

--note the language of God as judge
 & repaying for sins



Psalm 94 <small>(NRSV)</small>	
Trust / Confidence	^{1a} The LORD is a God who avenges.
imprecatory Petition	^{1b} O God who avenges, shine forth. ² Rise up, Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve
Complaint	³ How long, LORD, will the wicked, how long will the wicked be jubilant? ⁴ They pour out arrogant words; all the evildoers are full of boasting. ⁵ They crush your people, LORD; they oppress your inheritance. ⁶ They slay the widow and the foreigner; they murder the fatherless. ⁷ They say, "The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob takes no notice."
Trust / Confidence	²² But the LORD has become my fortress, and my God the rock in whom I take refuge. ²³ He will repay them for their sins and destroy them for their wickedness; the LORD our God will destroy them.

-- the lament psalms,
 including those with imprecatory petitions,
 are filled with "legal", "judicial" language & imagery
 --in the "court" imagery or metaphor,
 the psalmist is the plaintiff who is appealing to God,
 the righteous judge,
 to render a favorable verdict on the psalmist's behalf
 & punish the wrongdoers



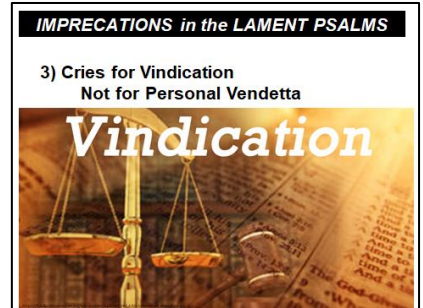
--to a degree, the imprecatory petitions might be considered as
 recommendations for sentencing
 --like in our court systems, when the accused has been found guilty,
 frequently the victim is asked to give a "victim impact statement",
 alone with their lawyer giving a recommendation
 for what the sentence of punishment should be,
 given the impact of the enemies' actions on the victim

--thus the psalmists, as the victims,
 give their recommendation to God of
 what they would like to see happen
 to those who are attacking & threatening them

--especially in the lament psalms in which the psalmists' assert their
innocence,
 the petitions are primarily cries for divine justice
 rather than the psalmist seeking divine mercy

----as cries for justice, the psalmist wants God
to execute justice on behalf of both
(a) the enemies,
 which means the defeat of evil
& (b) the psalmist
 which means vindication of the righteous

3) Cries for Vindication not for Personal Vendetta



- as the psalmists seek to be exonerated of wrong doing
- they cry for God to adjudicate between the psalmist & the enemy & pronounce & execute a judicial sentence against the enemy which vindicates the psalmist as the victim
- vindication comes through the psalmists' deliverance which shows the psalmist to be in the right

e.g., Psalm 7:9

**3) Cries for Vindication
Not for Personal Vendetta**

Psalm 7 (NIV)

imprecatory Petition	<p>9 Bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure— you, the righteous God who probes minds and hearts.</p>
---------------------------------	---

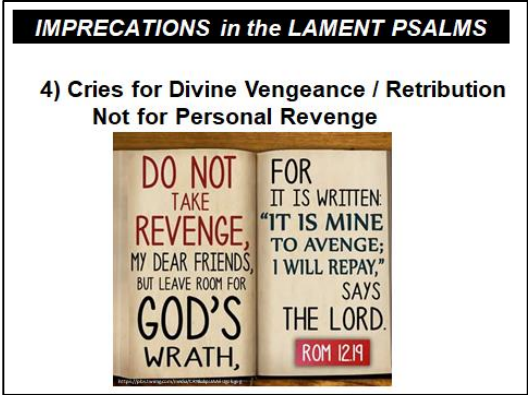
- it is not that psalmist is merely trying to get back at the enemy out of a personally motivated vendetta or feud with the enemy rather the psalmist is seeking to be absolved of wrongdoing in the eyes of the community

e.g., Psalm 35:22-27

**3) Cries for Vindication
Not for Personal Vendetta**

Psalm 35 (NIV)

Petition	<p>22 LORD, you have seen this; do not be silent. Do not be far from me, Lord.</p> <p>23 Awake, and rise to my defense! Contend for me, my God and Lord.</p> <p>24 Vindicate me in your righteousness, LORD my God; do not let them gloat over me.</p> <p>25 Do not let them think, "Aha, just what we wanted!" or say, "We have swallowed him up."</p> <p>26 May all who gloat over my distress be put to shame and confusion; may all who exalt themselves over me be clothed with shame and disgrace.</p>
Affirmation of Praise	<p>27 May those who delight in my vindication shout for joy and gladness; may they always say, "The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant."</p>



4) Cries for Divine Vengeance / Retribution, not for Personal Revenge

--through their actions, the enemies have violated the covenant relationship with God as well as transgressed against other humans as to how they should be treated, based on the covenant

--it is not just that the psalmist has been personally wronged the wicked are not only mistreating the psalmist, but doing similar things to others

--it is the enemies' characteristic actions toward everyone

--since that is the case, the issue is not that the psalmist is seeking personal revenge for an action committed solely against the psalmist

--but the psalmist seeks divine vengeance because the enemies are also violating the covenant in how they relate to both God & others

e.g., note the description of the enemies in Ps 10:1-18

Psalm 10 (NIV with modifications)

<p>Complaint "You –"</p>	<p>¹Why, LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?</p>
<p>"They –"</p>	<p>²In their arrogance the wicked hunt down the weak, who are caught in the schemes they devise. ³They boast about the cravings of their heart; they bless the greedy and revile the LORD. ⁴In their pride the wicked do not seek him; in all their thoughts there is no room for God. ⁵God's ways are always prosperous; your laws are rejected by them; they sneer at all their enemies. ⁶They say to themselves, "Nothing will ever shake me." They swear, "No one will ever do me harm." ⁷Their mouth is full of lies and threats; trouble and evil are under their tongue. ⁸They lie in wait near the villages; from ambush they murder the innocent. Their eyes watch in secret for their victims; ⁹like a lion in cover they lie in wait. They lie in wait to catch the helpless; they catch the helpless and drag them off in their net. ¹⁰Their victims are crushed, [their victims] collapse; [their victims] fall under their strength.</p>

Psalm 10 (NIV with modifications)

Complaint "They –"	¹¹ They say to themselves, "God will never notice; he covers his face and never sees."
Petition	¹² Arise, LORD! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless.
Complaint "They –"	¹³ Why do the wicked revile God? Why do they say to themselves, "He won't call me to account"?
Trust/ Confidence	¹⁴ But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless.
Imprecatory Petition	¹⁵ Break the arm of the wicked; call the evildoer to account for their wickedness that would not otherwise be found out.

Psalm 10 (NIV with modifications)

Trust/ Confidence	¹⁶ The LORD is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. ¹⁷ You, LORD, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, ¹⁸ defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.
------------------------------	---

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

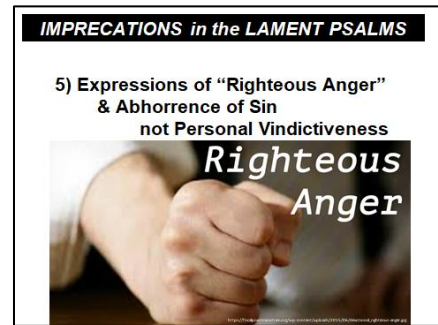
**4) Cries for Divine Vengeance / Retribution
Not for Personal Revenge**

- the psalmists are calling for God to act in judgment in the sense of vengeance & retribution, which is punishing for the wrong or criminal acts committed both against God
- as well as punishing for the wrong & injury committed against the psalmist & others

5) Expressions of “Righteous Anger” & Abhorrence of Sin not Personal Vindictiveness

--anger is evident in these imprecatory petitions,
 but the anger is directed against the sin
 & the ones who have committed it
 -a moral evil has occurred,
 which elicits a response of anger against it

e.g., Psalm 5:4-7; 9-12



Psalm 5 (INV)

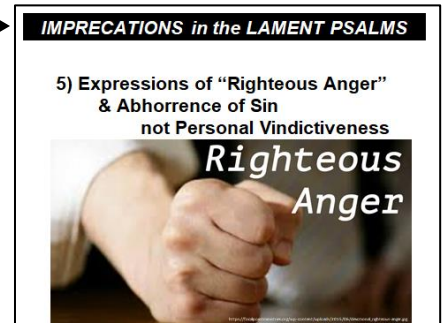
Trust/ Confidence	<p>⁴For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness; with you, evil people are not welcome.</p> <p>⁵The arrogant cannot stand in your presence. You hate all who do wrong;</p> <p>⁶you destroy those who tell lies. The bloodthirsty and deceitful you, LORD, detest.</p>
Assertion of Innocence	<p>⁷But I, by your great love, can come into your house; in reverence I bow down toward your holy temple.</p>

Psalm 5 (INV)

Complaint “They –”	<p>⁹Not a word from their mouth can be trusted; their heart is filled with malice. Their throat is an open grave; with their tongues they tell lies.</p>
Petition	<p>¹⁰Declare them guilty, O God! Let their intrigues be their downfall. Banish them for their many sins, for they have rebelled against you.</p> <p>¹¹But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you.</p>
Trust/ Confidence	<p>¹²Surely, LORD, you bless the righteous; you surround them with your favor as with a shield.</p>

in the psalms with imprecations,
 it is not merely that the psalmists are angrily responding
 to having been personally offended
 nor is it that the psalmist is carrying a personal grudge
 against the other person
 & thus, praying that the Lord sanctify that anger

--no, the anger is evoked by sin, disobedience to God,
 which has, in dramatic & drastic ways,
 personally affected the psalmist
 --thus the vehemence of the petitions, reflect
 both the impact of the actions on the psalmist's life
 which is graphically described in the Complaint component
 of the Lament pss
 but also, the vehemence of the petitions reflect
 the psalmist's empathizing with
 & reflecting the divine abhorrence of sin



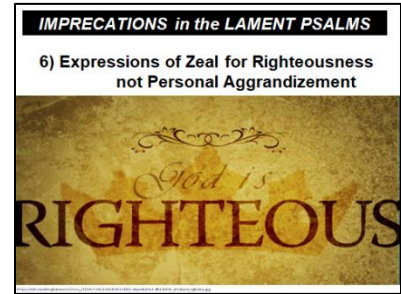
e.g., Psalm 139:19-22

Psalm 139 INV

Imprecatory Petition	¹⁹ If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty!
Complaint	²⁰ They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.
Assertion of Innocence	²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, LORD, and abhor those who are in rebellion against you? ²² I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies.

--because of the sinful character of the enemies' offenses,
 the psalmists' reaction is indignation
 --so, in their prayers, the psalmists confront & oppose
 the evil & injustice
 that is being perpetrated against them,
 --& they do so with the knowledge that
 God is a righteous God
 who does not tolerate such injustice

6) Expressions of Zeal for Righteousness Not Personal Aggrandizement



--the counterpart to Abhorrence of sin is a Zeal for Righteousness

--within the lament psalms containing the imprecatory petitions there is a repeated emphasis on “righteousness”

--sometimes it is the righteousness of God,
sometimes it is the righteousness of God’s judgments
sometimes it is God’s protecting his righteous people,
which includes the psalmist

--all of these come together in

Ps 7:6-11

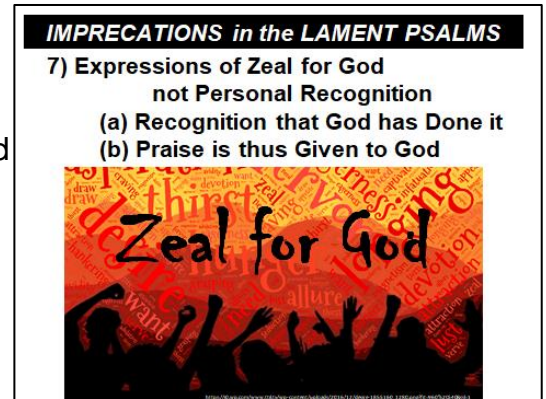
Psalm 7 <small>(NIV)</small>	
Petition	<p>⁶ Arise, LORD, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies. Awake, my God; decree justice.</p> <p>⁷ Let the assembled peoples gather around you, while you sit enthroned over them on high.</p> <p>⁸ Let the LORD judge the peoples. Vindicate me, LORD, according to my righteousness, according to my integrity, O Most High.</p> <p>^{9a} Bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure--</p>
Trust/ Confidence	<p>^{9b} you, the righteous God who probes minds and hearts.</p> <p>¹⁰ My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart.</p> <p>¹¹ God is a righteous judge, a God who displays his wrath every day.</p>

**7) Expressions of Zeal for God
Not Personal Recognition**



--the psalmists view the activity of a just deliverance by God as an action that will result in

- (a) the recognition that God has done it, & thus others will know who God is
- (b) & praise will redound –come back upon—God, because of what He has done



- (a) -a frequent expectation of the psalmist is that God responding to the psalmist & delivering will result in others recognizing that it is God who has done this
- the psalmists' desire is for God to be recognized through what is being asked for, not that psalmist be exalted
- e.g., Ps 59:11-13

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

**7) Expressions of Zeal for God
not Personal Recognition
(a) Recognition that God has Done it**

Psalm 59 (NIV)

Imprecatory Petition	<p>^{11b} In your might uproot them and bring them down.</p> <p>¹² For the sins of their mouths, for the words of their lips, let them be caught in their pride. For the curses and lies they utter,</p> <p>^{13a} consume them in your wrath, consume them till they are no more.</p>
---------------------------------	---

^{13b} Then it will be known to the ends of the earth
that God rules over Jacob.

--the psalmists want God to receive the full credit for having delivered the psalmist & for having defeated the enemies

e.g. Ps 58:10-11

--even though the imagery in v. 10 is a little unsettling,
the intended response of recognition in v. 11 is clear

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

**7) Expressions of Zeal for God
not Personal Recognition
(a) Recognition that God has Done it**

Psalm 58 (INV)

Affirmation of Praise	¹⁰ The righteous will be glad when they are avenged, when they dip their feet in the blood of the wicked.
------------------------------	--

↓

¹¹ Then people will say, "Surely the righteous still are rewarded; surely there is a God who judges the earth."
--

--recognition of God is not only the end result when God delivers **the individual**, but such is even more applicable when God acts on behalf of the **nation, His people** as evidenced in the Community Lament

-in Ps 83, the imprecatory petition against the attacking nations concludes with a purpose statement of why God should bring judgment against the foreign nations

Psalm 83 (INV) **Community Lament**

Petition	¹ O God, do not remain silent; do not turn a deaf ear, do not stand aloof, O God. ² See how your enemies growl, how your foes rear their heads.
Complaint "They --"	³ With cunning they conspire against your people; they plot against those you cherish. ⁴ "Come," they say, "let us destroy them as a nation, so that Israel's name is remembered no more."
Imprecatory Petition	¹³ Make them like tumbleweed, my God, like chaff before the wind. ¹⁴ As fire consumes the forest or a flame sets the mountains ablaze, ¹⁵ so pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your storm. ¹⁶ Cover their faces with shame, LORD, so that they will seek your name. ¹⁷ May they ever be ashamed and dismayed; may they perish in disgrace.

↓

¹⁸ Let them know that you, whose name is the LORD— that you alone are the Most High over all the earth.
--

(b) beyond mere recognition that God has done this,
the psalmists desire that God be glorified & praised
as a result of his actions
-- the psalmists, themselves, will be an example of such:
they vow that they will give God thankful praise
for having delivered them

--but they want that praise to go beyond just themselves
thus, they give their personal thankful praise, publically,
--they will express their praise in the midst of the congregation

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

7) Expressions of Zeal for God
not Personal Recognition

(a) Recognition that God has Done it
(b) Praise is thus Given to God

Psalm 109

Psalm 109 (109)

Petition	26 Help me, LORD my God; save me according to your unfailing love.
	27 Let them know that it is your hand, that you, LORD, have done it.
	28 While they curse, may you bless; may those who attack me be put to shame, but may your servant rejoice. 29 May my accusers be clothed with disgrace and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.
Affirmation of Praise	30 With my mouth I will greatly extol the LORD; in the great throng of worshipers I will praise him.
Trust / Confidence	31 For he stands at the right hand of the needy, to save their lives from those who would condemn them.

--the psalmists will publically bear witness to what God has done for them

--because they want others to also join in that praise
in recognition of God

Psalm 35

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

- 7) Expressions of Zeal for God**
- not Personal Recognition**
- (a) Recognition that God has Done it**
- (b) Praise is thus Given to God**

Psalm 35 (NIV)

Affirmation of Praise	<p>²⁷ May those who delight in my vindication shout for joy and gladness; may they always say, “The LORD be exalted, who delights in the well-being of his servant.”</p> <p>²⁸ My tongue will proclaim your righteousness, your praises all day long.</p>
------------------------------	---

--the purpose & function of Imprecatory Petitions
within the Lament Psalms can be summarized as:

IMPRECATIONS in the LAMENT PSALMS

- 1) Cries for Deliverance & Protection**
- 2) Cries for Divine Justice**
Not for Personal Favoritism
- 3) Cries for Vindication**
Not for Personal Vendetta
- 4) Cries for Divine Vengeance / Retribution**
Not for Personal Revenge
- 5) Expressions of "Righteous Anger"**
& Abhorrence of Sin
not Personal Vindictiveness
- 6) Expressions of Zeal for Righteousness**
not Personal Aggrandizement
- 7) Expressions of Zeal for God**
not Personal Recognition

--when the imprecatory petitions are understood in this way,
there is a high degree of validity in accepting these as
appropriate expressions of prayers
at least within the OT context

--but that still leaves open the issue of their validity for use today
within contemporary worship,
whether that be individual use in personal devotions
or corporate use in worship gatherings

--let me give three suggestions as to the ongoing usefulness of
these imprecatory petitions with the church:

* * * *

NOTE: would preface these potential uses with the note that
 --when using them in these ways,
 --especially in the context of any corporate use
 of the Lament Pss with imprecatory requests:
 it might require us to paraphrase the wording of the psalms
 or add explanatory comments
 so that our modified use of them is very clear
 --& thus avoid any misunderstanding as to how we are using them

1) Therapeutic value

--we can use them because of their therapeutic value

--anger is a human reaction to situations of suffering,
 pain, oppression, abuse

--without passing moral judgment on the appropriateness of the
 specific requests or content of the imprecations,

(a) there is value in the Form of that kind of prayer
 --there is value in the freedom of being able to express
 those kinds of feelings to God in prayer

--that kind of prayer instructs us to take any sense of vindictiveness
 or anger toward others
 to God in prayer

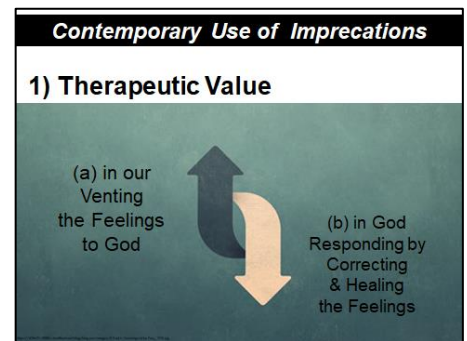
--prayer becomes the appropriate place to express our anger
 rather than suppressing the feeling
 or rather than directing the anger toward the other person

--within prayer, we can give full vent to our feelings & emotions,
 even to our anger

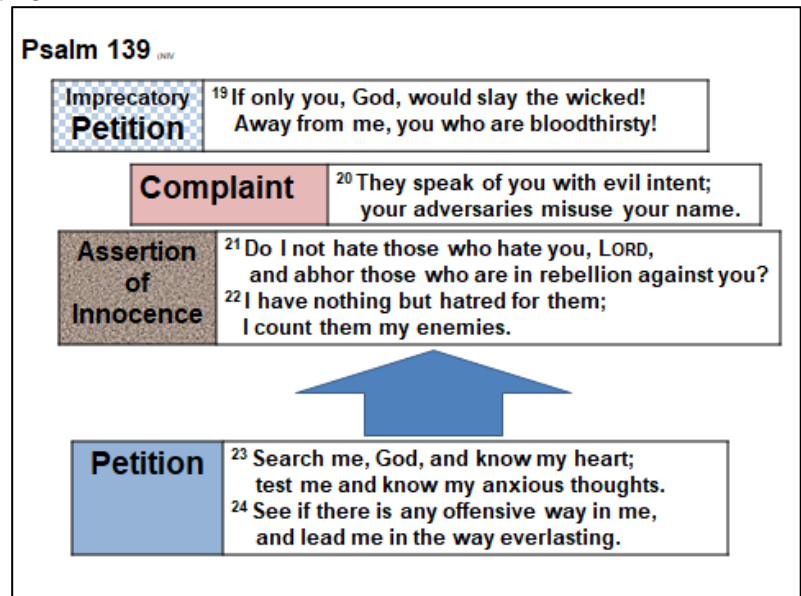
(b) because God is able to “handle” those expressions of our rage
 & He can then deal with them in the way
 that they need to be

--once we have voiced to God those feelings of seeking retribution
 on the enemies,
 we must then allow God to tell us
 if the feelings & emotions of anger
 that we are expressing are appropriate or not

--by voicing them, it allows God to Correct & Heal those feelings,
 when such is necessary



the sequence in Ps. 139: becomes instructive



--after having expressed the imprecatory petition: & the motivation for it in vv. 19-22

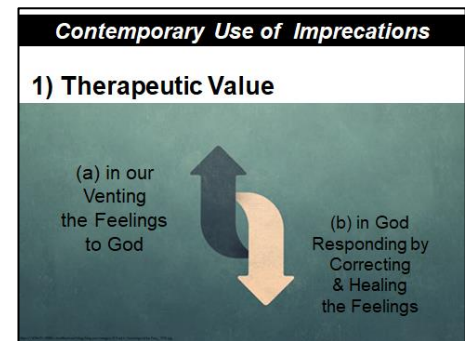
--the psalmist then goes on to ask God to search his heart (vv. 23-24)
--it seems like the psalmist is saying: "If anything I've just said is inappropriate, let me know."

--it seems, such is a good model of praying for us as well:
--expressing to God in prayer, the full range of our emotions & feelings
--then allowing God to examine those feelings, along with examining our motives & intentions

--so the therapeutic value in voicing the anger that we have toward others is in the venting of those feelings rather than bottling them inside ourselves or allowing them to manifest themselves in other unhealthy ways or in acting out the anger against the other person

--but once voiced to God,
--we must then allow God to examine those feelings & determine whether they are appropriate "righteous anger" or whether they are vindictive feelings that need to be corrected

--by taking the feelings to God in prayer, we thus allow God to work with our feelings in the way He desires, so that our attitude can truly be aligned with God's



3) Pray them not against personal enemies, but against the enemies of God

--if we are going to retain the specific individual nature
of the prayers against enemies,
we must Not pray them against our personal enemies
but only against God enemies

--there are occasions where God's people are suffering unjustly,
where God's people are experiencing persecution
& in those situations, such kinds of prayers against the oppressors
might be appropriate
as His people are suffering for Christ's sake

--I think we all come up with examples within history,
when an imprecatory prayer might be appropriate
--for example, against Hitler
with the atrocities that he was committing
--e.g., praying against the leaders of Isis
as they persecute & martyr Christians

--so praying them against persons who are God's enemies
may be appropriate at times

--we realize that there are occasions,
as in the original psalms,
where God's enemy & the person's enemy may be
one-&-the-same
but there must also be a caution, because
those who we consider to be our personal enemies,
may not always be God's enemies



--so before we pray these kinds of imprecatory prayers,
we need to

(a) Discern whether this kind of prayer is appropriate
in any given circumstance

--before we pray these kinds of imprecations,
we need to spend time with God,
discerning whether this kind of prayer
is in accordance with God's will or not

--we need to discern whether the persons are
really God's enemies,
or merely a personal enemy

2nd, before praying any imprecation, we need to

(b) do a self-examination of our own lives, to make sure we are
living in righteousness & purity

--seek forgiveness for any sins within ourselves
before we ask God to judge the sin in another person

we must be sure that our attitude is fully aligned with God's
& that our motives are those of

zeal for righteousness
zeal for God
zeal for justice

rather than personally centered motives

(c) first & foremost always pray for the other's salvation,
for their repentance,
for their turning to Christ

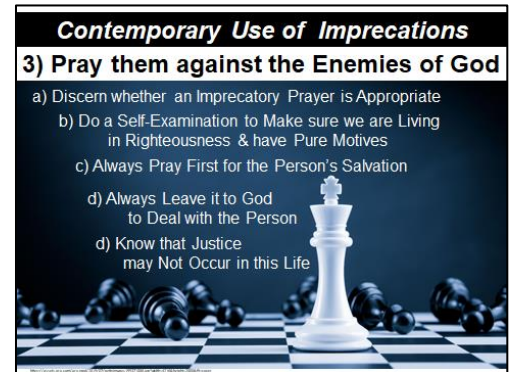
--only then should we pray:

"God, if they won't turn to you,
then deal with them in your righteousness & justice"

--even if we pray for God to bring a just punishment or judgment
upon them,

we should also pray that through such events,
the person might be brought to repentance

--the person's deliverance from their sin should always be
a key focus in our praying for others,
rather than solely focusing on them being punished for their sin



(d) when praying the imprecatory type petitions,
like the psalmists themselves did,
we must leave it in God's hands
as to how he deals with the person & their situation
--we must never take it upon ourselves
to exact judgment or retribution
--that is God's responsibility & prerogative, not ours

& **(e)** given the NT teaching of rewards & punishments in the life to come

we have to realize that at times
justice may not fully occur in this life,
but we have the assure that God will ultimately establish it
--in the end, justice will prevail,
in the end, the unrepentant will receive
just repayment for what they have done
in the end the righteous will be duly rewarded

but maybe **not** in this lifetime

* * * * *

--there is value in the imprecatory petitions of the Lament psalms
for contemporary Christians

- (1) there is Therapeutic value as forms of prayer
- (2) there is value in them
being modified into prayers
against de-personalized sin & spiritual forces of darkness
- (3) can be value in continuing to use them
as prayers against God's enemies
--with certain precautions being made before
& as we pray them

Contemporary Use of Imprecations

- 1) Therapeutic Value
- 2) De-Personalize & Spiritualize them
& Pray them against "Sin"
or against the Forces of Evil
- 3) Pray them
against the Enemies of God,
but NOT against Personal Enemies

* * * * *

--I know that my talks on the imprecations in the psalms
have not dealt with or resolved all of the issues
& difficulties related to these texts
--but hopefully having looked at them within their original contexts
& seeking to understand their purposes & functions
has given a better understanding of these perplexing texts
with some insights into their
validity for contemporary Christian use