

When A Prayer Gets Serious

A reading of the book of Psalms in the Old Testament isn't exactly a light-hearted affair. While some offer encouragement, others seek revenge and harm to those who have wronged God's people. There is an entire genre of Psalms called the Imprecatory Psalms where Psalms curse or pray for physical punishment for others belong. Verses such as Psalm 55:15 that state, "Let death take my enemies by surprise; let them go down alive to the grave" and "O God, break the teeth in their mouths" (Psalm 58:6) remind us that the Bible is not all rainbows and forgiveness.

That being said, many view such words as phrases uttered in a time gone by, not necessarily appropriate for our modern society. There is one man, however, that might not agree with that statement. Gordon Klingenschmitt is a former Navy chaplain. At the time of his chaplaincy he incited imprecatory harm against the agnostic Jewish founder of Military Religious Freedom Foundation, Mikey Weinstein. Klingenschmitt was witnessed praying intense imprecatory prayers against Weinstein and his family and even posted the prayers on his blog. The prayers specifically focused around Psalm 109 where the Psalmist is asking God to kill his enemy and curse his children and widow.

Weinstein's organization is seeking to rid the military of religious influence. Weinstein sued Klingenschmitt claiming that his comments have threatened the lives of himself and his children, encouraging others to act violently against his family. He has had swastikas painted on his house, bullets fired at his home and dead bodies of animals have been thrown onto his doorstep. The judge ruled against Weinstein stating that as long as his family is not directly threatened or harmed by Klingenschmitt, then no laws have been broken. "We are disappointed in the ruling because we believe the judge made a mistake in not understanding that imprecatory prayers are code words for trolling for assassins for the Weinstein family," spoke Weinstein.

As might be expected, Klingenschmitt could not be happier with the ruling. He considers it a triumph of religious freedom. The Rutherford Institute is a legal advocacy group that represented Klingenschmitt. They said the following of the case, "Thankfully, the district court recognized that if people are forced to stop offering imprecatory prayers, half the churches, synagogues and mosques in this country will have to be shut down." Weinstein is planning on filing an appeal but, for now, Klingenschmitt is off the hook and free to rain down prayers of death and destruction on his enemies.

Discussion Questions:

What do you think of imprecatory prayers? Should Christians still use them today?

Would you pray an imprecatory prayer against someone else? Why or why not?

Do you think such prayers offer a good testimony to others? Why or why not?