

# Imprecatory Psalms

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OT 613 – Psalms (2 credits)

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- I. **Definition:** Prayers for the defeat and divine judgment of the wicked. (Key examples include Psalms 35, 69, 109, and 137.)
- II. **Problem:** These prayers seemingly contradict the Christian standard of loving enemies. Many appeal to Matt. 5:43 to support this claim. Note that in this passage Christ is condemning the anti-biblical tradition of intertestamental Judaism (evidenced, for instance, in the sectarian literature from Qumran). The teaching of the Old Testament demanded love for personal enemies, just as the New Testament (see Ex. 23:4, 5 and Lev. 19:17, 18).
- III. **Nature of Imprecatory Psalms**
  - A. The prayers are just as much inspired by the Holy Spirit as any other Psalm. (They are, therefore, divinely given patterns to follow.)
  - B. The prayers are not merely emotional outbursts but carefully written revelation. (Note that these prayers occur throughout the Scriptures. See Jer. 15:15; 17:18; 18:21-23; Neh. 6:14; 13:29; Gal. 1:8, 9; 5:12; 2 Tim. 4:14; Rev. 6:10, etc.)
  - C. The prayers are addressed to God in good conscience.
- IV. **Aspects of Imprecatory Prayers**
  - A. They often contain poetic statements that must be interpreted figuratively (Ps. 68:21, 23).
  - B. They reflect an abhorrence of sin (Ps. 5:5; 139:21; note that “hating” in these contexts involves rejection rather than emotional aversion).
  - C. They place vengeance into God’s hands (Ps. 37:8, 9; 104:34, 35; 109:31; cf. Dt. 32:35; Rom. 12:19).
  - D. They are concerned with God’s glory not personal vindication (Ps. 52:6; 69:7; 109:3, 21).
  - E. They reveal God’s attitude toward sin and therefore stand as warnings to sinners (Ps. 145:20).
  - F. Many are prophetic of Christ (cp. Ps. 69:25 and 109:8 with Acts 1:20; Ps. 69:4 with John 15:25; Ps. 69:9 with John 2:17 and Rom. 15:3).