

Psalms 79

This evening - we're continuing our overview of the Old Testament book titled Psalms.

With this as our focus - let's open our Bibles to Psalms chapter 79 - and as we make our way to the 79th Psalm...

...I should take a moment to point out that - this is the 7th - of 11 consecutive songs - written by a seer named Asaph.

And it's here in this Psalm where we find Asaph - prophetically pointing to the dreadful day....

...when the enemies of Israel would defile the holy temple of the Lord.

Now - it should be noted that - the events that Asaph described here in our text tonight - took place several centuries after the death of Asaph.

It's for this reason that some scholars believe this Psalm was written by a descendant of Asaph - and the attributed to him after the fact.

And while this most certainly is a possibility - - I should remind you that...

...there are 11 Psalms written by guild of worship leaders known as the sons of Korah.

With that being the case - I can't help but to wonder - of this song was written by a similar guild of singers - who descended from the lineage of Asaph...

...then - it seems to me that the superscription section of this Psalm would be attributed to the SONS of Asaph.

And yet - it's there in the beginning of this Psalm - where we learn that this was a Psalm of Asaph.

I should also remind you that Ezra the priest - referred to Asaph as a Seer.

And just to be clear - the Hebrew word which was translated - Seer was of those whom the Lord gave prophetic vision...

...which would then be presented to His people.

This included Samuel, Gad, Nathan, Iddo, Heman, Jeduthun, Hanani - and Asaph.

That's right - Asaph was a Seer - who was empowered to present the prophetic word of God.

I should also remind you that - more than a quarter of the content found in the Bible - is prophetic in nature.

This is based on the research of J. Barton Payne — who's calculation helps us to see that...

...roughly 27% of the total Bible is considered prophetic - covering topics such as the Messiah and the end times.

This includes at least 1,817 specific prophecies across 8,352 verses.

With that being the case - I have no problem believing that the Psalm that we're studying tonight...

...was actually a prophecy - written by Asaph the Seer - as he prophetically described the day...

...when the Babylonians would invade Jerusalem - and defile the temple of God.

And as we make our way through this song of Asaph - - we'll consider how the God of Israel is the omniscient One...

...Who knows the end - from the beginning.

With this as our focus - let's turn our attention to the lyrics that we find here in the 79th Psalm.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 1 - where Asaph writes...

Psa 79:1 A Psalm of Asaph.

O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance;

Your holy temple they have defiled;

They have laid Jerusalem in heaps.

Psa 79:2 The dead bodies of Your servants

They have given as food for the birds of the heavens,

The flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth.

Psa 79:3 Their blood they have shed like water all around Jerusalem,

And there was no one to bury them.

Psa 79:4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors,

A scorn and derision to those who are around us.

Here in the beginning of the Psalm - we find Asaph - describing the days - when the nations invaded the inheritance of the Lord.

And just to be clear - Asaph also referred to the way that they defiled the temple - and destroyed Jerusalem.

And this is one reason for why many scholars believe that this song was written...

...by the sons of Asaph - - and not by Asaph himself.

We don't really know the year when Asaph died - - and so - it's possible that he was there when King Solomon built the temple.

At the same time - I can assure you that - he wasn't there to witness the Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem...

...which began back in 597 BC - and then culminated in the destruction of the temple - in 586 B.C.

Therefore - we can be sure that Asaph didn't physically witness that dreadful day.

As for those who insist that this song was written after the fact - by the sons of Asaph - who were there to witness that event...

...I can't help but to wonder why they failed to identify the Babylonians - as the invaders.

It seems to me that - IF this song was written by eyewitnesses - THEN they would identify the invaders - as the Babylonians.

And yet - there is no mention of the Babylonians at all.

Notice again - there in verse 1 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 79:1 O God, the nations have come into Your inheritance;
Your holy temple they have defiled;
They have laid Jerusalem in heaps.

As we consider this reference to the nations - - it sees to me that we're reading the words of a Seer...

...who was presenting His vision of a future invasion - lead by a nation that wouldn't become a world power...

...for at least another 200 years.

Proof of my point can be found in the vision that the Lord revealed to the Babylonian King - Nebuchadnezzar.

It's in Daniel chapter 2 - where we learn about the disturbing dream that caused great concern - in the mind of King Nebuchadnezzar.

The dream included a giant statue that had a head of gold a chest of silver - a belly of bronze - legs of iron - and feet which were made up of a mixture of iron and clay.

In an attempt to understand his dream - the King asked his wise men to tell him the dream - and it's interpretation.

And in response - the wise men assured the king that there was no man who could fulfill his request.

What they failed to realize was that - the true and living God is the Omniscient One - Who knows everything.

And the proof of this was found in the fact that - the Lord enabled the prophet Daniel...

...to describe the dream of King Nebuchadnezzar - and then tell him the interpretation.

It's in Daniel chapter 2 - where we find the prophet of God - helping the King to understand that...

...the different sections of the magnificence statute - represented the different kingdoms which would dominate the world.

And the metal - of each section - was the key for identifying each kingdom...

...beginning with the head of gold - which represented the Babylonian empire.

With hindsight being 20/20 - we can now see that - the chest of silver represented the Medo-Persian Empire.

The belly of bronze represented the Greek Empire.

The legs of iron represented the Roman Empire - which was divided into two...

...and then - finally divided into the 10 toes - made up of a mixture of iron and clay.

Further proof that this interpretation is correct is found in Daniel's vision of the four beasts - described in Daniel chapter 7.

This includes the Lion with Eagle's Wings that represents the Babylonian Empire

Then there's the Bear - which was raised up on one side - representing the Medo-Persian Empire.

There's the Leopard with Four Wings and four Heads - representing the Grecian Empire.

And finally - the fourth beast with huge iron teeth represented the Roman Empire.

Now - as we consider these prophecies about the consecutive kingdoms which would come after the fall of the Babylonian empire...

...we can see that the Lord decided to withhold the names of those kingdoms - from the prophet Daniel.

And in similar fashion - it seems to me that the Lord withheld the name of the Babylonian empire...

...when He presented Asaph the Seer - with a prophetic vision of the day...

...when the Babylonians would invade the city of Jerusalem - and destroy the temple.

Not only that - but - the Lord also presented Asaph with a vision of the aftermath of that invasion.

Notice with me again - beginning there at verse 2 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 79:2 The dead bodies of Your servants
They have given as food for the birds of the heavens,
The flesh of Your saints to the beasts of the earth.

Psa 79:3 Their blood they have shed like water all around
Jerusalem,

And there was no one to bury them.

Psa 79:4 We have become a reproach to our neighbors,
A scorn and derision to those who are around us.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - describing the aftermath of the Babylonian invasion.

And as we consider the way in which the bodies of the Israelites were left for dead in the streets...

...we can see why Asaph was so distraught - as he considered this vision.

I can't help but to consider the way that the prophet Habakkuk was also disturbed by a similar vision.

It was about 20 years before the Babylonian invasion - when the Lord spoke to Habakkuk - by declaring...

Hab 1:5 "Look among the nations and watch—
Be utterly astounded!
For I will work a work in your days
Which you would not believe, though it were told you.
Hab 1:6 For indeed I am raising up the Babylonians,
A bitter and hasty nation
Which marches through the breadth of the earth,
To possess dwelling places that are not theirs.
Hab 1:7 They are terrible and dreadful;
Their judgment and their dignity proceed from themselves.
Hab 1:8 Their horses also are swifter than leopards,
And more fierce than evening wolves.
Their chargers charge ahead;
Their cavalry comes from afar;
They fly as the eagle that hastens to eat.
Hab 1:9 "They all come for violence;
Their faces are set like the east wind.
They gather captives like sand.
Hab 1:10 They scoff at kings,
And princes are scorned by them.
They deride every stronghold,
For they heap up earthen mounds and seize it.
Hab 1:11 Then his mind changes, and he transgresses;
He commits offense,
Ascribing this power to his god."

To sum it up with simplicity - the Lord was helping Habakkuk to understand that...

...He was sending the Babylonians to punish the children of Israel...

...and the reason why was because - they were guilty of worshipping the false gods of Babylon.

In response - the prophet Habakkuk acknowledged the fact that...

...the LORD was right - to appoint them for judgment - and mark them for correction.

Now - as we consider all of these prophecies - there should be no doubt in our minds...

...that the Lord knew about the Babylonian captivity - during the days of Asaph.

And as we consider how the post-exilic priest named Ezra - referred to Asaph as a Seer...

...it seems to me that Ezra recognized the prophetic nature of this song...

...after returning to Israel - post Babylonian captivity.

As a matter of fact - it was Ezra the priest and scribe - who played a pivotal role...

...in assembling and canonizing the Old Testament scriptures - which included the Psalms.

And it was in 2nd Chronicles 29 - verse 30 - - where Ezra tells us that...

2Ch 29:30 ...the Levites sang praise to the LORD with the words of David and of Asaph the seer.

From this - we can see that Ezra the priest was led by the Holy Spirit - to identify Asaph as a seer.

And it's for this reason that I believe that this Psalm was a vision...

...that the Lord presented to Asaph.

With all of this in mind - let's consider the question that Asaph posed - after receiving this vision.

Let's pick up our study of the 79th Psalm - beginning there at verse 5 - where Asaph asked...

Psa 79:5 How long, LORD?

Will You be angry forever?

Will Your jealousy burn like fire?

Psa 79:6 Pour out Your wrath on the nations that do not know You,
And on the kingdoms that do not call on Your name.

Psa 79:7 For they have devoured Jacob,
And laid waste his dwelling place.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - asking the Lord - how long would he allow the descendants of Jacob - to suffer captivity?

And he wanted to know how long the Lord would be angry with the apple of His eye.

And as we consider the content of this Psalm - it seems to me that this question went unanswered...

...that is - until the time of the prophet Jeremiah - when the Lord presented the exact frame of time.

It's in Jeremiah chapter 25 - beginning at verse 8 - where Jeremiah declared...

Jer 25:8 "...thus says the LORD of hosts: 'Because you have not heard My words,

Jer 25:9 'behold, I will send and take all the families of the north,' says the LORD, 'and Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring them against this land, against its inhabitants, and against these nations all around, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, a hissing, and perpetual desolations.

Jer 25:10 'Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp.

Jer 25:11 'And this whole land shall be a desolation and an astonishment, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years.

Here in these verses - we learn that the Babylonian captivity would last for 70 years.

And one reason why was due to the fact that - the children of Israel failed to observe the sabbatical year - 70 times

Just to be clear - I should remind you that - the children of Israel were not only required to observe a sabbath day...

...but - they were also commanded to let the land rest for a year - every 7 years.

And this was something they failed to do - for 490 years.

Let's consider how Ezra explained the reasons for the Babylonian captivity in 2nd Chronicles 36.

It's beginning at verse 14 - where we learn that...

2Ch 36:14 ...all the leaders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more, according to all the abominations of the nations, and defiled the house of the LORD which He had consecrated in Jerusalem.

2Ch 36:15 And the LORD God of their fathers sent warnings to them by His messengers, rising up early and sending them, because He had compassion on His people and on His dwelling place.

2Ch 36:16 But they mocked the messengers of God, despised His words, and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of the LORD arose against His people, till there was no remedy.

2Ch 36:17 Therefore He brought against them the king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on young man or virgin, on the aged or the weak; He gave them all into his hand.

2Ch 36:18 And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon.

2Ch 36:19 Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions.

2Ch 36:20 And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia,

2Ch 36:21 to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.

According to Ezra - the Lord allowed the Babylonians to conquer the people of Judah...

...and the reason why was because - they people transgressed more and more...

...according to all the abominations of the nations.

As for the timeframe - the Lord kept them in captivity for 70 years...

...and the reason what was because - this was the number of years that they failed to let the land rest.

And so - the Lord allowed the land of promise to remain desolate...

...until the Sabbath years were accounted for.

Knowing that the Lord would be just - in allowing this sort of punishment - Asaph prayed for the salvation of his kinsmen.

With this as our focus - let's pick up our study of the 79th Psalm - beginning there at verse 8 - where he declared...

Psa 79:8 Oh, do not remember former iniquities against us!
Let Your tender mercies come speedily to meet us,
For we have been brought very low.

Psa 79:9 Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,
For Your name's sake!

Psa 79:10 Why should the nations say,
"Where is their God?"
Let there be known among the nations in our sight
The avenging of the blood of Your servants which has been shed.

Here in these verses - we find Asaph - praying for the mercy of our Messiah.

And as he considered the day - when the dead bodies of his kinsmen - would become food for the birds...

...and the flesh of his descendants would be consumed by the beasts of the earth...

...Asaph prayed for the Lord to help them - so that some might be saved.

And we should notice how Asaph prayed for atonement - there in verse 9 where he cried out...

Psa 79:9 Help us, O God of our salvation,
For the glory of Your name;
And deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins,
For Your name's sake!

Asaph was praying for the salvation of his kinsmen - so that the name of the LORD would be glorified.

He also asked the Lord to deliver them - by providing atonement for their sins...

...and not because they deserved to be delivered...

...but because - the name of the LORD is magnified by His merciful love.

Not only that - but - Asaph also prayed for deliverance - so that the nations might know that the God of Jacob is the LORD.

Look with me again - there at verse 10 - where Asaph asked...

Psa 79:10 Why should the nations say,
“Where is their God?”

Let there be known among the nations in our sight
The avenging of the blood of Your servants which has been shed.

Here in this verse - we find Asaph - asking the Lord to avenge those who would be slaughtered there in Jerusalem...

...so that all the nations might realize that - the God of Israel is the true and living LORD.

And that’s exactly what God promised to do - in the prophecy He presented through Jeremiah.

It’s in Jeremiah chapter 50 - and 51 - where the Lord detailed the destruction of Babylon.

For example - it’s in Jeremiah chapter 50 - verse 18 - where the prophet Jeremiah writes...

Jer 50:18 ...thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel:
“Behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land,
As I have punished the king of Assyria.

Both of these chapters provide us with the details - of the way that the Lord punished Babylon...

...for the ways that they defiled the land of Israel - and abused the people of God.

And I can assure you that this prophecy was fulfilled on the day...

...when the Lord raised up the Medo-Persian empire...

...just as He promised to the prophet Daniel.

Christian - listen - the Lord knows that end from the beginning - just like He revealed to the prophet Isaiah.

It's in Isaiah chapter 46 - beginning at verse 8 - where he declared...

Isa 46:8 "Remember this, and show yourselves men;
Recall to mind, O you transgressors.

Isa 46:9 Remember the former things of old,
For I am God, and there is no other;
I am God, and there is none like Me,

Isa 46:10 Declaring the end from the beginning,
And from ancient times things that are not yet done,
Saying, 'My counsel shall stand,
And I will do all My pleasure,'

Think about this for a moment - - the Lord knows how everything will end - - and He's known this - from the beginning of time.

And it's for this reason that God doesn't make predictions - no - instead - He presents prophecies...

...based on the things that He already knows will happen.

And it's for this reason that we can rest in the assurance...

...that God is able to accomplish His perfect pleasure - according to His counsel.

It's for this reason that Asaph rejoiced in knowing that the Lord was going to accomplish His will - and without fail.

With this as our focus - let's consider the final stanza of this song - look with me - beginning there at verse 11 - where Asaph declared...

Psa 79:11 Let the groaning of the prisoner come before You;
According to the greatness of Your power
Preserve those who are appointed to die;

Psa 79:12 And return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom
Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.

Psa 79:13 So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture,
Will give You thanks forever;
We will show forth Your praise to all generations.

Here in the final verses of this song - we find Asaph - asking the Lord to demonstrate his great power...

...by saving the prisoners who were condemned to die.

In this way - Asaph was praying for those who would be carried away into captivity.

And in light of his example - we too might pray for those who will be left behind after the rapture of the church.

I'm of course referring to those whom the apostle Paul was writing about - in 2nd Thessalonians 2 - beginning at verse 9 - we learn that...

2Th 2:9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,

2Th 2:10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

2Th 2:11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,

2Th 2:12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Much like Asaph - who prayed for those who would eventually be carried away as captives into Babylon...

...we too should pray for those who will suffer strong delusion - after the rapture of the church.

Let's pray that they would realize that they need to repent and trust in Jesus Christ.

Asaph also prayed for the Lord to punish those who dared to defile the temple of the Lord.

Notice with me again - there at verse 12 - where he declared...

Psa 79:12 ...return to our neighbors sevenfold into their bosom
Their reproach with which they have reproached You, O Lord.

Here in this verse - we find Asaph - praying for the punishment of those who reproach the Lord.

That word - reproach - was used of those who attempt to shame the Lord - with false accusations.

And while I encourage every Christian to pray for those who are rejecting our Redeemer...

...we should also pray for the day when the Lord will finally settle the sin debt...

...of those who refuse to repent of their sins.

Finally - it's there in the last verse of this song - where Asaph sang the praises of our good shepherd - by declaring...

Psa 79:13 So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture,
Will give You thanks forever;
We will show forth Your praise to all generations.

Christian - listen - the Lord is the good shepherd - and those who trust in Him - are the sheep of His pasture.

And while I realize that the Bible contains prophecies that are hard to hear...

...we must not lose sight of the fact that - our good Shepherd will always do what is right.

Whether we're talking about the wrath of God - which will be poured out during the time of tribulation...

...or we're talking about the second coming of Christ - when the armies of the world will be slaughtered on the battlefield...

...we can rest in the assurance that the Lord is going to do what is right.

The Bible is filled with prophecies about a future that is filled with wars - and natural disaster - pestilence - and persecution.

And much like Asaph - who was given a vision of a future that was filled with death and destruction...

...it can be difficult for us to look forward to the future - without fear.

And it's for this reason that I encourage you to follow in the footsteps of Asaph...

...by refocusing your faith on the fact that - our Savior is the good shepherd...

...who will never lead us astray.

I like the way that Jesus put it - in John chapter 10 - it's verse 11 - where He declared...

Jhn 10:11 "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."

Christian - listen - we don't need to fear the future - and the reason why is because...

...our good Shepherd is the One Who knows the end - from the beginning.

And we already know that He is going to work all things together - for the good of those who love Him.

And it's for this reason that we should rejoice - as we look forward...

...to the way that our Savior is going to accomplish His perfect will - and without fail.