

The Imprecatory (Vengeance) Psalms (The “Cursing” Psalms)

Psalm 3:8	Psalm 58:8-12
Psalm 5:11	Psalm 63:10-12
Psalm 6:10	Psalm 64:8-10
Psalm 17:14-16	Psalm 69:23-29
Psalm 28:4f	Psalm 71:13
Psalm 31:8f	Psalm 79:6, 12
Psalm 35:24-26	Psalm 83:10-19
Psalm 37:2, 9-10, 15, 20, 35f	Psalm 129:5-8
Psalm 40:15f	Psalm 139:19-22
Psalm 54:7	Psalm 140:10
Psalm 55:10, 16, 24	Psalm 143:12

These songs are filled with curses and calls for vengeance, sometimes expressing a cruelty that is disconcerting. We ought not be astonished by such language. The Psalms date from a time when the Gospel was not yet known; when placed on the lips of those being persecuted, they voice an urgent appeal for divine justice.

On the other hand, these vengeance psalms have a deeper meaning: At one time, they struck out against the enemies of the Chosen People, the “heathen,” that is, the enemies of God; today they give voice to a different hatred, that which Christians ought to have for the evil that Jesus intended to destroy by His Death and against which St. Paul the Apostle exhorts us to fight (Ephesians 6:11-13).