



Coptic Orthodox Diocese of the Southern United States



The Holy Book of Psalms

Psalm 79

Bishop Youssef



Introduction

- The title of this Psalm is *A Psalm of Asaph*
- According to the title the author is Asaph, the great singer and musician of David's era (1 Chronicles 15:17-19, 16:5-7, 25:6)
- There was a controversy among scholars concerning the identity of the author of this Psalm and the date of its writing; whether it is a prophecy of the desolation to come upon Jerusalem and the temple by the Chaldeans under Nebuchadnezzar or by the Gentiles, or it is a record written after it has already taken place
- Some claim that since it describes the destruction of Jerusalem then it was not written by Asaph



Introduction

- And since Asaph lived and served during the reigns of King David and King Solomon, this is likely a later Asaph
- But 2 Chronicles 29:30 add that Asaph was a prophet in his musical compositions
- Therefore, Asaph by prophetic spirit, he foresaw and foretold things that should come to pass, spoken of in this Psalm
- And some think it was composed by Jeremiah because verses 6 and 7 of this Psalm are exactly the same of Jeremiah 10:25
- Also 79:3 appears to be quoted in 1 Maccabees 7:17



Introduction

- This is the seventh of eleven Psalms which are attributed to Asaph
- This Psalm is closely related to Psalm 74, which also speaks of the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem
- In this Psalm Asaph calls out to God asking how long the anger of the Lord will burn against Jerusalem because of the sins of the people and their forefathers



Introduction

Psalm Outline

- The Devastation of Jerusalem 79:1-4
- A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12
- Praise is Promised 79:13

The Devastation of Jerusalem

79:1-4



- In these four verses the psalmist tells his grief to God
- His land is overrun by heathen, His temple is violated and defiled, His city is in ruins, His people are slaughtered, the survivors are the scorn of their neighbors
- The psalmist speaks of the attack on Jerusalem as an attack on God Himself
- The *nations* have invaded *Your inheritance*; they have defiled *Your holy temple*
- The psalmist had the land of Israel in mind with the words, *Your inheritance*

The Devastation of Jerusalem

79:1-4



- It was a purposeful attack on the True and Living God
- *They have laid Jerusalem in heaps*, This was certainly not done either by Shishak or by Antiochus Epiphanes; but was done, as prophesied (Jeremiah 9:11; Jeremiah 26:18; Micah 3:12), by the Babylonians
- As that desolation did not happen in the time of Asaph, this Psalm could be a prophecy of what will happen to Jerusalem in the days of Nebuchadnezzar, in those of Antiochus Epiphanes, or by the hands of Titus, the Roman commander



The Devastation of Jerusalem

79:1-4

- It was also an attack on God's people
- The psalmist now laments the slaughter of the people, and the cruelty of the enemy who would not allow the bodies of the slain to be buried
- They exposed these dead bodies to be eaten by *the birds of the heavens* and by *the beasts of the earth*
- That was the situation both at the time of the Babylonish captivity, and in the times of Antiochus
- The people are still spoken of as the people of God even though they deserved punishment for their sins

The Devastation of Jerusalem

79:1-4



- Verse 3 is quoted in 1 Maccabees 7:17 and *no one to bury them* was prophesied by Jeremiah in 14:16
- They have *shed Their blood* in such quantities that it seems to flow like water which is not uncommon in wars
- They shed their blood without remorse; without any fear of God or man
- According to St. Augustine, if we take here the word 'Jerusalem' as being the earthly city of Jerusalem, we shall understand the shedding of their blood around it in a literal sense
- And we may also take it as being the church

The Devastation of Jerusalem

79:1-4



- The persecution against the Church is so violent everywhere that the blood of martyrs is shed like rivers
- The shocking and brutal fall of Jerusalem and Judah made the Israelites a disgrace, shameful to the surrounding nations
- The Holy Book of Obadiah prophesied about Edom who rejoiced over the people of God on the day of their affliction; when they ridiculed them, and cut off those who escaped and delivered them to their enemies
- *A scorn and derision to those who are around us , As the Christians in all ages have been to the men of the world*

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- The psalmist, seeing God's anger so terribly provoked against his people, that he feared for their total destruction, he earnestly asks, *How long ... Will You be angry?*
- God's delays in sending relief often seem long and even frustrating
- Will there be no end to these chastisements?
- *How long* does not question the why of suffering, but in faith asks the when of suffering, and if it will last forever
- He understands that the affliction of God's people was a result of their sins, and he points out that the source of God's anger is His *jealousy*

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- They turned to other, false gods, thus provoking the jealousy and wrath of the True and Living God
- So, he beseeches God to spare His people from being burned by the fire of His divine *jealousy*
- Asaph expressed the heart of the devastated people of Judah after the fall of Jerusalem
- In the years of Jeremiah's ministry many false prophets had told them that deliverance would come
- Because they ignored God's true messenger (Jeremiah), judgment came upon them, and they were completely unprepared for it

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- God's anger and jealousy would not burn against His people forever
- Jeremiah foretold the judgment to come, but he also told of restoration that would follow
- *the nations*, It is not the heathen that had never heard of God who are intended, but those who, having heard of Him and refused to *know* Him (Exodus 5:2), as was the case with all the nations round about Canaan
- Asaph is asking God to *Pour out His wrath*
- Though he confesses that they have deserved God's wrath, yet the heathen, deserved it much more

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- They are guilty of far greater sins than them, living in total ignorance by not worshiping God and denying Him
- St. Augustine comments on *Pour out Your wrath on the nations* and says, “this too is a prophecy, not a wish. Not in the imprecation of malevolence are these words spoken, but foreseen by the Spirit they are predicted: just as in the case of Judas the traitor, the evil things which were to befall him have been so prophesied as if they were wished.”
- Not only have they paid no regard to the worship of God and *do not know* Him, but they eat up His people as they would so much bread and putting them to death

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- *his dwelling place*, The city of Jerusalem which they left desolate
- Some take this as a reference to the temple, which was certainly destroyed in the conquest of Jerusalem
- According to St. Augustine, it is the city where the temple of God is, where He commanded the assembly to offer the sacrifices, to practice the rites of worship, and to celebrate the feast of the Passover
- It may also refer to the land of Israel itself, previously referred to as God's *inheritance* in verse 1 of this Psalm
- Verses 6 & 7 occur, almost word for word, in Jeremiah 10:25

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- The psalmist, by reflection, recognizes the sins of the people of Israel to be the ultimate cause of the affliction
- So, speaking on behalf of God's people, Asaph humbled himself before God and admitted their sin against Him
- They could no longer deny their sin; instead, they could plead for forgiveness and for God's *tender mercies to come speedily*
- *former iniquities*, The Hebrew may mean either former times, or former generations
- So, here he may mean it is not their own iniquities which are particularly referred to, but the iniquity of the people as committed in former times

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- And the prayer is, that God would not visit them with the results of the sins of former generations
- The idea of the effects of sin pass over from one generation to the next is mentioned in the Scripture, *“For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generations of those who hate Me, but showing mercy to thousands, to those who love Me and keep My commandments.”* (Exodus 20:5-6), and also, in Exodus 34:7; Leviticus 20:5, 26:39-40; Numbers 14:18, 33
- But the children by repentance can remove their involvement of the parents' sin and they may in faith pray that God will not *remember them against them*

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- In addition, God promises not again to do so, *“In those days they shall say no more: ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, And the children’s teeth are set on edge.’ But everyone shall die for his own iniquity; every man who eats the sour grapes, his teeth shall be set on edge.”* (Jeremiah 31:29-30)
- Similar promise is also mentioned in (Ezekiel 18:1-4)
- Or it could mean the oldest sin of all that of our first parents, Adam and Eve, by which we are made sinners; and for which judgment comes upon all men; and from thence flows the corruption of nature, as the meaning in the Septuagint is *our ancient iniquities*

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- That original sin of our nature in which we are all *brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me*, (Psalm 51:5)
- *Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us*, the psalmist asks for deliverance, not on the basis of his own righteousness, but on basis of God's mercy
- This is how we all must stand before God: we are sinners; anything good that we receive is received based on God's mercy
- *brought very low*, they did not humbly repent
- Now they were in the place to do it

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- The psalmist next seeks deliverance, in order that God's name may be glorified; *Help us, O God of our salvation, For the glory of Your name*
- Their hardship and suffering have not affected all faith or hope
- God is still the God of Israel's salvation, the God from whom alone salvation can be obtained and expected
- He is entreated to come to Israel's aid, not for their sakes, as they are wholly undeserving, but for His own glory
- *Help us, Against their powerful enemies*

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- *deliver us*; Out of the hands of all their enemies, and out of all their afflictions, and out of this low estate in which they are
- This was another appropriate and wonderful confession of sin and dependence upon God for *His atonement*
- Asaph knew that any man-made atonement would be useless; God must *provide atonement for our sins*
- When the psalmist prayed this, the temple and the altar were destroyed
- The normal sacrifices were impossible, but he looked for a greater *atonement* that God Himself would provide (Genesis 22:8-14)

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- He pleads three things: *Help us, deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins*
- *we have been brought very low*, Being low, they will be lost if God does not help them
- Their dependence upon Him only, *God of our salvation*
- In verse 9, Asaph appealed to God by the glory of His name
- In verse 10 Asaph made a slightly different appeal, still with an eye to God's glory
- *Where is their God?* Where is the God that was used to protect the Jews?

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- He must have deserted them, or He is quite ignorant of what is happening to them
- A triumph over a foreign nation was always regarded in the ancient world as a triumph over their gods
- He asked God to put the nations to silence and display His active presence by acting as the avenger of blood on behalf of His people
- *Let there be known among the nations, Let Him manifest Himself among them that they cannot but see that He is God; that He is a just God; that He is the Friend and Protector of His people*

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- Openly and publicly *in our sight*, and in the view of the whole world
- *The avenging of the blood of Your servants which has been shed*, That God's name, then, be not blasphemed, Asaph is asking God to revenge the blood of His servants so cruelly spilled
- Asaph wishes that the enemy be made aware that what judgments are brought upon them are punishments of the wrong they have done to God's people
- It is a prayer that just punishment might be executed so God may be feared

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- The psalmist, speaking on behalf of God's people, had previously asked two things, that punishment may be inflicted for the slain, and that the captives condemned to death may be freed, *deliver us*
- He now repeats the prayer, but inverts it, first asking for protection for the living, then revenge for the dead
- He is asking God to hear those *groaning*, and come for the deliverance of those who are thus held in captivity
- Asaph considered those among the exiles in Babylon who were condemned to death and asked that God *preserve* them

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- The appeal to the Lord's tender mercy is here supplemented by another addressed to the divine power, *According to the greatness of Your power*
- The psalmist rises from a request for those who are brought low, to a prayer for *those who are appointed to die*
- He prays that God would find out a way for the rescue of His poor prisoners, especially the condemned ones
- Asaph's final request was that God deal with their enemies with justice and vengeance, returning to them *sevenfold* the agony they inflicted upon His people and the same *reproach* they directed toward God Himself

A Prayer to Turn Away the Anger of God 79:5-12



- Sometimes *sevenfold* is simply a way of saying abundantly or in great measure (Genesis 4:15; Isaiah 30:26)
- *Their reproach with which they have reproached You, As they reproached God by denying Him or calling in question the perfections of His power, truth, and goodness to help His people, destroying His House, and even reproaching His people in reproaching Him*



Praise is Promised 79:13

- After praying for rescue, protection, and vengeance, Asaph ended this Psalm with grateful dependence upon God
- He properly recognized God's place as Shepherd over His *people and sheep* and concludes with a vow of thanksgiving
- Israel, As grateful sheep, will then be able to render its tribute of unceasing praise to their Lord and Shepherd and would declare their *thanks* and *praise* now and in the future
- The psalmist, despite their sins, is confident in their relationship with God
- Though they are oppressed and *brought low*, yet they are *sheep of His pasture*



Praise is Promised 79:13

- Perhaps if the children of Israel had honored God from generation to generation before this judgment came upon them, they could have avoided it
- It is often the unbeliever's way to make promises to God when he encounters affliction
- We should rather praise and honor Him in times of peace, when there is no need for His deliverance
- And even when affliction comes, we should praise God and rest in Him as we go through it



Discussion

- What cruel nation is described in verses 1-4?
- Why did God allow His people to suffer at this enemy's hands?
- What happens to nations that will not repent?
- What is the psalmist most concerned about in this Psalm?
- In what direction does the prayer turn in verses 6-7? In your opinion, why or why wouldn't this be an appropriate prayer?

Discussion



- Why did the Israelites need God's mercy? (79:8-9)
- How did Israel try to convince God to come to her rescue? (79:10)
- Under what circumstances might God allow an enemy to inflict harm to a nation? If such a tragedy occurred, what purpose might it accomplish?
- Why is the fulfillment of God's will always the best thing that could happen to anyone?