

PSALLO

Psalm 109:1-10

A new translation of any Psalm to be sung presents not a few challenges, the two foremost being its faithfulness to the Hebrew text, and placing the translation in a metrical form that lends itself to singing in English. In this new translation, I have attempted to preserve the meaning and sense of the original, although perhaps taking some license with the Hebrew meter itself to render it able to be sung according to English conventions of rhyme more typical of our singing.

As for the translation itself, a few notes are in order. First, where many translations render the first line, “Hold not thy peace” (KJV) or “Do not be silent” (NASB), I have rendered the Hebrew verb שָׁרַח, *charash*, *to be deaf*, as “be not deaf” and then the implied “to me” in italics, because this better renders the sense of the Hebrew. When in his straits the Psalmist cries out to God, he desires a hearing, rather than, as we say in English, that the Lord would turn a deaf ear to him. The Psalmist understands that if God will not hear, He will not respond or rescue him out of his trial.

Another point worthy of mention is the use of the proper name “Satan” in verse six. This translation is maintained by the KJV, and is supported by the personal use of this same Hebrew name in 1 Chronicles 21.1, and Zechariah 3.1. This translation is also preferred by Keil and Delitzsch in their commentary on the Psalms, who see in this passage a courtroom scene, with the accuser, Satan himself, standing at the persecutor’s right hand.

As for the tune, while tunes are not inspired, and thus not preserved for us in the Divine record, still, Christian prudence (WCF 1.6) would have us order the tune in a way consonant with the matter of the Psalm itself. So, a Psalm with a triumphant theme, such as Psalm 46, ought to be sung to a triumphant tune. So here, with such a plea for help in trouble, and solemn imprecations as these, we ought to have a tune that is somber, plaintive, and has some expression of the gravity of leveling such curses.

This brings us to the content of Psalm 109. My suspicion is that this Psalm, along with other Psalms of imprecation, are often avoided by Churches for inclusion in their worship repertoire. I believe this stems from a lack of understanding of what these Psalms are to teach, and what this understanding ought to engender in us. In Psalm 109, we have imprecations,

strong cursings, leveled at the enemy of the Lord’s anointed. At the time of writing, this was David, and the opposer, probably Ahithophel, during the time of Absalom’s rebellion. And we learn in the New Testament (Acts 1), that these imprecations are leveled, by the Spirit of prophecy, at Judas, the betrayer of the Lord. The imprecations are not the vindictive cursings of one who has been misused. The Apostle Paul wrote, “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness...” (2Tim. 3.16 KJV). The words of the Psalter ought to be understood then, not as the expressions of an angry author, or fulminations of a firebrand, but as the sentiments of God Himself, the thoughts of the Psalmist being raised by that powerful Spirit of prophecy, above mere human vendetta and cursing. The expressions of the Psalmist against sinners are *God’s* expressions. They are the thoughts of *His* heart. The expressed hatred of the wicked, upon those who obey not God, ravage His people, terrorize His little ones, pursue and kill His Anointed, set so eloquently, solemnly, and awesomely in the Psalter, is the expression of *God’s* hatred of the wicked, the exposition of His great heart, who is unyielding in His pursuit of evil doers, and equally unyielding in the defense of His people, who are their prey.

Also, rather than primitive Old Testament expressions, we see that the New as well contains not only a vindication of these very Psalms, citing them as prophetic and indicative of events in the New Testament era, but also imprecations of its own. The imprecations of the Lord Jesus Christ are withering in the twenty third chapter of Matthew’s Gospel, against the “Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!” John the Baptist himself spoke against them as a “brood of vipers.” The Apostle Paul inveighed against Alexander the coppersmith (2Tim. 2.14), Hymenaeus and Alexander (1Tim. 1.20 cp. Psal. 109.6), all those who would pervert the Gospel of Christ (Galatians 1.8-9; 5.12), and against those who love not the Lord Jesus Christ (1Cor. 16.22). And the Apostle John also expressed the same sort of cursing and imprecation for God’s enemies in the Revelation, his inspired exposition of the final triumph of God’s decree of redemption, which is replete with imprecations against the wicked, and the rejoicing of heaven and the redeemed upon earth at their demise. Chapters 14-20 announce that the awesome judgments of God upon the wicked are not something at which we ought to mourn, but rejoice! God’s enemies and ours are crushed—and their demise is our salvation! We bless God with the rest of the saints on earth, and with the Church triumphant in heaven, and with the Holy Angels, at their demise. We, with the rest of the saints, pray for their end, *and in the words of the inspired Psalter we make these same prayers in song.*

TODD L. RUDELL ■

Psalm 109:1-10

To the chief Musician, A Psalm of David

Malediction

Todd L. Ruddell

¹O my God, O my praise, be not deaf to me
³Fierce - ly they, cast their words, words of hate - ful spite
⁴For my love, they've be - come en - e - mies to me!
⁶Up - on him, vis - it thou, with a wick - ed one
⁸Few his days, let them be, and an - oth - er take,
¹⁰Wan - der - ing, in - di - gents, be his child - ren so!

²for wick - ed and de - ceit - ful mouths are o - pened a - gainst me,
 their words en - comp - ass me a - bout and they a - gainst me fight,
 But I *de - vote* my - self to prayer⁵still e - vil for good they,
 let Sa - tan stand at his right hand,⁷con - demned let him be shunned
 his of - fice—⁹let his child - ren sigh from them their fa - ther take,
 Far from their des - o - late es - tates let them a - beg - ging go,

to me with ly - ing tongues they speak.
 ar - rayed a - gainst me with - out right.
 hate for my love re - turn to me.
 his pray - er let it sin be - come.
 and of his wife a wid - ow make.
 seek - ing while wan - d'ring to and fro'.