

Waltke, Psalms, Session 13, Resources from Notebooklm

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Waltke, Psalms, Session 13 Imprecatory Psalms, biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This lecture by Dr. Bruce Waltke focuses on imprecatory Psalms, exploring their meaning and relevance for Christians. He examines various interpretations, rejecting those that label these Psalms as uninspired or solely prophetic. Waltke argues that these Psalms, while expressing righteous anger and a desire for justice, are ultimately prayers of faith trusting in God's judgment. He differentiates between the church's response of prayer for salvation and the state's role in upholding justice, suggesting the imprecatory Psalms are theologically sound but practically inappropriate for the modern church. The lecture concludes by contrasting Jesus's use of Isaiah 61 with the original text, emphasizing God's favor over vengeance in the current era.

2. 22-minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Waltke's, Psalms, Session 13 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms → Waltke).



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3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts by Dr. Bruce Waltke on Imprecatory Psalms:

Briefing Document: Dr. Bruce Waltke on Imprecatory Psalms

Source: Excerpts from "Waltke_Psalms_EN_Lecture13.pdf"

Overview: This lecture excerpt focuses on Dr. Waltke's exploration of imprecatory psalms - those psalms where the psalmist calls upon God to punish their enemies. Waltke grapples with the challenge these psalms present to Christian ethics, particularly in light of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. He methodically analyzes various interpretations, ultimately offering his own perspective that integrates Old Testament justice with New Testament grace.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Context of Petition Psalms:

- Waltke establishes that petition and lament psalms are the most common type, highlighting their importance in spiritual development. He emphasizes that these expressions of need and distress are normal and continue throughout life.
- He identifies situations in the psalms, including the physical location (temple) and the presence of enemies.
- The "enemy" is primarily understood as a spiritual adversary opposed to God's kingdom, not merely a political or personal foe.
- He notes the importance of turning to God in times of distress. "The important point here is that it is sin when you're in distress, not to turn to God. That you either turn to God or you turn to something else. And that takes us back to Psalm 4, where it is a sin to depend upon anybody but God. It's a denial of faith."

1. Defining Imprecatory Psalms:

- Waltke clarifies that imprecatory psalms are not about personal revenge, but prayers for God to *avenge* wrongs and uphold justice by punishing the enemy. He emphasizes this important distinction, saying, "I wouldn't call them prayers for revenge. That's to judge their spirit. I believe I would rather say to avenge because the issue is justice and so to right the wrong, to avenge them. Justice demands that evil be paid back. I would rather define it that way."

- He notes that about 35 of the petition psalms include a call for punishment, in addition to requests for deliverance.

1. **The Central Problem: Old Testament Justice vs. New Testament Love**

- The primary tension Waltke addresses is how to reconcile the imprecatory psalms with Jesus' teaching to "turn the other cheek," love your enemies, and pray for persecutors.
- He emphasizes the distinction between the ethics of the church and the state, noting that the Old Testament lacked this distinction as the theocracy did not separate kingdom and state. "The ethics of the church and the state are very distinct. The ethics of the church is the cross where you die for your enemy. The ethics of the state is a sword, Romans chapter 12."

1. **Unacceptable Solutions to the Problem:**

- **Prophecy Interpretation:** Some interpret imprecatory prayers as *prophecies* rather than requests, translating "may God punish" as "God will punish." Waltke rejects this, stating "there are some forms that are clearly jussive...They are truly petitions wishing that God would do this and praying that God would do it."
- **Rejection:** Others believe these psalms are simply wrong, unchristian, or reflective of a less-than-holy spirit. Waltke strongly opposes this, citing theological continuity, the absence of scriptural censoring, and the presence of similar themes in other parts of the Old and New Testaments. He provides strong statements from Kittel, C.S. Lewis and others calling these psalms "devilish" or "mean-spirited," then says that he cannot take that position because it has a "bad doctrine of inspiration."
- **Direct Application:** Waltke rejects the idea that Christians should pray for God to directly punish enemies in the same way as the psalmists. He specifically cites an instance of Bob Jones University urging students to pray for God to smite an opposing politician as an example of an inappropriate way to directly apply imprecatory psalms. "That is unchristian to me... I reject that too. That to me is inconsistent with Jesus' teaching and it's inconsistent with the practice of Jesus."

1. **Waltke's Proposed Solution: Toward a Balanced Understanding**

- **Saints in Suffering:** The psalms are expressions of saints enduring gross injustices. We must understand their context of suffering before judging. "Few have experienced the agony of utterly unprovoked, naked aggression and gross exploitation. It is questionable whether such a detached discussion on responding to enemies would take place in the face of people with manifestly evil intentions."
- **Righteous and Just Prayers:** These are righteous pleas for God to uphold justice in a world that often fails to do so. Waltke quotes C.S. Lewis to highlight that the psalmist's anger is a righteous anger, not mere personal hatred, but moral indignation against evil.
- **New Testament Upholds God's Justice:** The New Testament affirms that God will ultimately bring about justice, citing both the Lord's Prayer and Jesus' Parable of the Unjust Judge as examples of God's eventual fulfillment of justice. Jesus does not censor these Psalms.
- **Faithful Prayers:** The prayers demonstrate faith by trusting in God for justice rather than taking matters into their own hands. Waltke notes that the psalmists do not avenge themselves. "These are prayers of faith. They are not avenging themselves. They are depending upon God to avenge them."
- **Ethical Prayers:** They are ethically valuable because they identify and condemn injustice. "They are edifying because they're ethical. They distinguish right from wrong."
- **Theocratic:** The prayers are theocratic in that the psalmist believes the "moral administrator of the universe" should administer justice.
- **Theocentric:** The prayers aim to see God praised for manifesting His righteousness and justice. They are "concerned for God's reputation."
- **Evangelistic:** They aim to witness to God's righteousness and see other nations converted because they see the God of Israel upholds justice.
- **Political:** They are political in that they hope the world will see Israel has a righteous God.
- **Covenantal:** The wrongs done to the saints are seen as wrongs against God.
- **Oriental:** Some of the prayers are figurative and perhaps hyperbolic, meaning they use exaggeration or figures of speech.

- **Conditional:** Importantly, the maledictions are conditional; if the enemy were to repent, the judgment would be lifted. Waltke uses Jeremiah 18 to illustrate this point, that “prophecy is always contingent upon a person’s response.”

1. **New Testament Application and Conclusion:**

- **Not for the Church:** While doctrinally sound, these prayers are not appropriate for the church in the New Testament age. "Prayer for justice apart from praying for forgiveness is inappropriate for the new Israel." He also explains Jesus stopping his reading of Isaiah 61 before the phrase “the day of vengeance of our God” to show that this is now “the day of God’s favor.”
- **Postponed Judgment:** He explains that judgment is postponed to the final day, and the church does not enact judgment now, trusting in God for the future. "We live within that understanding and that context of the day of God's favor."
- **Sin and Sinner:** We must clearly distinguish between sin and the sinner, desiring the salvation of the latter.
- **Spiritual Kingdom:** The kingdom comes spiritually, not carnally. We leave judgment to God.

1. **Application to Psalm 137**

- Waltke analyzes Psalm 137, particularly the verse about dashing Babylonian babies against rocks. He clarifies that the passion in the implication is zeal for God’s kingdom, not mere nationalism.
- He also mentions that the prayer was for strict justice in the context of oriental warfare.
- He notes that the prayer was also conditional. Just as Rahab, a Canaanite prostitute was saved because she repented, so the prayer would not be applicable if the Babylonians were to repent.
- Waltke insists that the law must be read in light of the entire narrative, using David and Bathsheba, and Achan as examples.

1. **Church and State**

- He addresses the distinction between church and state, particularly in response to the question of how a Christian president should respond to ISIS. Waltke says that the individual is “wearing two hats” and that while the church should pray

for the enemy's salvation, the state is responsible for "upholding righteousness with moral indignation and punish the enemy."

- He insists that "we bring [the kingdom] in with prayer and grace" instead of the sword.
- He does not believe that it is morally wrong for a Christian to use the sword as part of a political office.

Conclusion:

Dr. Waltke offers a nuanced and theologically grounded approach to the challenging issue of imprecatory psalms. He affirms their doctrinal soundness, highlighting their focus on God's justice, while also emphasizing that they are not directly applicable to the Christian in the same way due to the New Testament's emphasis on grace and forgiveness. His approach encourages both a recognition of the psalmists' righteous anger against injustice and a commitment to the New Testament's call to love and pray for even our enemies, trusting that God will ultimately bring about perfect justice.

4. Psalms Study Guide: Waltke, Psalms, Session 13, Imprecatory Psalms

The Imprecatory Psalms: A Study Guide

Short Answer Quiz

1. According to Waltke, what is the dominant type of Psalm?
 - The dominant type of Psalm is the petition or lament Psalm. These Psalms are not abnormal and are a part of spiritual maturation throughout one's life.
1. How does Waltke describe the enemy in the Psalms, and how does this relate to spiritual warfare?
 - Waltke argues the enemy in the Psalms is a spiritual enemy, opposed to God's kingdom. This means the Psalms are describing spiritual warfare, not just worldly conflicts.
1. According to Waltke, what is the major petition in the Psalms?
 - The major petition is for deliverance from a difficult situation, which is seen as a divine intervention. This deliverance is also a juridical concept, as God does it because it's right.
1. How does Waltke define imprecatory Psalms?
 - Waltke defines imprecatory Psalms as those in which the psalmist prays that God will avenge the wrongs done to him by punishing the enemy. He does not consider them prayers for revenge, but for justice.
1. Why does the Sermon on the Mount present a challenge for understanding imprecatory Psalms?
 - The Sermon on the Mount teaches turning the other cheek, loving enemies, and praying for persecutors, while the imprecatory Psalms seem to call for God to punish enemies, creating a tension.
1. What is Waltke's initial response to the idea that imprecatory Psalms are prophecies, not prayers?
 - Waltke rejects the idea that imprecatory Psalms are prophecies rather than prayers. He explains there are jussive forms in the text which demonstrate that they are indeed petitions and are not statements of fact.

1. What is Waltke's objection to the idea that the imprecatory Psalms are simply wrong or uninspired?
 - Waltke's objections are that it is theologically inconsistent, shows a bad doctrine of inspiration, and that the Psalms do not indicate that they were censored by the Spirit. He also argues it's part of the Holy War motif.
1. According to Waltke, how do the imprecatory Psalms reflect a high view of justice?
 - The imprecatory Psalms reflect a high view of justice because the psalmists believe that God is just and are morally indignant when justice is not enacted, seeking to have a topsy-turvy world made right by God.
1. According to Waltke, in what ways are the imprecatory prayers faithful?
 - The prayers are faithful because they are trusting God to avenge, not taking vengeance into their own hands, thus depending upon God as opposed to the self-avenger.
1. Why does Waltke conclude that the imprecatory Psalms are not appropriate for the Church in the New Testament era?
 - Waltke concludes these Psalms are not appropriate for the New Testament church because the time of vengeance is postponed to the final day of judgement, while the church is in the age of grace and salvation and should instead pray for the salvation of its enemies.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the tension between the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount and the imprecatory Psalms, and explore different ways that Christians have attempted to reconcile this tension.
2. Analyze Waltke's arguments for the theological value of imprecatory Psalms. How does he interpret them in light of God's character and the concept of justice?
3. Evaluate Waltke's claim that imprecatory Psalms are "profitable for doctrine" but "practically inappropriate for the church." How does he use the Isaiah 61/Luke 4 example to support this point?
4. How does Waltke use the example of Psalm 137 to explain the complexities of the imprecatory psalms? What specific points does he make that lead to a better understanding of these difficult verses?

5. Consider the ethical implications of applying the teachings of the imprecatory Psalms in modern contexts, particularly in relation to conflict and social justice. How can they be approached responsibly?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Imprecatory Psalms:** Psalms in which the psalmist prays for God to avenge wrongs by punishing the enemy.
- **Petition Psalms:** Psalms that express a request or plea to God, often in times of distress or need.
- **Lament Psalms:** Psalms that express grief, sorrow, and complaint to God, typically in response to suffering or hardship.
- **Jussive:** A grammatical form that expresses a wish, command, or exhortation.
- **Theocratic State:** A state or nation where God is recognized as the supreme ruler, and his laws are the foundation of the political system.
- **Moral Indignation:** Righteous anger or outrage at what is perceived to be wrong or unjust.
- **Retribution:** Punishment or recompense for wrongdoing.
- **Holy War:** A concept in the Old Testament where God commanded the destruction of Israel's enemies.
- **Theocentric:** Focused on God as the center and most important aspect of existence.
- **Covenantal:** Relating to a covenant or agreement.
- **Malediction:** A curse or invocation of evil or harm.
- **Hyperbolic:** Exaggerated or extreme language used for emphasis.
- **Dialectical Tension:** A situation involving two opposing ideas, creating a dynamic relationship where both ideas are considered.
- **Sanctified:** Set apart as holy, consecrated for a sacred purpose.
- **Prophecy (in this context):** A message from God, but understood as conditional in that it can change in accordance with people's behavior.

5. FAQ on Themes from Dr. Bruce Waltke's Psalms Lecture

FAQ on Imprecatory Psalms

- **What are imprecatory psalms and how do they differ from other petition psalms?** Imprecatory psalms are a subset of petition psalms where the psalmist not only asks God for deliverance from their distress, but also prays for God to avenge the wrongs done to them by punishing their enemies. While most petition psalms focus on asking for help or rescue, imprecatory psalms specifically ask for the punishment or downfall of the wrongdoers.
- **Why do imprecatory psalms pose a challenge for Christians, especially in light of the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount?** The Sermon on the Mount teaches Christians to love their enemies, to turn the other cheek, and to pray for those who persecute them. This contrasts sharply with the imprecatory psalms, where the psalmists seem to call for God's judgment, wrath and destruction on their enemies. This tension raises questions about whether it's appropriate for Christians to pray for harm to come to their enemies.
- **Are imprecatory psalms simply expressions of unholy anger or a desire for personal revenge?** No, these prayers are not primarily about personal vengeance. They are expressions of a deep sense of injustice and a desire for God to uphold righteousness in a world where the civil courts or authorities may not be acting justly. The psalmists, often suffering gross injustices, turn to God as the ultimate source of justice, expressing faith that God will correct wrongs and vindicate the righteous. They are not taking matters into their own hands.
- **Are imprecatory psalms prophecies of doom or are they conditional petitions?** Imprecatory prayers should be seen as conditional petitions, not simply as prophecies. The prayers for judgement are contingent on the unrepentant nature of the enemy. If the enemies were to repent, the psalmist would not want God to punish them. The overall theme is justice but mercy is always available.
- **How do the imprecatory psalms relate to the concept of the 'Holy War' motif in the Old Testament?** These prayers are consistent with the Old Testament concept of 'Holy War,' where God would command His people to destroy enemies as a means of establishing righteousness and justice. They reflect a time when the nation of Israel was a theocratic state, where religious and political dimensions were intertwined. The psalmist seeks to have his oppressor punished for the harm done to him and by extension to God.

- **How can Christians today approach imprecatory psalms in a way that is consistent with New Testament teaching?** Christians can appreciate the psalmist's longing for justice and affirm that God will ultimately bring about justice. However, they are not called to mimic these prayers of judgment, rather to pray for the salvation of their enemies, mirroring Jesus's teaching and example. Christians should hold both justice and mercy in dialectical tension, and recognize the church's role in spiritual warfare, not temporal violence. The judgement is to be left in the hands of God.
- **How do imprecatory psalms relate to the distinction between the ethics of the church and the ethics of the state?** The ethics of the church, as taught by Jesus, emphasize love, forgiveness, and non-resistance. The ethics of the state, on the other hand, are concerned with upholding justice and using the sword to punish evildoers. This distinction is significant for Christians, who should respond to persecution with love and prayer as individuals, while supporting the state's role in maintaining order and justice.
- **What does the omission of "the day of vengeance of our God" in Jesus' reading of Isaiah 61 in Luke 4 signify in relation to imprecatory psalms?** Jesus's deliberate omission emphasizes that his first coming was focused on bringing salvation and grace, "the year of the Lord's favor," not vengeance. It signifies the postponement of God's final judgment until the end times. This shows that while justice is an important theme in scripture, the priority for Christians in this age is to share the good news of salvation and to love their enemies while trusting in God's ultimate judgment.