

IMPRECATORY PRAYING: IS INVOKING A CURSE A VALID PART OF PRAYER?

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The Psalms are rich in imagery, soothing in time of trouble, and reassuring of God's presence and power. Nevertheless, some of the Psalms, like 69:22-28, depict King David invoking what amounts to curses on certain ungodly people. Psalms of this nature are called *Imprecatory Psalms* because to imprecate is to invoke a curse or evil upon someone. So what happened to soothing reassurance? What do we do with these verses? Was David inspired to write what he wrote? Should these Psalms be taken descriptively or prescriptively, meaning are they simply describing something, like how David felt, or prescribing for readers to go and pray or do likewise? Answers to these questions are quite detailed but should be wrestled with.

First, there is soothing reassurance in the fact that God forgives sin when faith is coupled with repentance, but the indescribable horrors of God's judgment await the unrepentant. Second, we must regard these verses as inspired just as much as Paul's letters, and the entire Bible for that matter. Third, whatever David recorded was inspired by the Holy Spirit, including glimpses of his humanity, so his imprecatory prayers were also inspired. Thus, these Psalms must be taken both descriptively, describing actual events and feelings, and

prescriptively, prescribing readers to pray accordingly, because the very nature of The Psalms is didactic. God inspired writers to take truths, events, and doctrines and put them to music in order to aid memorization and facilitate impartation of great facts. The Psalms were to teach, and anything designed to teach is designed to prescribe. To say that the imprecatory Psalms only express *David's* feelings or words is to step onto the slippery subjective slope of distinguishing the words of *men* from the words of *God* in Scripture. What is to keep one from doing the same with John, Paul, Peter, James, or with any "offensive" passage? The answer is not to step onto the slope at all and not to view the Bible as simply *containing* the word of God but as *being* the word of God. Therefore, we must regard these Psalms as inspired and prescriptive as well as descriptive; descriptive when reporting historical events and prescriptive when teaching doctrines, prayers, and the like.

Further, we must realize that there are situations, even today, when Christians may rightfully and scripturally invoke the judgment of the Lord on ungodliness as David did in Ps. 54:5. We may not necessarily pray for the ungodly to be stricken with blindness or palsy, like David requested in Ps. 69:23, but we may rightly ask for God's justice to reign and his vengeance to be swift concerning terrorism, murder, rape, wanton disregard for

moral holiness, and other monstrous crimes against God and man. Paul certainly did in 1 Cor. 16:22 by invoking a curse upon those not loving the Lord Jesus and in Gal. 1:8 by anathematizing any who preached another gospel contrary to the one he and his companions proclaimed. To Paul, these were crimes worthy of calling down a curse upon the perpetrators. In short, our imprecatory prayers may not be as specific or as severe as David's or Paul's, but imprecatory prayers are as biblically valid today as in yesteryear.