

WEEKLY SERMON

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How Long, O Lord?

How do we respond to the evil that was unleashed by Hamas terrorists on people in Israel? Each subsequent day brings more and more distressing details of hundreds of victims murdered and others taken captive and held hostage.

At the same time the devastating impact of the atrocity on the victims' families is repeatedly brought home to us in the news.

And having sown the wind, the terrorists must have known that the people of Gaza would reap the whirlwind of Israel's inevitable response; but they don't seem to care about that.

And so, alongside the suffering caused by the initial attack, we now also have numerous heart-breaking stories of the awful plight of the residents of Gaza as the crisis continues.

How do we respond?

There's a simple prayer that appears on several occasions in the Bible, and especially in the Psalms: "How long, O Lord?" (for example, see Psalms 6:3; 13:1-2; 79:5)

It's a prayer that King David seemed to pray whenever he went through a time of personal trial, but there's no reason why we shouldn't pray it when the world is going through an awful episode like recent days.

The beauty of the psalm is that in just a few words it expresses both anguish and hope.

As we are confronted with compelling evidence that this world is not as it should be, the prayer encourages us to take our feelings of disappointment and frustration to God and tell him that we want the evil to stop: "How long, O Lord?"

It's clear that David wasn't slow to complain to God when he went through a time of turmoil and the fact that his words have found their way into our Bibles gives us permission to do the same.

But entwined with anguish, the prayer also contains hope. There's a conviction that the awful suffering of this world won't go on for ever and it's only God who can bring it to an end.

As Christians we believe that God has set a time limit for wickedness and it's good for us to remember that as we pray. There will be a day of judgement. Through Christ "we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells." (2 Peter 3:13)

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