

Psalms, Hymns, and Spiritual Songs: The Master Musician's Melodies

Bereans Sunday School
Placerita Baptist Church
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Psalm 79 — “How Long, O LORD?”

1.0 Introducing Psalm 79

- It appears obvious from the opening verses of Psalm 79 that the historical setting is at the time of the Babylonian invasion and destruction of the Temple in 587 B.C.
 - ✓ The prophet Jeremiah quotes verse s 6-7 from this psalm (see Jer 10:25).
- Psalm 78 concluded with the hope of a second Moses in the person of King David, who would shepherd God's people. Psalm 79 opens with the destruction that resulted when the Davidic dynasty failed to remain obedient to God and His Word.
- Compare this psalm with Psalm 74 (another psalm of Asaph).
 - ✓ Seeing the Babylonian destruction of the Temple left a tremendous impression on Asaph in Psalm 74.
 - ✓ Here, however, it is the destruction of the people themselves that brings him such anguish and torment.

2.0 Reading Psalm 79 (NAU)

79:1 A Psalm of Asaph.

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

79:2 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.

79:3 They have poured out their blood like water round about Jerusalem;

- And there was no one to bury them.
- 79:4** We have become a reproach to our neighbors,
A scoffing and derision to those around us.
- 79:5** How long, O LORD?
Will You be angry forever?
Will Your jealousy burn like fire?
- 79:6** Pour out Your wrath upon the nations which do not know You,
And upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Your name.
- 79:7** For they have devoured Jacob
And laid waste his habitation.
- 79:8** Do not remember the iniquities of *our* forefathers against us;
Let Your compassion come quickly to meet us,
For we are brought very low.
- 79:9** 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.
- 79:10** 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.
- 79:11** Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
According to the greatness of Your power preserve
those who are doomed to die.
- 79:12** And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom
The reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.
- 79:13** 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.
- For the choir director; *set to* El Shoshannim; Eduth.

3.0 Understanding Psalm 79

3.1 Outline

- I. The Destruction of Jerusalem (vv. 1-4)
- II. The Desire for Justice (vv. 5-12)
- III. The Declaration of Praise (v. 13)



3.2 Notes

- **v. 2** "Your godly ones"
 - The Hebrew term for a "godly one" is *hasid*. *Hasid* is related to *hesed* ("loyal love").
 - Godly people are those who have a loyal love for God.

- Godly people fulfill the greatest of all the commandments, to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5; Matthew 22:36-37).
- **v. 5** “How long, O LORD?”
 - See study notes on Psalm 13:1. [Past Psalms study notes are available at <http://www.drbarrick.org/sermons.html#lessons>.
- **v. 5** “Your jealousy”
 - God’s jealousy is His zealous vigilance to protect His holiness and His honor—and all things that belong to Him alone. God is jealous for His people (Zechariah 1:14; compare 2 Corinthians 11:2).
 - See Exodus 20:5; 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24.
 - God’s wrath “is a function of God’s holiness against sin. Where there is no sin, there is no wrath, . . . Where God in His holiness confronts His image-bearers in their rebellion, there must be wrath. Otherwise God is not the jealous God He claims to be, and His holiness is impugned. The price of diluting God’s wrath is diminishing God’s holiness.”—D. A. Carson, “God’s Love and God’s Wrath,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 156/624 (Oct-Dec 1999): 388.
- **v. 6** “the nations which do not know You”
 - Because we treat both holiness and sinfulness too lightly, we tend to ignore the fact that God’s justice will punish evil just as surely as His goodness will reward righteousness.
 - Cf. Revelation 6:10.
 - Review study notes on Psalm 35.
- **v. 8** “Do not remember”
 - Focusing on persecution and disaster can cause us to miss the point that our own sinfulness might have contributed to the situation.
 - Asaph confesses his and his people’s sins and asks for divine mercy.
 - Compare Daniel 9:4-14.
- **v. 8** “Your compassion”
 - The plural (literally, “compassions”) is either literal (“Your acts of compassion”) or intensive (“Your full compassion”).
- **v. 9** “for the glory of Your name”
 - The central issue in all situations ought to be the glory of God.
 - See 1 Corinthians 10:31.
- **v. 9** “forgive our sins”
 - “Forgive” is actually “atone for.”
 - If the Temple is destroyed and sacrifices can no longer be offered, how will Israel obtain atonement for their sins? See Daniel 9:24.
 - Atonement is a work of God not tied to animal sacrifices.

- **v. 10** “Vengeance for the blood of Your servants”
 - See comment on v. 6.
- **v. 11** “preserve those who are doomed to die”
 - Asaph prays that God will deliver the prisoners of war who were subject to a sentence of death.
- **v. 12** “sevenfold”
 - This concept is as old as Cain (Genesis 4:15).
 - Leviticus 26:21 and 28 speak of this sevenfold punishment for sin for breach of God’s covenant.
 - See, also, Proverbs 6:30-31.
- **v. 13** “the sheep of Your pasture”
 - “Psalm 77 ended with God shepherding the people ‘like a flock by the hand of Moses and Aaron’ at the time of the exodus and desert wanderings. Psalm 78 ended with God shepherding his flock by the hands of David during the time of the monarchy. In Psalm 79 this has extended into the present and beyond, which is a way of saying that God will always be our good shepherd. This is true, which is why the psalm rightly ends with ‘praise.’”—James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms*, 3 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 2:658.
- **Subscription** “*set to El Shoshannim; Eduth*”
 - “El Shoshannim Eduth” could be translated as “To the lilies of the covenant” or “To the lilies of the testimony.”
 - “Shoshannim” occurs also at Psalms 45:1 (subscription to 44) and 69:1 (subscription to 68). “Shoshannim” might refer to a musical instrument upon which the song was played.
 - See, also, Psalm 60:1 (subscription for 59): “according to Shushan Eduth.”

4.0 Singing Psalm 79



In Thy Heritage the Heathen (Tune: “Our Great Savior”)

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|---|--|
| <p>1 In Thy heritage the heathen
Now, O God, triumphant stand;
They defile Thy holy temple,
They destroy Thy chosen land;
Ruthless, they have slain Thy servants,
They have caused Thy saints to mourn;
In the sight of all about us
We endure reproach and scorn.</p> | <p>2 O how long against Thy people
Shall Thine anger burn, O Lord?
On Thine enemies, the heathen,
Be Thine indignation poured;
Smite the kingdoms that defy Thee,
Calling not upon Thy Name;
They have long devoured Thy people
And have swept Thy land with flame.</p> |
|---|--|

3 O remember not against us
Evil by our fathers wrought;
Haste to help us in Thy mercy
Near to ruin we are brought;
Help us, God of our salvation,
For the glory of Thy Name;
For Thy Name's sake come and save us,
Take away our sin and shame.

4 Let Thy foes no longer scorn Thee,
Now avenge Thy servants slain;
Loose the prisoner, save the dying,
All Thine enemies restrain;
Then Thy flock, Thy chosen people,
Unto Thee their thanks shall raise,
And to every generation
We will sing Thy glorious praise.

— Author unknown

5.0 Praying Psalm 79

- Oh God, give me compassion for those who suffer. [vv. 1-4]
- Lord, establish Your justice in the chaos of horrific times. [vv. 5-6, 12]
- Father, forgive my sins against You. [v. 8]
- Help me to give You thanks, even when circumstances might not make me feel like it. [v. 13]
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6.0 Applying Psalm 79

- No matter what happens to God's people, He is still their Shepherd.
- Confession of sin and thanksgiving to God go hand in hand.