

PSALM 79

A Lament over the Destruction of Jerusalem, and Prayer for Help.

INTRODUCTION.

- A. From Roy H. Enoch (8-23-95). A Psalm of Asaph.
- B. "A Lament Over the Destruction of Jerusalem and A Prayer for Vengeance."
- C. Halley proposes three possible occasions for this psalm: "the invasion of Shishak, the fall of the northern kingdom, and the Babylonian captivity."
- D. Delitzsch suggests the desecration of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes.
- E. Coffman gives several reasons for identifying the occasion as the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586BC.
 - 1. For 18 centuries the Jews have used this psalm to commemorate two destructions of Jerusalem: the Babylonian destruction and that of the Romans in 70AD.
 - 2. Shishak never entered Jerusalem. (King of Egypt who attacked Judah under Rehoboam, who emptied the treasury of the temple to pay him.)
 - 3. Antiochus Epiphanes did not destroy either the Temple or the city of Jerusalem.
 - 4. The mention of the people's captivity (79:11) points directly to the Babylonian era.
 - 5. Only the Babylonians had completely destroyed Jerusalem.
 - 6. Many of the ablest scholars agree on the Babylonian date.
- F. Coffman suggests two divisions for the psalm:
 - I. A Description of the Disaster (79:1-4).
 - II. A Prayer for Deliverance, Forgiveness and Vengeance (79:5-13).

THE TEXT.

79:1 O God, the nations have invaded Your inheritance;
They have defiled Your holy temple;
They have laid Jerusalem in ruins.

2 They have given the dead bodies of Your servants for food to the birds of the heavens,
The flesh of Your godly ones to the beasts of the earth.

3 They have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem;
And there was no one to bury them.

4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors,
A scoffing and derision to those around us.

5 How long, O LORD? Will You be angry forever?
Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

6 Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You,
And upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Your name.

7 For they have devoured Jacob
And laid waste his habitation.

8 Do not remember the iniquities of *our* forefathers against us;
Let Your compassion come quickly to meet us,
For we are brought very low.

9 Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name;
And deliver us and forgive our sins for Your name's sake.

10 Why should the nations say, "Where is their God?"
Let there be known among the nations in our sight,
Vengeance for the blood of Your servants which has been shed.

11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
According to the greatness of Your power preserve those who are doomed to die.

12 And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom
The reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.

13 So we Your people and the sheep of Your pasture
Will give thanks to You forever;
To all generations we will tell of Your praise.

COMMENTS.

A. A Description of the Disaster.

[v1] "...the nations...have laid Jerusalem in heaps." Some argue that it does not say that the temple is destroyed, but Jerusalem was laid in heaps only once--by the Babylonians, and then the temple was defiled by burning it.

[v2,3] "The dead bodies...food unto birds...and there were none to bury them." This only fits the Babylonian captivity.

[v4] "We have become a reproach to our neighbors..." The derision and reproach itself is given in verse 10: "Where is their God?"

B. A Prayer for Deliverance, Forgiveness, and Vengeance.

The Jews had been warned for centuries that God would not tolerate their idolatry but the leaders did not believe it and many of the common people may not have heard the warnings, especially the poor who were left in the land. Jeremiah had told them that they would be in captivity for 70 years, but many did not believe him and wanted immediate deliverance.

[v5] "How long, Lord? Will You be angry forever?" They were impatient and wanted a speedy restoration. "Will Your Jealousy burn like fire?" The psalmist knew that it was God's jealousy of their idolatry that caused the captivity and Israel never returned to the worship of idols.

[v6,7] "Pour out Your wrath on the nations..." This imprecatory prayer is asking for God's just punishment against the wicked.

[v8] "Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!" This prayer for forgiveness acknowledges their sins as the cause of the destruction.

[v9,10] "Help us, O God...and deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, for Your name's sake!" The confession of sin and request of forgiveness makes no excuse for them and asks for mercy.

[v12] "And return to our neighbors sevenfold... their reproach w/which they have reproached You, O Lord." Some want to soften the "sevenfold" vengeance, but it is in the spirit of Lamech, the son of Cain: see Gen. 4:24.

[v13] "So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture, will give You thanks forever..." Asaph uses this common theme of God being the Shepherd and Israel His flock of sheep.