Vengeance Is Mine, Saith the Lord

Its Biblical Meaning and Fulfilment in Christ

The passage in 2 Thessalonians 1:6–9 connects the Old Testament declaration, "Vengeance is mine; I will repay," with the judgment exercised by the Lord Jesus Christ when He is revealed from heaven.

1. God's declaration concerning vengeance

Deuteronomy 32:35 (KJV)

> *To me belongeth vengeance, and recompence; their foot shall slide in due time: for the day of their calamity is at hand, and the things that shall come upon them make haste.*

God declares that vengeance belongs to Him. He is the righteous Judge who will recompense evil according to His perfect knowledge and justice.

2. The Christian is forbidden to take personal vengeance

Romans 12:19 (KJV)

> *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

Paul teaches believers not to seek personal revenge against those who have wronged them. Instead, they must leave judgment in the hands of God. This does not mean that evil will escape punishment. Rather, God reserves the ultimate execution of righteous vengeance to Himself.

3. The Lord Jesus Christ revealed from heaven, taking vengeance

2 Thessalonians 1:6–9 (KJV)

> *6 Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;*

7 And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

8 In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

9 Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

This passage establishes several important truths.

First, divine vengeance is righteous. Paul declares that it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to those who trouble His people. God's vengeance is not an uncontrolled expression of anger but an exercise of His perfect justice.

Second, Christ Himself is the executor of divine judgment. The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, taking vengeance upon those who know not God and obey not His gospel.

Third, the revelation of Christ brings both rest and judgment. To the afflicted believers, Paul promises rest. To those identified as opposing God and His gospel, he announces punishment.

Fourth, the punishment is described as everlasting destruction. Paul speaks of punishment from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. The precise nature of this everlasting destruction has been interpreted differently among Christian theologians, but the passage plainly presents it as a solemn act of divine judgment.

4. David recognised that vengeance belonged to God

1 Samuel 24:12 (KJV)

The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.

David refused to take vengeance against Saul, despite having the opportunity to kill him. His words illustrate the distinction between personal retaliation and trusting God to exercise righteous judgment.

Psalm 94:1–2 (KJV)

O LORD God, to whom vengeance belongeth; O God, to whom vengeance belongeth, shew thyself.

Lift up thyself, thou judge of the earth: render a reward to the proud.

The psalmist appeals to God as the Judge of the earth, recognising that vengeance is His prerogative.

5. Christ is appointed to execute judgment

John 5:22 (KJV)

For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son:

Acts 17:31 (KJV)

Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

These passages establish that God has appointed Jesus Christ to exercise judgment. The vengeance described in 2 Thessalonians is therefore not independent of God's judgment but an expression of the judicial authority committed to His Son.

6. The distinction between personal vengeance and divine judgment

The Scriptures present two complementary truths. The Christian is commanded to love his enemies, refuse personal revenge, and overcome evil with good (Romans 12:19–21). Nevertheless, God remains the righteous Judge, who will deal with evil and vindicate His people.

These teachings are not contradictory. The believer is forbidden to seize for himself the judicial authority that belongs to God. The command to refrain from personal vengeance rests upon the assurance that divine justice will not ultimately fail.

Conclusion

When God declares, "*Vengeance is mine; I will repay,*" He reserves to Himself the right to judge and recompense evil.

This truth is proclaimed in Deuteronomy, acknowledged by David, reaffirmed by Paul in Romans, and explicitly connected with the revelation of Jesus Christ in 2 Thessalonians.

In that passage, Paul comforts persecuted believers by assuring them that God will recompense their persecutors and grant rest to those who are troubled.

The Lord Jesus Christ is presented not only as the Saviour of His people but also as the righteous Judge who executes divine vengeance.

The central principle is therefore this: Christians are commanded not to avenge themselves, because judgment belongs to God, who has committed its execution to His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

An important question concerning the timing of this judgment
There is also a significant matter of biblical interpretation worth considering, particularly in relation to the dating of the New Testament and the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70.

2 Thessalonians 1:7 (KJV)

> *And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,*

Paul addresses actual first-century Christians who were suffering persecution and connects their promised relief with the revelation of Jesus Christ.

This raises a historical and exegetical question: Was Paul referring to a judgment that would take place within the lifetime of those Thessalonian believers, or to the final judgment at the end of history?

Interpreters who understand the passage in relation **to the events surrounding AD 70 emphasise its immediate pastoral relevance to the first-century persecuted church**. Those who understand it as referring to the future final judgment emphasise the universal and everlasting character of the punishment described. I take it to relate to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD and warning to all who look back that God does take vengeance.

The text deserves examination in its immediate context, particularly alongside 2 Thessalonians 2, before deciding between these interpretations.

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