

Psalm 79

A Psalm of Asaph.

Psalm 79: A companion poem to (Psalm 74), this psalm laments the destruction of Jerusalem at the time of the Babylonian captivity. The psalm has two distinct parts: expression of the lament to God (verses 1-5), and petition to God for deliverance of His people and retribution on their enemies (verses 6-13). Three motives for God to act are cited: the misery God's people are experiencing (verses 1-4), the "tender mercies" of God Himself (verse 8), and the humiliation brought to His name (verse 10). Unlike (Psalm 137), which seems to have been written during the Captivity, this psalm was apparently written by eyewitnesses of the desolation of Jerusalem.

Verses 1-13: The historical basis for this lament psalm was probably Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of the temple in 586 B.C. (compare Psalm 74; 2 Kings 25:8-21; Lam. Chapters 1 to 5). The psalm contains prayer for the nation's spiritual needs, curses against the enemies of God's people, and praises in anticipation of God's actions. The psalm helps the believer express his anguish in a disaster when it seems as though God is aloof.

- I. The Lamentation Over the National Disaster (79:1-4).
- II. The Supplication for Divine Intervention (79:5-13).
 - A. The Prayer for Vindication (79:5-7);
 - B. The Prayer for Forgiveness (79:8-9);
 - C. The Prayer for Reprisal (79:10-12);
 - D. The Praise for Response (79:13).

Verses 1-5: God is complained to: whither should children go but to a Father able and willing to help them? See what a change sin made in the holy city, when the heathen was suffered to pour in upon them. God's own people defiled it by their sins, therefore he suffered their enemies to defile it by their insolence. They desired that God would be reconciled. Those who desire God's favor as better than life, cannot but dread his wrath as worse than death. In every affliction, we should first beseech the Lord to cleanse away the guilt of our sins; then he will visit us with his tender mercies.

After a severe blow, the sacking of the "temple", the people asked not why but "how long" they must suffer. The question serves as a transition from lament (79:1-4), to prayer (79:6-9).

Psalm 79:1 "O God, the heathen are come into thine inheritance; thy holy temple have they defiled; they have laid Jerusalem on heaps."

"The heathen": In this context, the word refers to heathen, pagan people.

"Inheritance": The inheritance of God was national Israel, and specifically its capital city, Jerusalem, where the temple was located.

As we get into this study on the 79th chapter of Psalms, I would like you to consider that there could be 3 messages in this chapter. There was a destruction in the time of Asaph, there was a destruction 70 years after Jesus, and there will be a destruction at the end of the age. Please do not judge me too harshly for seeing this. I am not trying to force this, but ask that you would consider it.

Asaph speaks for all of us when he cries out against the destruction of God's hallowed place. It is a terrible thing for the enemy to destroy our home, but to destroy our place of worship is unspeakable. Destruction comes in so many ways. Sometimes the buildings are torn down, burned or looted. Another, just as devastating that actually took place in our lifetime, was when churches all over the world were closed and communism became the state religion. Some of the old saints had to look at the buildings every day, and yet were not allowed to go inside and worship. The most recent is the destruction of God's house from within. The church is being used for everything. The holiness of the place of worship is being lost. Even though this is a subtler approach, it is just as devastating.

Psalm 79:2 "The dead bodies of thy servants have they given [to be] meat unto the fowls of the heaven, the flesh of thy saints unto the beasts of the earth."

They have slain them, and left them unburied (see 2 Chron. 36:17). This is a description of widespread carnage and slaughter, such as we know occurred at the time when Jerusalem was taken by the Chaldeans. At such a time, it is not probable that the Chaldeans would pause to bury the slain, nor is it probable that they would give opportunity to the captive Hebrews to remain to bury them. That would occur, therefore, which often occurs in war, that the slain would be left on the field to be devoured by wild animals and by the fowls of heaven.

"Have they given to be meat to the fowls": By casting them out, like dung upon the earth, and not suffering any to bury them. This is the fourth of those calamities which are bewailed in this Psalm: and a dreadful one it is. For "to behold, or even imagine," as Dr. Horne observes, "the heaps of slaughtered bodies lying unburied. And exposed to birds and beasts of prey, is inexpressibly shocking to humanity."

"The flesh of thy saints": Have they cast out, and their blood have they shed round about Jerusalem, and there was none to bury them".

In the days of Asaph, the bodies of the dead were left on the field of battle for every fowl of prey. It was a similar destruction when the Romans came in and destroyed the temple and the people as well. The beasts of this world are not satisfied, they even now are in the church trying to devour God's children. The saints of the church today are being attacked and left for dead. The enemy is the same. Old Satan is at the bottom of all three.

Psalm 79:3 "Their blood have they shed like water round about Jerusalem; and [there was] none to bury [them]."

They have poured it out in such quantities that it seems to flow like water, not an uncommon occurrence in war. There was no event in the history of the Hebrews to which this description would be more applicable than to the Babylonian invasion.

"And there was none to bury them": The Chaldeans would not do it, and they would not suffer the Hebrew people to do it.

The enemy came and destroyed these people, as if they were nothing. They watched their blood flowing from them, just as if they had poured out water. Someone else's life meant nothing to them.

Psalm 79:4 "We are become a reproach to our neighbors, a scorn and derision to them that are round about us."

That is, those that remained. So the Jews were to the Edomites, especially at the time of the Babylonish captivity (Psalm 137:7).

"A scorn and derision to them that are round about us": As the Christians in all ages have been to the men of the world, and especially will be insulted and triumphed over when the witnesses are slain (Rev 11:10).

The Israelites had always been respected before this. They had no problem with the people around them, because the people feared their God. Now there is a different story. They feel that they do not have to fight Israel's God, just Israel. This was true in Asaph's time and also, at the battle between Rome and Jerusalem. I really believe there is a prophetic message for our age as well. The atheists have come out of the closet now. If you are a serious Christian, you are generally ridiculed by your neighbors and (friends). It seems they would do anything they could to get you stopped. You are labeled as a fanatic, and they avoid you if they can. Even those church people around you look at you out of the corner of their eye, and many times say, he has gone off the deep end.

Psalm 79:5 "How long, LORD? wilt thou be angry for ever? Shall thy jealousy burn like fire?"

That is, how long wilt thou be angry? Shall it be for ever (see Psalm 85:4)? For though what was done, or to be done, as before related, was or will be done by the enemies of the Lord's people, yet by his permission, and as a token of his anger and displeasure against them? At least it might be so understood, both by them and by their enemies; and hence this expostulation.

"Shall thy jealousy burn like fire?" So jealousy does; its coals are coals of fire (SOS 8:6). There were, at the times referred to, such among the people, who did evil things, and provoked the Lord to jealousy and wrath.

The two times that the place of worship in Jerusalem was destroyed was possibly because God allowed it to happen. We know that Asaph is speaking of God being angry, because the people had mixed idolatry up with worship of God. I believe that God allowed the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem after the resurrection of Jesus, because the Jewish believers would not stop sacrificing in the temple. To sacrifice after Jesus died on the cross, would be to say that His sacrifice was not sufficient to wash away the sin of the whole world for all time. They were treating His sacrifice as if it had been no more than the sacrifice of a natural lamb. You can see why this is in error, and you can see why God allowed the destruction of the temple then. Now to look at the church today. What have we come to? Are the services we conduct pleasing unto

God, or are they pleasing unto man? Perhaps, God is allowing the falling away now to make us realize that His house is holy. Remember, judgement begins at the house of God. Just as the temple was built after Asaph's day again, perhaps God will allow us to rebuild the church now, based on holiness and righteousness.

Verses 6-13: Those who persist in ignorance of God, and neglect of prayer, are the ungodly. How unrighteous whatsoever men were, the Lord was righteous in permitting them to do what they did. Deliverances from trouble are mercies indeed, when grounded upon the pardon of sin. We should therefore be more earnest in prayer for the removal of our sins than for the removal of afflictions. They had no hopes but from God's mercies, his tender mercies. They plead no merit, they pretend to none, but, help us for the glory of thy name; pardon us for thy name's sake. The Christian forgets not that he is often bound in the chain of his sins. The world to him is a prison; sentence of death is passed upon him, and he knows not how soon it may be executed. How fervently should he at all times pray, O let the sighing of a prisoner come before thee, according to the greatness of thy power and preserve those that are appointed to die! How glorious will the day be, when, triumphant over sin and sorrow, the church beholds the adversary disarmed forever! While that church shall, from age to age, sing the praises of her great Shepherd, her King and her God.

Verses 6-9: The psalmist prays for divine vindication for his people, not in a spirit of vengeance but justice (Jer. 10:25). Without any regard for God, the heathen had desecrated God's land and left His people desperate (53:4).

Psalm 79:6 "Pour out thy wrath upon the heathen that have not known thee, and upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name."

Who had poured out the blood of the saints like water, and therefore it was a righteous thing with God to pour out the cup of wrath in his hands, and cause them to drink the dregs of it. These words, though they are in the form of an imprecation, yet regard not private revenge, but public justice, and the honor of God. And besides, may be considered as a prophecy of what would be, and particularly of God's pouring out the vials of his wrath on the antichristian states. Who, though they profess Christianity, are no other than Heathens, and have no spiritual and serious knowledge of Christ.

"And upon the kingdoms that have not called upon thy name": But upon their idols of gold, silver, brass, and stone, on the Virgin Mary, angels, and saints departed. For these, besides the kingdoms of Babylon, Syria, and Rome Pagan, are the kingdoms of the ten kings, that gave their kingdoms to the beast, and committed fornication. I.e. idolatry, with the whore of Rome (see Rev. 17:2). These words are referred to in (Jer. 10:25), and also the following.

The wrath of God is reserved for those who are not His children.

Ephesians 5:6 "Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

Those who have called upon His name, then or now, are God's children.

Psalm 79:7 "For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his dwelling place."

Literally, "They have eaten." That is, they have eaten up what the land produced.

"And laid waste his dwelling-place": His home; his habitation; the residence of Jacob, or of the people of Israel.

1 Peter 5:8 "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"

God protected Daniel in the lion's den, and He will protect us, if we are as faithful as Daniel was. The holy city, Jerusalem, was destroyed twice. The spiritual holy city is the church, are we going to stand idly by and let Satan destroy the church?

Psalm 79:8 "O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low."

The sins committed by our forefathers, and by us, who have filled up the measure of their sins. For which we confess thou hast most righteously brought this desolating judgment upon us.

"Let thy tender mercies": Upon which all our confidence is fixed; for merit and righteousness we have none (see Dan. 9:7, 9).

"Speedily prevent us": Prevent our utter extirpation, which we have deserved, and have great reason to expect.

"For we are brought very low": Past the hopes of all human help, and therefore the glory of our deliverance will be wholly thine.

This is a prayer for God to forgive and start them all over again. We need to try that same prayer. Hurry and help us Lord, for our nation and our world have sinned against you. Be merciful once again, and save us.

Psalm 79:9 "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of thy name: and deliver us, and purge away our sins, for thy name's sake."

"Purge" (see Psalm 65:3).

"For thy name's sake": A defeat of a nation was believed to be a defeat of its god. A mark of spiritual maturity is one's concern for the reputation of God.

Who is the God of our salvation? It is Jesus Christ our Lord. What a prayer this is! We cannot help ourselves Lord, you help us and glorify Thy name in the doing. We see in the Scripture above an earnest prayer for God to intervene in our behalf. This next Scripture shows what we must do for that to happen.

2 Chronicles 7:14 "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land."

Psalm 79:10 "Wherefore should the heathen say, Where [is] their God? let him be known among the heathen in our sight [by] the revenging of the blood of thy servants [which is] shed."

“Where is their God”: The heathen were mocking Israel’s God by saying that the destruction of the nation implied that its God was nonexistent.

You have said Lord, in:

Romans 12:19 "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but [rather] give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance [is] mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

The world even now, is making fun of Christianity. They do not see the power of our God in action. Show them God, who you are; God Almighty.

Psalm 79:11 "Let the sighing of the prisoner come before thee; according to the greatness of thy power preserve thou those that are appointed to die;"

“Appointed to die”: A prayer for the preservation of the prisoners awaiting execution in the enemy’s dungeon.

Jesus not only destroyed sin on the cross, but he destroyed the sting of death when He arose from the grave. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were saved in the fiery furnace. Daniel was saved in the Lion’s den. Save us as you did them, O Lord.

Psalm 79:12 "And render unto our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom their reproach, wherewith they have reproached thee, O Lord."

“Sevenfold into their bosom”: A petition that God would restore His reputation by bringing a destruction of the enemies much worse than what had happened to Israel.

They denied your existence even though they were told over and over. They refused the very Son of God as their Savior. Seven means spiritually complete. God, your punishment for them will be perfect and complete. I leave them to you.

Psalm 79:13 "So we thy people and sheep of thy pasture will give thee thanks for ever: we will show forth thy praise to all generations."

Who were the people of God, not by creation and providence only, as all men are, being his creatures, and provided for by him. But by special choice, and by covenant grace. And "the sheep of his pasture"; whom he feeds as a shepherd does his flock, provides good pasture for them, and leads them into it.

"Will give thee thanks for ever: we will show forth thy praise to all generations": The above petitions being answered and fulfilled. The work of praise is acceptable unto God, what he is well pleased with, being glorified thereby. And is what becomes his people to do, and which they are formed for. And that for evermore, as long as they live in this world, and to all eternity in another. And who will and do take care that the wonders of divine grace and providence be transmitted and told to their posterity in succeeding ages. That so thanks may be given him, and his praise shown forth in one generation after another.

The people who have been grafted into the family of God will never stop thanking Him for His goodness and His mercy. We are the sheep of the pasture. Jesus is the Great Shepherd. He will lead me to green pastures, and give me pure water to drink, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Psalm 79 Questions

1. In verse 1, who has come into the temple and defiled it?
2. Name 2 of the three destructions in chapter 79.
3. What is even worse than the enemy destroying our home?
4. What are some of the ways of destruction?
5. In verse 2, the dead bodies had been what?
6. What are the beasts in the church today trying to do?
7. Who has always been the enemy of God's people?
8. Their blood have they shed like _____.
9. We are become a _____ to our neighbors.
10. Why had the people always respected the Israelites up until this was written?
11. Who have come out of the closet now and are openly opposing Christianity?
12. What are you labeled as now, if you are a serious Christian?
13. Why was the church destroyed in Asaph's time?
14. What is the possible reason the temple was destroyed after the resurrection of Jesus?
15. Why is God allowing the falling away today?
16. Who does Asaph ask God to pour out His wrath upon?

17. Who does 1 Peter 5:8 say is our adversary?
18. He will protect us, if we are as faithful as _____ was.
19. Are we going to sit idly by and let Satan destroy the church?
20. What is verse 8?
21. Who is the God of our salvation?
22. What does Romans 12:19 teach us?
23. Jesus destroyed _____ on the cross and _____ by His resurrection.
24. Who were the three that were saved in the fiery furnace?
25. Who are the sheep of His pasture?
26. Who is the Great Shepherd?
27. He will lead me to green _____.
28. I will dwell in the house of the Lord _____.